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RIDGEVILLE

BRANCH-LINE



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## The Ridgeville Branch

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### Author's Note. The Ridgeville

Branch has been gone for so long that finding any information about it is beyond a research project. It is more like an archeological dig. Much of the information used in this article is a result of the efforts of Carl Riff who spent many hours looking through microfiche, old newspapers, libraries and the Pelham Historical Society archives. He has even talked to a few local people who remember where the branch ran. For these efforts and for sharing his material with the TH&B Historical Society, I want to give him my thanks. Living in Texas, I am far removed from the TH&B. Therefore, I depend a lot on friends in the Society to answer questions and pass along any material in their personal collections. Without their help, some articles I have written would not be possible. A big thanks goes to Bill Sharpe who I depend on as one of my 'life lines'. He helped immensely with this article by sharing what information and maps he had but most importantly gave some of his personal time to drive to Ridgeville and photograph the few remains. The amount of material Carl and Bill provided more than doubled the number of pages of text and tells a more complete history of the branch.

### Introduction

The Ridgeville Branch was only supposed to be a temporary line. It was built to tap into a nearby source of ballast for construction of the Welland Sub and then it was to be removed. From the start, other business materialized

that warranted keeping the Ridgeville Branch permanently open. The line managed to remain in use for 40 years, though it was operated in almost total obscurity.

### The Push to Welland

In 1895, the Waterford Sub was completed from Brantford to Hamilton and the construction crews kept working their way east. The ultimate objective was to connect with the Michigan Central (MC) at Welland. This would create the all-important link between the CP connection at Hamilton and the MC. This 38-mile line called the Welland Sub defined the TH&B's role as the middle player in the movement of freight and passengers between Canada and the United States through the Niagara gateway.

With the construction came the need for a substantial amount of ballast to support the newly laid track. While the TH&B already served gravel pits near Mt. Pleasant and Scotland, tapping a nearby source of ballast would expedite the completion of the Welland Sub. An approximate 10-acre hilltop parcel of land was purchased from Elmer Crow containing more than enough ballast than was needed. The track was laid on right of way initially leased from local property owners. When it became clear that the branch would be permanent, the TH&B purchased the right of way in 1896 plus additional land for possible future extension that, if all the track was built, would bring the total length to six miles.

### About the Ridgeville Branch

The station of Chantler Jct. was established as the connection point with the Welland Sub. Chandler Jct. was at Milepost 3.97 just 2.86 miles west of the original Coyle Yard in Welland.

Later (sometime before 1930) the name was changed to Ridgeville Jct. so presumably not to be confused with the station of Chantler a third of a mile further west at MP 4.31. From Chantler Jct. the line headed due north towards Pelham Centre then turned northeast towards Ridgeville. A right-of-way map dated June 1, 1896 shows the line actually crossed Highway 20. Also, a spur built in a switchback fashion extended west and paralleled Highway 20 on the north side.

According to the original right of way map there were 4.01 miles of track. As originally built, the line had no sidings or run-around tracks. This is rather unusual but since it was originally intended to be a temporary spur to the gravel pit, none were required thus keeping construction costs to a minimum.

But over the years, the total miles changed slightly as side tracks were added or removed. By 1910, the TH&B annual report listed the total track miles as 2.61. This figure creates some confusion because both the gravel pit and nursery located at the end of the line were still active shippers. Perhaps some of the track was sold to the local shippers. Whatever the reason, the decrease of over a mile of track remains a mystery.

In 1914 the annual report indicated land for additional right of way was purchased at Ridgeville and the following year an additional four tenths of a mile of side tracks were built increasing the total track miles to 3.01. More side trackage was again added in 1916, bringing the total mileage to 3.05. This was the peak mileage for the Ridgeville Branch as stated in the TH&B annual reports. The line mileage remained at 3.05 until



1925 when about six tenths of a mile were removed, reducing the total track miles to 2.99. This suggests that one or more of the businesses stopped shipping by rail or discontinued operations.

The grade on the line varied from almost level at Chantler Jct. to a 2.87% uphill grade just south of Canboro Road. Keeping the grade under 2% was generally preferred if possible, especially for main tracks. Again, the Ridgeville Branch was intended to be temporary and the money spent on grading would have been minimal. The grade to Ridgeville was not a big concern operationally because most of the tonnage went in the downhill direction.

No Company records have surfaced indicating there were any railroad structures on the line. A tool house stood at Ridgeville Jct. and it was still listed in the inventory of structures as late as 1952. A couple of old newspaper articles imply there was a station at Ridgeville. However, the articles referred to Ridgeville as a 'shipping station' and as such do not necessarily mean there was an actual station building there. Chantler station was the closest agency to handle customer needs. A drawing included with the documents provided by Carl Riff show that the Chantler depot was very similar in both size and architectural style to the original Grassies depot built in 1895.

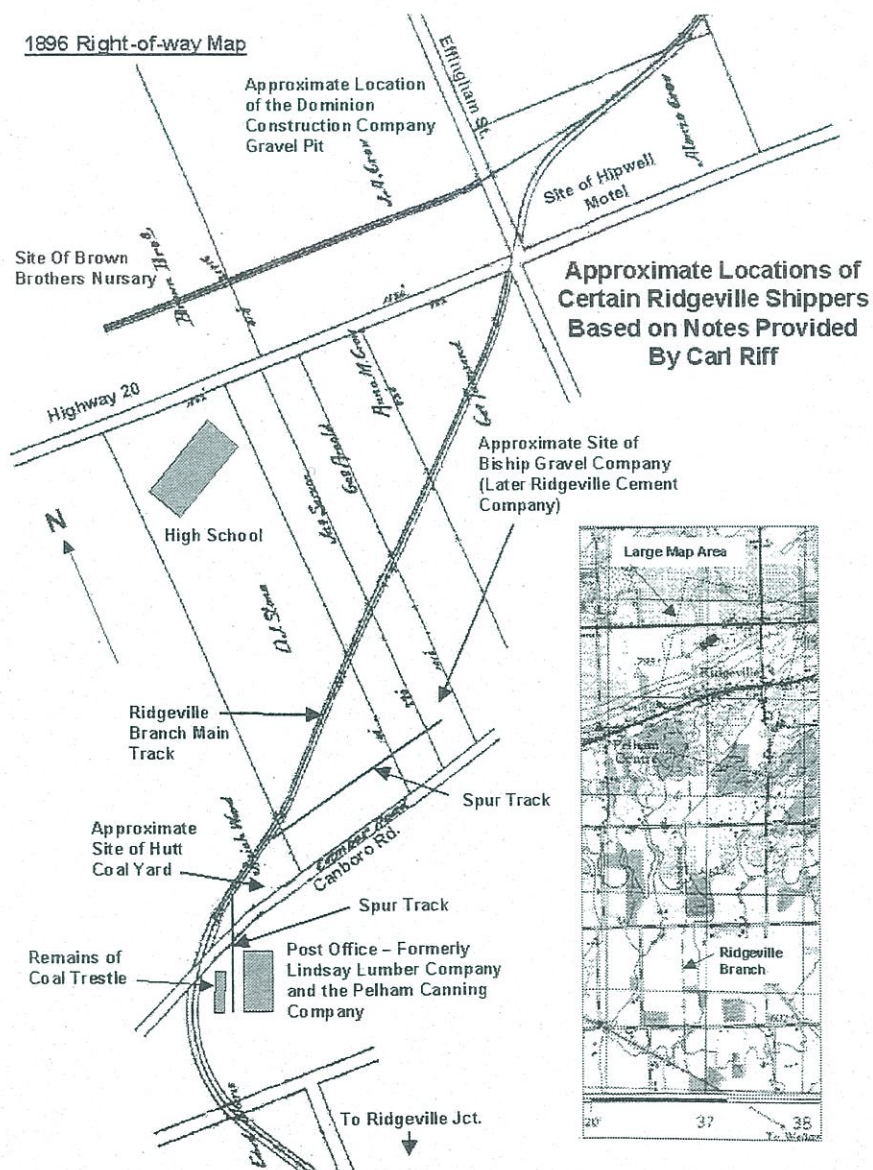
## Industries

Determining the various customers on the line was a challenge. Several companies came and went and a few of them changed hands over the years. Also, conflicting information from different sources adds to the confusion. The list presented is probably not completely accurate but it should convey a good

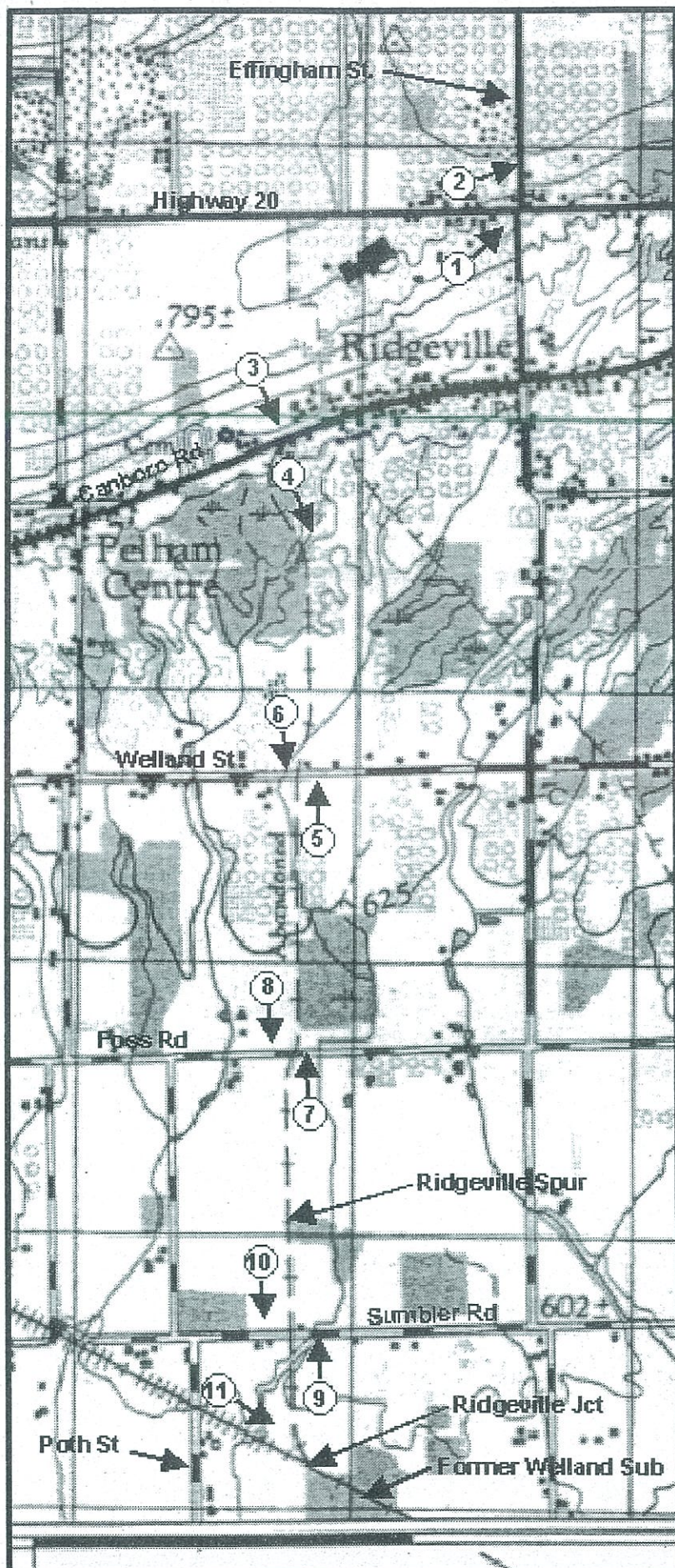
picture of the overall commercial activity. Products shipped included stone and gravel, nursery stock, lumber, cement, livestock and locally grown produce common to the area. There were even a couple commodities received including manure from the Toronto stockyards that was used by the local nurseries, and coal. All of the industries appear to have been concentrated around Ridgeville. Figure 1 is a map showing approximately where most of the customers were located. It is based on a couple of rough sketches made by Carl Riff.

## Dominion Construction Company gravel pit

The Dominion Construction Company not only built the Welland Sub but was also affiliated with the TH&B due to John N. Beckley being the president of both companies. The Ridgeville Branch was constructed originally to reach this gravel pit. The land was purchased in October 1895 and by November had two steam shovels working around the clock loading 400 cars of ballast per day. Loading 400 cars per day as reported by the *Welland Tribune* is seemingly too high of a figure







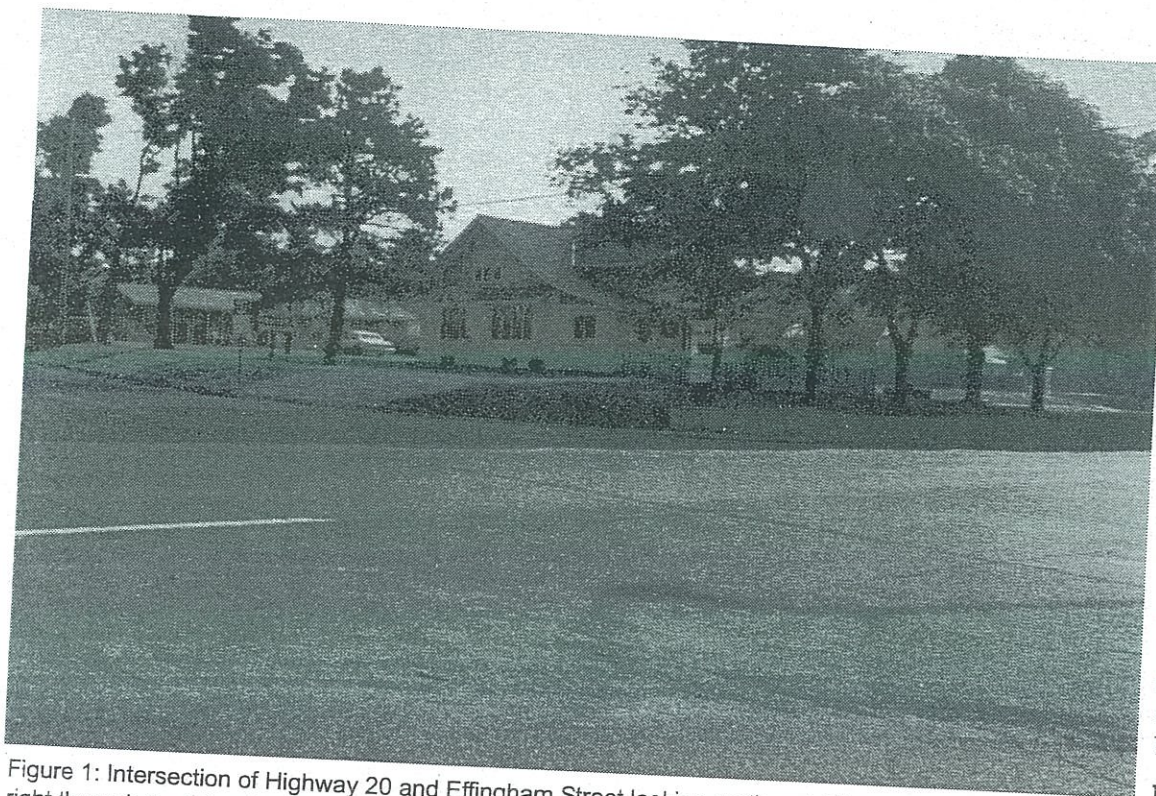
given the lack of track space and the simple nature of the operation. But that is what the *Welland Tribune* reported.

The Welland Sub was virtually completed and train operations commenced on December 30, 1895. Subsequently in January 1896 mining operations were halted. The stoppage was very short for in February 1896 it was announced that the pit was to reopen in a few weeks. Operations did not actually resume until July when the TH&B was again taking out carloads of ballast to fill in various places along the Welland Sub including around switches and station buildings.

How long the pit remained open is unclear. A notation about the Dominion Construction sand pit was in the March 13, 1932 employee timetable but if it was still active remains uncertain. Overall sand and gravel represented on average about 5% of the traffic handled by the TH&B. Despite several on-line gravel pits, the percentage of this traffic was just a little over 2% of all the freight traffic that originated on line. In the 1920's when TH&B annual reports showed traffic volumes split by originating versus received, around 2,300 cars were loaded in 1920 but by 1928 this number dropped to under 1,900 annually. Also, in 1928 the Hamilton & Dundas Branch was extended to serve the Canada Crushed Stone pit in Dundas. This gave the TH&B a new and more centralized source ballast. All this suggests that by the time the March 13, 1932 timetable was issued, there was little rail activity at this pit.

The location of exactly where the pit was located was somewhat in question. But a right-of-way map dated June 1, 1896 provides some clues. There were three





Effingham Street. Another map from Carl Riff's material verifies this. First, the TH&B purchased the property from Elmer Crow. Second, a photocopy from Carl Riff of an old map shows this parcel as owned by 'Crow' but no first name is given. The size of the property is the approximate acreage of the pit and the switchback ran alongside the southern boundary.

**Brown Brothers' Nursery** – A very active shipper since the opening

of the line, they were influential in keeping the line from closing in 1896. In March of that year they were loading cars daily and in April it was announced that

Figure 1: Intersection of Highway 20 and Effingham Street looking northeast. The Ridgeville Branch went right through the Hipwell Motel property just to the left of the motel office on the corner.

stating the property purchased totaled 10 acres, nothing was found to actually verify this. They were all located around the intersection of Highway 20 and

parcels purchased from A. C. Crow totalling 7.2 acres. This is somewhat less than the 10 acres stated earlier in the article. However, other than one article

Figure 2: Looking east from Effingham Street just north of Highway 20. The tail of the switchback can be seen in the center left with the track to the gravel pit and Brown Brothers' Nursery coming back through the left center.

