32d The CPR in Victoria County

BACKGROUND

Ontario's early railway history consisted of a profusion of longer and shorter pioneer lines, intersected by, or contiguous with, the influential and pervasive Grand Trunk Railway (GTR). This empire, financed by British investors, forged a trunk line from Portland, Maine through the New England states to Montreal, and then along the north shore of Lake Ontario to Toronto, proceeding from there in a direct line to Sarnia, Ont., and on to Chicago, Illinois. Its only serious competition came from the Great Western Railway (GWR) in southern and southwestern Ontario, and the Grand Trunk snuffed that out in 1882 when it assumed the GWR. The GTR had started to acquire failing pioneer railways as early as the 1860s. This process had reached near monopoly proportions by 1880, the two major systems not by then in the GTR fold being the Northern & North Western; and the group of lines that became the Midland Railway of Canada in 1881.

Well before the Canadian Pacific Railway had completed its transcontinental line from Montreal to Vancouver in 1885, it was eyeing the lucrative Ontario market. Its strategy was a pincer movement. By 1883 it had acquired two George Laidlaw railways – the Toronto, Grey & Bruce (Toronto and Owen Sound) and more importantly, the Credit Valley Railway, whose main line was Toronto to Orangeville, with a branch to St. Thomas. It was the branch that was the CPR's prize. (Railway promoter George Laidlaw of Bexley sponsored four railways altogether, the other two being the Toronto & Nipissing and the Victoria Railways that both feature in Victoria County railway history.) With a trunk line through central Ontario and a pipeline to Georgian Bay in place, all that was needed now was a link to connect these properties with Montreal. The Grand Trunk's last ditch defence was its assembly of the Midland Railway as a bulwark against the CPR's thrust into the heart of Ontario.

THE CPR RAILWAYS

Enter the **Ontario & Quebec Railway** (O&Q). Its original charter was granted as early as 1871, and was amended in 1881 to permit it to build into Ontario. Among the directors were a number of Montrealers including George Stephen, the "Grey Eminence" of the CPR. Stephen was a good friend of George Laidlaw. It was the O&Q that acquired the Toronto, Grey & Bruce from the GTR which, ironically, had grasped this line in 1882, but had to let it go as it had become rather stretched financially in its many acquisitions to build its monopoly and keep its CPR competitor at bay. On November 30, 1883 the Credit Valley Railway amalgamated with the O&Q, and on January 4, 1884, the O&Q was leased to the CPR for 999 years. On May 5, 1884, trains were running between Toronto and Smiths Falls, clipping along the southern edge of Victoria County at Pontypool. The GTR's Midland Maginot Line had been breached. The O&Q between Peterborough and Toronto has remained in place with steady shipments of nepheline syenite from north of Havelock. Now renewed passenger service is proposed, while the former Pontypool Elevator looks silently on.

In 1890, Bobcaygeon's predominant lumber business begun by Mossom Boyd in 1846, and carried on by his sons, agitated for and obtained a charter for the **Lindsay, Bobcaygeon, & Pontypool Railway (LB&P).** Construction began in 1901 and the line was opened in 1904. It branched off north at Burketon (west of Pontypool) on the CPR's O&Q line. The GTR attempted to block its entry into Lindsay, but the LB&P ducked under the GTR at the Scugog River bridge, and followed the east bank of the river to a station on the west side of Caroline St. The original segment between Burketon Jct., Nestleton, Viewlake and Lindsay Jct. (the latter created in 1912 by the newer shorter connection to Montreal via Bethany to Dranoel) was abandoned in 1932. The last train to Bobcaygeon was in 1957, and the Bobcaygeon branch was abandoned altogether in 1961.

In 1905, to compete more effectively with the GTR for the grain traffic off the Great Lakes, the CPR chartered the **Georgian Bay & Seaboard Railway,** also known as the CPR's Port McNicholl branch, to avoid the delays and the additional distance of shipping grain through Toronto. This line was opened in 1912 by building a line from the newly-deepened Victoria Harbour (creating the community of Port McNicholl), with stations via Orillia, Brechin and Eldon, and then across country via Cambrai and over the Scugog River to Lindsay, curving into the Caroline St., Lindsay station. From there, it followed the Bobcaygeon line right-of-way to just south of Logie St. at what became Lindsay Jct., then via Bethany to Dranoel (or Bethany Jct., east of Pontypool) on the CPR's O&Q line. The very lightly used passenger service was discontinued in 1932, with total abandonment between Orillia and Lindsay in 1937, an undoubtedly regretted decision in view of the renewed need for grain shipments with the onset of WWII. The abutments that carried this road over the former Victoria Railway to Haliburton can still be seen on the Legacy (Victoria Rail) Trail a short distance north of the former Victoria Jct. The last segment of this line from Lindsay to Dranoel (Bethany Jct.) was abandoned in 1987.

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