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Huron Historical Notes



BRUCEFIELD RAILWAY STATION 1939 – Incoming and Outgoing mail bags are exchanged and Harold Barley Brandon (on the left) delivers his collection to Varna and Bayfield while the other man delivers his to the Brucefield Post Office.

– Photo Courtesy of Gordon Wright

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Railway Construction in Perth and Huron Counties

The Grand Trunk's Victory

By 1850, about 15 years after the first groups of settlers had begun to make the first clearings, the development of many of the farms had gone not only beyond the tree-removal phase, but beyond the stump-removal phase, and there were some thousands of acres of land fenced, cultivated, and ready to produce crops. The hard work of clearing the land was beginning to show some results; those pioneers who had not faltered had land ready to grow wheat, the staple crop of the period, and to produce some cash income.

For weeks after the wheat harvest each year, a farmer worked at the job of getting the wheat to market. In one long day he could drive a loaded wagon or sleigh to Arva, five miles north of London. A big hotel there had large stables, and in the early morning of the second day he hitched up again in the hotel yard and drove on to London. One day was normally enough to unload in London, and return with an empty wagon, back to Huron County. Sixteen bags of wheat, or about 40 bushels, made a normal load. The cost of moving wheat was the sum of board, wages and hotel bills for a man and a team, for one week, to move 120 bushels to market. These transportation costs took a large bite for any profit which could be made by the farmer from his wheat-growing. A man and two horses would work for a month to transport the amount of grain that would now be moved the same distance in one hour by one man with one large truck, or which could then have been moved in one box-car of a train pulled by a wood-burning locomotive.

The great handicap which stifled progress in Huron County was the lack of transportation. Any thinking man on any of the newly-cleared farms could see little prosperity in his personal future as long as many miles of primitive road separated his farm from the places where wheat, hides and salt pork could be converted to cash income.

The magic word which offered an answer to the pioneer's problem was, "railways." The period was one of feverish interest in railways, everywhere in Canada. Under authority of a charter granted in 1849 a railway was being built from Toronto north to Barrie. The first sod was turned at London in October, 1847, for a line of railway to connect London to Ancaster and Dundas. The Toronto and Hamilton Railway Company received its charter in 1852. The Grand Trunk line from Montreal to Toronto was under construction. Newspapers reported in detail on the many schemes afloat in the Province of Canada to promote railways and so end the cramping isolation of backwoods agriculture.

During 1850-52 the promoters of the Buffalo, Brantford and Goderich Railway had sold to the councillors of Huron, Bruce and Perth, meeting in Goderich as a single body, the proposition that the best interests of the United Counties would be served by encouraging a railway route through Buffalo to the markets of the United States and the

port of New York. At a meeting of the Council of the United Counties, June 30, 1852, this encouragement was made practical by a decision to buy £125,000 of stock in the proposed railroad. However, more than three years were to pass before promise became performance. The first regular service in Huron County did not begin until the autumn of 1856.

The effort of salesmanship which induced the United Counties to provide £125,000 for a railway connection to Fort Erie and Buffalo had been contested by a rival group of promoters. The rival scheme was to build a rail line which would connect Goderich and Stratford to Toronto. One scheme was strongly backed by commercial men in Buffalo and New York State, who could envisage a main artery of trade leading from the Upper Lakes, through the port of Goderich, and by direct rail line to the western terminus of the Erie Canal at Buffalo. The other scheme was backed by commercial interests in Toronto, intent on gaining the future trade of the Western Ontario peninsula; their efforts were concentrated on promoting the plans of a company chartered under the name of the Toronto and Guelph Railway. In 1852 the Toronto and Guelph applied to the Legislature for an amendment to its charter, to permit it to build an extension through Stratford to Goderich. The company proposed to change its name to, "Toronto, Guelph and Goderich."

Opinion in the Goderich community in 1852 was strongly in favour of the Buffalo-Brantford line. Businessmen and farmers of the Goderich area liked the idea of Goderich becoming a major transfer point in a route from Chicago to New York, much better than they liked the idea of the town becoming the end of a branch line from Toronto. At a public meeting held in Goderich June 29, 1852, a delegation from the Toronto and Guelph Railway received a poor hearing, but there was great applause for James S. Wadsworth, mayor of Buffalo, and J.D. Clement, provisional warden of Brant County, who were there to advance the claims of the Brantford and Buffalo. The meeting, held in the town square and attended by an estimated 1,500 people, voted overwhelmingly for a resolution in favour of the railway to Buffalo. There is little doubt that this event strongly influenced the decision of the United Counties Council, meeting in Goderich the following day, to vote money to one company, and deny support to the other. It is very likely, in turn, that the decision of the United Counties had a bearing on subsequent decisions of the Legislature when it considered bills for railway charters. On November 5, 1852, authority was given to the Toronto-based company to build from Guelph through Stratford to Sarnia, but it was denied permission to build to Goderich. On the same day the Legislature authorized the Brantford-Buffalo company to build to Goderich.

It is one of the ironies of history that the Huron element of the United Counties, having chosen emphatically to have a rail line to Buffalo rather than be at the end of a line

from Toronto, now is at the end of a line from Toronto. The line of the railway from Stratford to Goderich is the line chosen in 1852 for the Buffalo, Brantford and Goderich. As the result of successive mergers, it is now a branch of the Canadian National, which in turn was leased to the Goderich-Exeter Railway Company in 1992.

The rivalry between Toronto and Buffalo interests for rights to put the first railway into the United Counties was brought to a conclusion in 1852, so far as the Goderich area was concerned. The Buffalo line took six years to get to Goderich, but in 1858 the trains did start to run along the full length of it, and for the following half century that was the only railway to Goderich.

For the Stratford area, including the townships which in 1852 left the United Counties to form a separate County of Perth, the story was quite different. The rivalry to build a rail line into the south end of Perth County did not end. Rather, it became much livelier. The Toronto and Guelph Railway Company received new backing, developed new and larger ambitions, and persisted in its efforts to put a railway line to Stratford and beyond. The result was that in 1856 the commercial isolation of Perth County was ended by the arrival, not of one railway service, but of two. The first train to arrive in Stratford came September 3, 1856, and it did not come from the direction of Brantford and Buffalo. It arrived from Toronto by way of Guelph. There was no welcoming ceremony. The train, consisting of one car behind the locomotive and tender, carried Sir Casimir Gzowski, head of the firm of Gzowski and Company of Toronto, which had the contract for the building of a Grand Trunk line from Toronto to Sarnia. Sir Casimir came unannounced into Perth County by rail, to inspect the work done by his construction gangs and sub-contractors. The official opening of a railway line from Toronto to Stratford came five weeks later, October 8, 1856. The first train from Buffalo to Stratford arrived December 6, beaten by more than two months in a contest that had gone on for four years.

During 1854, 1855 and most of 1856 the race was on to push construction to Stratford, the one company building northwesterly from Brantford, and the other southwesterly from Guelph via Berlin. For some time the Buffalo line seemed to be winning. Its line of rails actually arrived in Perth County in 1855, but the line was not yet well enough ballasted to carry traffic and the company was getting to the end of its financial tether. For a while in 1856 the Buffalo line was out of business; its treasury was in such poor shape that it had to stop operating trains along the stretch from Buffalo to Brantford. The Grand Trunk line, meanwhile, kept on coming across Wilmot and South Easthope, and while it did not win the race to put the first rails into Perth, it won the race to lay the first track that could carry trains.

The year when the railways came into the county opened the future for the people, and altered the pace of development, agricultural and commercial, from a crawl to a gallop.

The years during which the railway lines were approaching the county had the excitement that goes with big construction projects, and the more so because in the nineteenth century railway lines were built by manpower

and horsepower. Hundreds of teams of horses were at work pulling scoop-shovels, hundreds of teamsters were on me job to handle the horses, and hundreds of men were employed to lay ties and spike down the rails. The railway construction gangs of the 1850's in Canada consisted chiefly of Irishmen, most of them recent arrivals from Ireland. They worked 10-hour and 12-hour days, six days a week, at jobs that called for powerful, big-muscled men.

Two months later, on December 6, 1856 the first train on the B. & L.H. line arrived in Stratford, without causing any excitement. The weekly Beacon gave the event one inch of space.

The thrusting development of the two competing rail companies continued during 1857 and 1858, until all of the south half of Perth County had been opened to railway service. The B. & L.H. continued northwestward with a line parallel to the Huron Road, running to Goderich. The Grand Trunk, having abandoned any thought of going to Goderich, turned southwestward at Stratford, and built steadily on to St. Marys, then westward to Sarnia, where it arrived in 1860. By the end of 1858 the south half of Perth County was served by two rail lines which crossed the map of the county in the form of an X lying on its side. Every farm in the south half of Perth was within 10 miles of a railroad, and Stratford had become a rail junction.

The effect on communities served by the railways was dramatic. Railway construction on the B. & L.H. got as far as Mitchell in 1857, and that hamlet took steps at once to get itself incorporated as a village. By 1858, through service began on the rail line to Goderich and this also affected the towns in Huron along the line. In the census year 1851, before the railway arrived, many communities had only one third the population of that in 1861, the first census year after the railway arrived, and development of every kind was given sudden impetus.

Towns grew with the addition of churches, newspapers and industrial plants of a wide variety, as well as becoming an outlet for the growing farm production of its area.

For several years after 1856 the south end of Perth County had the benefit of service from competing railroads, but the unlucky B. & L.H. continued to drop behind in the competition. It had been founded and promoted on the assumption that Goderich could be developed as a great lake port, which would draw traffic from the Upper Lakes to be transshipped by rail from Goderich to the United States. One flaw in this theory appeared when it was discovered that the port facilities at Goderich were not as good as had been thought. Cargo vessels arriving there could not tie up at dockside, but had to anchor out in the lake, and transfer their freight by lightering to shore. The B. & L.H. bought the existing harbour installations from the Canada Company, but lacked the capital to improve them. The first through train from Fort Erie arrived at Goderich June 28, 1858, to be greeted by a celebration much greater and grander than the Grand Trunk had received at Stratford in 1856, but the triumph was illusory. The train got to Goderich over temporary trestles. A great deal of construction work needed to be done to replace the trestles with permanent embankments, and the B. & L.H. lacked the money to do it. In an effort to attract traffic, the railway company gave a guarantee to a

line of streamers operating from ports on Lake Michigan of a minimum annual revenue from calls at Goderich. Revenue fell below the guaranteed amount, and the B. & L.H. had to make good the deficit. Some of the trackage of the B. & L.H. was found to have been laid too hastily, with rails not properly joined, and from time to time operations had to be suspended. At Buffalo the connection to the United States depended on a ferry boat, which was put out of action for a month by an accident in the summer of 1858. While all these troubles mounted, the management of the B. & L.H. was uncomfortably aware that the Grand Trunk, with its line through Perth County well established, was steadily building on toward Sarnia, and that once it got there, it would be competing to draw lake traffic away from the B. & L.H. terminus at Goderich.

The troubles of the B. & L.H. led to discussions of merger. In the nature of things, the strong swallowed the weak. The first step toward merger was taken in 1863 when the two companies agreed to combine their resources for the operations of through trains from Detroit to Buffalo by way of Stratford. In 1864 the Grand Trunk gained control of the operations of the B. & L.H., by means of an agreement to pool receipts for the next 17 years. With 13 per cent of the total track, the B. & L.H. was to receive 13 per cent of joint net earnings, while the Grand Trunk managed the two rail systems. Six years later the Grand Trunk completed the takeover by leasing the entire Buffalo and Lake Huron system in perpetuity, at an annual rental sufficient to pay the interest on the bonds of the Buffalo company. The shareholders of the Buffalo and Lake Huron did not fare so well, getting stock in the Grand Trunk in exchange, but the bondholders, after 1870, had a trouble-free investment.

The Grand Trunk, which from 1864 onwards was in effect the only railway company operating in Perth County, in 1871 enlarged greatly its investment in Perth by transferring to Stratford from Toronto its locomotive repair shops. The foundations for the first shop building were laid in the summer of 1870 and the transfer became effective in the following May. As the Grand Trunk grew, the work of repairing its locomotives grew and for about eight decades the motive power shops in Stratford constituted the biggest industry in Perth County, employing 1,000 or more men.

Large additions to the shops at Stratford were made in 1888, 1903, 1907-09 and 1948-49.

The knell of the big railway shops in Perth was sounded by the shrill toot of the diesel engine. During the decade of the 1950's, Canadian railways were rapidly converting their motive power from steam to diesel-electric, and as the number of steam engines in service shrank, the scale of operations at the shops in Stratford shrank accordingly. In 1958 the Canadian National, successor to the Grand Trunk, announced that the shops in Stratford would, over a period of years, have the work forced reduced to zero. On December 16, 1959, the work force was down to 300, and by April 1964, the last few railway shops employees were retired or transferred, and an era ended in Perth.

The south end of Perth County enjoyed railway service which was excellent for those times, from 1856 onward. After the Grand Trunk swallowed the Buffalo line and obtained a monopoly of railway lines in Perth there were

complaints about freight rates, and the bad effects of monopoly. A committee of County Council reported at the January session of 1867 that, "... since the amalgamation of the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railroad with the Grand Trunk Railway, the winter rate of wheat from Stratford to Buffalo has been raised from seven to ten and a half cents per bushel, with corresponding increases in all classes of freight ... Railway monopoly, like monopoly in other enterprises, your committee regard as bad in principle and paralyzing (sic) in its influence on industrial prosperity ...". The committee advised that the County should support a competing railway; the Council approved the principle, although it took no action.

Discontent in the North

If the south end of the County had some cause for complaint about the Grand Trunk monopoly, the north end had much greater cause for complaint in the fact that it had no railroad at all. While the farmers of the southern townships were prospering from the shipment of wheat at the high prices of the American Civil War period, 1860-65, the northern townships were still hampered by the lack of any railway north of the line of the Huron Road. For 15 years the north end of the county lingered in the era of horse-drawn public transportation, while the south end had direct rail service to big-city markets. Farm produce from the Listowel area moved slowly to the nearest railway loading point by means of wagon-freight service whose teamsters travelled on a regular schedule between Listowel and Mitchell, carrying loads of grain, hides and dressed hogs. Passengers and mail were carried by stage-coach between Listowel and Mitchell.

North-south communication on the east side of the county was provided by a stage-coach service between Stratford and Millbank, which operated three days a week.

Perth County had three railways being considered to service its northern area, one of which was the Stratford and Huron Railway, with a charter authorizing it to build from Stratford to Southampton, a route which would begin by providing rail connections between the south and north ends of Perth County. This company set some kind of record for slowness in proceeding from plans to action. It was chartered in 1855 and finally began in 1877 to build a rail line from Stratford toward Listowel. Long before 22 years had gone by, the people had grown weary of waiting for the railway that was going to come to them from the south end of Perth. They looked elsewhere to find what they sought.

To the eastward were two railway companies jockeying for advantage in rival attempts to put railways into the newly-settled counties of Grey and Bruce. One company, the Toronto, Grey and Bruce, was backed by Toronto commercial firms which hoped to attract the new business of an area which was rapidly being cleared, and to draw it to Toronto rather than let it go to the rival city of Hamilton.

The rival company, incorporated as the Wellington, Grey and Bruce, was interested in tapping the new farming areas north and west of Perth County, to draw their trade toward Hamilton. In the background of the W.G. & B. was the management of the Great Western Railway, the main competitor of the Grand Trunk system. The Great Western was extending its own line to Guelph, and encouraged the

promotion of the W.G. & B., which proposed to build 102 miles of railway from Guelph to Southampton.

Neither company had much money of its own to back its schemes. Each of them relied on getting bonuses from the municipalities through which it would pass, and on being able to sell bonds on the strength of the municipal bonuses.

The fight between the two sets of promoters was won by the W.G. & B., the two decisive events being the promise of a \$250,000 bonus from Bruce County and the assurance of aid from the engineering department of the Great Western. In 1869 the W.G. & B. had construction gangs at work, translating promises into performance, and putting a line of rails across the countryside on a route from Guelph through Fergus and Elora toward Harriston. The route chosen did touch Perth County, but so slightly that it was more an aggravation than a satisfaction to the people of the Listowel area. The main line of the "Wellington" entered Perth at the Ninth Concession of Wallace, ran for three miles across the extreme northern tip of the county, and went out again at the site of Palmerston. A northern area committee approached the W.G. & B.

The result was a decision to build a branch line, called the "Southern Extension." It was by no means an altruistic move on the part of the railway company; municipalities along the proposed route gave bonuses to a total of \$270,000, including \$10,000 from Wallace, \$15,000 from Listowel and \$30,000 from Elma. The municipalities were, however, at least as eager to get a railway as the W.G. & B. was to enlarge its plans. The negotiations for bonuses and the necessary decisions by local votes of the ratepayers were completed so swiftly that construction work on the Southern Extension began even before the main line of the W.G. & B. had been completed.

The meandering route of the Southern Extension, from Palmerston south through Listowel to the middle of Elma Township at Newry Station, then westward to Brussels and northwesterly again to Kincardine, was what was called a "subscribers' route." The railway was built where the bonuses were given. The first sod was turned December 17, 1871, and the first nine miles of the Extension, from Palmerston to Listowel, were opened almost exactly a year later, December 19, 1872. Sixteen years had passed since the first Grand Trunk train had entered the south end of Perth, but at last the main commercial centre of the north part of Perth and Huron also had a railway.

Construction continued for another two years, until on December 29, 1894, the whole 67-mile length of the Southern Extension, from Kincardine by way of Wingham, Brussels and Listowel to Palmerston, was opened for regular use.

The arguments which easily convinced farmers of rural municipalities such as Wallace and Ema that they should take on a greater burden of local taxes to provide bonuses for railways were coldly practical arguments, which flowed from the simple premise that farmers could not make money unless their produce could get to market. The point was shrewdly understood by the promoters of the W.G. & B., who in 1867 published a prospectus in plain language: "Fat cattle lose in weight, in driving them even fifteen miles to market, no less than 5%. Assuming that a farmer has two head of cattle to sell in the year, the loss of weight

will be at least 150 lbs., which at \$4.00 a hundred would be \$6.00. He will raise for market at least 500 bushels of grain of all kinds upon which, assuming an average loss of even five cents a bushel, extra cost of teaming would be \$25.00. It now takes the farmer at an average distance from the nearest railway station two days to go to market and return, making on the 500 bushels of grain an expenditure of at least 12 days time. After the construction of the railway at least two-thirds of that time will be saved ... making in all an annual saving on the two items of cattle and grain of \$47.00.

This was talk that the pioneer farmers could understand. If by some miracle a railway had been built for them with other people's money, they would have been well content, but after many years had passed with no miracle happening, they raised their own local taxes to provide cash bait for the railway.

For the next decade, 1872-82, the commerce and agriculture of the north and south ends of Perth County were in two different worlds. The grain and livestock of the eight old townships moved eastward by the Grand Trunk, which also became, by means of its locomotive repair shops, the biggest industrial employer in Perth. The commerce of the three northern townships also moved easternward, but along the lines of the Great Western Railway, which had taken a 999-year lease on the Wellington, Grey and Bruce. The Grand Trunk and the Great Western were each other's opponents. Neither was interested in doing anything that might promote traffic for the other. The effect on Perth County, during the 1870's, was that the web of commerce and travel was being torn apart. The merchants of the north dealt with the Great Western to bring in their merchandise, and the cattle-buyers dealt with the Great Western to ship out the livestock bought from the townships around Listowel; the south had its affairs similarly entwined with the Grand Trunk. If the reeve of Wallace had to go to Stratford, 30-odd miles away, for a County Council session, at any time of year when the roads were bad, his railway route was north to Palmerston, east 45 miles to Guelph and then west 40 miles to Stratford.

The rivalry between Grand Trunk and Great Western was ended in the same way as the earlier rivalry between the Grand Trunk and the Buffalo and Lake Huron. In 1882 the Grand Trunk swallowed its rival in North Perth, just as it had in 1856 swallowed its rival in South Perth. The Great Western fell into financial difficulties and in April 1882 its shareholders voted for amalgamation with the Grand Trunk. For the next 25 years the Grand Trunk ruled the railway roost in Perth County.

The Stratford and Lake Huron Railway never did get to Lake Huron. The line was built via Palmerston to Harriston, and there it stopped.

Summary, 1853-82

In the course of three decades, nine companies had embarked hopefully on the building or operating of railways in Perth County. Eight of them had folded and the Grand Trunk had picked up all the pieces. After it absorbed the Great Western and the Port Dover and Lake Huron, the Grand Trunk had a monopoly of rail service in Perth and operated 125 miles of line within the county.

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In this age of automobile travel and highway transport it may be difficult to realize how important the Grand Trunk complex was to the business, farming and everyday life of people at the end of the nineteenth century. A simple fact illustrates the difference between then and now. In 1899, at the height of the railway era, 44 scheduled passenger trains daily departed from the Grand Trunk station at Stratford. In 1967 there were eight. The regular schedules of 1899 provided four passenger services daily from Stratford through Mitchell and Dublin to Goderich. In 1967 there was one, a single-car rail-liner and now none.

In the 30-year process of putting many bits and pieces together to make one railway network in Perth, the Grand Trunk brought all of them to a common gauge. There were, at various periods, three track-widths on railways in Perth. The Buffalo and Lake Huron line across the County, from Tavistock through Mitchell, was built with a track width of four feet eight and a half inches, but the Grand Trunk line through Shakespeare and St. Marys was laid to a gauge of five feet six inches. When the Grand Trunk became possessor of both lines it faced the problem of being unable to switch rolling stock between the two lines that crossed at Stratford. The decision was to standardize on the narrower of the two widths, and the changeover was made in one night, October 3-4, 1873.

"One snowy morning in 1873, Stratford citizens awoke to find a string of trains standing in unbroken line from the Grand Trunk station here to Sebringville. The trains had been called in from all parts of the division to complete a changeover from broad to standard gauge tracks. ... Gangs of men had been set out along the line and as the deadline approached a train moved over the rails with a sign reading, 'last train'. The minute the train passed over the rails the gangs took up spikes and levered one rail to the standard size ... Equipment not set for standard gauge was taken to stops for alteration ... at Stratford shops the equipment came pouring in. There was not room to handle it, so it stretched out wherever track was available, in this case to Sebringville. Trains which had come in one day on broad tracks went out next day on new standard gauge lines."

Canadian Pacific Challenge

The absolute monopoly which was enjoyed by the Grand Trunk after 1882 was challenged in the early years of the twentieth century by the Canadian Pacific Railway. The company which had earned its reputation by putting the first set of rails across the empty expanses of the Canadian prairies looked enviously at the railway empire which had been built by the Grand Trunk in the compact and prospering peninsula of Western Ontario. The Grand Trunk monopoly in Western Ontario drew traffic from cities like Galt, Guelph, Brantford, Woodstock and Stratford spaced so closely on the map that the Grand Trunk could make shorter runs city-to-city than the Canadian Pacific's western lines could make hamlet-to-hamlet.

The Canadian Pacific strategy called for a line to Goderich which would tap territory midway between the Grand Trunk's former B. & L.H. line at Mitchell, and the Grand Trunk's former W.G. & B. line at Atwood. Secondly, the Canadian Pacific was interested in a line coming up from the Lake Erie shoreline through

Tillsonburg and Ingersoll, to St. Marys. Thirdly, these two projects were to be cemented with a line to make a connection between them. The connecting line, according to C.P.R. planning, would run from St. Marys to Linwood, using the valley of the Avon River to go through the middle of Stratford. This ambitious program, if all three of its elements could be created, would give the C.P.R. a network of rail lines which would run north-south and east-west, with the connections necessary to move freight between lake ports on Lake Huron, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, at Goderich, Port Burwell and Toronto respectively.

The first stage of the plan was put in effect quickly; the Guelph and Goderich Railway, with C.P.R. backing, was running trains through in 1907. The second element was put in effect more slowly; it was not until 1912 that the St. Marys and Western Ontario Railway, under C.P.R. control, arrived from the south in St. Marys. The third stage was never completed. Strong opposition which arose within Stratford defeated the plan to make the vital cross-connection from St. Marys to Linwood. The proposal to bring the C.P.R. through Stratford was a contentious issue for eight years, but the line was never built.

The line across the waist of the County, was built during 1906 and 1907 by the Guelph and Goderich Railway Co. The G. & G. obtained bonuses of \$86,933.92 from municipalities along its 80-mile route from Guelph Junction to Goderich, sold \$125,000 of stock to the Canadian Pacific, and sold bonds to raise the remainder of its construction costs. Train service began on the line before it was completed. Passenger service to Guelph and Toronto was in operation in 1907.

Operations on the Guelph and Goderich were completely controlled by the Canadian Pacific, which acquired all the common stock issued by the G. & G., and leased the company for 999 years, paying an annual rental equal to four per cent on the G. & G. bond issues.

As an offshoot to the invasion of Perth County by the new line, Listowel regained the advantage of competing railway services, which it had lost when both the P.D. & L.H. and the Great Western were absorbed by the Grand Trunk. The Canadian Pacific undertook to run a branch to Listowel from its G. & G. subsidiary. The route chosen began at Linwood, in Wellesley Township, and ran 16.5 miles through Wellesley, Mornington and Elma to a terminus in Listowel. Construction began in the summer of 1906 and went on simultaneously with the building of the main line westward from Linwood.

The advent of the C.P.R. was a great event for Listowel, enabling that town for a while to take rank with Palmerston, its near neighbour, as an important railway centre. In addition to its Grand Trunk services radiating north, west and south, Listowel had two C.P.R. passenger trains departing daily, making connections at Linwood for Guelph, Hamilton and the Niagara Peninsula. The Linwood-Listowel branch was destined to have a short life, however. In 1908, when trains started running on the line, there were not many years left before the age of the automobile would arrive to take the profit out of short-haul railway trains. The twice-a-day passenger service on the C.P.R.'s Listowel run was cut in the 1920's to one a day,

and then to one mixed train (passenger and freight) making a round trip daily between Linwood and Listowel. In 1939 the C.P.R. tore up the rails and soon thereafter deeded the right-of-way back to the farms from which it had been bought in 1906.

The short 31-year life of the Linwood-Listowel line made it possible for one man to achieve an unusual distinction. The late Joseph Fair of Listowel was the engineer of the first C.P.R. train to enter Listowel, July 1, 1908, and he was the engineer on the last passenger train to leave Listowel on the same line, May 13, 1939. His daughters, Lola and Kathleen, who as small girls had been passengers on the first train when their father drove it in 1908, were present again to see him take the throttle on the last train. Mr. Fair had been retired from the railway in 1926 but he was brought back for the occasion of May 13, 1939, to occupy the engineer's seat in the cab of Locomotive No. 891, as it pulled away from the Listowel station. He alighted at the first crossroad out of town and Engineer T. McDonald completed the run. Among those who attended the ceremonial departure was John Livingstone, who sold the first C.P.R. ticket in Listowel in 1908.

The Guelph and Goderich Railway Co. was liquidated in 1956, and its assets were absorbed by the Canadian Pacific. The 80-mile line was then operated as a C.P.R. branch, for freight service only. During the 1950's a mixed train was operated, with one passenger car hooked on to a freight. In the early 1960's that vestige of a passenger train was removed. Service was discontinued in 1989 and the rails removed from Goderich to Guelph shortly after.

Some writer may some day produce an impartial history of the Canadian Pacific Railway which will reveal the reasons for a management decision to accept defeat at Stratford. There would have been no insuperable engineering obstacles to a line skirting Stratford on the east. One can speculate that the eight-year period 1905-13 was one in which C.P.R. thinking could change. In 1905 few people had ever ridden in an automobile; by 1913 the age of the automobile was foreshadowed, and astute railway directors may have lost some of their enthusiasm for putting money into more miles of track.

In 1913 the Grand Trunk turned back the last challenge to its supremacy in Perth, where it had had a monopoly from 1882 until the Canadian Pacific rivalry developed in 1905. After the rejection of the C.P.R. bid for a line through Stratford by a margin of 127 ratepayers votes, the new contender was left with 33 miles of line in Perth County, in two separate parcels. The Grand Trunk was left in command of the battlefield, with 115 miles of line in Perth in a network with junctions at St. Marys, Stratford and Listowel which allowed the easy interchange of traffic.

Since the Grand Trunk has been absorbed, in 1923, into the Canadian National system it operated at its peak 114 miles in Perth County of the system which the Grand Trunk put together. The Canadian Pacific in Perth had at its peak of development 33 miles of line.

Radials Rejected

Perth County was unusual in its rejection of electric railways during the period in the early part of the twentieth century when a majority of the cities and counties of

Southern Ontario became temporarily enthusiastic for "radials". In the 1920's there were 37 electric railway companies operating lines in Ontario. Among them were the London and Port Stanley, the Grand River, the Kitchener and Waterloo, the Waterloo-Wellington, the Guelph Radial, and the Woodstock, Thames Valley and Ingersoll, all of which were able to get franchises and municipal support in counties which are neighbours to Perth. Forty years later the majority of the 37 electric railroads are defunct and those few which continue to run are operating at a loss.(1967)

Some canny instinct in the collective mentality of Perth County people defended them against getting caught in the rush to build electric railways. It was certainly not through lack of opportunity that Perth failed to have a rail line with electric trolley cars. During the period 1906-16 no fewer than seven attempts were made to promote radial lines in Perth. Each of the seven flopped before it got to the stage of laying track.

Promoters of a company chartered as the North Midland Railway Co. planned an electric line from London to St. Marys. In 1906 they were trying to get a grant of \$40,000 from the Town of St. Marys, while some jealousy was being shown in Stratford at the suggestion that St. Marys might get an electric railway first. The North Midland never did build any line, and St. Marys was saved \$40,000.

The Stratford and St. Joseph Railway Co. was being actively promoted in 1906-07 by Narcisse Cantin, who had a vision of a great shipping port at St. Joseph, 30 miles due west of Stratford. His scheme included an electric railway with its eastern terminus in the middle of Stratford, and a line running through Carlingford, Fullarton and Russeldale. Crews of surveyors used the hotel which then stood at Russeldale, operated by Peter Pauli, as their headquarters while they worked for months staking out the line and calculating the grades. A dock and a big hotel were built at St. Joseph but the promotion collapsed before the railway could be achieved.

In 1909 an effort was made by A. W. Bugg, a Toronto promoter, to raise \$300,000 from municipalities to finance the People's Railway Co. This scheme envisaged an electric railway running a triangle route Guelph-Woodstock-Stratford. It did not get past the talking stage.

During the years 1910-12 a more active promotion was undertaken in the name of the Stratford Railway Co., chartered as a street railway to move freight to and from factories, with the hope that it would later be extended to Lake Huron. The advocates of the scheme in Perth County were T.O. Dobson, David Bonis, H.L. Rice and Archibald Baird, all of the St. Marys area. In the background was the Canadian Northern Railway Co. which, through Sir William Mackenzie, was linked with private Niagara power interests, that would have supplied the electricity for the railway. The City of Stratford was willing to grant a franchise for the first stage of the enterprise, but insisted that the electricity should come from the Hydro-Electric Power Commission. Stratford could scarcely do otherwise; it had been one of the original seven municipalities which brought about the creation of a municipality-owned public power system in Ontario, and in 1907, only three years before the Stratford Railway Co. proposals were made,

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Stratford ratepayers had voted by 1,041 to 303 to buy power from the fledgling H.E.P.C. Sir William Mackenzie was not willing to operate a railway in Perth with power supplied by his arch-rival, and the Canadian Northern withdrew its support.

The Ontario West Short Railway Co.

actually built a few miles of line, during the period 1908-12, from Goderich north toward Kincardine, but never ran a train. Two towns, Goderich and Kincardine, and two townships, Ashfield and Huron, lost heavily by guaranteeing the O.W.S.R. bonds. The charter allowed the Company to build lines also from Grand Bend to London, and from a point in Osborne Township through Blanshard and Downie to Stratford. Perth County, fortunately, was able to keep clear of this enterprise.

A charter was granted by the Ontario Legislature in 1914 to the London, Grand Bend and Stratford Railway Co. to build an electric railway on a triangle route. The promoter, C.T. McAllister, did not get beyond the planning stage.

A more serious enterprise was announced in December 1915 by Sir Adam Beck, chairman of the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario. Sir Adam, the great apostle of electrification in Ontario, planned an electric railway to run on the line Toronto-Berlin-Stratford-London. On its way through Perth County it was to serve as a local street railway in Stratford. Financing was to be by means of a \$13,000,000 H.E.P.C. bond issue. At one time this enterprise seemed so likely of accomplishment that when brick pavement was laid on Ontario Street in Stratford the bricks were left loose along a middle strip, so they could be lifted easily to make way for the electric railway tracks. This plan, like its predecessors, was dropped. The loose bricks never were replaced by rail lines.

- Permission was kindly granted by Perth County Council to use information from their "History of Perth" publication in preparing the above article. - Condensed and submitted by R. Latham.

The Old Railroad Gone

By Mrs. Robert Gibson, Gorrie

A railway is a bustling station, a curving track on a steep and winding grade, a locomotive speeding through scenic countryside and above all, people.

The Canadian Pacific Railway had a profound effect on the lives of townfolk and farmers along its route.

Life was slower paced then, but not because we were waiting. Now that we travel by air at nearly the speed of sound, or even faster, we often spend more time waiting in lines - sprawled on airport benches, sitting on pack sacks - than it used to take to get where we were going by horse and buggy.

When you took a trip by train, you stood for perhaps 10 minutes beside your valise in a lofty, echoing cathedral of a train station, then strolled to where a trainman, standing at the steps of a coach, touched your elbow and said, "To the right, madam, no hurry."

You took a seat in a hushed, expectant atmosphere with a nice fragrance of leather, perfume and a distant whiff of cigar smoke and then you heard a soft chant, "A-b-o-o-o-ard."

There was a faint creaking and the very whisper of movement, the station began to glide backward and a

white-haired gent in a blue uniform came down the aisle touching the backs of the seats as if blessing them.

You never waited for a train trip to end. You enjoyed the views of warehouses, old streets, railway sidings, backyards, clotheslines, kids waving and dogs you couldn't hear, but could see barking.

Then you were gliding past fields and barns. "Your destination, lady?" the conductor says, bending over as if it were just between you and him.

I sense a nostalgia of the past as I watch today - in September of 1988 - the heavy steel rails being lifted and all semblance of that mode of travel erased forever from our local history.

Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway started on Oct. 5, 1869, when Prince Arthur turned the first sod at an impressive ceremony at Weston. The railway was built with all possible haste, being completed to Orangeville by April of 1871.

These rails were known as the "narrow gauge" with a span of three feet, six inches. An interesting discovery a decade or so ago, at the end of an old quarry deep in the bush near Alton, were two pieces of the original narrow gauge, dated 1870 and still spiked to a tie.

Finally, due to money pressures, an Ontario and Quebec paper company, owned by the CPR, officially acquired control of the line in 1884, with the amalgamation of Toronto, Grey-Bruce and the Grand Trunk lines.

Let us take a memory trip and travel through the countryside via rail, going westward from Orangeville. It is here where there is the parting of the ways - a junction where a split was made in the CP Railway with separate branches to Teeswater, Owen Sound and Fergus, the Teeswater branch being the one of particular interest to us.

The next station on the line was Waldemar, which was the site of a serious train wreck in 1915. It appeared at one time that Waldemar would replace Grand Valley as the leading town, but the dispute was settled and five years later, Grand Valley received its depot.

It was noted that William Buchanan was a station agent at Grand Valley for over 45 years, something of a record.

Arthur was next on the route its station an exact replica of the one at Grand Valley.

Then came Mount Forest, which was not located on the Teeswater branch proper. The tracks curved away just before reaching the town. Trains were run around Mount Forest and backed into town.

On course again after leaving Mount Forest, the railway, with many financial difficulties to contend with, was finally completed as far as Harriston by December of 1893 with plans to extend to Wingham and Teeswater.

The next three towns on the Teeswater branch were among the most pleasing to the eye in all of Ontario. Like peas in a pod, Fordwich, Gorrie and Wroxeter were quiet, rural villages nestled on the banks of the Maitland River.

Their present sleepy state is misleading, however, for at one time the river provided the power for a very bustling and prosperous milling economy.

Fordwich, the first of the three towns sported two stations. After 1915, the original was relegated for use as an agent's residence and a freight shed.

The other little depot handled the passenger and express