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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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Clinton Railway Station 1882-1974

The former Clinton Railway Station was built in 1882 by Mr. Joseph Edge who also built a station house in Seaforth a year later. The former building had a second storey fitted as a former residence where the station master and his family lived.

Clinton Station was demolished in 1974 by Clifford Hallam who took out a contract to demolish the building, which he did in his spare time, as he was otherwise employed.

The Hallam family lived in an older home at 196 Dunlop Street, Clinton and in 1979 he used part of the lumber to build another house on the same property. The house covers 1500 square feet (approx.) and a suitable siding was used to complete the job. Part of the remaining lumber was used to build a home for his brother near Auburn.

The Hallam property on Dunlop Street abuts the railway track at the southern boundary of Clinton, so the former railway station just travelled a few rods westerly from its former site north of the track.

It seems that a few momentos from the former station were saved as Cliff has one of the baggage cars and the Clinton sign. Another sign warning people "Do Not Drive On Station Platform" may be found at Murphy's Garage in Clinton.

The railroad itself from Goderich to Stratford and from Clinton to Centralia was purchased by Railtex Incorporated in April 1992 (an American firm). The cars are colourful being painted cream and green and bear the name of the company and each route and each car is individually named Titania #177; Portia #179, and Falstaff #180.

The former GTR station Maitland Road, Goderich is the historic depot for the new railway which carries freight as far as Stratford.

The Clinton freight sheds were removed in 1974 and used to build a three-door shed on the farm of Murray Popp at R.R. No. 1, Auburn.

- Researched by Doris Batkin, 1993.

RAILWAY NEWS - CLINTON

There were two 'early' station houses in Clinton the first one served the needs of the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railway built by Joseph Whitehead who took out a contract to build their line in 1858. It was located at the south end of Victoria Street on present London road adjacent to the Railway track.

The Great Western Railway station serving the north-south line was located at the west end of Mary Street at Howard Street. This railroad was built under contract by Patrick Kelly and was built as far as Clinton by 1875 and soon reached City of London.

Railway News from the Clinton New Era Newspaper:

April 1878

The steam sawing machines used in the construction of the Grand Trunk Railway (formerly the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railway) put in a couple of days service here last week during which about 250 cords of wood were cut.

July 1881

It is expected that the G.T.R. authorities will next year erect new stations at both Clinton and Seaforth. It is certainly to be hoped they will, for the present buildings are a disgrace to any railway.

August 1881

As many as 14 trains called at Clinton Station on the Grand

Trunk Railway on Tuesday last.

March 1882

The passenger business of Clinton G.T.R. Station for the month of March showed a very gratifying increase of about \$12,000 over the same month last year, and up to an increase of \$4,000 taking both stations into consideration.

April 13, 1882

A plan of the proposed new station house which the Grand Trunk think of erecting here has been proposed. The plans for a two-storey building, the upstairs section to be used as a dwelling, downstairs is divided into baggage room, general and ladies room, office and closets - the whole being about 90 feet in length. Some of the officials have not decided yet when it will be erected. Some of the officials favour placing it where the old one is while others wish to carry it further west in the vicinity of Mr. Perrin's old storehouse and to erect it so that the passengers will step right from the cars on the station platform without having to cross the track, as at present. The probability is that it will be at the place which will bring it near the Bayfield Road.

May 4, 1882

Some of the material for the new station arrived yesterday and it is expected that work will be commenced on the same at once, notwithstanding the amalgamation.

May 25, 1882

The workmen commenced the erection of the foundation for the new G.T.R. Station on Tuesday. It is expected that the building will be finished about the first of August. This being the case the Council will now require to fix up King Street in order to accommodate the traffic that will be on it.

June 8, 1882

The Mason's have the foundation of the new station about ready for the frame work. It is built to allow a platform on all sides of it, that in front being 18 feet wide.

August 3, 1882

The frame work for the new G.T.R. station is up.

October 5, 1882

It is reported that the Great Western Station in this town is to be closed in a few days and all business transacted from the Grand Trunk. We scarcely anticipate however, that this will be done until some better accommodation is provided at the latter, as the present freight building will certainly not do for the traffic of both railroads, and to use two freight sheds at one station will make it very inconvenient indeed.

October 12, 1882

The Great Western Station (at Mary and Howard Streets) closed and will no longer be used for any purpose so that passengers by this route should remember that now there is only one station used. Mr. H. Fremlin will likely fill the position of freight agent. The siding is put in so the Great Western trains can come into the Grand Trunk Station.

November 16, 1882

Mr. A. O. Pattison expects to soon move his family into the new station possibly next week.

Jan. 5, 1883

The old station (G.T.R.) (Victoria Street) has been torn down and the timber removed to Stratford. Another rumour is that it may be used to add an addition to the Grand Trunk freight sheds, as the building is too small to accommodate the freight.

April 1883

The spring freshet assumed such proportions on the

Bayfield River, that on Tuesday the foundation of the bridge on the Grand Trunk about 1 1/2 miles east of this place were undermined, and it is in such dangerous condition that no train can cross it. Conductor Patrick's train was the last to cross it and he realized the risk he ran in coming over. The track has been carried about four feet out of line, but additional track has been built across to prevent the bridge from going out altogether. Trains came to both ends of the bridge, and a transfer of passengers and baggage is made. The company is making every effort to repair the damage having a large staff of men who worked all Wednesday night, and all material is on the ground, so that communication will soon be established again. A telegraph operator with instruments is also present to facilitate the work. The water went down about 18 inches on Wednesday night.

June 1, 1883

Mr. Geo. Pullman the world renowned sleeping car inventor and builder was a foreman of carpenters for Mrs. Joseph Whitehead of Clinton when the latter was contractor for the building of the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railway.

May 1884

For some time now there has been a difference of several minutes between town and railway time causing considerable inconvenience, this will be abolished in future as Fisher and Son have arranged to get Toronto time daily and the town will go by that.

October 10, 1884

The old Great Western Station has been pulled down, and the timber moved away. The Company would have moved it down to the freight sheds and attached it thereto but the town authorities objected.

Clinton, 1886

Honorable Joseph Whitehead is the oldest railroad man in the world (72 years). Mr. Whitehead at his advanced age has retired from active life and settled in his old home on Victoria Street, Clinton, Ontario.

- Article prepared by Doris Batkin.

Londesborough Railway Station

Unless you have lived in Huron County, it's possible you've never been in Londesborough. It's just a small, pleasant, rural village. But 100 years ago, the London, Huron & Bruce Railway "put it on the map." Four passenger trains stopped daily in the village, and the railroad built one of its largest stations for this farming community.

The village still exists, but the station and railway are gone; the railway which was once so familiar to everyone in Huron County, is seldom mentioned now. It was a short rural line running between London and Wingham, just seventy-four miles in all. Built with the help of the Great Western Railway in 1875, it became amalgamated with the Grand Trunk Railway in 1882, and in 1923 it became a part of the Canadian National System. Despite all the changes, it was always known as the London, Huron & Bruce. Trains with exotic names such as "The Flyer," or "The Express" never used this line. Speed really wasn't very important with the L.H. & B., and in fact, engineers would have had trouble trying to set speed records because there wasn't time to build up steam between station stops. Every farmer and villager who lived along the line of the L.H. & B. regarded the

railway as a family affair right from the moment it was planned, and when service was finally concluded it was a sad day for them.

Construction of the London, Huron & Bruce was followed by the villagers with interest, and daily bulletins in local newspapers reported its progress. Excitement was aroused when the announcement was made stating, "Plans have been completed for the railway from London to Wingham. Coming through Londesborough, the tracks will run through the farms of Mr. Craven and Mr. Murdock."

Plans continued on schedule and in June 1875 another bulletin said, "Work is progressing so rapidly that there is every probability the trains will be running to Exeter, if not Clinton in three months." By November 6, 1875, the track laying was completed between London and Londesborough and "the work of ballasting the road is being pushed forward with vigor, and there is every probability of an early opening of the line for traffic."

Excitement was riding high all fall in Londesborough, and after the latter bulletin was published on November 10th, side roads were busy with farmers in buggies out to see the fun. It was reported that "A train with 17 cars arrived in Clinton on Wednesday, November 10th. The engine with cars has been up as far as Mr. Murdock's farm which is close to the village."

The last spike on the London, Huron & Bruce was driven in on Saturday, December 11, 1875, but the big celebration of the line's completion didn't take place until a month later. The wait was well worth it; the enthusiasm shown on that occasion is seldom seen today, and the front page of every local newspaper carried stories of the event. The London newspaper said:

The first passenger train left London at 5 minutes past two o'clock on Monday, January 11, 1876, having on board a delegation of the Celebrating Committee, and proceeded to Wingham for the purpose of conveying the guests to the banquet along the route to London. The entire number arriving at London being 700. On arriving at London, the excursionists were met at the depot by the General Commission and a large number of the citizens. In the city a scene of gaiety presented itself. Flags and banners were profusely exhibited, and at intervals the peals of St. Paul's chimes and the musical notes of the striking clock added to the effect. About 3 o'clock, the grand salute was fired by the men of Major Peters' Field Battery, the guns being in Victoria Park. The exhibition by the Fire Brigade gave a good deal of delight to the visitors, and served as the topic upon which to hinge many a remark, and form many opinions as to the relative advantages of steamers and hand-fired engines.

The banquet was in the evening. There were numerous speeches, and the guests returned by special trains provided for their accommodation by the Company on Wednesday morning, and reached their several destinations without mishap or accident having occurred to mar the pleasures of the trip, and all were loud in their praises of the kind treatment they had received at the hands of the

people, and feeling convinced that railway banqueting is not such a bad business after all.

Life in Londesborough began to move at a new pace when the L.H. & B. arrived, and after having been called Hagyard's Corners since its earliest days, it became Londesborough – a name with more class! New businesses were soon attracted to the village, and the four corners quickly expanded to hold a post office, grist mill, general store, four wagon shops, a church and a millinery shop. A buggy and sleigh maker also moved in, as did a barber, who gave a moustache cup to every customer. The most lively establishment was a hotel called "The Ploughboy," and a few doors from it was the Temperance Hall.

Londesborough's first railway station was a functional, frame building of board and batten design, and it served the community until 1907 when it was destroyed by fire. Mr. W. F. Mylne was its first station agent. A bad fire broke out in July 1881, threatening to level the building, but it was brought under control by the villagers. It was reported that "they carried water from the station pump, and when that gave out, it had to be brought from the river on the jigger." Londesborough was a wood-up station, and the great stacks of cordwood piled around the station frequently presented a fire hazard, particularly so on this occasion.

When a whole trainload of farm machinery arrived at the Londesborough station in June 1881, almost the entire town turned out to see the unloading process, which merited mention in the paper: "A busy scene took place at the Londesborough Station, in the delivery and loading up of some 25 mowing and reaping machines from the celebrated factory of D. Maxwell of Paris, under the superintendence of Mr. Maxwell Jr. and Mr. Trenamen and the agent, John Brundson of Londesborough. After all were loaded, they made a grand procession to the village where Mr. Bell (owner of the Ploughboy Hotel) provided a sumptuous repast for the entire company of about 50 people."

The Londesborough station had six different agents in its sixty-five years. A Mr. Jeffrey followed Mr. Mylne in 1888 and stayed until 1904. Mr. Fawcett followed him, and then came Percy Carisle. He was the agent in 1907, the year the old station burned down. The cause of the fire was never discovered; one of its worst results was a heavy loss for apple buyers when flames spread to the freight sheds.

Building of the new station was postponed until spring, because of the very severe snowstorms that winter. Grand Trunk Railway, who now owned the L. H. & B., chose a design which was popular for their stations at that time.

In a long list of rules published by the Grand Trunk in 1898, agents and telegraphers had to work at 12-hour day with an hour for meals included. An agent and telegrapher on a branch line, at a station with dwelling, fuel and light, received the princely monthly wage of \$35. However, if he did not have a company dwelling, his salary was increased to \$40. There were fringe benefits for a telegrapher, which relieved him of some unpleasant duties: "He is not required to cut wood, load or unload wood or coal, sift ashes, clean or disinfect stock or other cars, or outbuildings. If telegraphers are required to attend switch lamps or semaphore lamps they will receive \$3.00 per month per station for four or less of such lamps, and 50¢ per month for each additional switch or semaphore light at such station." It's doubtful that

telegraphers ever became rich men, but their job was a popular one within the railway.

The second to last station agent at Londesborough was Will Lyon, who followed Mr. Carisle in 1909 and held the job for 15 years. Mr. Fred Thompson was the last station agent, and it was he who sold the last train tickets at the station when it closed on April 26, 1941.

On December 6, 1940, clerks of the municipalities bordering on the CNR right-of-way from Clinton to Wingham were advised that "action was being taken to close that portion of the road," and on April 26, 1941, service was discontinued.

"Sentimental Journey" would certainly have been an appropriate title for the farewell train ride. CNR's engine #1318, pulling train #603, steamed out of Wingham station, heading south for the last time. Mr. L. C. Steele, who had been on the run for ten years, was conductor that day, and his crew consisted of A. Sherlock, trainman; William Rowell, engineer; Roy Steinberg, expressman; and N. S. Fletcher and W. H. Acres, mail clerks.

The seats in the coaches were filled with passengers who had ridden on the train all their lives. There were old men on board who remembered when the railway was built, and they brought along their grandsons so that they could tell their own grandsons some day. At Belgrave, old "Bill," the horse that had always drawn the mail from the station, was standing in his usual spot, unaware that his job had come to an end. A crate of baby chicks was the last piece shipped on the line. Conversation in the coaches was quiet and reminiscent. Passengers recalled the nickname, "The Butter and Egg Special," given to the train in its early years. In those days farmers' wives all along the line had carried baskets of butter and eggs to sell at the market in London.

Wherever the train stopped that day, the station agent and members of the train crew shook hands with new and departing passengers. The entire event was similar to the break-up of closely-knit family. Newspapers made their final report of the last moments of the London, Huron & Bruce by saying, "there were no silk hats, flags or speeches to mark the occasion."

RAILWAY BYGONES

The flavour of the old railway stations can very rarely be recaptured today. It was made up of intangibles, such as the welcome warmth of the potbelly stove, the ticking of the Seth Thomas clock, flies buzzing against the dusty window panes, and the mysterious messages in Morse code which were only understood by that man of genius, the station telegraph operator. Every fibre of a rural railway station was impregnated with the pungent aroma of smoke and kerosene, and no amount of ventilation altered the quality of the aroma. These invisible elements were as much a part of the station as were the waiting room benches.

The daily train timetable was recorded on the blackboard, which hung on the platform, near the doorway to the waiting room. Times were checked and rechecked by the drivers of the hotel's horse-drawn omnibuses, which met every train. Just before train time the town's postmaster would arrive in his buggy to pick up the sacks of mail.

An iron water-pump could be found near the station, and at a discreet distance from the station stood the outdoor

privy, genteelly concealed by lilac and honeysuckle bushes.

Travellers in the early part of this century would have marvelled at our modern, matched sets of luggage. Theirs ranged from flimsy wicker grips to heavy leather suitcases. They also carried carpet bags, Gladstone bags, satchels and valises. If the family were making an extended trip, they packed their wardrobes inside large, elaborate trunks (collectors' items today), and a sign of affluence was the number of stickers from steamship lines and hotels covering each trunk.

Changes have taken place in every sector of railway life. There used to be water towers in the days of steam locomotives – tall, ungainly-looking coal shutes protruding over the railway tracks, bunkhouses for weary train crews, white-washed cattle pens at rural stations, smoke-stained roundhouses and turntables. Where could you find them today? They exist only in the memories of retired railwaymen, and in faded photographs in the family album.

– The above article is from the book "Faces and Places Along The Way" by Elizabeth (Wilmot) Kettlewell who graciously gave her permission to use it for our 1993 Historical Notes.



Fate of the Railway Stations in Huron County

1) C.P.R. Line from Goderich To Guelph.

This line began operating both passenger and freight service in 1907. From 1907 to 1930 the CPR ran four passenger trains daily from Goderich to Guelph and beyond as well as separate freight runs. From 1930 - 1955 passenger service was reduced to one daily round trip.

In 1960 CPR cut back service to one freight train each way daily from Guelph to Goderich and this train included a passenger coach. Shortly thereafter there was no passenger service at all.

Freight service was stopped in 1989 The rail lines were removed in 1990, ending an 80 year service to mid-Huron County. Only one of the seven stations built remains at its original site.

Goderich Station. This brick structure of magnificent architecture is still standing in the Goderich dock area, on the site where it was first built in 1906. In 1990 it was purchased by the Town of Goderich, including seven acres of land. The building is now slowly being refurbished by local senior residents, members of the Menesetung Bridge Association. The station's future is not assured but it is

hoped it will become a heritage building, a showplace for residents and visitors, in the same manner that the nearby Menesetung railway bridge across the Maitland river, which was saved from demolition.

Meneset Station. This was a small flag station used by the local area residents. It was shut down in 1955 and moved to a cottage site on Lake Huron.

McGaw Station. This station was torn down in 1964, and where there was once a cluster of buildings associated with the station operation, nothing remains today at the site where the line crossed country road no. 1. Mr. Norm Hoy, now a senior resident of Goderich, who is working on the Goderich C.P.R. station refurbishing as a volunteer, was one of nine children born at McGaw, where his father was section foreman. Norm's car licence is McGaw - 9.

Auburn Station. The station was located 1 km. south of the village. It was a typical wood constructed building which included telegraph service, freight shed, weigh scales, stock yards, grain elevator, and tool shed. In 1958 the station house was sold for \$150 to Mr. Little of Goderich, who dismantled it and moved it away.

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