

The Grand Trunk Railway: A Look at the Principal Components

By Omer Lavallée and Raymond F. Corley

Like virtually all North American railways, the Grand Trunk embraced dozens of lines that once had been corporately independent. There follows a look at the principal lines absorbed or controlled by the GTR after 1881, the first of them in Canada, the others in the United States. In between is a consideration of the Grand Trunk Pacific, conceived by the GTR but born a foundling.

Great Western Railway

One of Canada's oldest railway companies, the Great Western was initially chartered in 1834 as the London & Gore Rail Road Company. The legislation was revived in 1845, an elaborate groundbreaking ceremony took place at London on October 23, 1847, and in 1853 the name became the Great Western Railway Company of Canada.

The line was projected westward from London to Windsor and Sarnia, and eastward to Niagara Falls via Hamilton.* Owing to the usual scarcity of capital, however, work progressed slowly; when the Canadian government imposed the provincial gauge in 1851, no London & Gore track had yet been laid. The L&G had intended to build to the American standard gauge, since its lines would meet U.S. systems across the Detroit, St. Clair, and Niagara rivers. But it needed assistance under the Guaranty Act, and so when the company's *Elk* pulled the first train of 20 freight cars across Roebling's new Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge on March 18, 1855, it was on 66-inch gauge rails. (Later, the railway deck carried a triple-gauge track: standard gauge, 66-inch gauge, and 72-inch gauge, the latter for the Erie.)

The section between Hamilton and Niagara Falls had been the first opened, on November 10, 1853, and the balance of the main line as far as Windsor, completed in stages, was in regular operation throughout by January 27, 1854. Branches completed during the ensuing four years included one from Hamilton to a Toronto connection with the GTR in 1855, and one from near London to Sarnia in 1857.

While it suffered initially from some of the same handicaps as the

* The Sarnia line had been included in the Main Trunk Line of Railway Act of 1851, but purposely excluded in the creation of the GTR in 1852.

Grand Trunk—absentee management and British modes of engineering and operation—the GWR was less vulnerable to waterborne competition and did enjoy periods of prosperity. In 1860 it began to construct its own locomotives at its Hamilton shops. The first group, five 0-6-0 tender engines built over a two-year period, were designed by Richard Eaton, the GWR's locomotive superintendent, as coal burners. One of them, *Scotia*, outshopped in 1861, was the first locomotive in Canada constructed with a steel boiler. (See cover.)

The disadvantages of the provincial gauge were felt keenly during the 1860s, and in mid-decade the Great Western laid a third rail along its main line to accommodate standard-gauge rolling stock—particularly freight cars from U.S. roads—an arrangement apparently not forbidden by the 1851 legislation. The standard-gauge rail was put in operation from Windsor to Niagara Falls on January 1, 1867, thereby eliminating the physical restriction on free interchange with connecting roads in the U.S. Trains of “narrow” (i.e., standard) gauge cars were moved behind broad-gauge locomotives, a cumbersome practice. Locomotives hauling such trains carried metal plates lettered NG on their pilot, to ensure that switches were aligned only for double-gauge trackage.

In 1870, when the Parliament of Canada repealed the provincial-gauge legislation, the GWR was the first to begin conversion, lifting the outside rail in stages, rebuilding cars and locomotives, and also starting construction of standard-gauge locomotives in its own shops. The last broad-gauge trackage, between London and Hamilton, was removed at the end of June 1873.

While in the process of standard-gauging, the Great Western made a number of significant acquisitions and extensions. In 1872 it took over the London & Port Stanley and also the newly completed line of the Wellington, Grey & Bruce Railway from Guelph to Southampton. Events of 1873 included takeover of the branch from Palmerston to Kincardine, construction of yet another line northward from London to connect with the Kincardine branch at Wingham, and completion of the Glencoe Loop Line, from Glencoe to Fort Erie—a much more direct through route between the Detroit and Niagara frontiers. In 1874, 51 miles of second main track were completed, between Glencoe and Chatham, Belle River and Windsor. This was the first main-line double track in Canada.

The depression that began in 1873, its effects compounded by an incessant rate war with the Grand Trunk, adversely affected the Great Western's financial performance for the balance of the decade. While conditions improved after 1880, the GWR's shareholders became increasingly convinced that amalgamation with the GTR was preferable to competition. On August 12, 1882, after 29 years of independent operation, the company was absorbed by its larger rival.

Northern Railway of Canada

Another Canadian pioneer incorporated into the GTR in the 1880s had begun as the Ontario, Simcoe & Huron Union Railroad, incorporated in 1848 and opened between Toronto and Aurora on May 16, 1851. It was the first steam-operated railway in Ontario, and its second locomotive, *Toronto*—a 4-4-0 built by James Good of Toronto in 1853—was the first railway locomotive ever built in Canada (see page 88).

By 1855, the OS&HUR had been extended to Collingwood on Georgian Bay, and three years later it assumed a new name, the Northern Railway of Canada. Under various other charters the NRC built several extensions, chief among them being a line from Allandale to Muskoka Wharf, opened in 1875. In 1879 all trackage was standard-gauged, and that same year (on June 9) the NRC and the Hamilton & North Western signed an agreement providing for joint operation under a single management, though with each company preserving a separate corporate identity.

Northern & North Western Railway

The combined Northern Railway of Canada/Hamilton & North Western system was known as the Northern & North Western Railway. In 1878 and 1879, just prior to the operational merger, the H&NW had completed lines between Hamilton and Port Dover, Hamilton and Barrie, and Alliston and Collingwood. Under the new regime, and yet another charter, the main line from Gravenhurst (near Muskoka Wharf) was extended northward to a junction with the Canadian Pacific line a few miles east of North Bay, which had opened in 1886. On January 24, 1888, the N&NW was amalgamated into the Grand Trunk Railway.

Midland Railway of Canada

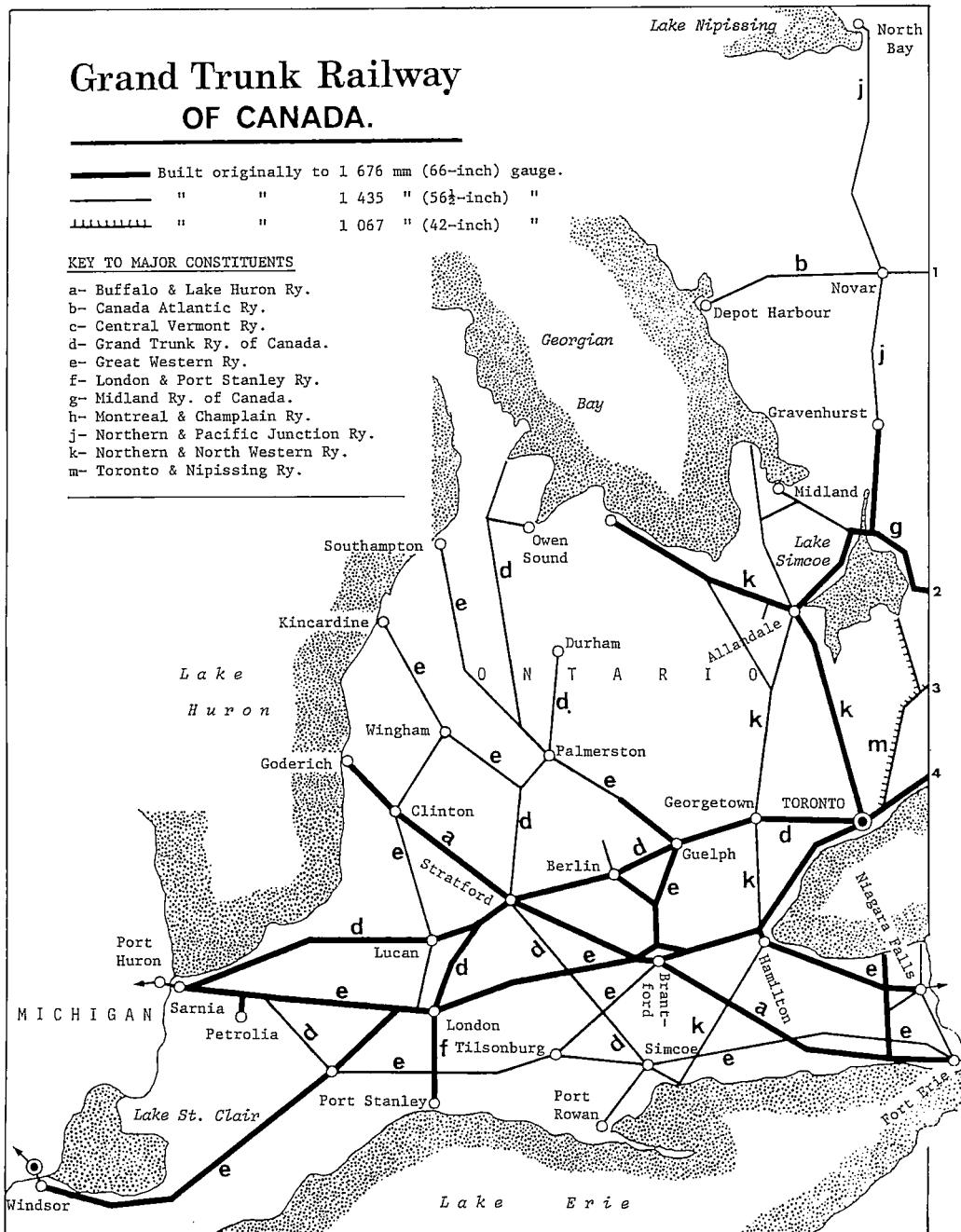
This company traced its ancestry to an 1846 charter and a company formed in 1854 as the Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway. In 1857 and 1858 lines were completed from Port Hope to Lindsay and Peterborough. The name was changed to the Midland Railway of Canada in 1869, and in 1873 tracks were extended to Orillia and a connection with the Northern Railway. After standard-gauging (June 13-15, 1874), the main line was extended from Orillia to Waubashene in 1875 and then on to the new harbor of Midland on July 14, 1879. Between 1877 and 1882 the Midland Railway acquired control of a number of local lines, among them the Toronto & Nipissing, which opened with a 42-inch gauge in 1871 and was standard-gauged in 1883 after consolidation of the Midland with five subsidiaries. Lease of the Midland system to the Grand Trunk took effect on January 1, 1884, with amalgamation on April 1, 1893.

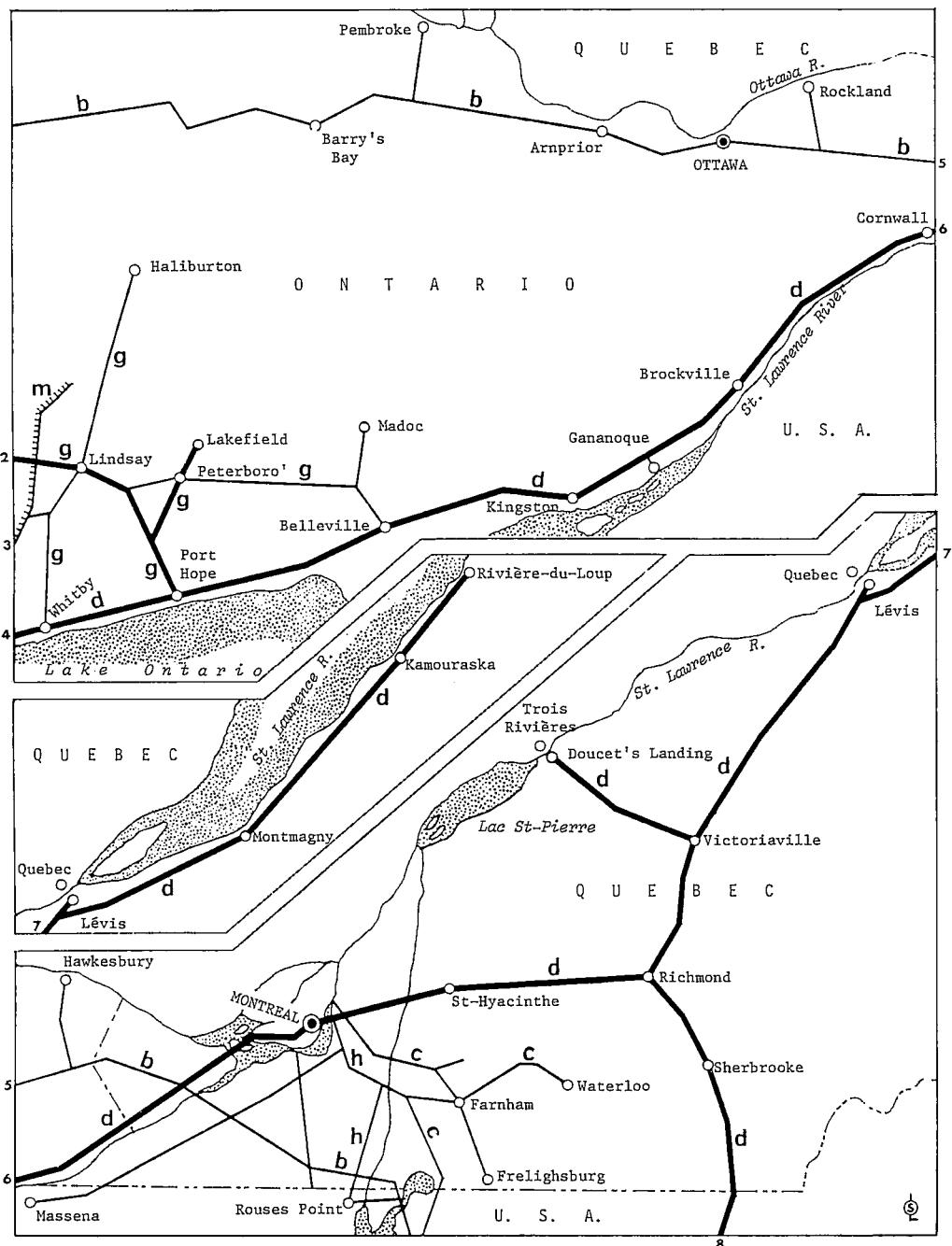
Grand Trunk Railway OF CANADA.

— Built originally to 1 676 mm (66-inch) gauge.
 — " " 1 435 " (56½-inch) "
 - - - - " " 1 067 " (42-inch) "

KEY TO MAJOR CONSTITUENTS

- a- Buffalo & Lake Huron Ry.
- b- Canada Atlantic Ry.
- c- Central Vermont Ry.
- d- Grand Trunk Ry. of Canada.
- e- Great Western Ry.
- f- London & Port Stanley Ry.
- g- Midland Ry. of Canada.
- h- Montreal & Champlain Ry.
- j- Northern & Pacific Junction Ry.
- k- Northern & North Western Ry.
- m- Toronto & Nipissing Ry.





All cartography by Omer Lavallée.

Canada Atlantic Railway

This enterprise, the brainchild of a Canadian lumberman and entrepreneur named J.R. Booth, was chartered in 1871 to build a railway from Ottawa to a connection with the Grand Trunk at Coteau, Quebec, thereby affording a more direct route between Ottawa and Montreal. The name Canada Atlantic Railway was adopted in 1879, the line completed in 1883. To provide a short and convenient link between the Ottawa Valley and the U.S., a line was completed under a subsidiary charter in 1888 from Coteau to East Alburgh, Vermont. Carferry service across the St. Lawrence at Coteau was superseded by a bridge in 1890.

Booth possessed extensive timber rights in what is now the Algonquin Park region of Ontario. To tap these he secured charters to extend the CAR westward from Ottawa, through Renfrew, Golden Lake, and Scotia Jct. to Depot Harbour, near Parry Sound on Georgian Bay. This extension opened in 1896; Depot Harbour was more than 400 miles from East Alburgh.

A 1904 agreement between Booth and the GTR involved the transfer of nearly all CAR's capital stock in return for a guarantee of its bonds. This took effect on October 1, 1905, and ultimately, in 1914, the CAR was fully amalgamated into the Grand Trunk.

Grand Trunk Pacific Railway

This company was incorporated in 1903 as part of a plan put forth by the Grand Trunk Railway in response to proposals for a second transcontinental line following a route much to the north of the Canadian Pacific. The GTR plan had the eastern terminus at Quebec City, but the government insisted on Moncton, New Brunswick, equidistant from the ports of Saint John and Halifax. As ultimately agreed, the line went from Moncton to Quebec City and Lake Abitibi, to the north of Lake Nipigon, thence to Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Yellowhead Pass to a new port in British Columbia near the mouth of the Skeena River, later known as Prince Rupert.

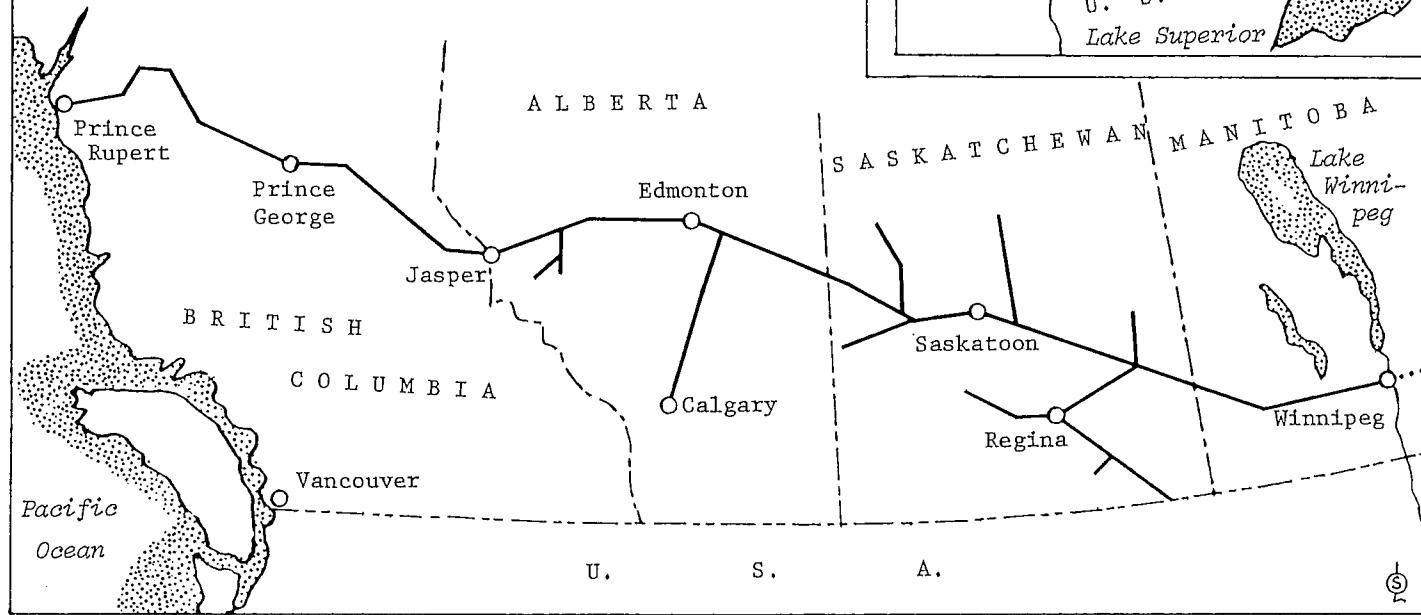
According to the GTR proposal, the federal government was to build the Eastern Division, Moncton to Winnipeg, then lease it to the GTP. The GTP itself was to build the Western Division, Winnipeg to Prince Rupert. Construction had started by 1905, and the last spike on the Western Division was driven in British Columbia west of Prince George on April 7, 1914. The Eastern Division had been completed on November 17, 1913. By that time, however, the GTP was in such financial difficulty that it could not take over the line for operation. Hence the Eastern Division was put under Canadian Government Railways for operation as the National Transcontinental Railway—the appellation under which the entire project had been approved on May 29, 1903—though equipment was never lettered for the NTR, only the CGR.

Grand Trunk Pacific RAILWAY.

— Grand Trunk Pacific Ry.

..... National Transcontinental Ry.

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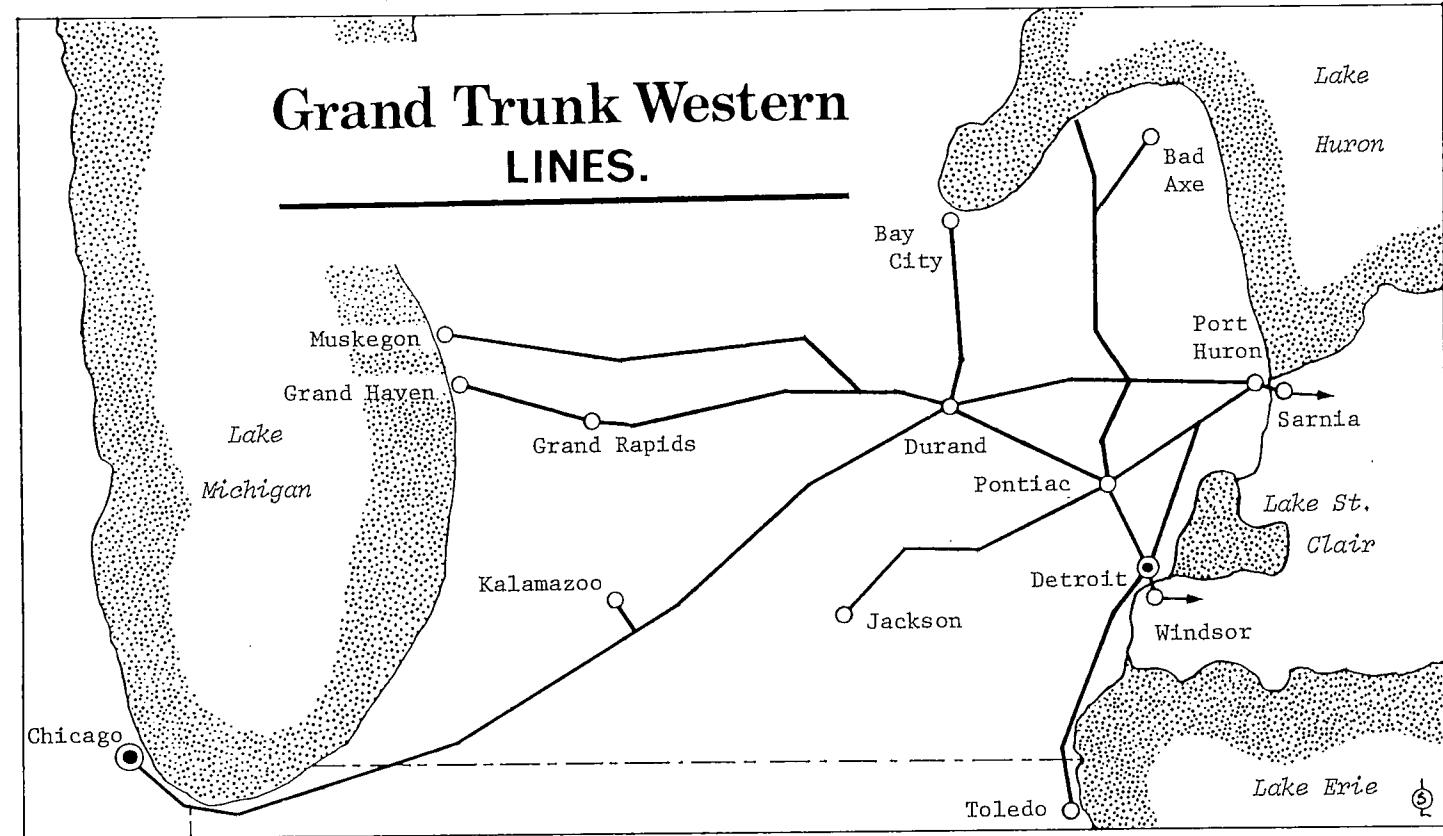
As for the Western Division, the Grand Trunk Pacific was subsequently advanced large sums of money by the government to ensure continued operation during the war. With the parent Grand Trunk bankrupt, the long-range choices were nationalization, further government assistance, or a cessation of operation after the war. In 1917 the Drayton-Acworth Commission recommended government acquisition. Accordingly, on March 10, 1919, the GTP was placed under the receivership of the Minister of Railways and Canals, and subsequently it was incorporated into the newly-organized Canadian National Railways.

Grand Trunk Western Railway

Until the late 1870s, virtually all of the Grand Trunk's traffic in the U.S.A. west of Detroit was exchanged with the Michigan Central. When the Vanderbilt interests secured control of the MC in 1878, the GTR decided to establish its own line through to Chicago. This was based on a number of local charters, some dating back to 1847, most of which were consolidated into the GTR-controlled Chicago & Grand Trunk Railway in 1880, the year that through trains began operating between Port Huron and Chicago. At the turn of the century, the C> defaulted on its bonds and in subsequent proceedings its assets were assumed by the Grand Trunk Western Railway Company, incorporated on November 22, 1900. In 1928 the GTW and other corporate components in Michigan were reorganized as the Grand Trunk Railroad Company.

The rest of the GTW's extensive Michigan network was the product of various acquisitions. One of the principal routes, Detroit to Grand Haven, dated from an 1830 charter with the first section opened in 1838. Eventually this became part of the Detroit & Milwaukee Railway, which was opened through to a point near Grand Haven in 1858. In 1877 this line came under the control of the Great Western Railway, and on November 9, 1878, it was renamed the Detroit, Grand Haven & Milwaukee. With the GWR amalgamation in 1882, it became part of the GTR.

Yet another branch line was the Pontiac, Oxford & Northern, from Pontiac to Caseville, which opened in 1883 and was sold to the GTW in 1909 while in receivership. The Michigan Air Line Railway, from Richmond to Jackson, came under GTR control in 1877 and was completed in 1884. The Toledo, Saginaw & Muskegon was acquired by the GTR on May 10, 1888, and opened in August. And so the story goes: The GTR controlled the Detroit & Huron from its inception; it leased the Cincinnati, Saginaw & Mackinaw on July 1, 1901. These and all other components became part of the Canadian National system in 1923, following transfer of the GTR's assets to the Canadian government. Motive power bore the name Grand Trunk



Railroad History

Western even prior to the 1928 reorganization. Still maintaining its identity in 1928 was the St. Clair Tunnel Company, which had been created by the GTR in 1884, opened in 1890, and electrified in 1908. The "tunnel company" with its distinctive motive power remained a key link in the international "main line."

Central Vermont Railway

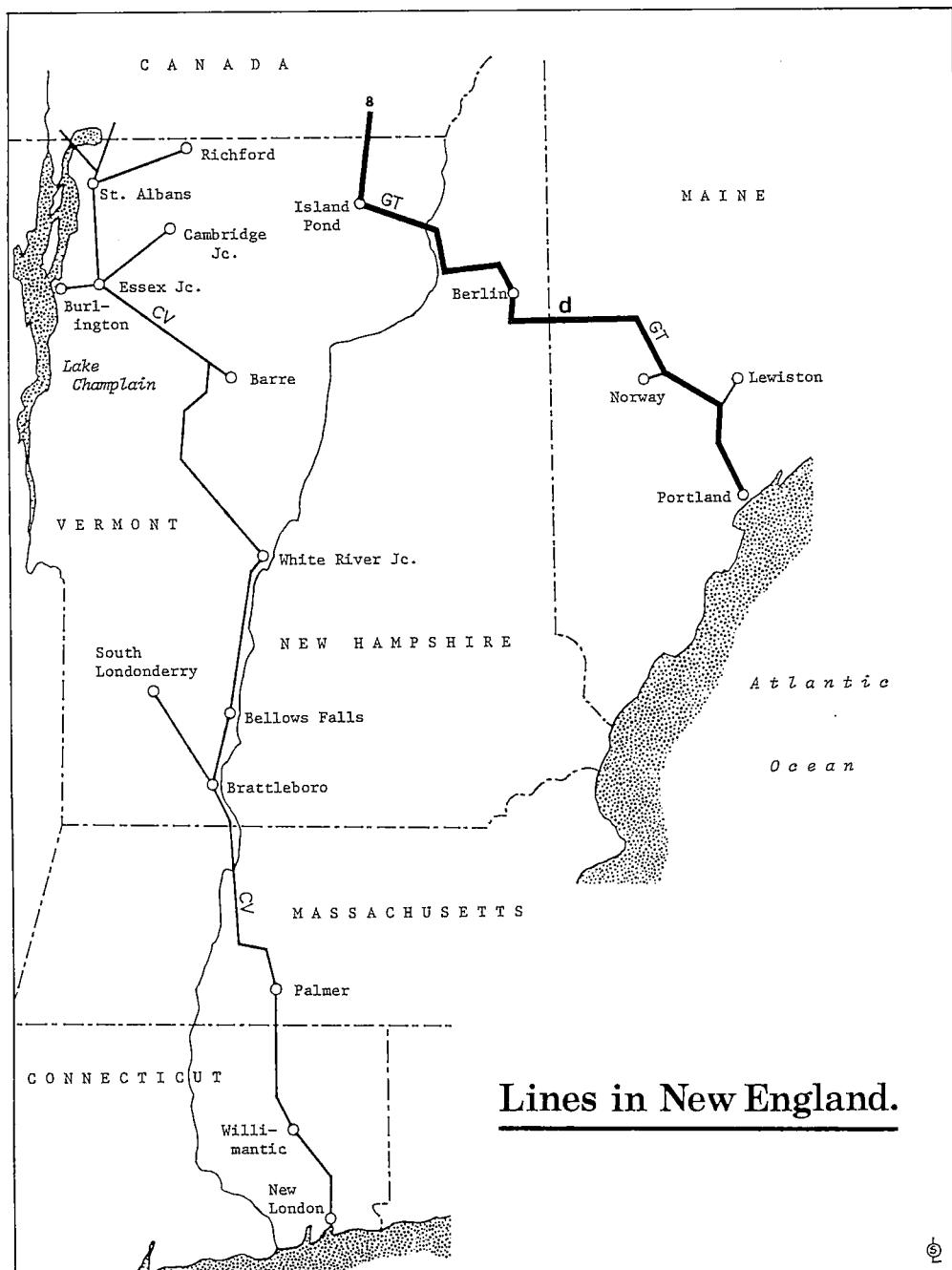
While the original twin charters of the StL&A/A&StL linked Canada to the Maine seaboard, the U.S. territory just south of Quebec's Eastern Townships had been the preserve of various other roads. One such road had grown from charters secured by the Vermont Central (November 1835) and the Vermont & Canada (October 1845), extended from a connection with the Boston & Maine at Windsor to interchanges with the CAR at East Alburgh and the GTR at Rouses Point, as well as the Northern Rail Road of New York, the Rutland, and the Napierville Junction. In addition, to enter Canada, the Vermont Central revived the charter of the Montreal & Vermont Junction Railway and acquired the Stanstead, Shefford & Chambley, which connected with the GTR.

The Central Vermont, formed on May 23, 1883, brought together more than a dozen components into a system reaching to New London on the south and to Lake Ontario on the west—nearly 1,000 miles in all. But leases of such roads as the Ogdensburg & Lake Champlain and the Rutland proved unprofitable, and, as bankruptcy threatened in 1893, the GTR took more than a casual interest. After receivership resulted in termination of the two major leases, the remainder of the system became the Central Vermont Railway Company on November 16, 1898, with more than two-thirds of the stock in GTR hands. Under the GTR the CV held its own, barely, though as the World War approached it began to show losses. After the war it passed, with its parent, to the Canadian National.

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Epilogue

While to the casual observer the Grand Trunk Railway had disappeared into the Canadian National empire as its last major acquisition in 1923, the name lived on. All GTR locomotives remained corporately distinct on CN (subsidiary) books until June 1, 1927. As late as 1942 timetables proudly advertised service provided by the "Grand Trunk Railway System in Connection with Canadian National Railways" (and vice-versa). While names such as Canadian Northern, Intercolonial, and Canadian Government all were obliterated as equipment was repainted, corporate U.S. subsidiaries such as the Grand Trunk Western and the St. Clair Tunnel Company survived,



Lines in New England.

and in New England both the Grand Trunk name and its corporate identity were preserved—indeed, were reserved for New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine.* Locomotives operating the old A&StL route from Coaticook through Island Pond, Berlin, Gorham, Bethel, South Paris, Mechanic Falls, and Danville Junction to Portland continued to carry the Grand Trunk name on their brass numberplates and tenders (on the latter, the tilted herald after 1927), and even the advent of diesels did not alter this tradition.



On the northern New England line that never lost its Grand Trunk identity—South Paris, Maine, 1938. (Richard F. Dole Collection)

While it would be fitting to conclude this overview of the Grand Trunk system where it began—in its New England birthplace—events of the past two decades have led to a revival of the Grand Trunk name elsewhere. In 1961 GTW equipment began to display the stylized GT logo derived from the Canadian National's bold two-letter emblem unveiled in December 1960. In 1971 the Grand Trunk Corporation (GTC) was formed as a holding company to oversee the CN's interests in the U.S., and it currently is in an expansive phase. In the 1980s, following acquisition of the DT&I (June 1980) and the D&TSL (April 1981), another name from the past was revived—with the GT logo—for the GTW/DT&I/D&TSL: “Grand Trunk Rail System, the Good Track Road.” After 130 years, the Grand Trunk heritage lives on! □

* The name was also used for the interchange facilities and motive power at Black Rock, New York.