

the SHANLYS

By Brian Gilhuly – Part Two

Canada's early railways were shaped by a small group of men who lived and worked through the technology shift from canals to railways and the political transformation from colonies to confederation.

Remarkably, three pairs of brothers were prominent among them: Samuel and Thomas Keefer, Walter and Francis Shanly, and John and Harry Abbott. Five were civil engineers whose careers spanned the emergence of a profession from its craft roots. All were establishment Tories; the Keefers held public appointments, Walter Shanly and John Abbott were elected as Conservatives, while brothers Francis and Harry ran for the party without success. John Abbott became Canada's third Prime Minister.

The brothers' legacies mark the Ottawa region but their accomplishments extended from the Canso Strait to the Pacific by way of Massachusetts. This is the second of three *Branchline* articles recounting their stories.

Determined Young Gentleman

Photo 1 – Walter Shanly was in his mid-twenties when this ca. 1845 daguerreotype was made. He already had the look, and the wardrobe, of a man accustomed to giving orders. Wellington Co. Museum and Archives, photo 17032. Photographer unknown.

WALTER AND FRANCIS SHANLY

When Hamilton Killaly (*see part 1*) came to Canada in 1835, he tried farming near London for only two years before resuming his engineering career. His old Dublin friend James Shanly settled on the adjoining lot in 1836 with his family of nine, including sons Walter, 18, and Francis (Frank), 15. The Shanly brothers were no more enamoured of farming than was Killaly. So, when their family friend became head of the Board of Works, two of them hired on immediately: older brother Charles took an administrative position and Walter became a trainee engineer.

Walter remained with the Board and then the Public Works Department until 1848 (*photo 1*), working on canals. Frank worked in his father's distillery until 1846 (*photo 2*). Unable to get into the Department, he found employment on the survey for the Great Western Railroad. Nothing immediately came of the survey, but in early 1848 Frank Shanly became the first of the Band of Brothers to build a railway. He was hired as an assistant engineer by a contractor on the Northern Railroad of New York (NRY), under construction from Rouse's Point to Ogdensburg. The NRY was later taken over by the Rutland Railroad.

Later that year, Walter quit Public Works to join the NRY, where he became Resident Engineer of the western division. The railroad soon took construction in-house and Frank reported to his brother, the first of several collaborations. Once the road opened in September 1850, Frank left to work on canals in Pennsylvania while Walter stayed on to close the books.

His work on the NRY attracted the attention of the promoters of a connecting line to Bytown from Prescott, opposite Ogdensburg. He wrote to Frank on December 1, "The Bytown & Prescott people ... have, without consulting me, elected me an engineer." They quickly came to terms and Walter Shanly became Chief Engineer of the Bytown and Prescott Railway (B&P) on January 23, 1851. Within six months he had selected and surveyed a 54-mile route and estimated the costs of construction. Acquiring, clearing and grading the right-of-way began in October. That month, Walter was offered the post of Chief Engineer of the newly-chartered Toronto and Guelph Railway in

Jolly Good Fellow

Photo 2 – The contrast with his uptight older brother is aptly illustrated by this ca. 1868 photo of Frank Shanly, then in his late forties. Wellington County Museum and Archives, photo 16995. Notman and Fraser Studio.

addition to the B&P. His first response was to write Frank, asking him to return to Canada.

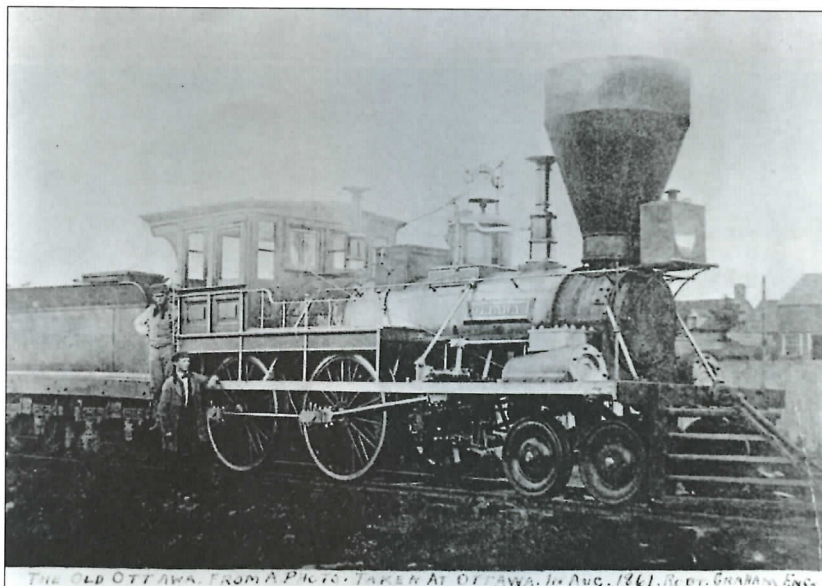
The Toronto and Guelph appointed Walter in December; he hired Frank as Principal Assistant Engineer on January 26, 1852. They – mostly Frank because Walter was busy with the B&P – again had their route settled within six months. In August, Frank surveyed an extension to Goderich, but the promoters of the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) moved in on the company and it was decided that Sarnia would be the new terminus. Absorption of the line into the GTR in 1853 allowed the Shanly brothers to upgrade the railway's engineering, substituting stone viaducts and iron bridges for wooden trestles. Walter took personal charge of the Humber River bridge, which still stands, although now widened to four tracks.

The B&P, meanwhile, was shaping up slowly, because of lack of funds. Walter persevered, turning to Frank to design the Rideau and Nation River bridges. In the summer of 1853 he located a route for an extension from Bytown to Arnprior, part of the B&P's efforts to prevent construction of the Brockville and Ottawa Railway. Walter, who never married, was in Guelph for Frank's September wedding. The B&P was ready for track-laying when he left it at the start of 1854 (*photo 3*). Both brothers then focussed on the Grand Trunk.

With its Toronto-Guelph section open in July 1856, Walter took a Public Works contract to survey a possible ship canal to Georgian Bay via the Ottawa. Frank launched his contracting career that autumn with the construction of the Welland Railway.

Over the next decade, Frank Shanly was much in demand as consulting engineer to lines in Canada and Michigan. As a contractor, he rebuilt the Northern Railway of Canada, and he operated a quarry at Georgetown. Well-liked and famously honest, he was often retained to arbitrate contractual disputes. Although lacking Frank's affability, Walter shared his integrity and he, too, became sought after as an arbitrator.

By the time Walter submitted his canal report in 1858, he had been appointed General Man-



3. *Bytown Belle* – The first locomotive on Walter Shanly's Bytown and Prescott, the Ottawa, was delivered after his departure in 1854. At the time of this picture, in 1861, Walter was managing the Grand Trunk, in negotiation with the renamed Ottawa and Prescott for access to the St. Lawrence waterfront. Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN no. 2265698. Photographer unknown. Previously published by Colin Churcher in *Branchline*, 2010/03, p. 6.

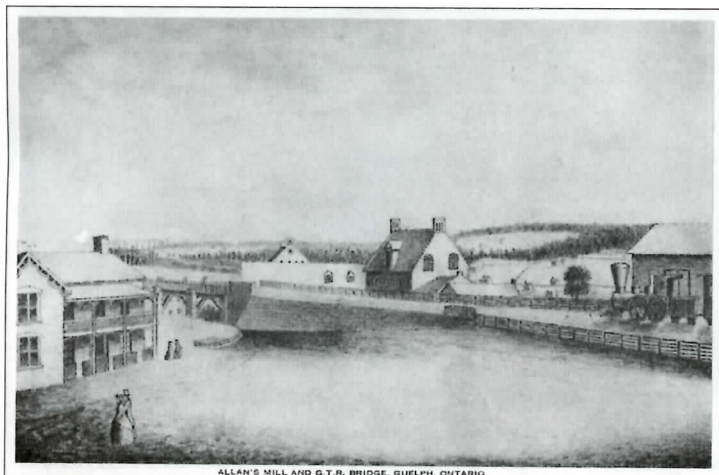
4. Royal Occasion – The 1859 Victoria Bridge was regarded as the “eighth wonder of the world” – a triumph of British technology and capital. The Queen dispatched the Prince of Wales to Canada in 1860 for its triumphal official opening and the first-ever Royal Tour of Canada. Guest L.F.G. Baby, then a young lawyer, later served as a federal minister in the Macdonald government. Université de Montréal, Service de la gestion de documents et des archives, P0058Q1,0293.



ager and Chief Engineer of the Grand Trunk. At 40, he was running the world's longest railway. Though his tenure had its high points – opening the Victoria Bridge and the line to Sarnia among them – the affairs of the GTR were in a highly politicised mess, that Walter did little to improve (photos 4-6). Too cozy with the governing Conservatives to suit the GTR's shareholders, he nevertheless had his management severely criticized by the Provincial Auditor. A shareholder revolt and the election of a Liberal government in Canada (*Ed note: Canada then consisted only of today's provinces of Ontario and Quebec*) encouraged his resignation in 1862.

Undaunted, Walter Shanly made Conservative politics his job, winning the seat of Grenville South in the Canadian Legislature in 1863. He resumed his engineering practice and followed Frank in taking arbitration cases. Not an enthusiastic federalist, Walter was persuaded by Macdonald to run in the 1867 federal election, and sat in the House of Commons until the election of 1872. His defeat then was widely ascribed to his being an 'absentee MP'. Walter wasn't in the House or in his constituency because he and Frank were in Massachusetts making engineering history with North America's longest tunnel.

In 1868 the Shanly brothers won a State of Massachusetts contract to



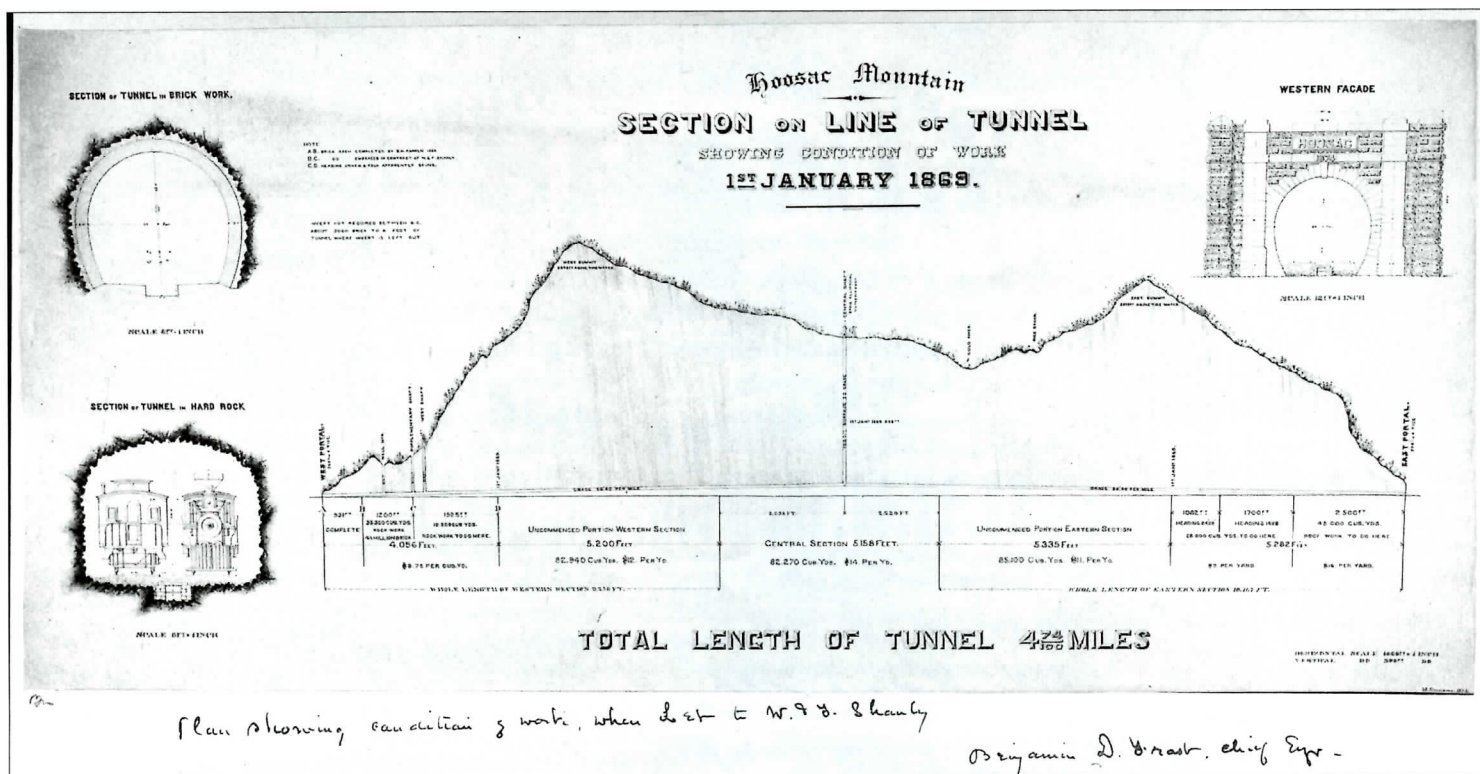
5. Guelph GTR bridge – A print of a charming pencil drawing from 1861, showing the Shanlys' Speed River bridge with Allan's Mill visible beyond. Wellington County Museum and Archives, A1991_253. Artist: Charles Lemon.

complete a tunnel through Hoosac Mountain, a project that had defeated some of America's best engineers (photo 7 – next page). Aggressively adopting new tunnelling technologies, the Shanlys succeeded where others had failed (photos 8-10 – next page). By late 1871, with the project well in hand, Frank returned to Canada. Walter remained until the contract was completed in 1874.

Frank's renown brought him the Conservative nomination in Toronto Centre for the 1872 election, but he joined his brother in defeat. Politics aside, the early seventies were great years for Frank Shanly. He consulted or contracted for more than a dozen railways in Ontario, from the Kingston and Pembroke to the Great Western. Like other contractors, Frank often accepted payment in railway stock; he was wiped out in the Great Depression of 1874-78.



6. Weston GTR bridge – This view of a westbound passenger train on the Weston bridge was captured by the local Anglican rector on July 24, 1869. Today, the Shanlys' bridge, its brick piers encased in concrete early last century, carries VIA, GO, and UP Express services. To accommodate additional tracks, Metrolinx built a new bridge abutting the heritage structure on the north side. Courtesy of Toronto Public Library. Artist: William Arthur Johnson.



7. Hoosac Mountain – This sectional view was prepared for the State of Massachusetts by the Chief Engineer in 1875 to show the state of the works on Jan. 1, 1869, when the Shanly brothers began their contract to complete the tunnel. State Library of Massachusetts, ocn496812714.

From 1875 on, he was a City Engineer in Toronto and struggled to clear his debts, with much help from Walter.

Financial ruin was a precursor of deeper tragedy to come. In 1877, Frank and his wife lost their eldest son, 20, to tuberculosis. In the spring of 1880, their two youngest children died within a month, aged just three and four.

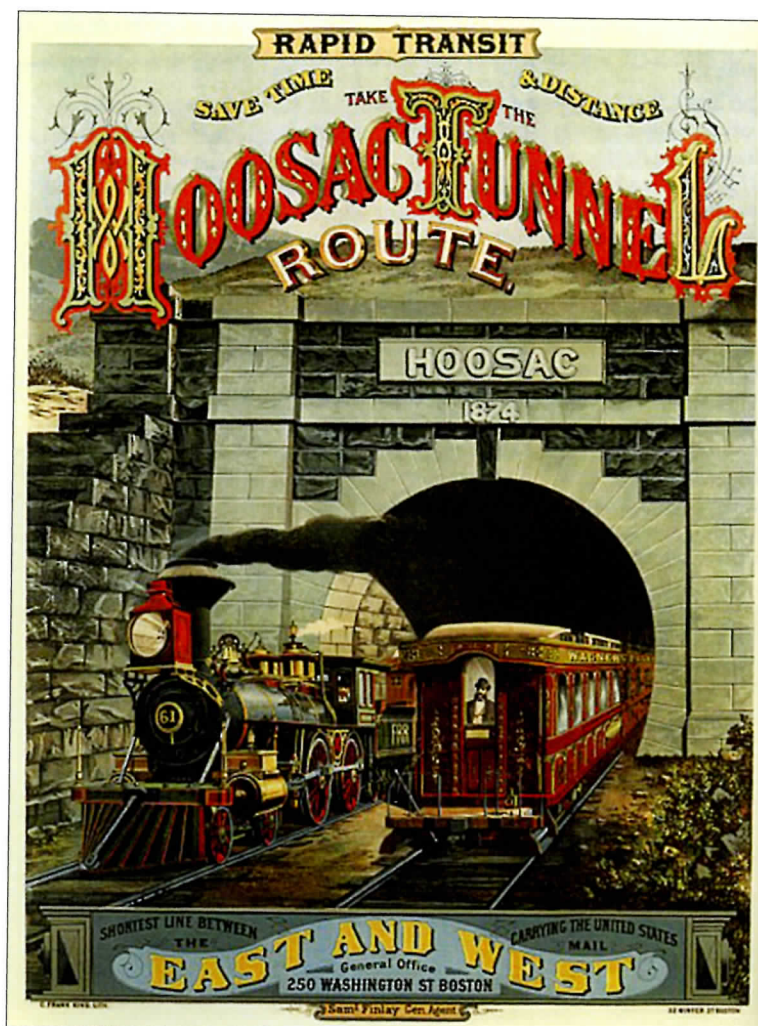
Walter continued to prosper, as engineer, contractor, and arbitrator. He partnered to build Nova Scotia's Western Counties Railway (photo 11). In 1877 he consulted for the Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa and Occidental Railway, then became Chief Engineer of the Canada Atlantic (CAR). Walter Shanly thereby had a hand in three of the first four railways to reach Ottawa. He drew on his 1853 survey in planning the CAR's future western extension, the Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway. When the General Manager of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa – the former B&P – died in 1880, Walter stepped in and saw the road through to acquisition by the Canadian Pacific.

Frank turned to John A. Macdonald, back in power from 1878, for a second chance. In July 1880, he was appointed Chief Engineer of the Intercolonial Railway and hired his eldest surviving son, Cuthbert, as his secretary. Before the year was out, Cuthbert contracted TB. He died in August 1882, aged 23. In the early hours of September 13, on an overnight train to Ottawa, Francis Shanly, 61, died of a heart attack. Walter believed that he "died of a broken spirit" after the loss of his son (photo 12).

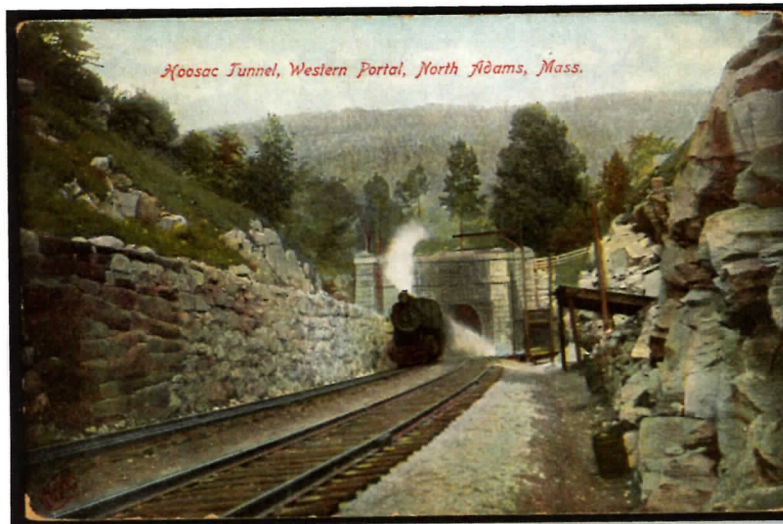
Walter kept working through the eighties, though he notably was not involved with the Canadian Pacific. In 1882, he surveyed the alignment for the GTR tunnel under the St. Clair River at Sarnia and later he served on several inquiries. He returned to Parliament in 1885, acclaimed in Grenville South following the death of the incumbent. His private member's bill to charter the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers passed in 1887 and he became the Society's first vice-president.

He left politics before the 1891 election, but Walter never entirely retired. Just months before his death in December 1899, he arbitrated a dispute between the Federal Government and contractor Hugh Ryan over work on the St. Mary's River Locks.

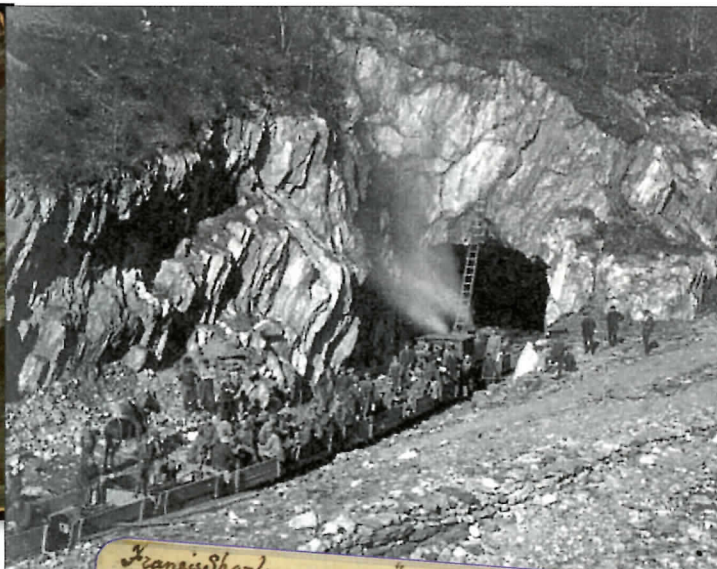
It was a fitting last bow for a man of whom the Railroad Gazette observed, "Although he was an eminent engineer, it cannot be properly said that he was a great one; his chief attributes were a well-balanced mind and an absolute rectitude of purpose." A tough judgement, but fair. I expect Walter Shanly would have approved. ■



8. Making a splash – The opening of the Hoosac Tunnel coincided with the flowering of colour printing technologies like chromolithography, used for this 1877 advertising poster. Fitchburg Railroad No. 61 emerges from the west portal as a Wagner Palace Car trailing a passenger train enters. <https://urbanpostmortem.wordpress.com/2012/09/07/field-trip-the-bloody-pit/> (downloaded 2018/04/20). Publisher: C. Frank King, Lithographer.



9. West Portal above – This ca. 1908 postcard shows the west portal of the Hoosac Tunnel as it appeared just prior to electrification in 1911. North Adams Public Library PC_HT_00027 7942. Robbins Bros., Boston.



10. Miners at the East Portal above right – A tunneling crew aboard the spoil train at the east portal ca. 1872. The photo was taken in the middle of the day, not a usual time for a shift change, so the miners may well have been brought out just to pose for the photographer. The Shanly brothers acquired the construction locomotive late in 1870. Photographer unknown. <http://www.hoosactunnel.net/east.php> (downloaded 2018/04/20).

11. Western Counties Railway below – This newly-built trestle near Saulnierville Station, NS was photographed ca. 1879, the year Shanly and Plunkett's line opened from Yarmouth to Digby. Université Sainte-Anne, Harold Robichaud Collection, Centre Acadien Series A, photo 4.



12. Remembrance at right – This photo of Frank Shanly was taken in 1880, the year he became Chief Engineer of the Intercolonial. The financial and personal ordeals of the seventies had clearly left their mark. Walter wrote the annotations after Frank's death in 1882. Wellington County Museum and Archives, photo 16808. Notman and Sandham Studio.



SOURCES FOR THE BAND OF BROTHERS SERIES

In writing *Band of Brothers*, I have drawn very selectively from primary and secondary sources, omitting much fascinating non-railway material. I encourage you to read further.

The Dictionary of Canadian Biography (<http://www.biographi.ca/>) is a national treasure and it includes H. H. Killaly, the Keefers, the Shanlys, and John Abbott. Legislative and other public documents can be retrieved from <http://www.canadiana.ca/>, a subscription site, or accessed in major public and university libraries. Historical Quebec newspapers are accessible at <http://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/> and a vast array of transcribed Ottawa-area newspaper items on railways are at <https://churcher.crcml.org/>.

For the Keefers, the published pamphlets and reports written by the Keefer brothers are primary sources, along with legislative documents and contemporary newspaper reports, especially of the construction of

the Brockville and Ottawa Railway and the Parliament buildings.

For the Shanlys, Gladys and Frank Walker's 1957 *Daylight Through the Mountain* – an annotated selection of letters between the brothers – is invaluable. Published reports, particularly by Walter Shanly, and legislative documents of Canada, Nova Scotia, and Massachusetts provide much information.

John Abbott's life and career are well documented, as is usually the case with Prime Ministers. Brother Harry has mostly languished in obscurity, though his CPR work in 1881-86 is covered in Omer Lavallée's *Van Horne's Road*. His son wrote a brief personal remembrance in 1926, published privately in 1984 as *Harry Braithwaite Abbott CE*. The Vancouver and Toronto Public Libraries hold copies. Otherwise, one must rely on contemporary newspapers and public documents.

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