

23f The Grand Junction Railway

BACKGROUND

In 1849 the Province of Canada passed the Railway Guarantee Act for loan interest on the construction of railways not less than 75 miles in length. It was this legislation that triggered Canada's railway building boom. The grand design of a "trunk" railway all the way from Portland, Maine through to Chicago, Illinois was "in the works" and the passing of the Railway Guarantee Act set the stage for the Grand Trunk Railway to pass through the Province of Canada with the newly-legislated financial support in its corporate backpocket. While the Grand Trunk's focus was on its grand design, its passing through what is now Canada had an enormous impact on the fledgling towns along its route. While the **Grand Trunk Railway of Canada**, incorporated in 1852, busied itself with its trunk line along Lake Ontario, the waterfront towns were occupied with their own railway ambitions. They saw themselves as gateways to the untapped resources of the "hinterland" and foresaw the prospect of increased trade, and thus booming prosperity at their respective ports. Thus emerged a pattern of "development roads" from Whitby, Port Hope, Cobourg, Trenton, Belleville, Napanee, Kingston, Brockville and Prescott. (Toronto was already leading the way very pro-actively with its portage road to Collingwood.) Waterways remained an important integral component of the Province's transportation infrastructure, and if a development road did not lead to another body of water for a portage route, there were rich natural resources and a rapidly expanding population as successive waves of immigrants had to seek land further and further north from Lake Ontario. This south-north development pattern could certainly stand to benefit from an overarching east-west connecting link or "bridge route" north of the GTR mainline.

OUTLINE

This was Belleville's vision as it incorporated the **Grand Junction Rail-Road Company**, also in 1852 (the same year that the GTR was incorporated in the Province of Canada), to build a "loop line" arching from Belleville through the "hinterland" west to Toronto, which would also serve to "tie in" all of the burgeoning development routes snaking north from the Ontario shoreline. The GTR acquired this charter as early as 1854, but with the economic fallout of the Crimean War in England and the GTR's financial woes, the project was shelved. It was revived in 1870 as the **Grand Junction Railway Company** (GJR), but the 1870s saw another economic depression, so that the original plan was modified to a line from Belleville to Peterborough, with a continuation to Georgian Bay to compete with the Midland. With the rapidly changing map of railway politics, that plan was again redefined as Belleville to Lindsay (via Peterborough) only, with a branch to Bobcaygeon (never implemented). At long last, the first train reached the easterly outskirts of Peterborough in 1880, and by virtue of a negotiated use of the roadbed of the defunct Cobourg & Peterborough Railway, was able to enter Peterborough on the east side of the Otonabee River at the old Ashburnham station in late 1880. With the emergence of the Midland Railway of Canada as "the gatekeeper" of railway development in central Ontario, the GJR came under its wing in 1881, so that Peterborough rather than Belleville had become the *de facto* as well as the legal owner of this road, a circumstance that never fails to create a dent in civic pride. The year 1881 was a tumultuous year for the Midland, with a whole new railway empire to digest, with the attendant rationalization of the existing networks, new routings to establish and physical links to create. By 1888, the Midland arranged for a bridge across the Otonabee River, so that the newly-acquired eastern portion of the "loop line" that had been dreamt of so many years ago, could come to fruition to link up with the western portion of the "loop line" from Peterborough to Toronto that the Midland set about to fashion in the years following its consolidation in 1881. It was on account of this consolidation that there was now an actual loop line between Belleville and Toronto via Peterborough. This route continued to operate right until the cessation of CNR passenger service in 1962. Some freight traffic continued after that date into the 1970s. The Belleville-Peterborough section was abandoned in 1987, with the Peterborough-Lindsay section following in 1989, and the Lindsay-Uxbridge section in 1991.

Sources and recommendations for further reading:

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