

## 33 The Toronto Grey & Bruce Railway

### BACKGROUND

In 1849, the Province of Canada passed loan interest legislation that triggered Canada's railway building boom. Unfortunately, in 1851 the Province of Canada enacted further, *inter alia*, to create a Board of Railway Commissioners, one of whose duties was to administer the 1849 loan interest guarantee. The Board required that to obtain the loan interest guarantee benefit, any railway had to build to the 5ft 6in gauge, which came to be known as the "Provincial" or "Broad" Gauge.

During this "broad gauge" era of railway development in Upper Canada from 1850 to 1870, one George Laidlaw rose to prominence as an advocate of the economies of the (3'6") narrow gauge. An emigrant from Scotland, he obtained a position with the Toronto distillery firm of Gooderham & Worts, and persuaded his employers to invest in the narrow gauge concept in sponsoring feeder lines for their business. Accordingly on March 4, 1868, the Toronto Grey & Bruce Railway (TG&B) was chartered "to build from Toronto to Orangeville, Mount Forest, Durham and Southampton; with branch to Kincardine and Owen Sound."

The objects were (1) to provide a pipeline of grain to the distillery; (2) to break the firewood monopoly of Toronto's existing development road, the Northern Railway of Canada; (3) to provide increased business from railway access to Grey and Bruce Counties; and (4) primarily, to establish a port for trade and transfer on Georgian Bay in competition with the Northern Railway of Canada, and secondarily, ports for trade on the Lake Huron coast.

The TG&B at first succeeded well at all four objects (except for the Lake Huron coast), but as did its sister railway, the Toronto & Nipissing, it eventually choked on its own success with the critical disadvantage of its 3ft 6in narrow gauge track. The 1870s were a period of depression, and railway financing was therefore hard to obtain. By the end of the decade, the TG&B was faced with increasing traffic, deteriorating infrastructure, and little capital for renewal or upgrades. The most pressing infrastructure issue was the very narrow gauge that had been touted a decade earlier as the affordable solution to railway financing. In the short term it had been, but in the long term, the stricture of transshipment costs in a widening economic world where goods were finding markets further and further afield, threatened to strangle any railway not on what was by then the 4ft 8½in standard gauge. So in 1880 the TG&B turned to the giant Grand Trunk Railway for help, and a deal was worked out for funds to convert to the Standard Gauge in exchange for management control. By dint of irony, the GTR itself was also at a critical financial juncture, and three years later it let the TG&B go to its avowed threat to its Ontario hegemony, the emerging CPR in Ontario.

### THE RAILWAY

The first sod was turned at Weston on October 5, 1869 with Prince Arthur presiding. Construction from Queen's Wharf in Toronto began immediately, facilitated between there and Weston by a third rail on the GTR's Stratford-Sarnia line. It then wound its way around the Humber River in Woodbridge, pushing out to Bolton and then addressed the Caledon hills with its innovative but later notorious Horseshoe Curve. It reached Orangeville in mid-1871, and Mount Forest in December of that same year.

The original plan was to build from Orangeville to Mount Forest, with a "Grey" branch from there to Owen Sound; and a "Bruce" branch on to Walkerton, with two lines from there to Kincardine and to Southampton. The politics of municipal bonuses, the premier revenue source, did however lead to a change in this plan. In a deft feint, the new plan for Owen Sound was to build direct northwards from Fraxa Junction, leaving speculators along the anticipated way holding an empty bag. The rails of the Owen Sound branch reached there in June 1873, just over a year later after the Northern reached Meaford with its belated North Grey Railway in April 1872.

As the TG&B had beaten out the plan of the Northern to reach Owen Sound, so however did the Wellington, Grey & Bruce (sponsored by the Great Western Railway) dash the TG&B's plans for Kincardine and Southampton, so that instead of continuing on from Mount Forest to Walkerton, the TG&B settled for an extension to Teeswater (completed in 1874), even foregoing a spur to Wingham (later installed by the CPR in 1887).

In summary, the TG&B did a most satisfactory job of bringing a railway to the spine of Grey County, but its promise to Bruce was met only with its line from Fraxa Junction (just northwest of Orangeville) to Teeswater, barely into the county; notwithstanding its charter objectives. Its successor owner, the CPR, built a branch from Saugeen Junction, just south of Flesherton, to Durham, Hanover and Walkerton in 1906.

### Abandonments:

Fraxa Junction to Teeswater/Wingham **1988**. Saugeen Junction to Walkerton **1984**. Orangeville to Owen Sound **1995**.

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