

History of Thousand Islands Railway

By A. A. MERRILEES

One of Canada's shortest railways was the Thousand Islands Railway, only 6.33 miles long, and connecting the Toronto-Montreal main line of the Canadian National Railways with the pleasant manufacturing and resort town of Gananoque on the St. Lawrence River.

The company was incorporated on February 15, 1871, as the Gananoque X Rideau Railway, and the name was changed to the present one on March 25, 1884. Construction began in 1888, and in the same year the company took over the Gananoque, Perth X James Bay Railway, a "paper" company. The line was opened for traffic in 1889.

Although the smallest unit in the vast Canadian National Railways system in the scope of its operations, the Thousand Islands Railway has several claims to distinction. It's the only line in the country on which you could buy a ticket to a cemetery.

You could fish from the windows of a coach as it stood in the station, and you could board the train right on the main street.

The line passes right along the Gananoque Cemetery and this was an established flag stop. You could buy a round trip to the cemetery for a quarter, but they wouldn't sell you a one-way ticket.

There was one other of-

ficial flag stop. Cheereboro, where, as you may have guessed, a cheese factory was located, near the point where the main line from Toronto comes alongside.

In addition to the above two local stops, however, an unofficial one was invariably made in the main street for the convenience of passengers. Gananoque station was located on a wharf overlooking the St. Lawrence River. In hot weather, the station employees found it easy to go for a swim or fishing on their lunch hour. The wharf is also a favorite haunt of fishermen other than railroaders. One evening a local Isaac Walton swung his line just as the train was pulling out, and neatly "caught" the locomotive.

One time a prize-winning cow was on board the train. Consigned by express to a local farmer, she arrived at the junction in a crate, but they couldn't get the crate into the baggage compartment of the combine, so they took the cow out and tied her in the baggage compartment.

Imagine the surprise of the express handler at Gananoque when he slid the door open and Elsie stuck her head out and bawled in his face.

In the days before good roads the railway performed many errands of mercy in winter, hauling supplies to

homesteads isolated by snow storms, and bringing out those in need of medical attention.

Gananoque, being a favorite summer resort, is also the haunt of many honeymooners, and the line's employees hit upon a sure-fire technique for spotting them. They just look at their shoes, and if both are wearing new ones there can be no mistake. Seldom will you find both partners in a marriage of long standing wearing new shoes at the same time, they say.

Although the line's employees belonged to the big railway Brotherhoods, there was never any labor trouble, in spite of the fact that they draw lower rates of pay than the men on the main line railways. Nobody is unhappy about this, however, for this is one of the few railways on which everyone can sleep in his own bed every night, and eat his dinner at home every day in the bargain.

In recent years locomotive 500, a small diesel-electric job built at Oshawa handled all the work on the line except on the rare occasions when heavy repairs are needed which cannot be performed at Gananoque, when its place is usually taken by CNR number 77, an oddlooking oil-electric job which usually put in its time at Montreal.

The usual passenger one combination baggage and passenger car, which, since 1949 has been borrowed from the present CNR, the line's own venerable cars having all been scrapped.

Freight trains are not heavy, and the 500 is rated at only 22 per cent, and it is an uphill pull all the way from the town to the junction. Three pieces of work equipment complete the roster.

The promoter and builder of the line in 1871 was the Rathbun Company, of Deseronto, who at that time

were one of the largest lumber operations in this part of Ontario, being responsible for heavy cuts of timber on the watersheds of the Moira and other rivers flowing into Lake Ontario at various points in the eastern part of the province.

In addition to their extensive forest operations, this company had, in the closing years, of the nineteenth century, a very diversified industrial empire at their headquarters at Deseronto, including a cement plant, brick yards, a high-capacity, saw-mill, iron smelter, and a railway car-building plant.

They sponsored several railways from various points on the lake into the interior with the prime object of bringing out their timber. One of these, the Bay of Quinte Railway, was built from Deseronto inland, while two others, the Oshawa Railway and the Thousand Islands Railway, were also incorporated with wide charter powers, but never succeeded in building more than a scant few miles of track apiece.

By the year 1911 the timber reserves held by the Rathbuns had become almost exhausted, and the elder members of the family had passed away. The company gradually liquidated its industrial empire, selling the Bay of Quinte Railway to the Canadian Northern, and its other two railway properties to the Grand Trunk. The G.T.R. issued 4 per cent capital stock in payment, and both small lines have since been operated by the G.T.R. and its successor, the Canadian National Railways.

The original junction between the Thousand Islands Railway and the Grand Trunk was at the point where the two lines meet. However, the main line is here on a steep grade, and trains experienced considerable trouble in restarting after the stop at the junction. In 1912,

therefore, the station Gananoque Junction resited some three miles of the original location, an additional track for use of Thousand Islands Railway trains was built a

Marsh World



THE WHOOPING CRANE
rare bird nests in
National Park, N.W.
of Texas. As only
survives, a "foster"
started where one
a close relative, the
Hopefully the young
hills will establish
thereby increasing
species.

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FINDING FOOD BY FEELING — It is a common belief that racoons wash their food before eating it because of the rubbing motion with which they manipulate objects in the water. However, racoons obtain much of their food in shallow, often muddy, water by feeling and probing with their sensitive, hand-like paws. When they locate an object, they grasp and rub it between their paws. If it is food, it is eaten. It appears, therefore, that rather than washing their food, racoons are merely identifying objects they have found by feeling them.



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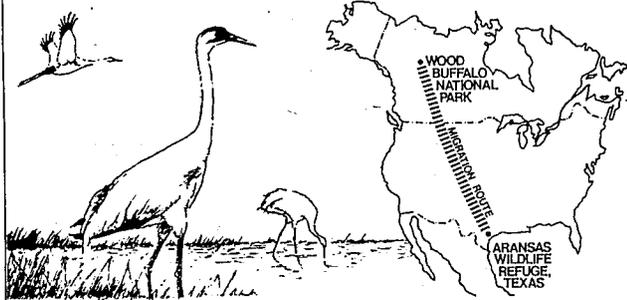
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the south side of the main line. Engine 500 ran for the Thousand Islands Railway Station on the Gananoque waterfront was closed by the Canadian National Railway. The rail line is used daily by the C.N.R.

Marsh World



THE WHOOPING CRANE (*Grus americana*) — This rare bird nests in marshy areas in Wood Buffalo National Park, N.W.T. and winters on the Gulf Coast of Texas. As only one of its two eggs usually survives, a "foster parent" program has been started where one egg is transferred to the nest of a close relative, the sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis*). Hopefully the young "whoopers" raised by sandhills will establish another breeding population thereby increasing chances of survival of this species.

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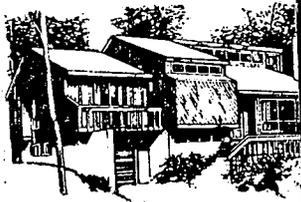
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