

## 30d Guelph & Goderich Railway

Goderich became connected to the railway network by means of the Buffalo & Lake Huron Railway (formerly the Buffalo, Brantford & Goderich Railway) in 1858. As an emerging port of importance on Lake Huron, Goderich had been fingered by Buffalo commercial interests as a logical portage point to shorten shipping time diagonally across southwestern Ontario between there and Buffalo, thus cutting off two sides of a substantial triangle through the southern part of Lake Huron, the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair itself and the whole length of lake Erie.

The plan was a bold one, encouraged by civic interests in Brantford which had felt snubbed by the Great Western Railway (GWR), as its mainline had bypassed that city to the north.

Unfortunately, two major factors conspired against the success of that plan. The first was that the B&LH traversed relatively sparsely-populated territory (except for the emerging centres of Brantford and Stratford), so that its intermediate stop revenues were uneconomic. The second was the attraction of the substantial profits that were to be had from the border-to-border transshipment of US goods between the States of New York and Michigan across southern Ontario. Competition for this traffic became the major focus of the two major railway companies in southwestern Ontario – the Great Western and the Grand Trunk (GTR). As the B&LH's financial woes increased, so did the interest of the GTR in that railway, as its line between Stratford and Fort Erie/Buffalo stood to provide the GTR with the necessary section of track to compete with the GWR for the border-to-border traffic. In the blizzard of this east-west traffic flow, the original notion of a portage railway from Lake Huron to Buffalo faded away. In 1864, the GTR struck a joint management agreement with the B&LH which provided financial support in exchange for control. (Part of that agreement required the B&LH to lay a 4'8½" standard gauge third rail between Buffalo and Stratford to facilitate the movement of standard gauge US freight cars over the 5'6" broad gauge of the GTR and the B&LH. Because of the extreme financial constraints of both companies, this never came about.) In 1870 the GTR's ownership of the B&LH became absolute, and the Stratford-Goderich stretch was confirmed as a branchline in a GTR empire that had its priorities elsewhere.

Goderich prided itself on being economically progressive and ambitious, and while the city worked with what it had, it continued to chafe under the monopolistic regime of the GTR. Goderich and Guelph had been "sister" cities from the Canada Company days, and Goderich watched the efforts of Guelph to escape from its own GTR stranglehold by means of the Guelph Junction Railway (GJR), which was chartered in 1884 to connect Guelph with the CPR's mainline at a point west of Campbellville. The CPR had its own reasons for wanting to expand its influence in Ontario. In 1887 an extension of the GJR to Goderich was approved, and interest on the part of CPR gathered momentum to the point where the CPR signed an agreement in 1904, allowing it to build an extension to Goderich under the authority of the GJR. To that end, the Guelph & Goderich was incorporated that year; and leased its line to the CPR for 999 years.

The first sod was turned at Meneset across the river from Goderich in 1904, and the line was opened in stages from Guelph to Elmira, to Millbank, and then to Milverton, all in 1906. A branch to Listowel opened in 1908, but plans for a further extension to Stratford were shelved. Getting the line across the Maitland River into Goderich proved to be a real engineering challenge, but the railway opened to Goderich in 1907, somewhat to the chagrin of the GTR which now performed hand-springs to compete with its newly-arrived competitor.

As with many other railway age enterprises, a 999 year lease proved optimistic in the extreme. The G&G performed well, although not as bountifully as the CPR had expected, but in any case fell victim to the end of the Railway Age. "Mixed" train service ceased in 1962, intermittent freight service continued into the early 1980s, and the line was abandoned from Guelph to Goderich in 1989.

### **Sources and recommendations for further reading:**

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