

## 23ae Peterborough County – A Capsule Railway History

### BACKGROUND

Before the Railway Age, travel and the movement of goods in Upper Canada were primarily dependent on waterways, and primitive trails that passed for roads. Needless to say, both of these modes of transportation relied very much on the weather of the seasons. Agitation for a more efficient mode of transportation had started to build with the news of the new-fangled railroad, but the economic depression of 1837 and the years following were bad years for Upper Canada and for railway development, especially in view of the unsettled economic and political conditions in England, on whose financial houses the crucial investment in railway ventures depended. However, in 1849 the Province of Canada passed the Railway Guarantee Act which guaranteed the interest on loans for the construction of railways not less than 75 miles in length. It was this legislation that triggered Canada's railway building boom.

While the **Grand Trunk Railway of Canada** (GTR), incorporated in 1852, busied itself with its trunk line along Lake Ontario, the waterfront towns were busy with their own railway ambitions. They saw themselves as gateways to the untapped resources of the "hinterland". Thus emerged a pattern of "development roads" from Whitby, Port Hope, Cobourg, Trenton, Belleville, Napanee, Kingston, Brockville and Prescott. (Toronto had already led the way with its portage road to Collingwood, and later participated in additional development roads to Owen Sound and Coboconk.) North of Lake Ontario were rich natural resources and a rapidly expanding population as successive waves of immigrants had to seek land further north from Lake Ontario. The south-north development road pattern was eventually knit together by east-west connecting links or "bridge routes" north of the GTR main line, so that Peterborough found itself at the crossroads of such a pattern with a spider's web of pioneer railway lines.

### THE HISTORY

Cobourg was the first of these shoreline communities to grasp the nettle of railway construction with its charter of the **Cobourg Rail Road Company** as early as 1834. Revived as the shortlived **Cobourg & Rice Lake and Ferry Company** in 1846, it was transformed into the **Cobourg & Peterborough Railway Company** (C&P) in 1852. The line expediently followed the roadbed of the abandoned predecessor's plank road to Harwood on the south shore of Rice Lake, where a trestle was built across to Hiawatha on the northern shore, using Tick Island as an intermediate base. The first train reached Peterborough at Ashburnham on the east side of the Otonabee River in late 1854, with terminal facilities between Elizabeth (now Hunter) and Robinson Streets. The railway's Rice Lake trestle was repeatedly ravaged by ice, and the northern segment between Hiawatha and Ashburnham was closed permanently after the winter of 1860-61.

The promoters of the C&P also had plans for traffic that could be obtained from Chemong Lake north of Peterborough, and accordingly incorporated the **Peterborough & Chemong Lake Railway** (P&CL) in 1855. By 1859, four miles of track north of Ashburnham to Perry's Mills (Nassau) had been completed. Its fortunes were tied to the lingering C&P, and the line became isolated with the abandonment of the section of the C&P road between Hiawatha and Ashburnham. Cobourg stubbornly clung to ownership, and renewed its efforts to reach Chemong Lake by means of a bridge across the Otonabee River (constructed between 1867 and 1871) and over the Midland Railway's Lakefield line, but the project languished again. In 1882 that bridge was closed and there the P&CL rested until it reappeared under the auspices of the Grand Trunk Railway as of 1888, branching off its Lakefield line on the west side of the Otonabee near Park Hill Road. By this time its lumber business purpose had all but disappeared, and by 1902 the P&CL was all gone.

In the meantime, Cobourg, its dream of a continuous railway link with Peterborough shattered, sought to salvage some of its enormous investment in the C&P. Effecting a merger with the Marmora Iron Works to ship iron ore, in 1866 it formed the **Cobourg, Peterborough & Marmora Railway and Mining Company** (CP&M&M). In the following year a railway line was completed from Trent Bridge at the northeastern tip of Rice Lake via Blairton to Crowe Lake. The ore was taken by barge from Trent Bridge to Harwood, and thence by rail to Cobourg. When the iron ore traffic was in decline, the CP&M&M was auctioned off and the residual assets taken over by a new company, the **Cobourg, Blairton & Marmora Railway and Mining Company**, incorporated in 1887. After an unsuccessful bid to connect the Blairton trackage with the Ontario & Quebec Railway (see below), the death throes of the original C&P were mercifully extinguished by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1893 when all the remainder of the Blairton line track was abandoned, and the track between Cobourg and Harwood closed. A few miles were used for storage of old boxcars until complete abandonment in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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More auspiciously, in 1846 the rival town of Port Hope had chartered the **Peterborough & Port Hope Railway**, with the same aims that Cobourg had for the C&P. It called for a route via Bewdley at the southerly tip of Rice Lake. The project did not get underway until 1854, and re-incorporated as the **Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway** (PHL&B) with a new focus on Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay. The line reached Lindsay in 1857, Beaverton in 1871, became the Midland Railway of Canada in 1869, and reached Midland in 1879.

In their ambitions, the Port Hope promoters did not lose sight of the benefits of bringing Peterborough into their fold. While that city was initially being served reasonably well by the C&P, the difficulties with that line had already begun to appear, and every winter month increased the uncertainties. So in 1857, Port Hope arranged to have a branch constructed into Peterborough, which was shrewdly advertised as “the reliable route to Peterborough”. On May 12, 1858 the first train from Millbrook Junction appeared in Peterborough, and shortly afterwards the **Peterborough Branch Railway** was officially opened for traffic. Thus the PHL&B entrenched itself in the very heart of Peterborough with a large tract of land bounded by Charlotte, Bethune, Sherbrooke and Aylmer Streets. A station and yards were built in expectation of the business to be had. With further extension already in mind, the PHL&B negotiated unsuccessfully with the C&P for its spur to Nassau as a continuum of a line to reach Lakefield. With an eventual parliamentary ruling in its favour, the PHL&B extended the spur it had already prepared at the northerly end of its Bethune St. terminus, to cross the Otonabee River at Auburn Mills and assume the needed portion of the C&P spur. The line to Lakefield was completed and opened for traffic in 1871.

Meanwhile, to the east of Peterborough, railway development plans were also afoot as Belleville incorporated the **Grand Junction Rail-Road Company** to build a "loop line" arching from Belleville through the "hinterland" west to Toronto. This served to become a bridge route to connect up the development roads 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. Entry into Peterborough, or Ashburnham at least, was happily resolved with the lease of the derelict portion of the almost-defunct C&P's road north from Hiawatha, so that the first GJR train was able to steam into the old Ashburnham station. In 1881, the GJR passed into the newly-consolidated Midland Railway of Canada, and it was the Midland who arranged for a bridge across the Otonabee River in 1888 to facilitate a direct entry into Peterborough.

#### **George Cox and the Midland Railway of Canada**

For more detail, please see leaflet “23a The Midland Railway of Canada”. Briefly, the PHL&B, which had become the Midland Railway of Canada in 1869, expanded under the astute leadership of a leading Peterborough citizen and capitalist, George A. Cox. In 1881/2 it acquired five neighbouring pioneer railways, namely the Grand Junction, the Toronto & Nipissing, the Whitby, Port Perry & Lindsay, the Victoria and the Toronto & Ottawa Railways. This conglomerate was leased to the GTR in 1884, and amalgamated into the same in 1893.

#### **The coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway**

The GTR depleted its treasury in a futile bid to keep the CPR out of Ontario. The CPR's plans for lucrative Ontario were laid almost as early as that for the transcontinental railway. Its cat's paw **Ontario & Quebec Railway** (O&Q) was chartered in stages (1871-83) for an eventual line from Toronto to Montreal via Peterborough and Smiths Falls. In 1883 the O&Q acquired the Toronto, Grey & Bruce Ry which gave access to Owen Sound; and also absorbed the Credit Valley Ry, giving access to St. Thomas. In 1884, the O&Q was leased to the CPR. In the same year, trains were running between Toronto and Smiths Falls, and the CPR was in Peterborough.

#### **Footnote:**

In 1887 the Midland Railway of Canada made Lindsay its operational headquarters. When the GTR absorbed that road altogether in 1893, Lindsay became the division point for the GTR's 8<sup>th</sup> (Belleville, Peterborough and Port Hope), 9<sup>th</sup> (Midland and Coboconk) and 10<sup>th</sup> (Scarboro Jct. and Whitby) Districts. The GTR was merged into the **Canadian National Railways** (CNR) in 1923.

#### **Abandonments**

Peterborough – Hiawatha **1881**, Peterborough – Chemong Lake **1889-1902**, "Old Road" Millbrook – Omemee Jct. **1927**, Port Hope – Millbrook **1951**, Peterborough – Millbrook **1964**, Peterborough – Belleville **1987**, CPR Glen Tay – Tweed **1971-72**, CPR Tweed – east of Havelock **1988**, Peterborough – Lakefield **1989**, Peterborough – Lindsay **1989**.