

23b The Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton 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. To obtain the financial benefits of the 1849 Railway Guarantee Act, any qualifying railway had to build to the 5' 6" "Broad" or "Provincial" gauge, rather than to the emerging 4'8½" Standard Gauge. This shortsighted requirement proved to have short-term consequences for the PHL&B, and long-term ones generally.

THE RAILWAY

All of the emerging towns along the Lake Ontario shoreline, with a steadfast belief in the superiority of their respective harbours, saw the benefits that were already accruing to Hamilton and Toronto, and were actively sizing up opportunities to develop their local economies from the "hinterland" that was ripe for tapping.

The genesis of the eventual Midland Railway was the Provincial Gauge Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway (PHL&B). It was originally chartered in 1846 as the Peterborough & Port Hope Railway (P&PH), with the same aims that neighbouring Cobourg had for its project to Peterborough across Rice Lake. The Port Hope railway on the other hand called for a route via Bewdley at the southerly tip of Rice Lake. Port Hope's ambition got underway in 1854, when the P&PH re-incorporated as the PHL&B with a new focus on Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay. Construction reached Reaboro in December 1856, and Cunningham Corners just southeast of Lindsay in August 1857. The first train arrived in Lindsay at the St. Paul and King Streets station on the east side of the Scugog River on October 16, 1857, and the line as far as Lindsay was officially opened on December 30, 1857.

In their ambitions, the Port Hope promoters did not lose sight of their original plan and the benefits of bringing Peterborough into their fold. While that city was initially being served reasonably well by the rival Cobourg & Peterborough Railway (C&P), the difficulties with that line across Rice Lake 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 the Peterborough Branch Railway was officially opened for traffic eight days later. 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 eventually completed and opened for traffic in 1871.)

Adolph von Hugel

After the failure of the neighbouring Cobourg & Peterborough Railway, its principal backers transferred their financial support to Port Hope, and in 1872, Baron Adolph von Hugel, bought a controlling interest from D'Arcy Boulton, the Cobourg line's principal promoter, and became president of what was then still a lucrative investment.

In the meantime, the name of the PHL&B had been changed to the Midland Railway of Canada in 1869 to reflect its amended goal to reach Georgian Bay. Still on the Provincial Gauge, the railway reached Beaverton in 1871, and Port Hope's expanded ambitions were consummated with extension to Orillia in 1873, Wau-bashene in 1875 and on to lucrative grain traffic at Midland in 1879.

Adolph von Hugel was born in Strasbourg, France, on August 7, 1828. He emigrated to the United States of America, came to Canada around 1863 and became a person of influence in Port Hope affairs. The timing of his assumption of control at the Midland was unfortunate as it coincided with the major 1873 North American financial downturn, and the consequent erosion of the Midland's profitability, a major contributing factor being the cost of its conversion to the standard gauge in 1874. Von Hugel fought bravely on to save the railway, but by 1878 he was physically and financially exhausted. Around the time of the completion of the line to Midland, Peterborough interests under the directorship of its several-times mayor George A. Cox took control.

George A. Cox and an extended Midland Railway of Canada

In that age, railways exercised power, and power was to be had with the right promotion of railways. George Cox understood that reality, and learned quickly how to work those levers of power. He had had a

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humble beginning as a telegraph operator in Colborne, Ont., but he had business acumen, and on moving to Peterborough, he gained the confidence of influential area families. He had been a director of the Midland Railway for three years when he took over the reins from von Hugel. He went to work most energetically to consolidate the surrounding pioneer lines, and with the original Midland Railway as the nucleus, he brought about a unified regional railway system with its hub at Peterborough, which was accomplished in 1881/2.

The dormant charter of the Toronto & Ottawa Railway was used to construct four “missing links”, three of which were part of the Midland system. One link was between Wick (Blackwater) Jct. of the T&N and Cresswell (Manilla Jct.) of the WPP&L, connected up in early 1883 and thus affording a direct route between Lindsay and Toronto (previously via Lorneville Jct.). The second was between Peterborough and Omeme, completed in late 1883 after some engineering challenges with sink holes at “Tully’s” and “Doube’s” (near Orange Corners), for a direct connection between Peterborough and Lindsay (previously via Millbrook Jct.). The third was a short section of line to link Downer Corners (across the Otonabee River from Peterborough) and the Millbrook branch of the former PHL&B, connecting a few blocks south of the Bethune Street complex to provide a more direct route between Belleville and Peterborough, in 1888.

In Lindsay, a new entry from Omeme was decided upon. Instead of the curving alignment of the early PHL&B down to the east bank of the Scugog, the line now continued straight west with a new bridge over the Scugog River into downtown Lindsay, where it curved north to connect with the former Victoria Railway on Victoria Avenue. (The original mainline became a spur to the Scugog that lasted until the end of the CNR era.) In 1887 the Midland Railway, already leased to the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) in 1884, decided to make Lindsay its operational headquarters. A large freight yard was built south of Durham between Lindsay and Hamilton Streets, and the Port Hope engine house was dismantled and rebuilt in Lindsay as a running shed, together with the attendant shops, on the east side of Albert Street south of Durham. In the meantime the old PHL&B swing-bridge across the Scugog River at Lindsay and Colborne Streets was dismantled in 1887. The former Midland Railway route across Victoria Junction at William St. and Orchard Park Road, and through what is now the Lindsay airport, was abandoned when the new direct line from Lindsay out to Midland was built in 1907. The purpose of the new direct line was to put an end to the heavy grain traffic having to come south on mid-town Victoria Avenue through Victoria Junction. The Midland Railway’s decision to centralize its operations at Lindsay was continued by the GTR when it assumed that road altogether in 1893, and Lindsay became a division point for the GTR’s 8th (east of Lindsay to Belleville and Port Hope), 9th (Lorneville Jct., Coboconk and Midland) and 10th (Haliburton and west of Lindsay to Scarboro Jct., Sutton and Whitby) Districts. The GTR was merged into the new Canadian National Railways (CNR) in 1923.

There is some uncertainty as to Cox’s exact relationship with the GTR, but Cox was an entrepreneur, not a professional railroad man. Certainly he was on friendly terms with the GTR. While economic reasons were at play for the consolidation of the Midland Railway system, politically for the GTR the Midland was a strategic bulwark in its futile struggle to block the inevitable entry of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) into Ontario. As it happened, the CPR succeeded brilliantly in its thrust into the heartland of Ontario in 1884 by means of its cat’s-paw Ontario & Quebec Railway (O&Q). Whatever the exact nature of the Cox-GTR relationship, on September 22, 1883, the Midland system that Cox had so deftly and assiduously assembled, passed officially into the control of the GTR, and George Cox moved to Toronto to further his own ambitions.

Abandonments: Port Hope to Millbrook 1957 Millbrook to Peterborough 1964 Millbrook to Omeme 1927 Omeme (Peterborough) to Lindsay 1989 Lindsay to Orillia 1966 Orillia to Uthoff 1993 Uthoff to Midland 1992.

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