

22c The Wellington, Grey & Bruce Railway

The emergence of the WG&B arose from the fervent need for railway service in its namesake counties, and the solid refusal of the Northern Railway of Canada to build branch lines. The first step in the realization of this need was the incorporation in 1856 (one year after the Northern reached Collingwood) of the Canada North-West Railway Company “to build from Southampton on Lake Huron to Toronto on Lake Ontario with branch to Owen Sound, etc. etc.”.

Sandford Fleming carried out a preliminary survey and endorsed the project. Tight money, as everywhere, remained the obstacle, but in 1864, Francis Shanly, prominent engineer and railway consultant, led the move to a successor company, the Wellington, Grey & Bruce, incorporated in that year “to build from Guelph to Southampton, with a branch to Owen Sound”. The contract for the first section from Guelph to Fergus was with Donald Robertson of Queenston; and beyond Fergus, with William Hendrie of Hamilton. The first sod was turned at Fergus on June 28, 1867 and work began on the 5ft 6in Provincial Gauge. By the end of 1870, the railway had passed Fergus and Elora, and reached Alma.

Its charter was amended in the same year to provide for a change to the 4ft 8½in Standard Gauge, an extension to Kincardine (despite opposition from the Toronto, Grey & Bruce), and lease to the Great Western Railway.

Operation between Guelph and Elora had begun in 1870. By October 1871 steel was at Harriston, the line reached Paisley in June of 1872, and the final 16 miles to Southampton were opened on December 7, 1872.

Before completion of the Southampton line, the branch to Kincardine was put in hand with the necessary solicitation of bonuses. A “subscribers’ route” was decided upon, running southwest from Palmerston to serve Wallace and Elma townships and the village of Listowel, then angling to the northwest and heading for Kincardine. The contract was given to D. D. Hay & Co. and the first sod was turned on December 17, 1871. The Palmerston-Listowel section was opened on December 19, 1872, but delays ensued and the line to Kincardine was not completed until December 29, 1874.

Plans for an extension from Kincardine to Owen Sound and a branch from Clifford to Durham were quietly abandoned as the WG&B struggled to meet its operating expenses in the mid-1870s. A traffic agreement was signed with the Great Western in 1873; and in 1876 and 1882 the GWR acquired the bonds of the company. The Wellington, Grey & Bruce was taken into the Grand Trunk system when the Great Western and the Grand Trunk amalgamated in 1882, at which time Sir Henry Tyler, president of the Grand Trunk declared: “the old Wellington, Grey and Bruce did not do well for the Great Western and is not doing well for us”. (Nevertheless its network eventually passed intact into the CNR and continued to serve Bruce County until the end of the Railway Age.) The WG&B was formally amalgamated into the Grand Trunk in 1893, which in turn was amalgamated into Canadian National Railways as of January 30, 1923.

Abandonments:

Fergus to Kincardine and Southampton **1983**.

Sources and Recommendations for further reading:

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Hopper, A.R. and Kearney, T.: [Synoptical History of Organization, Capital stock, Funded Debt and other General Information](#) CNR Acc'tg Department, Montreal Que., 1962

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