

NARROW GAUGE INTO THE ACADIAN  
AND AROOSTOCK BUSH

NEW BRUNSWICK RAILWAY

C. H. RIFF

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## THE NEW BRUNSWICK RAILWAY

The first sod turned of the New Brunswick Railway was at a spot selected on the right of the main road at St Mary's, opposite Fredericton, New Brunswick, Tuesday May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1872, by New Brunswick Lieutenant-Governor Wilmot. In this open field he used the historic spade, used at both the opening of the European & North American in 1853, and the Fredericton Railway in 1867. The Officers of this new Company, elected the previous evening at the Company Meeting, were assembled; Alexander Gibson, the President and the new directors; A. F. Randolph, R. Robinson M.P.P., Thomas Temple, S. S. Hall, Alexander Jardine, and J. S. Bois de Veber. Speeches were made. Work would start immediately, claimed Boss Gibson.

Dreams of building railways were one thing, but often they only remained dreams, but this would not be the case for the railway had received a massive land and timber grant from the Government in the St John River Valley, 500,000 acres of valuable timber land was awarded on completion of the railroad at locations of the company's choosing. The problem was the scarcity of construction labour, few people lived in New Brunswick, and those that were, were all ready employed in agriculture or logging. The Company went looking for construction workers and to this end they sent a Mr Anderson to recruit labour in the North of Great Britain, as far north as one could travel, the Shetland Islands. He was successful, for he convinced 138 people to come to Canada, 66 males, 18 females and 54 children. They left their homes in the Shetlands the 27<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1872 travelling to Greenock where they boarded the Olympic and sailed for fourteen days to land in New Brunswick.

The first rails were being laid by September 1872 between the Lower Wharf and the village of St Mary's and work was continuing in the direction of Keswick.

December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1872 saw the arrival of the first New Brunswick locomotive from England. There has been some mystery about the first engine but it was solved when the Woodstock newspaper reported it came from Hunslet Works, of Leeds. It would have been a sister of the more famous Prince Edward Island Railway 4-4-0T's.

June, 1873 the road was finished, ballasted and ready for the cars for sixteen miles, while rails and ties had been completed for a further six miles. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of June when the Government Inspector arrived an impromptu excursion was quickly arranged with a single flat car.

Starting at Gibson's Landing, or as it was also known as Gills Landing, on the River Bank, the little train ran parallel with the main road where it crossed the Miramichi Portage near St Mary's Village. It crossed McFarlane Mill Pond on a truss bridge sixty-six feet span then crossed the main road about four miles from the station. Skirting the southern side of the road and along the River bank crossing the gulley at Currie's Mountain over a substantial wooden trestle bridge, it continues in a straight line in a north-west direction till the locomotive reached the mouth of the Keswick River about ten miles. It then swept due north following the valley of the Keswick, crossing the main road to Jones Fork's which it crossed on a well built truss bridge. Continuing in a straight line to Eaty's Bridge just a little below Smiths Corners seventeen miles. The train then took a southern inclination still skirting the main stream till it reaches dorn Cove where out of necessity it has to take a short double curve. Leaving the main Keswick stream it crosses Burt's Mills Road to arrive at the present Terminus. Rails have been laid for a further four miles just waiting for ballast.

By September the 10<sup>th</sup>, 1873 the narrow guage was in operation carrying both freight and passengers to the benefit of the local farmers for forty miles. The local newspaper reported that three new locomotives had arrived that week and a regular service would commence. These three locomotives were the tiny Mason built 0-4-4 engines.

The New Brunswick Railway opened for traffic Wednesday September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1873 a narrow guage railway twenty-eight miles long, Trains would leave Nashwaak and St Mary's each afternoon at 4:15, returning the following morning at 8:50. The names given the stations were Nashwaak, St Mary's, Douglas, Springhill, Rockland, Keswick, Cardigan, Lawrence, Zealand, Stone Ridge and Upper Keswick. A station every two miles.

Mid-December the railway had reached the opposite bank of the St John River at a point given the name Nashwaak. The line starts a mile above Woodstock, New Brunswick, on the east side of the river follows the river bank for twelve miles then turns directly at a right angle away from the river and by means of a heavy grade climbs eighty-five feet per mile and then with sharp curves passes over the slope towards the St John River where it joins the line south to St Mary's six miles from the St John River. The Railway then turned back towards the River and reaches its bank at Hartland.

New Year's Day 1874, President Gibson, and the Company Directors made an official excursion to Woodstock, From Woodstock Junction the branchline had not even been ballasted so this portion of the trip was made very slowly. A reception with the locals was celebrated. It was reported that the "cob work cedar bridge over Downey Creek was ninety-two feet high and three hundred feet long took 7000 cedar timbers." It was reported that the line north had been located to Grand Falls.

The January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1874 edition of The New Brunswick Reporter gives a unique glimpse into the early operations on the railway when individual steam engines were assigned to an engineer.

Engine No. 1	Driver Daniel Tapley
Engine No. 2	Driver Daniel Doherty
Engine No. 3	Driver Archibald Davis
Engine No. 4	Driver Steward Yerza

Nashwaak's name was officially changed by a local vote to Gibson's on March 4, 1874.

By August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1874 the railway had been opened to Hartland, and the railway had received another new locomotive from the Mason Works in Taunton, Massasscutts.

In the summer and fall of 1874 the water level had become unusually low on the St John River. This brought failure to the River Boats and success to the little railway. It was reported that there were piles of goods at the freight houses at St Mary's and Gibson.

On to Aroostock! The little narrow guage railway had decided to push over the International Border into the Aroostock territory February 1875. The terminus chosen would be Fort Fairfield Maine. It would now be a Maine Narrow Guage, but it would have to first cross the St John River. The River had been the route for about eight steam boats and they would not be happy. The Peoples Line of steamers complained to Government agencies about the building of this bridge at Andover. They claimed it was an obstruction to navigation. The bridge would have a span or draw of forty feet and the boats were twenty-eight feet wide. The railway countered all the objections and continued building the stone piers.

The construction of the bridge and the new branch line continued in the summer and fall of 1875. Ballast trains were now running. On October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1875 little Mason No. 2 with four cars of rails was slowly crossing the new railway bridge at Andover. The portion of the bridge from the third permanent span to the Andover shore was only temporary. Without warning the wood trestle collapsed with a loud crash and the engine and the cars fell into the river in a tangled mash of rails wood and a steaming engine. Conductor John D. McDonald was killed.

December First 1875 the narrow guage was open into Fort Fairfield, Maine. The railway was proud that in three and a half years it had built 119 miles of railway, crossed the mighty St John River on an 1100 foot, five span bridge, bisected the International boundary, and had opened Maine's Aroostock trade. The official train had to travel through a raging snow storm pulled by two of the lines teakettles.

In 1876 the railway concentrated on the second crossing of the River at Woodstock made necessary by commitments made at its inception.

October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1878 President Alexander Gibson and his family were on the first train to enter Edmunston, New Brunswick on the upper St John River. Only one hundred miles away was Riviere du Loop on the St Lawrence River and the Grand Trunk (later the Intercolonial-CNR) Railway.

Immense amounts of freight was being carried south from the Aroostock, shipments of Potatoes from Caribou Maine destined for New York, lumber, shingles. In the spring of 1880 there had become a problem on the northern Grand Falls Branch. Persons were putting material on the track to wreck the trains. Newspapers said that Acadian obstructionists opposed to railways and settlement from the south were behind these attempts to wreck trains. It had become such a problem the railway refused to operate trains north. By April 1880 trains were running again.

April 14, 1880 the mixed train, composed of a flatcar, smoking and passenger car, in charge of Conductor McQueen was on its way from Caribou to Gibson. When it was two miles north of Woodstock Junction just left the track. The locomotive stayed on the rails and dragged the cars over ground and stumps. The passenger car was demolished but nobody was badly hurt.

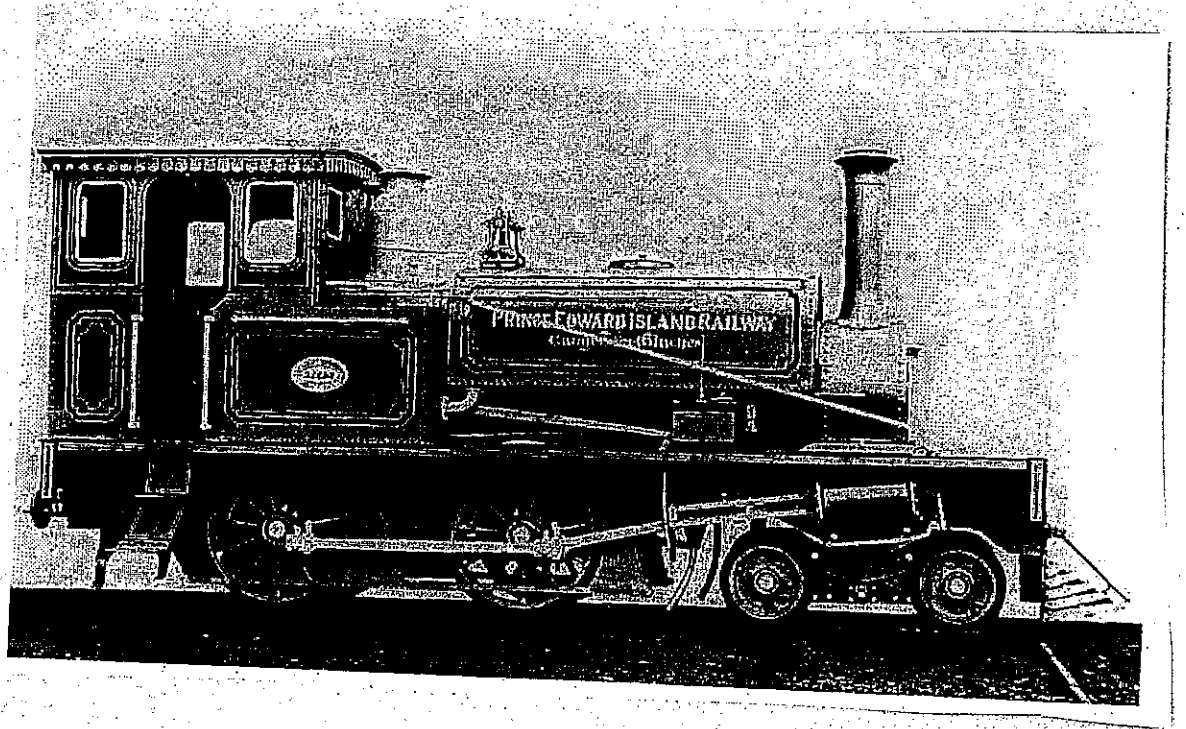
July 1880 suddenly it was announced that the New Brunswick Railway was to have new Proprietors. A special train conveyed the new owners over the road. The announcement; they would Standard Guage the Narrow Guage. The new owners Lord Elphistone of London, and Donald A. Smith, George Stephen, T. W. Ritchie of Montreal.

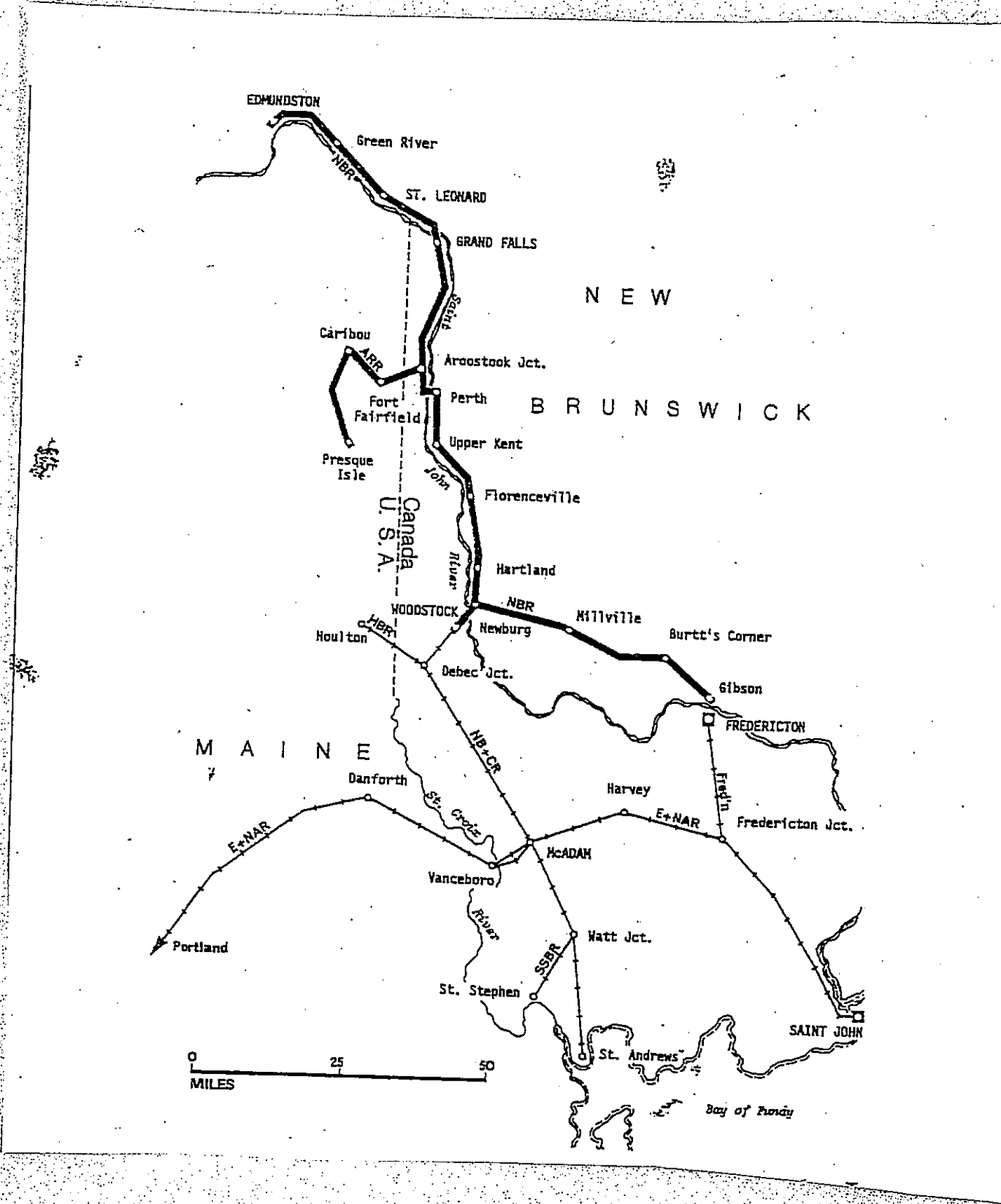
The transfer was reported completed October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1880, Alexander Gibson and the first backers and builders were all gone. It was reported that these new owners had a hand in the new Canada Pacific Railroad.

May 1881, four handsome passenger cars from the Western Counties Railway of Nova Scotia had arrived. Work of widening the railway had started and by September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1881 the New Brunswick Railway was now standard guage. At the Annual Meeting October Samuel Thorne of New York City was the new President, Issac Burpee the Vice-President and General Manager. Rails had been laid from Caribou to Presque Isle fifteen miles.

NEW BRUNSWICK RAILWAY NARROW GAUGE  
1873-1881

1	4-4-0T	Hunslet	1872	
2	0-4-4	Mason	1873	489
3	04-4	Mason	1873	509
4	0-4-4	Mason	1873	510
5	0-4-4	Mason	1873	526
6	0-4-4	Mason	1873	527
7	0-4-4	Mason	1873	531
8	0-4-4	Mason	1873	532
9	2-6-0	Baldwin	1877	4211
10	2-6-0	Baldwin	1878	4345







An accident November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1878, underscores how delicate narrow guage rolling stock could be. One of the train hands threw a bag out of the baggage car at Peel station while the train was moving at an ordinary speed. The bag fell under the wheel of the first class passenger car. This forced the carriage to jump the track pulling with it another car. The derailed cars then rolled down the railway embankment, the steepest it was said on the line. The cars rolled and turned over at least four times before stopping at the edge of the river, right side up.

The first locomotive brought to the city of Fredericton named the "Woodstock" met with an accident August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1867. It was brought to Fredericton with the intension of scowing it up river to Woodstock to be employed on the upper end of the Woodstock Branch Railway. While trying to land the locomotive on the wharf it managed to smash the carrying timbers, fall, swamped the scow and then fell into the river, settling on the bottom. The work of raising the engine even one week later was described as no triflin matter.

## COLLISIONS AND DERAILMENTS

FEBRUARY 5, 1952 COLLISION AT GRAND FALLS CP 3380

APRIL 29, 1952 SLIDE DERAILS FREIGHT NEWBURG

FEBRUARY 5 1925 GRAND FALLS

DECEMBER 12 1950 McADAM

NEWBURG

APRIL 28, 1952

A mud slide, thirty five feet wide, rushed down from a one hundred foot high cliff along the St John River April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1952. The slide smashed into the north-bound freight train hitting the locomotive and the front portion of the train. The engine and some cars were carried down into the river.

Engineer R. K. McNally and trainman D.G. Ketch were swept into the river while the fireman E.H. Haylor was thrown clear

Canadian Pacific in the fall of 1909 expanded the role of Aroostock Junction into an engine terminal. A six stall roundhouse and turntable was installed and the yard capacity was expanded, making it a northern terminal.