

## 18 The Cobourg & Peterborough Railway (C&P)

Cobourg was the first of these shoreline communities to grasp the nettle of railway construction. The charter of the **Cobourg Rail Road Company** was one of the two earliest railway charters in Canada of the day, granted on March 6, 1834 with authority to construct an iron or wooden railroad to Rice Lake. The charter lay dormant until June 9, 1846 when it was revived as the **Cobourg & Rice Lake and Ferry Company**, but the plank road to Rice Lake was vulnerable to winter upheaval and was abandoned after one year of operation - an omen that might well have been heeded for what was to follow.

On November 10, 1852 the **Cobourg & Peterborough Railway Company** (C&P) was incorporated to build between those two places. In 1849 the Province of Canada had 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. The Board of Railway Commissioners who administered this legislation specified that to obtain the financial benefits of the 1849 Railway Guarantee Act, any railway had to be built to the "Broad" or "Provincial" 5'6" gauge, so that was the gauge that was used. As it turned out, the C&P did not survive for long enough to endure the financial stress of eventual conversion to the emerging 4'8½" Standard Gauge.

The line expediently followed the roadbed of the abandoned 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 December 1854, where terminal facilities were set up between Elizabeth (now Hunter) and Robinson Streets. No sooner were the celebrations over than the Rice Lake trestle was ravaged by ice in January 1855, and again in 1856-57, 1859-60 and 1860-61. While the railway operated, Peterborough benefited substantially (without any investment on its part) from the line, but the northern portion from Hiawatha to Ashburnham was closed permanently after the damage to the trestle in 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) on May 30, 1855, and by midsummer 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. There for the foreseeable future the P&CL remained, while the citizens of Cobourg, their dream of a continuous railway link with Peterborough shattered, struggled to re-coup at least some of their enormous investment in the C&P. Its owners effected a merger with the Marmora Iron Works with a view to iron ore shipments from that district, and so on August 15, 1866, the **Cobourg, Peterborough & Marmora Railway and Mining Company** (CP&M&M) was formed, and the following year a railway line was completed from Trent Bridge at the northeastern tip of Rice Lake 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 were then held by a new company, the **Cobourg, Blairton & Marmora Railway and Mining Company**, incorporated on June 23, 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 (see below) as of April 1, 1893, at which time all the remainder of the trackage of the Blairton line was abandoned, and the trackage between Cobourg and Harwood closed. A few miles were used for storage of old box cars until complete abandonment in the 1910s.

As for the **Peterborough & Chemong Lake Railway**, the Cobourg interests stubbornly clung to its ownership, and renewed its efforts to reach Chemong Lake by means of a bridge across the Otonabee (constructed between 1867 and 1871) and over the Midland Railway's Lakefield line, but for lack of funding, the project languished again. In 1882 that bridge was closed and there the P&CL rested again until it reappeared under the auspices of the Grand Trunk Railway as of March 23, 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.

### Sources and some recommendations for further reading:

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