

34 The Credit Valley Railway (CVR)

BACKGROUND

In 1849, the Province of Canada passed loan interest legislation that triggered Canada's railway building boom. Unfortunately, in 1851 the Province of Canada enacted further, *inter alia*, to create a Board of Railway Commissioners, one of whose duties was to administer the 1849 loan interest guarantee. The Board required that to obtain the loan interest guarantee benefit, any railway had to build to the 5ft 6in gauge, which came to be known as the "Provincial" or "Broad" Gauge.

During this "broad gauge" era of railway development in Upper Canada from 1850 to 1870, one George Laidlaw rose to prominence as an advocate of the economies of the narrow gauge. An emigrant from Scotland, he obtained a position with the Toronto distillery firm of Gooderham & Worts, and persuaded his employers to invest in the narrow gauge concept in sponsoring feeder lines for their business. Accordingly on March 4, 1868, the Toronto Grey & Bruce (TG&B) and the Toronto & Nipissing (T&N) Railways were chartered to build to the northwest and the northeast of Toronto. By 1865, Laidlaw had become a grain merchant in his own right, and his passion for transportation issues (the benefits of the narrow gauge system in particular) and his involvement with railway projects had come to dominate his career. After inception of the TG&B and the T&N, Laidlaw also became a moving force in the Credit Valley and the Victoria Railways. While the disadvantages of the narrow gauge system had not yet become apparent, in the meantime, the 5'6" "Provincial Gauge" was falling economically and politically out of favour. During the 1870s, in order for any railway to obtain the important contribution of the now Government of Ontario grants, it had to be built to the 4'8½" Standard Gauge, making Laidlaw's hitherto favourite denunciation of railway construction profligacy moot.

In 1870 and subsequently, The Credit Valley Railway was incorporated to build from Toronto to Orangeville, via the Credit River Valley and Streetsville; with branches to Galt, Berlin, Waterloo, etc.; and then again in 1873 with power to extend to Woodstock and St. Thomas, entered into amalgamation with the Ontario & Quebec Railway (O&Q) in 1884, and then as the O&Q in 1887 had the charter extended to the Detroit River. By 1881, the newly-engineered Credit Valley was in financial difficulty (as were many other fledgling railways at that time, including the TG&B and the T&N). Laidlaw was commercially and politically very well-connected and in particular was on good terms with George Stephen, who was the driving force behind the CPR syndicate and its secondary ambition for Ontario (the primary one being of course the transcontinental railway). Going by its name, the primary focus of the Credit Valley may reasonably have been assumed to be a connection with Orangeville (although why remains a conundrum, in view of the fact that Laidlaw's TG&B had already been there since 1871, but perhaps it was the prospective entry into Wellington County to Fergus and Elora), but the CPR's focus was on the "branch" to Woodstock, as the line's subsequent extension to St. Thomas and beyond made abundantly clear.

THE RAILWAY

Surveys were in hand by 1873, and construction followed in 1874, a major engineering challenge being the numerous bridges including the iconic trestle across the Forks of Credit. Aside from the straight engineering challenges, the project was plagued by lawsuits over land, labour problems, financing difficulties, loss of supplies at sea, fence and snow-clearing issues, and the extra-ordinarily complex issue of trackage rights into Toronto itself. In the event, the railway was formally opened at Milton by His Excellency, the Marquis of Lorne, Governor-General of Canada, on September 19, 1879. The line to Milton had been open since 1877; and was opened to Galt, Streetsville Jct., to Orangeville, and Cataract Jct. to Elora in 1879. St. Thomas was reached in 1881.

When the CVR was built into Orangeville, it crossed over the TG&B line at Melville Junction, about 2.5 miles south of Orangeville and terminated just north of Broadway in Orangeville, where the station was located. When the CPR (O&Q) assumed the CVR and the TG&B in 1884, it consolidated its entry into Orangeville using the TG&B right-of-way, and the CVR spur into Orangeville was abandoned.

Abandonments:

Melville Jct. to Orangeville (CVR) **1884**. Cataract Jct. to Elora **1987**. Streetsville to Orangeville **1995** (track not taken up).

Renewal: Orangeville-Brampton Railway [OBRY] since 2000

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