

25 Port Dover & Lake Huron, Stratford & Huron, Georgian Bay & Wellington and the Grand Trunk, Georgian Bay & Lake Erie Railways

Port Dover & Lake Huron Railway (PD&LH)

The PD&LH was incorporated in 1872 to build from Port Dover to Stratford. The company was allowed to acquire the roadbed and holdings of the defunct and scandal-ridden Woodstock & Lake Erie Railway and Harbour Company. The line was opened between Port Dover and Woodstock in 1875, and between Woodstock and Stratford in 1876. The PD&LH purchased Port Dover harbour from the federal government in 1877. The PD&LH crossed five east-west railways: the Canada Air Line at Simcoe, the Canada Southern at Waterford, the Brantford, Norwich & Port Burwell at Norwich, the GWR at Woodstock and the GTR at Stratford, which place it reached in 1876.

In 1877, the PD&LH received authority to amalgamate with the Stratford & Huron Railway. This was presumably for the purpose of enhancing its strategic interconnections and thus its revenue potential, but this was occurring in an increasingly crowded field of smaller competing companies, and rationalization was at hand. In 1881, the Port Dover & Lake Huron (along with the Stratford & Huron and Georgian Bay & Wellington Railways) were amalgamated into the Grand Trunk, Georgian Bay & Lake Erie Railway (GT,GB&LE) in 1881, a subsidiary of the Grand Trunk Railway. The seven-mile portion of the PD&LH from near Tavistock to Stratford ran parallel to the original Buffalo, Brantford & Goderich line. In 1893, when the GT,GB&LE was absorbed outright into the GTR, this section of the PD&LH was closed in favour of a short connecting track at Tavistock Jct., in the western part of Tavistock. Part of the original PD&LH line in the east end of Stratford, was retained as a connection between the BB&G, the GTR main line, and the Stratford & Huron to the north.

Stratford & Huron Railway (S&H)

The Stratford & Huron was incorporated as early as 1855 for the purpose of building from Stratford to Southampton, from where branch lines would radiate. Its incorporation was an attempt to forestall any invasion by the Northern Railway (which, ironically, Bruce County had actively but unsuccessfully been promoting with the Northern); but lacking financial backing, the S&H lay dormant until 1864 when Bruce County promised some financial support. At that time a survey was authorized and the charter updated. However funding remained an issue, and as already noted, in 1877 the PD&LH and the Stratford & Huron received authority to amalgamate. In view of the fact that Southampton had already been reached by the Wellington, Grey & Bruce, the S&H's destination was changed to Wiarton. Construction was completed from Stratford to Listowel in 1877 and from Stratford to Harriston in 1877. The Stratford & Huron was amalgamated into the Grand Trunk, Georgian Bay, & Lake Erie in 1881, a subsidiary of the GTR and the sections from Harriston to Chesley to Wiarton were completed in 1882. The dictates of viability and consequent rationalization in the light of an increasingly crowded field of smaller competing companies were at hand.

Georgian Bay & Wellington Railway (GB&W)

In 1878, the Georgian Bay & Wellington Railway was incorporated by local promoters to build from Guelph, Listowel or Harriston to Owen Sound. In the light of the fact that the TG&B had reached there five years earlier, this ambition was scaled back to become the Georgian Bay & Wellington Railway with the more modest object of building from Palmerston to Durham, which place was reached in 1882, some 18 years after Frederic Cumberland had spurned the petition of a Northern Railway of Canada branchline to that place.

Grand Trunk, Georgian Bay & Lake Erie Railway (GT,GB&LE)

In 1881, the Port Dover & Lake Huron, the Stratford & Huron and the Georgian Bay & Wellington Railways were amalgamated into the GTR under the name of the Grand Trunk, Georgian Bay & Lake Erie Railway. Following the amalgamation, a portion of the S&H from Westonville (Listowel) to Harriston (15 miles) was abandoned. The spur from Park Head through Shallow Lake to Owen Sound was begun in 1891. The GT,GB &LE was folded into the GTR in 1893, so that by the time of its completion, the extension to Owen Sound was integrally part of the GTR.

Sources and Recommendations for further reading:

Bowers, Peter: Two Divisions to Bluewater – the Story of the CNR to the Bruce, Boston Mills Press, Erin, Ont. 1983
Scrimgeour, Pat: Historical Outlines of Railways in Southwestern Ontario. UCRS Newsletter July 1990. Toronto, Ont.
Stevens, G.R.: Canadian National Railways, Volume I, Clarke Irwin, Toronto, ON 1960