

30c Guelph Junction Railway

In the 19th century, the first order of business of any ambitious community was to attract a railway to secure its economic survival and to enhance its status with the surrounding burgeoning places. With that accomplished, the next order of business was to encourage another railway connection to break the monopoly stranglehold of the first.

Guelph had been fortunate to be well-placed in line with the Grand Trunk Railway's ambition to get to Chicago, with the opening of the Toronto-Guelph Railway (newly-assumed by the GTR) in 1856.

Unlike some other places that had to wait for more than a decade to get to the next order of business, Guelph was favoured the very next year, no less, with the arrival of the Great Western Railway-sponsored Galt-Guelph Railway, which not only provided a link to a major competitor to the GTR, but also proved to be the gateway to access to the Huron coast with the pioneer Wellington, Grey & Bruce, also eventually folded into the GWR with a traffic arrangement in 1873.

As many other Ontario communities discovered, the luxury of two railways competing for their business did not last long. In 1882, the Grand Trunk Railway took over its major Ontario rival, the Great Western, and Guelph was back to a "one (iron) horse" town, and Guelph businessmen immediately began to look for a solution. The main line of the recent (1881) Credit Valley Railway (CVR) from Toronto to Woodstock passed just to the south of Guelph, and was on the verge of being absorbed into the Canadian Pacific. Unfortunately the CVR was in tough financial shape and not in a position to build a branch to Guelph, but the year 1883 brought good news. The CPR was working on entry into Ontario and the key was its catspaw Ontario & Quebec Railway (O&Q), then under construction between Toronto and Montreal. The O&Q in turn leased the CVR (among others), so that Guelph's renewed chance at competitive railway service was a direct link with the O&Q that came to be leased to the CPR in 1884. In the same year, a charter was introduced for the Guelph Junction Railway (GJR), with power "to build from Guelph to a point of connection with the Credit Valley Ry between Milton and Galt; with power to extend line to a point on Lake Ontario at or near Burlington etc. etc." which authorized a connection between the CVR main line and Guelph, with power to extend southeast, to Lake Ontario at Burlington (amended in 1887 to include an extension to Goderich). The charter required that construction begin within two years. The winter of 1886 had arrived, and the deadline loomed.

Fearing that Guelph might be overtaken economically by other cities on the CPR's Ontario network, Guelph City council decided in February 1886 that the line, at least the portion between Guelph and the Canadian Pacific connection at Campbellville, should be built at the city's expense. In 1887, the City of Guelph took majority ownership in the GJR, which in 1891 was leased to the CPR for 99 years. City council agreed to allow the Priory, the first building in Guelph and erected by the Canada Company in 1827, to be used as a passenger station. With financing to be obtained, some necessary negotiation with the GTR over land disputes, and the route itself to be decided on, construction was begun and completed in 1888, when the line opened from Guelph to a point west of Campbellville, called Guelph Jct. The City of Guelph purchased all of the shares of the GJR in 1901 and 1910, and still owns the railway today.

Sources and recommendations for further reading:

Andrae, Christopher: *Lines of Country: An atlas of railway and waterway history in Canada*, The Boston Mills Press, Erin, ON (Then an Affiliate of the Stoddart Publishing Co.) 1997

Dorman, Robert: *A Statutory History of the Steam and Electric Railways of Canada 1836-1937*, Canada Department of Transport, Ottawa, ON 1938

Filby, James: *Credit Valley Railway – The Third Giant*, The Boston Mills Press, Erin, Ont. 1974 #1 Credit Valley Series

Hooton, D. Thorning, S. Mull J. Beaumont, R.: *Rails to Goderich - A History of the CNR and CPR Lines from Stratford/Guelph Junction to Goderich*

Scrimgeour, Pat: *Historical Outlines of Railways in Southwestern Ontario*, UCRS Newsletter (July) 1990, Toronto ON
Stamp, Robert M.: *Riding the Radials – Toronto's Suburban Electric Streetcar Lines*, Boston Mills Press, Erin, Ont. 1989

Wellington County History – Railway Issue, Vol 4., Wellington County Historical Research Society, Fergus, Ont. 1991
Wellington County History – various railway topics, Vol 20, Wellington County Historical Research Society, Fergus, Ont. 2007

Wilson, Donald M: *The Ontario and Quebec Railway*, Mika Publishing Co., Belleville, Ont. 1984