

## 55d Ontario West Shore Railway

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ontario became enthused with the concept of the radial electric or “interurban” railway concept. Outside of Toronto, it was promoted, supported and often assumed by the then Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario, whose Chairman Sir Adam Beck was the guiding enthusiast. In the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mann and Mackenzie empire was also involved as competition.

The “radials” offered a significant advantage over the steam railways with more frequent service and more convenient and frequent stops, and significantly – cheaper fares. There were many schemes planned as a loosely-knit southern Ontario network, but many, if not most of them, ever came to fruition.

The major reasons for the demise of the lines that were built were (1) politics, (2) financing issues after WWI, (3) the emergence of the automobile and of course (4) the Great Depression, where few had the money to afford the fare, let alone to buy anything once they got to where they were going.

The Ontario West Shore Railway was first chartered in 1902 as the Huron, Bruce & Grey Electric Railway “to build an electric railway from Town of Goderich, southerly through Townships of Goderich, Stanley, Hay and Stephen, to boundary line between Huron and Middlesex Counties; and from the Town of Goderich northerly to Owen Sound, with branches ... etc etc.” Its name was changed in 1903 to the Ontario West Shore Electric Railway Company. In 1904 Then St. Joseph and Stratford Electric Railway Co. (never built) was authorized to “purchase rights of Ontario West Shore Electric Railway Co. in construction of line from St. Joseph to Hensall”, and in 1908 there was authorization for “Extension of lines to London; branch lines to St. Mary’s, Stratford and Kincardine ...” In 1909, its name was changed again to the Ontario West Shore Railway Co. The handwriting was on the wall in 1913 with “Property, rights etc. of the Ontario West Shore Railway Co. vested in Thos. Stothers as Trustee for Municipalities which guaranteed the bonds of the railway company, and the end became official in 1919: “Cites sale, by Trustee, of assets of the above railway company; ..., etc etc.” (Was there ever so much authorized for so little?)

One of the principal promoters of the Ontario West Shore Railway was a Mr. J. W. Moyes of Toronto. Mr. Moyes had been previously involved with the construction of the Metropolitan radial line in Toronto. While the OWSR project made some progress, it certainly never came anywhere near the status of the Metropolitan. There are lots of stories about this ill-fated enterprise. What we do know is that there was a small construction locomotive used on the OWSR, numbered 999. It pulled two flat cars in addition to its tender back and forth along the line during construction, and that track was eventually laid from Goderich to Kintail.

And the OWSR ended in scandal when all of the \$385,000 raised for construction had been spent, but records could only be found to account for \$228,000. According to *The Intercity Electric Railway Industry in Canada*, by John F. Due, Mr. Moyes refused to co-operate with the investigation by the Ontario Railway and Municipal Board, and was last seen at Scotia Junction, heading for Algonquin Park to evade arrest. Many questions remained. Was it just greed and scam? Incompetence? Or both?

### **Sources and Recommendations for further reading:**

Clowes, Art: *Ontario West Shore (Electric) Railway*, UCRS Newsletter #513 July 1992

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Stamp, Robert M.: *Riding the Radials – Toronto’s Suburban Electric Streetcar Lines*, Boston Mills Press, Erin, ON 1989