

CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

II. Work Begins

The surveyors of the C.V.R. reached Milton on March 13, 1873 and were received by the Reeve of Milton and the Warden of the County of Halton. They were entertained at a supper at Wallaces' Hotel where they announced to their hosts and visiting newspaper reporters that they had “found a suitable route from Toronto to Milton and gave an account of the progress of the railway to-date. The hand of George Laidlaw controlled even the surveyors reports', he seized every opportunity to publicize the railway and to assure its supporters that progress was being made”.

By June 12 1873 the survey parties were under Mr. C.J. Wheelock C.E., and were locating the line between Orangeville and Brampton; again Laidlaw chose to allow their reports to reach the press and to indicate that grading was almost finished from Toronto to Streetsville.

When July 24, 1873 rolled around, the station locations on the Elora branch had been designated and the report in the Orangeville “Sun” of that date relates the details with which they were outlined and the specifications within which the company had to operate in order to obtain their bonus. The following is an extract from these specifications:

Station Locations:

At the village of Erin or one mile thereof.

In the village of Pillsbury, or one mile thereof.

At or near the town line between Erin and Garafraxa East.

At or within one and one-half miles of the village of Douglas, and should engineering or other obstacles cause the station to be located more than one mile from the town, the road to the village to be gravelled by the company to the satisfaction of the Warden of the County.

A flag station, with switch, located one-half mile from the Hines Hotel located on the Fergus-Douglas road.

A station within the limits of the town of Fergus located northwest of the Grand River.

A station within Lot 17 in the eleventh concession of the Township of Nichol and the Grand River in the village of Elora at a point west of a line between the 11th and 12th concessions of said Township and Irvine St. in said village.

A station within the village of Orangeville.

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The company was also to be bound to erect and maintain free warehouses of suitable size and capacity at all stations with the exception of the station at the town line (item #3 above); also, to build and maintain workshops for this portion of the line in Fergus and to expand the line with the Wellington bonus pro rata per mile from a point between Belfountain and Elora to Salem.

Such were the precise limitations, and by October 1874 it became apparent that the line could not be run through Belfountain. The shareholders were informed that “should the line through Belfountain prove impracticable a junction at Church's Falls (Cataract) may be had under very favourable circumstances.” The land in the Credit Valley area was to be preserved and a glowing report is given in the Orangeville “Sun” of May 13 1880: “The Credit Valley Park, one of the most beautiful, romantic and picturesque parks in the Dominion will be that now being surveyed by Mr.C.J. Wheelock P.L.S. for Mr. G. Laidlaw and occupying grounds along the western and northern branches of the river. If the views of the projector be carried out in full as they generally are, this park will be a favourite of all lovers of the grand sublime and beautiful in nature. Compared with it the Victoria and Lorne Parks sink into utter insignificance.”

A brief reference to Mr. Lumsden, the chief of the Survey Staff. in the Woodstock “Sentinel” of July 31, 1874 mentions that “he has gone to work on the Elora branch the work upon the mainline to Ingersoll being so far completed as to warrant him in leaving its further prosecution in the hands of his associates.” By reference to an article in the Woodstock “Weekly Review” and comparing the date of February 6, 1874 with that mentioned above. We can see that the surveying from Galt to Ingersoll took approximately six months. This same paper briefly mentions that the work crew on this section of the line were Italian and the majority new immigrants to Canada.

By 1874 the Province of Ontario had decided that in order to obtain a government grant or subsidy, a railway in future had to be built on a gauge of four feet eight and one-half inches. Prior to this time the choice of gauge was entirely up to the promoters of the railway and varied from 5'6" to 3' 6" in width. The obvious problems of eventual interchange between railways can easily be imagined and it wasn't until the standardization of gauge took place that an efficient transportation system could be developed within the Dominion.

Therefore in spite of his successful building of two narrow-gauge railways, the T G. & B. and the T. & N. Laidlaw constructed the Credit Valley on a standard gauge compatible with the major contemporary roads.

Regardless of argument and design operational proof taken from the above narrow-gauge railways together with the impending loss of subsidy due to the implementation of the Guarantee Act convinced Laidlaw and his associates that further ventures in the narrow-gauge field would be futile and the Credit Valley settled on standard track width.

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At the annual meeting of the shareholders of the C.V.R. in Toronto on October 29, 1874 it was announced that the building of the railway so far had been done in a most satisfactory manner and the bridges at the Humber and Credit Rivers “If equaled are not surpassed in the dominion” states the Orangeville “Sun” Full credit for the construction of the bridges is awarded to the skill of the Chief Engineer of the C.V.R. Mr. J.C. Bailey, who superceded Mr. Holt his resident engineers Mr. J. McCalman and his superintendent of bridges, Mr. T. Watts. At this particular time the grading of the line was under way on the Orangeville and Elora branches, effectively managed by Mr. J.A. Walsh while Mr. F.B. Brothers was in charge of the St. Thomas main line.

In order to gain entrance into Orangeville, Mr. Bowles one of the directors of the railway was successful in obtaining seven acres of ground on the property of Mrs. Ketchum at East Broadway and East Fourth St. Mrs. Ketchum with “commendable liberality” made a grant of the seven acres and gave the company the right to purchase additional land at the rate of \$700 per acre when required. The site selected was one of the best possible considering both the interests of the railway and of the town. Even today it would lend itself as an ideal site for a terminal with ample flat land for yard facilities - yet on the edge of town but close enough for passenger and freight handling with ease. The terminus consisted of a station and freight sheds as well as a turn-table water tank and buildings for servicing engines, together with storage and side tracks. No trace of these facilities remains today save some roadbed and some concrete bases for water tower legs and engine pits.

By 1879 the construction of bridges had proceeded extremely well. A report in the February 14, 1879 issue of the Brampton “Conservator” carries a letter received from a resident of Cheltenham saying “We saw the engineer who is stopping at Mr. Berry's Hotel. He is about laying down a switch at the junction of the Hamilton and Northwestern road for the purpose of getting down there timber for bridges and etc. of which they have over three million feet ready for shipment as soon as the siding is down.” This lumber was being brought into the general area so that bridges could be constructed, track laid and work trains moved over them and up the line toward Orangeville and Fergus.

On November 5, 1879 the first construction train arrived in Lambton Mills from Toronto and reports tell that the work is “being pushed forward with energy and dispatch.” Track laying was proceeding at the rate of one mile per day.

So interested were the people of the towns through which the railway was to pass that the newspapers publicized the shipment of the first freight. The Brampton “Conservator” of November 15, 1878 tells of “an earnest of the good things to come as the first freight passed over the line on Saturday last in the shape of a new stationary engine for the firm of P.& F.A. Howland of Lambton Mills. The arrival of the first passenger train is looked for shortly.”