

## CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

### **IV. Difficulties and Controversies**

Many vexatious delays and controversies occurred which seemed to make the building of the railway almost impossible.

In the Woodstock “Weekly Review” of July 30, 1875, better than two whole columns were devoted to an exchange of letters between the Honorable George Alexander of Woodstock and the president of the C.V.R. George Laidlaw. Apparently Alexander objected to the C.V.R. trackage through his property and had indicated that he would take legal action against George Laidlaw personally. The attack was withdrawn later by a letter, stating that the reference was not “with your personal and private character” but “I could only be referring to your official management of this unfortunate enterprise.”

Alexander warned that the route from Innerkip to Woodstock “will cause you to waste \$10,000 of the bonus monies granted to the C.V.R. by the industrious inhabitants of the county.” He further stated “you are not possessed of means to complete the work”, referring to a portion of George Laidlaw's letters which mentioned that the railway would require more money than they presently had but that they expected to get it. Alexander continued his attack by saying “Does anyone believe that the enterprise known as the C.V.R. will ever be completed? The general sentiment of the country is that its whole inception from the beginning has been a folly, and that the monies voted by the municipalities have been virtually thrown away. Who would ever purchase the bonds of a company whose line for nearly half its distance runs alongside one of the finest railways on the Continent while no other portion of it is more than twelve or fourteen miles from other railways north and south of it?” Alexander's assumptions and arguments did possess some merit. However the determined will of Laidlaw to see his railway completed led him to reply with eloquence as can be seen in the following letter to Alexander:

The Honourable George Alexander,  
Woodstock, Ontario.

Dear Sir:

In reply to your favour of the 14th inst., I have to say that there was no course for the company to pursue other than to adopt the line recommended by Mr. Bailey as much the best and cheapest. We cannot continue the construction of the railway through your property without authority from a judge or unless we come to an agreement with you as to the value of the right-of-way. I have instructed proceedings to be initiated with a view to arbitration and to obtain the necessary order from a judge to enable us to work. We necessarily encounter a great deal of objection, reasonable and unreasonable from proprietors of right-of-way, but either by private agreement or by the force of law we must go on. Since commencement of our work we have lost much time and money by the obstructiveness of the proprietors of right-of-way. The work from the Brock Road to Galt it is our intention to finish simultaneously with the Galt Bridge for which structural materials are being delivered this season. It is true we shall require more money than we have got to finish the whole line but we expect to get it. As to the statements and Affidavit which you say you will file against me personally, I can only promise that when they appear I shall defend myself against them to the best of my ability.

## CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

The board of directors and myself regret exceedingly the necessity which sometimes arises for disturbing householders by the contiguity of the line to their premises; and in your case if it can be proved that your grounds are a place of great public resort we shall afford such facilities to visitors by the erection of covered platforms and etc. as will enable people even from a distance to enjoy your grounds.

The value of your grounds will thus be very greatly increased; an important fact for the consideration of the arbitrators.

I remain, dear Sir Yours very resentfully  
George Laidlaw  
President, C.V.R. Co.

The attack had been blunted and a counterattack staged. It should be noted that no legal action was ever taken and the railway proceeded through on schedule.

The annual meeting of the Credit Valley Railway held on October 24, 1878 at Toronto relates another of the many problems faced and overcome by the dauntless George Laidlaw. While Mr. Laidlaw was in England a Mr. Angus Morrison occupied the chair in place of the president, and reported that “Mr. Laidlaw has succeeded in making provision for the completion of the railway. He had, after much opposition, concluded arrangements through Messrs. Saunders Bros. of London for the steel rail and fastenings sufficient for the whole line from Toronto to St. Thomas, Elora and Orangeville subject to the required bonuses and exchanges of debentures with the various municipalities. He has also concluded financial arrangements for the necessary rolling stock.”

A quantity of rail and fastenings equal to 5000 tons is on the way or has already arrived and is sufficient for the requirements of the company until the opening of the navigation in 1879. Track laying is proceeding two and one half miles west of the city and will be laid as far as Streetsville. Had it not been for the loss of the steamship “Copia” with 17,000 tons of rail and fastenings, Milton and Brampton would probably have been reached at the time of this meeting. The “Copia's” cargo has been duplicated.

Mr. Morrison further reported that the line between Woodstock and Ingersoll was complete and in operation and that the success with which this section has been completed “promises successfully for the whole undertaking.” Laidlaw had written letters, travelled and spoken to the general public and raised funds in various municipalities and townships, enabling Laidlaw to go to London, England, to secure rail and related materials. There was tremendous opposition from the Grand Trunk interests which Laidlaw with the Honourable Edward Blake, was able to surmount and only then obtain credit for the necessary supplies.

## CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

Further opposition appeared as even in the 1880's ecologists were attacking unnecessary destruction of trees although then the abundance of forest was staggering and cordwood was an essential item so essential that part of some bonuses to the railways was the establishment of rates for shipment of cordwood.

A September 9, 1880 newspaper reports “The C.V.R. is being fenced with barbed iron wire. The fencing looks durable enough, is a sure safeguard against snow build up and is cheaper than straight board fences or snake rail fences. The day is coming when such fences with heavier wire however, will be in use on all farms and the sooner the better. Drifts will then cease to trouble the chilly traveller and for cedar there will be found better use than splitting into rails. Try the wire fence and let the cedar grow.” It was a requirement of building a railway in this period to completely fence the right-of-way with a four foot high board fence or cedar rail fencing consisting of split cedar rails five high. The first wire to be used on the C.V.R. was individual strand barbed wire either four or five strands high on cedar posts. In some locations three horizontal boards or split rails were topped by one or two strands of barbed wire. This combination fence was used where there was a possibility of pigs getting out onto the tracks. Near Englewood and Cataract small sections of these board fences may still be seen today.

Stories are told of the problems of early travel in Upper Canada. and it is fitting to indicate the need for snow ploughs, when we realize how primitive were the methods of clearing track. After a fierce storm north of Toronto, the entire route from Orangeville to Toronto would be blocked. Wedge plows were of no use and it was left to track crews to shovel their way north by hand. Mr. N. Weatherspoon, a superintendent on the Toronto Grey and Bruce relates that. due to narrow cuttings and inadequate snow-fighting equipment, two gangs of men living out of fifteen box cars spent six weeks shovelling their way northward from Toronto to Owen Sound. In the Forks of the Credit area, evidence of narrow cuttings may still be seen today and it is easy to imagine the snow falling and drifting until a solid wall of snow closed off any passage through the area.

When temperatures rise above the freezing mark the top snow melts; when the temperature drops again, the snow blockade is now surfaced with ice and requires the use of picks as well as shovelling. The railways of today with their modern powerful diesel locomotives grind helplessly to a halt when confronted by overpowering snow.

The original basic patent for a rotary plow was taken out by a Toronto dentist, Dr. J.W. Elliott in 1869, but the railways were not interested. Thanks to the efforts of an Orangeville, Ontario resident Mr. Orange Jull, the modern rotary plow is capable of keeping even the remotest of mountain passes open all year round for passenger and freight movements. When Mr. Jull announced the development of a new plow representing quite an improvement and advance in principle over any other plow then in use, Mr. John Leslie the Postmaster of Toronto having obtained an interest in the new invention, arranged a demonstration in Toronto at the Parkdale Station of the Credit Valley Railway. Leslie Brothers of Orangeville built the first full-size unit and when the plow was ready to test the season for snow had passed and it had all but disappeared.

## CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

Nevertheless a gang of men succeeded by searching fence corners and other shady places and with shovels brought forth enough snow for the demonstration. The rotary plow, pushed by a locomotive, pressed into the shove and the series of knives in the front of the plow revolvingly high rate of speed reduced the snow to powdering, shot it out through a funnel over the right-of-way fence. The test was a success and from the modest rotary plow of the late 1880's evolved the enormous steel rotary plows now being used on nearly every major railway in the U.S. and Canada. The invention of the plow remains the honour of Mr. Jull and credit for its first use belongs to the Credit Valley Railway.

The device needed refinement and the Leslie Brothers built a new model from which the Cook Locomotive Works in Paterson, New Jersey built a working unit which was operated on the Chicago and Northwestern Railway in northern Iowa in 1885-86. By 1888 the Canadian Pacific Railway were building their own Elliott-Jull plows in the Montreal shops. By 1908-09 George Bury, General Manager of the western lines of the C.P.R., redesigned the plows and in 1911 the Montreal Locomotive Works produced a basic design for rotary plows used throughout North America with great success.

Labour problems on the railway are especially noteworthy. The Woodstock “Weekly Review” of July 23, 1875 reports that at Drumbo “On Saturday last the employees of the C. V. R. were paid and many of the men went to the taverns in the village and commenced to drink. When the liquor began to tell, a disgraceful scene occurred of disorder and rioting. About forty men were seen in all stages of intoxication. Fights occurred for 'when wine is in wit is out'. One man was nearly scalped, another had his arm broken and it is a wonder lives were not lost.”

The low wages paid to railway personnel at this time and slow payment of its employees resulted in frequent strikes. Spikers were paid 10 cents more than common labourers who received \$1.00 per day. An advertisement in the August 1, 1879 “Conservator” of Brampton says “500 men wanted wages \$1.12; 200 men for ballasting and track laying \$1.00 per day.”

In the Shanley notebooks the salaries of train crews are recorded as follows:

Conductors on mail trains.....	\$1.80 per day for 176 mile trip
Conductors on local trains.....	\$1.80 per day for 130 mile trip
Conductors on mixed trains.....	\$1.70 per day for 85 mile trip
Brakemen.....	\$1.25 per day
Baggagemen.....	\$1.40 per day
Enginemen.....	\$1.75 to \$2.50 per day
Station Agents.....	\$1.00 to \$1.75 per day averaging \$35.00 a month.

At this time Mr. Frank Shanley, one of the foremost civil engineers of the day, was in the employment of the Federal Government as an inspector. It was his duty to check the methods and materials used in the construction of the railway and, based on his reports as to completion of the work, the Government would release funds to the railway for further construction from the bonus monies allocated to the railway under the Railway Guarantee Act. A letter from the office of the president, George Laidlaw to Frank Shanley, dated September 8, 1879 gives a good indication of the financial problems which faced the railway and shows the situation as related to wages, etc:

## CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

My dear Shanley: We are in a dreadful state for want of subsidy. The office is besieged by men with discharge papers and overdue paper. The Grand Trunk is holding 50 cars of our rail for freight. We cannot move without money and we cannot get any on account of the state of affairs with the Consolidated Bank Note Company until we have your certificate for both sections. Bailey has just told me he thinks you will get out tomorrow. Will you please give everything else go by and settle this without fail. It is quite ready for you.

Yours faithfully. George Laidlaw

The task of obtaining good men and keeping them must have been almost an impossibility when the wages were so low and after having earned their money, the men were made to wait up to two months to collect it. It is possible that this 'employee problems' could have been a favor in the incidence of accidents which occurred on the C.V.R. until they were able to meet their financial indebtedness and payments were made on time.

Few enterprises ever encountered greater difficulties. Undertaken at the beginning of 'hard times' it was no small task to raise funds for its construction. Through the energies of Laidlaw and the generousities of the municipalities to be served by the road each difficulty was overcome as it appeared.