

CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

VI. Opening The Line

The Credit Valley Railway was formally opened by his His Excellency, the Marquis of Lorne, Governor General of Canada at Milton Ontario on September 19, 1879. From the charter to the first official train it took eight years. The railway building had been hampered by lack of funds, opposed by the existing railways in obtaining credit, further burdened by a strike of its employees in the Toronto area in 1880, and lengthy litigation to obtain entry into the City of Toronto. Opening day was a grand occasion.

A train sheet for Streetsville Station the Junction Station dated September 19, 1879, gives a list of Conductors Engineers, Firemen, etc. this record preserved because it referred to the Special Train taking the Governor General to Milton and returning for the official opening of the railway. On the run from Toronto to Milton the Conductor was Flanagan, the Engineer was Sprague and the Fireman was Phipps. Even the baggageman, Ryan on this particular is listed. On the return trip, the Special carried the same conductor and baggageman but changed Engineer and Fireman to Greenshields and Cameron respectively. The train left Toronto at 10:55 a.m., cleared Streetsville Junction at 11:25 and arrived at Milton at 11:46 a.m. On the return trip the record indicates a departure from Milton at 12:26, through Streetsville Junction at 12:51, Lambton at 1:12 and arriving in Toronto at 1:35 p.m. From this schedule it is quite evident that the official opening ceremonies were brief, since the Marquis of Lorne spent less than an hour at Milton, including having his picture taken in the midst of the official group.

In his book, *The Trail of the Swinging Lantern*, John M. Copeland details a photograph of the official party standing before a banner which reads, 'Success to the C.V.R. Welcome to Lorne'. Among those identified was George Laidlaw the promoter and president of the line. Others in the photograph were John C. Bailey, the engineer of the C.V.R. and Harry Crew, his assistant. Many prominent personages accompanied the Governor General, among them the Honourable George W. Allan Senator; the Honourable John McMurrich, M.L.C., Toronto; James Beatty, K.C., Mayor of Toronto; Wm. Taylor, secretary for James Ross, the young Scottish surveyor and engineer in charge of construction and Ross McKenzie accountant with the C.V.R. who later became one of Canada's most famous lacrosse players.

The entry of a railway into the town that helped to sponsor it was usually a gala affair. Write-ups of the opening of the railway and the first sod-turning at Milton indicate that a good crowd of people attended, numbering several hundred and including the Governor General. Not so at Orangeville when the C.V.R. finally arrived on December 4, 1879. "The first engine crossed Broadway on Monday evening at 5 p.m.," states the Orangeville "Sun", "the men on the mainline had been hard at work for sometime previously. By 4 p.m. on Monday, the rails were laid as far as the station and soon after the iron horse came steaming along with several flat cars of rails attached. Quite a crowd of citizens were present on this auspicious occasion. A temporary platform was erected below the station where the hard-worked and exhausted men were treated to refreshments. The C.V.R. employees' thanks for the kindly manner in which they were treated at the conclusion of the road were due not, we are ashamed to confess, to the town of Orangeville but to an ordinary citizen Mr. H. Haley."

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Less than a week later on December 11, 1879 the same paper headlines an article “A reduction wanted!” saying “Now that the C.V.R. is in running order people are expecting a reduction in the fare to Toronto. It is one of the advantages we looked for on completion of the road. Return tickets should be issued between the different points on the line. At present neither on the C.V.R. or the T.G.&B. Railway are return tickets to be had. The policy pursued by the latter road hitherto seems to have been to make as much money as possible. The convenience of the public was little considered. Return tickets to Toronto ought to be had for \$2.00, and if the C.V.R. makes a move at once in the matter, the public will not be slow to appreciate its action.” The idea was coolly received by the Laidlaw interests and never acted upon by the Railway.

Even before the formal opening of the railway in 1879, regular trains were running between Milton and Parkdale with a bus service from Parkdale to the Toronto Union Station carrying about six hundred passengers per day to and from the Toronto Exhibition.

The Milton “Canadian Champion” files contain the diary of a Mr. David Downey, an employee of the McCallum Quarries at Milton. From a small entry therein we learn that the first train into Milton arrived on December 7, 1876. Since the official opening was September 19, 1879, some three years later, we can only assume that it was a construction train, and, however, that the railway was progressing rapidly but not without difficulty.

Mrs. C.T. Gerrie, in her history of Belwood, mentions that “the first train came into Belwood Station on November 18, 1879 and was a great day for rejoicing. The school was let out for the day and all the children were permitted to have a ride on the train. It then backed up about a mile with the children on board and came into the station again, A few farmers were quite upset as they had not been paid for their land which was taken and even put rail fences across the tracks. However this trouble was soon settled when they got their money.” Mr. Gerrie, in a letter to the author recalls his father speaking of this story, since he himself was one of the children who received the free ride.