

CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

VII. Riding The Train

To experience the days of the early railway it is necessary to “ride the train”. With a little imagination we will now travel by the Credit Valley Railway from Toronto to Orangeville, making a trip from one terminus to another over the toughest terrain that the railway encountered.

We begin as our engine arrives at the Toronto Union Station located in the centre of this thriving metropolis. She is the “J.L. Morrison” Engine #19 built at Kingston, Ontario in 1882. Her type is a 4-4-0 with 69“ drivers and 16x24” cylinders. Slowly she moves on to our waiting train as black smoke belches from her stack. Our train consists of two head-end baggage-box cars and four coaches since this is Monday and passenger traffic is brisk and the local freight shipments are heavy. The scene at the station is one of hustle and bustle as friends and passengers make farewells and businessmen load their wares onto baggage cars. There are no porters and everyone carries his or her own hand baggage. Immigrants, headed for the deep back-country now that almost all of central and southern Ontario has been settled, stand beside their total belongings. awaiting the word of the stationmaster to load; their worldly possessions seem so meager and the open doors of the baggage-box cars look like gaping mouths waiting to gobble up everything on the platform at the stationmaster's signal.

Grunting and clanking like some fierce bull our engine waits. Suddenly a piercing shriek of the whistle announces the completion of loading-boarding preparations, and we slowly move out of the arched sheds of the old Union Station on the trackage of the Grand Trunk Railway and into the blazing sunshine. A six foot high board fence partially blocks our view to the south a symbol of the rivalry with the Northern Railway, a blatant physical barrier erected to separate the trackages.

As we clank and bump slowly over the trackage of our competitors we see the Ontario Government Parliament Buildings on our right. This edifice is the largest building in Toronto and dominates the young city skyline. Situated between Simcoe and John Sts., it faces Front St. West and backs onto Wellington St., occupying almost a complete city block.

To our left is the vast expanse of the Grand Trunk passenger and freight yard, with the Toronto Harbour background Through the pall of smoke which hangs over this area due to the many switch engines bustling back and forth we can look across this vast array of cars and trackage and see, at the water's edge, the focus of all the legal problems described earlier here is the Credit Valley freight shed, its four-track storage yard and the single-track spur which leads out onto the Credit Valley wharf.

We grind past the Toronto Waterworks at the foot of John St., past the Grand Trunk Elevators at Peter St. and under the Brock St. footbridge (Spadina Avenue) and slowly past another railway in Toronto, the yards and engine facilities of the Northern Railway. This yard extends from Brock St. to the Queens Wharf at the foot of Bathurst Street Just beyond the Northern yards we can see the passenger and freight terminal facilities of Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway at the foot of Bathurst Street directly south of Old Fort York.

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Between Bathurst St. and Tecumseh St. we slowly cross the mainlines of the Grand Trunk and the Northern Railways the two major railways in Ontario and ease onto the right-of-way and trackage of the Credit Valley Railway. On our right we see the sheds of the Western Cattle Market and to the left the engine facilities of the Toronto, Grey and Bruce. Next stop is Parkdale and from our apparent increase in speed, it is easy to see that our engine crew are on home ground and know the speed that our right-of-way will allow. We pass the industrial complexes of the Massey Manufacturing Company and Dominion Bridge Company to the north while the Central Prison passes by on the lakeside to our left. We cross King St., notice the Provincial Lunatic Asylum sandwiched between King and Queen Sts., its high wall dome towers and grayish buildings reminiscent of some debtors prison of old.

After crossing King St., we approach the Parkdale Station set to the southwest of the Credit Valley trackage. Here are the main terminal facilities of the Credit Valley Railway with its many freight and passenger sidings, its roundhouse turntable and repair depot. These are located in the general area of King and Dufferin Sts., in the northeast corner extending north from King St. up to Queen, parallel to Dufferin St. At Parkdale our tender is loaded with coal for this is the last point from which we are able to obtain coal until our return. From here on we will burn wood, and at most of the stations, the wood will be piled and waiting to be loaded while the passenger and station agents handle inbound and outbound freight.

After a lengthy stop at Parkdale we move out, at an only slightly accelerated speed, toward the Junction. When we crossed Dufferin St. at Queen St. we left the actual city of Toronto behind, for Dufferin St. was the west city boundary, and it is evident by the large sections of open land that we are now in the “suburbs”. It is easy to predict that some day soon all this open land will be overtaken by development and that the city will devour the hamlet called the Junction, which is just ahead and probably continue beyond. We approach the Junction slowly and one can see that this is a significant junction of railways and will someday be a major railway terminal. Here the lines of the Grand Trunk the Toronto, Grey and Bruce, and the Credit Valley pass, cross or merge with one another for interchange. Here someday will be facilities for expansion of railway freight handling as yet undreamed.

It is easy to look back and predict the future; even the Prediction is 'ancient history' now. As we can see by a map of the Junction, by 1866 the trackage became quite complicated and indeed the Junction was a railway hub for many years. Not until the advent of the diesel locomotive and the tremendous expansion of the city of Toronto well beyond the Junction did the importance of this centre begin to recede. Even today the Junction remains a major station for passenger trains on the C.P.R. and a complex yard facility for local industry and freight car handling.

Our train of 1882 steams slowly into the Junction; the station scene resembles those at Union Station and Parkdale, and similar scenes will be at every station on the trip all the way to Orangeville; the arrival of the train in the depot will activate a bustle of fond farewells, joyous hellos, embarking and disembarking businessmen, local trades people loading stacking goods for shipment, picking up raw materials. Modern efficient methods for transport of rail shipments onto railway-owned trucks for direct delivery exclude this aspect of trade essential to the merchant of 1882.

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The railway station was a hub of activity and an area of interchange of news and information that is nowhere duplicated today.

Leaving the Junction we head westward across the open fields of farmlands near Summerville, toward our next stop, Lambton Mills. (The station here is situated west of the intersection of what is now Jane St. and St. Clair Ave. West). Our stop is brief and we once again plod westward, crossing the Humber River near the village of Summerville. (To locate this accurately for the reader today, the area is very near the immense interchange of Highways #5 and 27) Our train rattles across the trestle over the river and open land into Dixie Station. The population of Dixie at this date is about 150; the village consists of two carpenter shops, a blacksmith shop, three churches a large brick schoolhouse and a hotel. The general store does an extensive business and the hotel is well patronized; no large industries or mills provide freight however, and so our stop is primarily for passengers returning home after a trip to the “big city”.

Soon we arrive at Cooksville with its population of 300. Prior to the disastrous fire of 1852, it was a lively little village with all kinds of businesses flourishing and now, in 1882, with the coming of the Credit Valley, some of the business is beginning to return. Here gas-oil is being loaded onto the train for delivery to the famous Barber Brothers factory at Streetsville. Gas-oil (gasoline) is a local product of the refinery of Parker and Gordon of Cooksville, which coupled with the products of a carriage factory and a steam saw mill provide additional freight. Our stop at this station is of considerable length. Cooksville is the home of the Canadian Vine Growers Association whose farm of thirty acres provides grapes which produce 50,000 gallons of wine per year.

Moving slowly out of Cooksville we head in a more northerly direction now into the back country towards Streetsville. Here are extensive railway facilities to enable us to meet inbound trains from St. Thomas and to pass each other in safety. Streetsville is the junction of the Credit Valley mainline to St. Thomas and the branch to Orangeville. This is the site of the famous C.V.R. Wye; enabling the turning of complete trains as well as allowing movements from St. Thomas to Orangeville, Orangeville to Toronto or St. Thomas to Toronto. Streetsville is the home of the Barber Brothers, world famous woolen producers, and the home of the large grist mills of Gooderham and Worts. Here too are the mills of R.R. Beatty and the hosiery factory of Isaac Staton. It is a bustling, energetic town with a population in excess of 675 persons. After much freight is unloaded and loaded, the track switches are lined up and our locomotive leads us across a network of rails and slowly begins the northward trip over gently rising land towards Brampton.

Brampton, the seat of the County Government of the County of Peel has a population in excess of 2000. Brampton became a town in 1873 and is a first class grain market. The town has three schools two banks, two telegraph offices five hotels four doctors, eight lawyers and many factories. One of these the Haggart Brothers factory, a four-storey building on Main St. devoted to the manufacturing of threshing machines and stoves is clearly visible as we enter Brampton. Also visible are huge lumber piles for the Haggart works; the yard covers two acres of land and the raw materials provide a large amount of freight traffic for the railway. In Brampton our tracks cross those of the Grand Trunk and after a long station stop we are on our way, crossing the diamond trackage of the Grand Trunk and climbing slowly away from the town and upward toward the Caledon Hills.

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The next stop is Cheltenham another of the many water fed mill towns that mark the route of the Credit Valley as it winds its way northward. The station lies about one-half mile east of the town and because the town is situated in a valley on the Credit River, we can see just the odd trace of smoke rising amongst the trees. Our conductor tells us that the population is about three hundred and the town is very prosperous. with many mills, a good carriage and wagon factory, two fine hotels and many shops and stores.

After a brief stop we begin again our ever winding climb and shortly pass the settlement of Boston Mills where we can see the huge three and a half stored frame mill of C.D. Spalding. This mill was originally built in 1860 by Henry Castor and is capable of producing 30,000 pounds of grist and flour annually.

Shortly after Boston Mills we ease our way across the track of the Hamilton and Northwestern Railway. This is Sligo (later to be called Riverdale and as we know it today, Inglewood), a railway junction and nothing more. Our right-of-way seems to have been carved out of the bush like some giant finger pulled through the mass of trees and shrubs and then smoothed. Our tram twists and squirms as we continue to climb and enter the glen area of the Caledon Hills. Ahead is some of the most spectacular scenery in Ontario. The triumph of pioneer railroad engineering is evident on every side as we scramble and claw on our narrow ledge, climbing until we can see ahead that the glen has divided and we approach the huge trestle across the Credit River below. The trestle is an engineering masterpiece in itself being over 1,100 feet in length and 85 feet high. All the discomforts of traveling are quickly forgotten as we gaze out ahead of us up the valley with our right-of-way and track winding off towards the horizon. To our left as we cross the trestle is the glen leading to Belfountain and on our right and almost directly below is the settlement of Brimstone. We slow slightly as we cross the trestle and pull past the Forks of Credit station and its siding, with the flat cars loaded with “Brownstone” destined for pickup by the next southbound train and scheduled for the Toronto building trade market. The beautiful scenery continues all the way up the valley to Alton.

Approaching another depot we start to slow again. On our left appears another track slightly above us and soon this line reaches our level and we merge. We have arrived at Cataract population 300. For the traveler leaving the train at this station, with its array of sidings, engine stall and turntable the scene is all 'railway' until one looks out over the valley. The view is breathtaking. Directly below the station is the Credit River and less than half a mile south is the Credit Falls, the site of Church's Mill. Somewhere in the vicinity is supposed to be a salt spring which once gave rise to a thought by a certain Mr. Grant to utilize the spring as a source for salt, however none was ever found or produced.

Cataract lays claim to the Credit Valley Gold Rush begun in 1818 by a rumor that “gold” had been found there. People quit their jobs and began to roam the hillsides. Like the salt no gold was ever found and had it not been a railway junction Cataract would probably exist only as a memory today. As we limber our legs by disembarking from our coach for a few minutes, denote that the town contains a brewery, a large flour mill, general store, post office woolen factory, sawmill and two hotels. Both village and railway junction have remarkably been carved out of the side of the escarpment, marks of the engineering and drive of the pioneers of Canada.

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After taking on water and wood we start once more on the upward climb towards Alton. The terrain from Cataract to Alton is less severe than the previous ten miles and the rugged valley of the Credit River begins to level out and emerge as a series of undulating hills rather than a steep-sided gorge. Alton is situated in one of the valleys between these gentle hills and is about a mile and a half from the widely famed Shaw's lake the major source of the Credit River and a very famous locator for bird hunters. Alton is already one of the smartest looking villages of its size in the County of Peel with a post office, three churches, a beautiful schoolhouse, five general stores, a tin shop, harness shop, shoe store, blacksmith, wagon shop, three grist mills, a flour mill, saw mill and furniture factory together with two hotels and a large foundry for farm equipment. Nearby are two very large patent lime kilns, large enough to warrant special rail sidings for the transport of the finished products to the large construction trade in Toronto. Indeed, as we slow to our stop at Alton station, we sense the activity of a thriving community and so the Importance of the daily trains to and from the metropolitan centers to the south. The train is the vital link with the great world of business and the station at each of its stops is the axis of the town.

Here, and only here, is the news first hand. How is the City? The Country? The markets? All these and many more questions vital to every day living are answered at the depot at train time.

Once again we are jostled, as our engineer does his best, with the light motive power available to bring our train back to life and to the seemingly never ending climb towards Orangeville.

Soon we rise out of the valley and approach the relative level run to Orangeville. Farm land has been cleared on either side of our right-of-way farm out buildings appear on the horizon as meager holdings are made more secure; hints of civilization appear. Down the line we begin to slow again because we are approaching the level crossing with the tracks of the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway at Melville Junction. Here we cross the line of another of the Laidlaw promoted railways ease through the diamond and resume our run north. (Melville a small hamlet at this time will eventually almost completely disappear when the water-powered mills give way to steam and the Credit Valley Railway no longer exists.)

As we go through Melville on our train of the 1880's we see another type of back-country gathering place with local mill and general store. Some five hundred yards beyond the village we approach the smallest trestle on the north branch of the C.V.R. and glide, once more, over the Credit River, barely twenty feet above the flood level. The trestle is one hundred and forty-six feet long with short spans of sixteen feet. From here to Orangeville is "smooth sailing" with little grade and fairly uninteresting scenery.

Suddenly we can see ahead the settled town of Orangeville and the end of our journey. Here is the northern terminus of the Credit Valley Railway; freight sheds, sidings, water-tower, coaling facilities, a turntable, repair depot and assorted railway buildings, together with a multi-tracked terminal for passengers. Once more the sights and sounds of the station stops enroute are repeated; this time there are no farewells, this is the end of the line and glad greetings are offered as friend meets fiend with hearty handshake and fond embrace; the businessman unloads his wares; local merchants hopefully look for much needed shipments of supplies.

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The railway crew uncouple the old style link-and-pin couplers the engine to be watered and refueled. No return trip will be made until tomorrow; in 1882 one or two trains daily are scheduled.

While we have been struggling from Cataract to Orangeville one of our counterparts has been running westward with some of our original cars and passengers, destined for Erin, Hillsburg, Garafraxa, Fergus and Elora.

We would encounter nothing significantly different from the stops made between Toronto and Cataract except that at Garafraxa we might notice we had left the Credit River watershed and entered the Grand River watershed. The line of watershed is remarkably noticeable on the curve a rather sharp bend just before our arrival at Garafraxa station (now known as Belwoods). From here to Fergus we would follow the Grand River first on one side, the east bank and then crossing over to the west side before we encounter the Elora Gorge and the town of Fergus and its historic mills. Fergus does give us an interchange with the Wellington, Grey and Bruce Railway and sometimes the traffic which originates from here is very brisk. South of Fergus we would continue to Elora, the other terminal of the north branch of the C.V.R. Turntable, engine sheds, station, freight platforms and the smaller out buildings all signify that this is another end of the line for the C.V.R.

It is easy today to look at eighty-foot streamlined passenger cars and forget the open vestibule, thirty-eight foot long, hard-seated coach of the C.V.R., yet the papers of the day exclaimed how elegant they were! Nor can we imagine short, twenty-five foot long freight cars, arch bar trucks, truss rod under frames and hand brakes, particularly as we look at today's sixty-to- eighty-foot insulated, roller bearing, steel cars with fail-safe air brakes. All the horsepower of the average small railway of the 1870-1880 era is the equivalent of just one diesel locomotive on the average Canadian railway of today.