

CREDIT VALLEY RAILWAY – THE THIRD GIANT

IX. End of The Rail:

The Brampton “Conservator” of Friday April 9, 1880 reports that “On Monday last, quite a commotion was raised in our village, (Cataract) by the refusal of the section men and some others employed on the C.V.R. to proceed to work and after the heavy rains of Saturday and Sunday, the road was, in some places, blocked and trains unable to get through. Men were sent from Elora and elsewhere to take their places and upon reaching here were intimidated by the strikers and refused to work. Matters stood thus until about 5 o'clock when a compromise was reached and in two hours the line was clear and the first train dispatched from Toronto. The strikers numbered about forty men”. The July 9th edition of the Brampton paper tells of a strike on the C.V.R. totally suspending traffic over the entire line due to wages in arrears as much as two months.

Whenever the Credit Valley is mentioned in writings of an historical nature, the borrowing of coal is always noted. Due to very tight money conditions the officers were at their wits end trying to keep a supply of coal on hand for the use of their engines. Many times the Parkdale agent would be sent down to the Grand Trunk yard to induce the yardmen to put a loaded coal car on the interchange track. Soon this method of delivery came to a stop because the owners of the coal objected and eventually the C.V.R. was hampered even to the extent of delaying passenger trains until arrangements could be made for coal to be sent up to the yards in horse-drawn carts. There it was shoveled into tenders of outgoing locomotives which would be standing coupled to cars with passengers aboard and ready to pull out. The coal owner was “Paddy” Burns of the famous Burns Coal Company of Toronto, one of the largest coal distributors in Ontario for years to come.

The October 20, 1881 edition of the “Canadian Champion” of Milton reads “A New Railroad - The Goderich people, growing tired of the monopoly enjoyed there by the Grand Trunk Railway are making overtures to the officials of the C.V.R. to induce them to build a branch of their road from Elora to Goderich, seventy miles distant and they offer a handsome bonus. If the proposals are not accepted, they will interview the directors of the Great Western or the Toronto, Grey and Bruce railways and see what terms can be made with them. Cause of hesitation on the part of the C.V.R. directors is the already large amount of debt on the road”.

Shortly before the end of the year the inevitable rumours of sale or deals began to appear in the news. Again the Brampton “Conservator” taking an always alive interest in the affairs of the C.V.R. came forth with an editorial on December 9, 1881 which observed “the air has been full of rumours for a fortnight of the sale of the Credit Valley first to the Great Western and next to the Canadian Pacific. Directors of the latter were interviewed at Montreal on Wednesday last about the report and state that they are not correct rumours but that negotiations are on foot by the C.P.R. syndicate to purchase or to lease both the Credit Valley and the Great Western Railways with a view to having stronger opposition through lines to the Great Trunk Railway. Furthermore we observe through advertisements in the “Mail” (Toronto) of yesterday that the Credit Valley Railway Company is making application to the Ontario Legislature to grant them in the next session power to amend their charter to extend their lines to London, Goderich Berlin and other towns in the west, to lease their lines or parts of lines at present belonging to other companies and to lease their own lines to any other railway company should the C.V.R. see fit to do so.

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This last clause is the one to which every municipality that gave a dollar by way of bonus to the C.V.R. should stoutly object. The promises were made time and again by the directors of the C.V.R. that the road would be a competitive line and would be run in the interest of the people who were asked to pay large sums for its construction. To sell or lease this line to one of the powerful railway corporations such as the C.P. or the Great Western would be a betrayal of the peoples' confidence and rights and an act of gross treachery on behalf of the owners and directors of the road. Should it become known that any preliminary steps have been taken by the C.V.R. directors to transfer their interests to the C.P.R. or G.W.R. companies, meetings should be held by the councils of every municipality wherein bonuses were granted to the C.V.R. line and the most urgent protests entered against the transactions.”

Such were the heated feelings of the Brampton paper, further borne out when one takes into consideration what these bonuses meant to the individual citizen at the time. In his book *Our Yesterdays* Andrew W. Taylor of Galt, when writing of the transportation in the area of Galt and Ayr, explains that "the bonus which the township gave to the company in 1874 raised the tax rate two and one half mills and, over a period of twenty years in the depressed '80s and early '90s proved a very irksome burden to the taxpayers."

Moving ahead to January 13, 1882, the Brampton "Conservator" ever alert, again reported under a title banner. "The Credit Valley Railway: the true inwardness of the lease by the Great Western: the Chicago Tribune of Saturday contains an article from the pen of a member of the staff who interviewed the general manager of the Great Western Railway at Eastwood on the first instance the purchase of the Credit Valley Railway by the Great Western Authorities. The information contained in the appended extract may be taken as officially correct. "The Great Western Railway has leased the Credit Valley road for 999 years, which runs from St. Thomas the central point of the Canada Southern, to Toronto.

A company backed by the Great Western has been organized to build a line eastward from Toronto to a point of connection with the Canadian Pacific about a hundred and fifty miles west of the city of Montreal. At the commercial metropolis of Canada, it will connect with the Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa Road which in turn forms a close connection at Quebec with the Intercolonial road whose eastern terminus is Halifax. The Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa Road is the property of the government of the Province of Quebec and negotiations for its purchase by Sir Hugh Allen are now underway and it is understood in Canadian railway circles that this offer will be accepted. It was at first supposed that he was acting on behalf of the Grand Trunk people but later this was proved erroneous and information points conclusively that he is one of the Stevens-Osler-Childers syndicate between whom and the Grand Trunk there has not been any harmony for several months.

During the season of navigation for the past two years there has been an active rivalry between the Grand Trunk and the Great Western over the westbound immigrant business brought to Montreal by the Allen Steamship Line. The Great Western has also insisted that the Grand Trunk should divide the business west of Toronto which is the common junction point of the two systems in Western Canada and remain content with the absolute control of 330 miles of traffic. This the Grand Trunk refuses to do as the system touches all the important towns in Western Canada. In order to get any of the business, the Great Western was obliged to enter into an alliance with the steamboat lines running on Lake Ontario and the river St. Lawrence.

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This arrangement however was of value only during the season of navigation. When the boats ceased running on the Great Lakes the whole of the traffic became the property of the Grand Trunk. The Great Western people admitted they would no longer submit; the Credit Valley road being in the market, they wisely took it in so as to prevent it falling into the hands of the Grand Trunk and having thus, two lines from the Michigan Frontier to Toronto, they came to the conclusion that they were in a position to force the fight on the Grand Trunk. To aid in this direction they joined hands with the Canadian Pacific syndicate and the indications are that before the year has lapsed there will be a well-built line running through the thickly settled farm country and close enough to the Grand Trunk for a distance of 330 miles to give it as keen a competition as it may desire. It is also understood that as soon as Sir Hugh Allen acquires the Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa Road he will make Quebec the summer terminus of the Allan Steamship Line the inland business of which will be given to the Q.M. and Ottawa Railway. The Michigan Central will connect Chicago with this new Canadian line to the Seaboard.

The fight for survival now joined the Ontario and Quebec Railway came into being, and serious meetings began to take place to settle the Credit Valley Railway's position. It was at this precise moment that the Credit Valley became the Third Giant: the key to entry into the Toronto market as well as the long finger joining the United States market through St. Thomas with the proposed connection with the C.P.R. namely the Ontario and Quebec Railway. The route for the C.V.R. chosen by George Laidlaw though ostensibly patterned from finance rather than engineering and foresight, gave the Canadian Pacific Railway the key to trans-provincial routing which has yet to be equaled by its rival the C.N.R.

The final entry by the Brampton "Conservator" is a stroke of reporting genius. It is quoted here to fill two purposes; first, it records the method of the ending of the Credit Valley Railway's brief claim to fame and second it pays a short but glowing tribute to the railway's promoter, George Laidlaw:

The Brampton "Conservator" November 23, 1883
The Credit Valley Railway

"At the adjourned meeting of the shareholders of the Credit Valley Railway yesterday, it was decided to lease the London Junction Railway for 999 years at the price of \$18,800 per year and also to amalgamate with the Ontario and Quebec Railway. At the adjourned meeting of the shareholders of the Ontario and Quebec Railway, it was decided to make several extensive additions to the line. The Toronto "World", November 20th refers to the incident - 'The amalgamation of the Credit Valley with the Ontario and Quebec was consummated yesterday at a meeting of the former company. Mr. Osler was there with proxies for the majority of the stock and he had the little motions drawn and ready for submission. It passed without opposition and the Credit Valley Railway was wiped out of existence as a Toronto concern and passed into the hands of the C.P.R. without a murmur. The last of the railways promoted by the King of the Bonus Hunters George Laidlaw and which were ever to remain independent surrendered without a shot from that remarkable man. The consolidation now includes the Toronto, Grey and Bruce, the Credit Valley and the Ontario and Quebec; the headquarters of which will be in the old U.E. building on King St. and before long the Northern will join the consolidation despite the denials of the Hamilton "Times". When that is consummated everything will have been gobbled up by the two great gobblers and the only thing left them to fight over is the Kingston Tramway".

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And so the history of the Credit Valley comes to an end:

Born February 15, 1871
Died November 20, 1883

But such was the vision of George Laidlaw that even today (1974), the entire trackage of the railway, save a small section of some three miles from Melville into the terminus at Orangeville is still in use as the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway. From Streetsville to Orangeville and thence northward to Owen Sound and the Georgian Bay area: from Cataract west to Elora; from Toronto through Streetsville to St. Thomas and thence west to Windsor and Detroit, these are the main lines of the C.P.R.