

TRANSPORTATION

The C.P.R. Came Through

The progressive construction of a railroad from the setting of the surveyors' stakes to the running of trains on schedule is a fascinating and interesting procedure. It is something the present generation know little, if anything about, especially in this day and age when passenger trains are being withdrawn from service.

In the years 1910-1913, Cobourg witnessed the arrival of two new railroads to pass through the town. What excitement! First, the Canadian Northern Railway came through and located its right-of-way to the north of the former Grand Trunk, now the Canadian National, still more familiarly known as VIA RAIL. The Canadian National had its railway station east of Division Street and the entrance was opposite to Buchanan Street, now Agricola Fertilizers. This location was the former house and property of the Hon. James Cockburn, Cobourg's father of Confederation. In fact the Cockburn house was used by the Leonard family, Mr. Leonard was the CNR station agent. All that has disappeared in that area, except for the electric power lines that still occupy the right-of-way. In the western part of the town, Kerr Street was the location of that

railroad.

I was too young to observe the building of the Canadian Northern. I do recall an older brother taking me with him to see the first passenger train stop and pass on through Cobourg.

Railway construction in those days required a lot of men, and a lot of hard labour. Horse-drawn scrapers would scrape up the earth from the ditch areas and dump it on the roadbed. When the required track bed was shaped, ties were laid by gangs of men and the rails carried in, placed, then spiked down to the ties.

The building of the Canadian Pacific Railway through Cobourg was a different story. By that time, our family was living on the Factory Hill and I was nearly seven years of age, and "on the loose". There was no interference with our roaming the construction site. We managed to watch out for any danger while roaming all over the railroad building work. What a time the Factory Hill boys had! In the summer, we ran barefoot and enjoyed walking through the moist clean clay as it was dumped from the construction trains.

In building through our neighbourhood, the railroad required an elevated

embankment, bridges and an overpass in order to change its location from the north side of the Grand Trunk to the south side. What a piece of construction work that overpass situation created. There were six bridges to be built between the Tracey farm on the west and Ontario Street on the east. During the winter and spring of 1913, preparation went ahead to erect these structures. Teams of horses drawing gravel wagons, brought in and piled up large mounds of aggregates for the concrete abutments, hauled from the lake shore. Concrete mixers on the site of each bridge were used to prepare the concrete for placement in the abutment forms. By summer the bridge supporting piers were in place.

The building of the high earthen embankment was special. To the west, at the north end of Tracey farm, a special railway siding was placed, coming in the field off the new Canadian Northern track. A large railway mounted steam shovel was used to excavate clay from the hillside. With the laying of track on top of the ground and the use of dump car trains, the railroad was started in an easterly direction towards the present

day Tracey Road. In this section, earth was built up gradually, the ties and rails jacked up for the dumping of the next train load of fill.

The building of the elevated embankment from Tracey Road to William Street



was a much different procedure. Here, a long series of high timber bents or frames, made of 12" x 12" BC fir were erected by gangs of carpenters. Large heavy timber stringers were placed on top of the stringers to carry these rails. The construction trains were pushed ahead of the locomotive onto the trestle, dumped their load and returned to the borrow-pit for another load. Bridges were erected as the fill-up progressed. Two trains were

kept in operation day and night. One train was loaded up by the steam shovel while the other delivered its load. Gradually the long embankment, what one sees today, took form.

The erection of each bridge, too, was an interesting procedure. A railway mounted crane picked up a girder off a flat car attached, swung it around and set it down on the bridge abutments. Then the remainder of the bridge parts were assembled.

I can assure you that the boys of the Factory Hill had a big time of it that year, spending much of our spare time in and around that construction work, just having the fun of our young lives, and observing the various procedures that took place. Correction from last week's story:

The Boulton family moved from Breen Bush, New York State, to Cornwall in Upper Canada in 1800. It was in Cornwall where George Strange Boulton met up with and received his early education from John Strachan.

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