

1. Victoria County – A Capsule Railway History

BACKGROUND

Before the Railway Age, travel and the movement of goods in Upper Canada were primarily dependent on waterways, and to some extent on such trails and crude strips of dust or quagmire that passed for roads. Needless to say, both of these traditional modes of transportation relied very much on the seasons and the weather.

Agitation for a more efficient mode for the movement of goods and people (in that order) had started to build with the news of the new-fangled railroad, but the economic depression of 1837 and the years following were bad years for Upper Canada and for railway development, especially in view of the unsettled economic and political conditions in England, on whose financial houses the crucial investment in railway ventures depended.

However, in 1849 the Province of Canada passed the Railway Guarantee Act for loan interest on the construction of railways not less than 75 miles in length. It was this legislation that triggered Canada's railway building boom.

The Province of Canada also legislated a "broad" or "Provincial" 5'6" gauge in 1851, so that to obtain the financial benefits of the 1849 Railway Guarantee Act, any railway had to have the 5' 6" gauge.

The politics and reasons for this decision remain controversial among historians even today, but it proved to have enormous consequences in the crucial years of railway development in Ontario, and the effects of this unfortunate legislation reverberated long after its repeal in 1870.

THE HISTORY

The first railway into Victoria County was the Provincial Gauge **Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway (PHL&B)** (chartered in 1846 as the **Peterborough & Port Hope Railway**) that had an abiding belief in the superiority of the Port Hope harbour, and set its sights on Georgian Bay.

Construction reached Reaboro in December 1856, and Cunningham Corners just southeast of Lindsay in August 1857. The first train arrived at the St. Paul and King Streets station on the east side of the Scugog River on October 16, 1857. A branch to Peterborough was commissioned, and the first train operated from Millbrook to Peterborough on May 12, 1858.

The name of the PHL&B was changed to the **Midland Railway of Canada** in 1869, and Port Hope's ambitions were consummated when the railway reached Beaverton in 1871, Orillia in 1873, Waubashene in 1875 and on to Midland in 1879.

Around the time of the completion of the line to Midland, Peterborough interests under the directorship of its several-times mayor George A. Cox took control of this railway from Adolphus von Hugel, its previous president and Port Hope entrepreneur.

The second railway to reach Lindsay was a project that began as the **Fenelon Falls Railway** in 1871, changed its name the next year to the **Lindsay, Fenelon Falls & Ottawa River Valley Railway**, and to improve its promotional prospects, in 1873 to the **Victoria Railway**, a standard gauge project from the outset.

The first sod was turned in 1874, Kinmount was reached after many vicissitudes in 1876, and the line reached and terminated at Haliburton in 1878.

At its Lindsay end, the Victoria Railway connected with the original Midland Railway route (from across the east bank of the Scugog) at the top of William Street at “Victoria Junction” in 1875.

The Victoria Railway subsequently applied to Lindsay for permission to extend its railway down Victoria Avenue to Glenelg Street to connect up with the WPP&L, and upon the town’s approval, a brick station was built on the east side of Victoria at Melbourne to serve the two railways as a “union” station, so that the Victoria Railway also became the second to reach downtown Lindsay, ahead of the Midland.

The third railway to reach Lindsay was also a standard gauge (4’ 8½”) line that had begun as the **Port Whitby & Port Perry Railway**, reaching Port Perry in 1871. In 1876 it was extended to Lindsay, reaching Albert Street on June 15, 1877 as the **Whitby, Port Perry & Lindsay Railway (WPP&L)**, and the first to actually reach downtown Lindsay.

While this was going on, the Toronto Gooderham & Worts Distillery chartered the narrow gauge (3’ 6”) **Toronto & Nipissing Railway (T&N)** in 1868 (amended in 1869 to include a branch to Lindsay, but not built), and entered Victoria County between Cannington and Woodville. It was planned to reach Lake Nipissing (and connect up with the CPR transcontinental railway), but this railway never went further than Coboconk, which was reached in late 1872.

However, the days of the small companies were numbered, both for economic and political reasons. Economically, the necessary conversion of the PHL&B gauge from 5’ 6” to the standard 4’ 8½” gauge in 1874 was a major financial burden in an era of declining traffic receipts, as proved to be the T&N’s prospective conversion from the 3’ 6” gauge to the standard gauge in 1881. Politically, the consolidation of the many struggling pioneer lines was inevitable.

In 1881 the Midland Railway bought out its neighbouring smaller lines, and used the dormant charter of the **Toronto & Ottawa Railway** to construct four “missing links”, two of which were in Victoria County.

One link was between Wick (Blackwater) Junction. of the T&N and Cresswell (Manilla Junction.) of the WPP&L, connected up in early 1883 and thus affording a direct route between Lindsay and Toronto (previously via Lorneville Junction.).

The other was between Peterborough and Omemee, completed in late 1883 after some engineering challenges with sink holes, for a direct connection between Peterborough and Lindsay (previously via Millbrook Junction.).

In Lindsay, a new entry from Omemee was decided upon. Instead of the curving alignment of the early PHL&B down to the east bank of the Scugog, the line now continued straight west with a new bridge over the Scugog River at the east end of Durham Street. The track now came along just south of Durham Street to Cambridge Street, where it curved north to connect with the former Victoria Railway on Victoria Avenue.

A new station was built at the south end of William Street in 1883, at which time the King at St. Paul Street station was abandoned. The new station burned in 1885, and the former union station was taken back into use until 1890, when a grand new two-storey station was built, that lasted until 1963.

In 1887 the Midland Railway, already leased to the **Grand Trunk Railway (GTR)** in 1884, decided to make Lindsay its operational headquarters. A large freight yard was built south of Durham between Lindsay and Hamilton Streets, and the Port Hope engine house was dismantled and rebuilt in Lindsay as a running shed, together with the attendant shops, on the east side of Albert Street south of Durham.

In the meantime the old PHL&B swingbridge across the Scugog River at Lindsay and Colborne Streets was dismantled in 1887.

The former Midland Railway route across Victoria Junction at William St. and Orchard Park Road, and through what is now the Lindsay airport, was abandoned when the new direct line from Lindsay out to Midland was built in 1907. The purpose of the new direct line was to put an end to the heavy grain traffic having to come south on mid-town Victoria Avenue through Victoria Junction.

The Midland Railway's decision to centralize its operations at Lindsay was continued by the GTR when it assumed that road altogether in 1893, and Lindsay became a division point for the GTR's 8th (east of Lindsay to Belleville and Port Hope), 9th (Lorneville Junction., Coboconk and Midland) and 10th (Haliburton and west of Lindsay to Scarboro Junction., Sutton and Whitby) Districts.

The GTR was merged into the new **Canadian National Railways (CNR)** in 1923, and the Maynooth Subdivision was added to Lindsay's control in 1931 – the height of Lindsay's function as a railway centre of some considerable importance.

While a number of reasons were at play for the consolidation of the Midland Railway system, as a bulwark it also had the backing of the GTR in its futile struggle to block the inevitable entry of the **Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR)** into Ontario.

The CPR succeeded in its thrust into the heartland of Ontario in 1884 by means of its cat's-paw **Ontario & Quebec Railway (O&Q)** that passed through the southern edge of Victoria County at Pontypool, on its way from Peterborough to Toronto.

In the meantime Bobcaygeon interests had applied for, and in 1890 obtained, a charter for the **Lindsay, Bobcaygeon, & Pontypool Railway (LB&P)**. Construction began in 1901 and the line was opened in 1904. It branched off north at Burketon (west of Pontypool) on the CPR's O&Q line. The GTR attempted to block its entry into Lindsay, but the LB&P ducked under the GTR at the Scugog River bridge, and followed the east bank of the river to a station on the west side of Caroline St.

Meanwhile, with an eye to the grain traffic on the Great Lakes, the CPR sponsored the **Georgian Bay & Seaboard Railway (GB&S)** (also known as the CPR's Port McNicholl branch), to avoid the delays and the additional distance of shipping grain through Toronto.

This line was opened in 1912 from the newly-deepened Victoria Harbour on Georgian Bay, creating a community known as Port McNicholl, with stations via Orillia and Brechin across country to Lindsay, and then branching off the Bobcaygeon Subdivision south of Logie St. at Lindsay Junction. to Bethany Junction, or Dranoel (east of Pontypool), on the CPR's O&Q line.

The GB&S bridge abutments over the former Haliburton line can still be seen on the Victoria Rail Trail a short distance north of the former Victoria Junction.

In Victoria County, three GB&S stations have survived as private residences.

The last regular passenger trains out of Lindsay were in January 1962. The Lindsay Dispatching Office closed in 1960 and the Terminal in 1978, but freight services continued as required into the 1980s.

Abandonments: CPR Lindsay Junction. to Burketon Junction. **1932**. CPR GB&S passenger service **1932**, CPR Orillia to Lindsay **1937**. CPR Bobcaygeon branch (last train 1957) **1961**. CNR Lorneville Junction. to Coboconk **1965**. CNR Lindsay to Midland **1966**. CNR Woodville to Lorneville Junction. **1966**. CNR Haliburton branch **1981**. CNR Blackwater Junction. to Woodville **1986**. CPR Lindsay to Dranoel spur **1987**. CNR Lindsay to Peterborough **1989**. CNR Lindsay to Uxbridge **1991**.

For more information about the various Victoria County railways, please see our other leaflets

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