

3. The Whitby, Port Perry & Lindsay Railway – The “Nip and Tuck”

BACKGROUND

Of the towns of Cobourg, Port Hope and Whitby along the Ontario lakeshore, Whitby was the last to catch the railway fever. To be exact, there had been talk and plans in the 1850s for a Port Whitby & Port Huron Railway that had come to naught. Whitby had had its eye for some time on the prospective “hinterland” lumber business in the Kawarthas and the Muskokas.

In Beaverton there was dissatisfaction with the Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway’s apparent inability to get beyond Lindsay.

Closer to home, the Gooderham & Worts-promoted Toronto & Nipissing Railway (T&N) [chartered, as it turned out, on the same day as the Port Whitby & Port Perry Railway] was making overtures to Beaverton. Besides, the T&N had every promise of siphoning away traffic that Whitby would like to have at its port, rather than at Toronto.

The shared interests Port Perry, Manchester and Prince Albert resulted in the chartering of the **Port Whitby & Port Perry Railway (PW&PP)** on March 4, 1868, with authority “to build from Whitby to at or near Port Perry on Lake Scugog”. The Town of Whitby, and Whitby and Reach Townships approved bonuses totaling \$100,000.

After a succession of three contractors (the first of whom [Kestavan & Starrat] was to build the railway to the 5’ 6” Provincial Gauge but was forced into bankruptcy, the second of whom [Dumble] was involved in speculation and collusion scandals, and a third [English] who threw up the contract because he couldn’t get paid for the work that he had done), the work was finally completed by the PW&PP itself.

Francis Shanly, a prominent railway engineer and consultant doubted that the line could attract enough business to make it pay, but its sponsors dreamed big dreams, and in 1874 transformed the venture into the **Whitby & Port Perry Extension Railway (W&PPE)**, with powers to build to Gravenhurst, the Muskoka River and beyond, etc.

It was the W&PPE that owned two steamships on Lake Scugog, *Ogemah* and *Victoria*, to ply between Port Perry and Lindsay to connect there with the Midland Railway trains.

When Shanly’s forecasts proved to be only too true, the ambitious plans of 1874 were trimmed back in 1876 to settle instead for just 26 miles to Lindsay, for what became the **Whitby, Port Perry & Lindsay Railway (WPP&L)**.

In summary, the story of the WPP&L was a battle for turf with the T&N, and a lot of nasty infighting between directors, investors and the succession of contractors. The eventual cost of the railway was over 1.1 million dollars of the day.

Despite all the bonuses, federal and provincial subsidies, and with \$690,000 in first mortgage bonds, it was clear that it could not hold its own financially, but it was the pride of Whitby, and the Town

and the communities rallied to its financial “Nip and Tuck”, sometimes only one step ahead of the bailiff. G.R. Stevens in his seminal work *Canadian National Railways Vol. I, Sixty Years of Trial and Error*, describes the rollicking flavour of this enterprise:

There was a fine careless rapture about the operations of the Nip and Tuck, as the railway was known to its devotees. The grade from Port Perry to Whitby was downhill and it is said that on more than one occasion, when the brakes failed to hold, the train came within yards of fetching up in Lake Ontario. The line had no snow plough, and in winter passenger trains often were stalled. No one seemed to mind; cases of eggs and crates of bacon were broached in the baggage car, and crew and passengers lived cozily until the uncoupled locomotive had butted its way through the drifts ...

THE RAILWAY

Such hilarity aside, the PW&PP (after a prestigious sod-turning on October 6, 1869 with His Royal Highness Prince Arthur presiding) opened for traffic in July 1871. It was built to the standard 4' 8½" gauge and started with a dock at Whitby Harbour, had its own two-storey station and engine house in Whitby, then stations at Brooklin, Myrtle, Manchester, Prince Albert and Port Perry.

At Port Perry a large amount of money was spent on extensive docks.

When extended to Lindsay, there were stations at Seagrave, Sonya, Cresswell, Mariposa and Ops. (Manilla Junction. replaced Cresswell when a “missing link” between Manilla and Wick (Blackwater Junction.) on the former T&N was completed in early 1883.)

On arrival in Lindsay in 1877, it joined with the Victoria Railway in an architecturally modest but dignified “union” station on Victoria Avenue between Glenelg and Melbourne Sts.

After all of its struggles, it was a pioneer railway of its day. It served its communities and contributed to their development, especially at Port Perry.

For Lindsay, it provided an important segment of an eventual direct connection to Toronto.

The WPP&L was absorbed into the Midland Railway system in 1881 (along with its arch rival, the T&N). The Midland was in turn taken over by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1893, and assumed by Canadian National Railways (CNR) in 1923.

Passenger service between Whitby and Port Perry ceased during the Depression, but a special passenger train left Port Perry for Toronto in July 1939 for the Royal Visit.

Abandonments: Port Perry to Manilla Junction. **1937.** Whitby to Port Perry **1941.** Manilla Junction. to Lindsay **1991.**

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