

# Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers - Canadian Refractories

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Canadian Refractories

Kilmar

A company-owned mini railway's last hurrah

Kilmar. There's no smoke-belching stack or eerie stream whistle. There are no lounge cars with pannelled walls and silver dining service

The doomed Dominion Timber and Minerals Railway is just not the stuff train buffs normally wax nostalgic about.

But the 20-kilometre (12 1/2 mile) railway, which crossed the Laurentians to link a magnesite mining company's two plants 90 km (55 miles) east of Ottawa still tugs at local heartstrings.

Until late last week, a 30-year-old, rusty-orange diesel locomotive hauled just-as-faded hopper cars of mineral over a tortuous route.

Its last trip ended in an era that started in 1916.

Canadian Refractories Ltd., with the only underground mine still operating in the Ottawa area, has decided that its unusual company-owned railway is no longer economical

Soon the hauling of semi-processed magnesite from the mine here to the shipping depot down the mountain at Marelan, Que., will be contracted to truckers.

Maintaining the railway costs about \$250,000 a year, and it keeps climbing, says Canadian Refractories personnel manager John White.

The engineer, brakeman and four-man maintenance crew will be relocated within the company, which converts magnesite, a white crystal valued for its resistance to heat, into kiln liners.

The company, a subsidiary of the Dallas-based Dresser Industries, has a 600-member staff at its plants here and at nearby Marelan, including 35 miners who work 300 metres (1,000 feet) underground.

Canadian Refractories customers include steel copper, nickel, titanium, aluminum, cement and glass processors around the world.

The little railway's last hurrah came recently when about 800 company employees and friends climbed into gondola cars for a ride and some reminiscing about the early days.

White is hard-pressed to explain the heavy load of sentiment attached to the train.

"It's not romantic at all," White says, scanning the 65-ton engine's battered exterior.

"It's a strictly functional work train."

The diesel, made by General Electric, has been sold to a l'Original company for yardwork, as a smaller, backup engine. Several freight cars will be scrapped.

To retired general manager Lloyd Thomas, who beginning in 1961 prepared several reports on the railway's viability, it hurts to know the rails are about to be torn up and melted down.

"It's one of the last industrial railroads to fall prey to modernization."

The Dominion Timber and Minerals line was a going concern when Thomas, now 67, arrived at Kilmar in 1937. Six years before, the narrow-gauge track and four 15-ton steam locomotives had been replaced by standard gauge and two 35-ton gasoline engines.

Mining of magnesite started here in 1914 when the First World War cut off supplies from Austria.

The Kilmar deposit was known as early as 1900 when a travelling minister took a sample to Ottawa for analysis. The minister had been curious about a local farmer's green watch fob.

It had been fashioned, he learned, from a piece of serpentine, a soft crystal that intermingles with magnesite.

At first, the raw material was carted out by horse and wagon, but the railway was soon installed over a series of cattle trails and logging roads.

In addition to being a constant hazard to roaming cattle, the early locomotives spewed out hot cinders that caused countless brush fires until they were held in check by wire traps fitted to the smoke stacks.

The Dominion Timber and Minerals line grew with the company. But in recent years, company production and operating costs have overtaken it.

The little railway will be missed.

Gertrude Brown lives with her husband, a retired company safety officer, in a flower bedecked mobile home here. As a child, she rode one of the first locomotives, and took the last ride behind the orange diesel.

There were times when the train was the only lifeline to the outside world, she recalls.

"one winter we were snowed under for three days. The only way to get home was to ride up on the engine."

To Brown and other residents, the train was much more than a company workhorse.