

Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers 1988

30/04/1988 Ottawa Citizen Maniwaki

TENDERS CALLED FOR OPERATION OF TOURIST TRAIN: Almost three years after the termination of tourist train service to Wakefield, Quebec, over the erstwhile Maniwaki Subdivision of CP Rail, tenders have finally been called for the private sector operation of a tourist train service between Hull, Quebec, and Wakefield, a distance of 20 miles.

The notice, issued by the Conseil de developpement touristique Hull-La Peche was published in the April 30, 1988 issue of The Ottawa Citizen in addition to several other newspapers.

Of interest both to readers and potential bidders are the following items: 1) the proposal is for the operation of a tourist train for a "continuous period of twenty-five years;" 2) aside from relevant experience, the successful firm is to have the financial capacity "to invest \$1,000,000 in the project;" 3) all proposals must be accompanied by a certified cheque for \$10,000 or a security bond.

For a fee of \$100, proposal call documents are available from Mr. Rosario Dutrisac, Caisse Populaire de Hull, 41 Victoria Street, Hull, Quebec, J8X 3Y5.

All proposals are to be in Mr. Dutrisac's hands by no later than 11:00 hours, on July 15, 1988.

29/11/1988 Ottawa Citizen Maniwaki

POLITICS PLAYS HAVOC WITH TOURIST TRAIN PLANS:

Hopes of resuming tourist train service to Wakefield, Quebec, during the summer of 1989 have been placed in jeopardy following an announcement by the Province of Quebec that the federal government should contribute up to 50% of the money required to rehabilitate the Gatineau Valley line.

According to estimates, some \$2.8 million of public funds is required before the line can become operational.

The official stance of the Provincial Government notwithstanding, the project still has the backing of the local MNA, Michel Gratton. Also the Minister of Tourism, Gratton claims that his hands are tied, however, and that the Quebec Treasury Board is the one that is attempting to rewrite the game plan by insisting that the Federal Government become involved. Federal involvement is necessary, it appears, because of the previous involvement of the National Capital Commission and the National Museum of Science and Technology in the operation of a tourist train service between Ottawa and Wakefield from 1973 to 1985. According to some sources, moreover, the Provincial Government may even take things to the point of withholding all financial support for the initiation of the project.

Ironically the controversy has sprung up at a time when studies by the Department of Tourism have concluded that the Outaouais region, where the line is located, has never been a big draw for tourists, partly because of a lack of attractions and partly because of a lack of knowledge of the area. The train is seen as a way of stimulating tourism in the region.

Formerly CP Rail's Maniwaki Subdivision, the Wakefield line was last used on September 1, 1985. It was officially abandoned in January of 1986 with the Wakefield to Maniwaki portion dismantled during the spring and summer of that year.

22/12/1988 Low Down to Hull and Back Maniwaki

In mid-December, former Thurso Railway GE 50-ton switcher No. 5132 (ex-No. 10) was hauled by truck from thurso, Quebec, to the end of track at Wakefield, Quebec. The 43-year old switcher will be used for track maintenance on the planned tourist operation over the remaining 17 miles of the Canadian Pacific's former Maniwaki subdivision.

25/12/1988 New Edinburgh News Ottawa and Prescott Sussex Street

Christmas Eve 1854

Slide back through the years to Christmas Eve, 1854. Here we are standing Burgh-side (New Edinburgh, Ottawa) on the bank of the Rideau River not far from the foot of present-day Victoria Street. A small crowd, excited, muffled in heavy scarves, chatters in the cold of this cold, snowy night.

The darkness is broken by the light of a half dozen fires built of logs and tended by an older man who, with his snow-covered beard, could pass for old St. Nick himself. He moves among the people wishing "Merry Christmas" here and a "t'wont be long now" there.

Approaching sleigh bells jingle the arrival of some of the MacKay family snuggled under Buffalo robes. They alight into boot-top snow and a warm Yule punch appears from the sleigh. Hearty cheers are extended while the horses, sporting large red bows, seemingly snort their cheers from frosty noses. But the greater excitement of the evening is still to come and the crowd settles again into pockets of conversation.

Suddenly, the chatter stops. Firelit faces peer through the snow toward Beechwood, towards a new sound the far off wail of a whistle. Silence. Then, again, the whistle, but closer now. A single, throaty note followed by a rhythmic chuffing sound.

Nearer and louder these strange new sounds pierce the night and then from the falling snow a single, dimly-lit light appears like a giant eye gliding ghostly above the snow - the whistle breaks into a series of staccato notes! The crowd responds with an excited three cheers! and "Old St. Nick", lantern swinging, signals the steamy locomotive to a sliding stop. From the cab. the Engineer bellows "Merry Christmas" to a very happy crowd.

History buffs will know that the first passenger train service to Ottawa did, in fact, arrive on Christmas Eve, 1854, 140 years ago this Christmas Eve, at New Edinburgh. The train travelled from Prescott on the Bytown and Prescott Railway. A bridge across the Rideau did not exist so the passengers were taken by row boat or sleigh across the river to Lower Town, near where the Foreign Affairs building is now located.

It was this little "Burgh" line that first spurred my interest in railroading as a young boy. I have often tried to visualize the arrival of the first train. This is my attempt.

And a "Merry Christmas" to the BRS.

(From the New Edinburgh News, Christmas edition 1988, thanks to Robert Short)

Ed note: In history books, the date of the arrival of the first train in Ottawa is shown as Christmas Day, 1854. Perhaps the first arrival was on Christmas Eve, 1854. (Branchline)