

Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers - 1996

05/01/1996 Globe and Mail Vankleek

VANKLEEK SUBDIVISION FOR SALE: Canadian National has its Vankleek Subdivision up for sale. The 20-mile line links Glen Robertson (on the Alexandria Subdivision) with Hawkesbury, Ontario. Also included is the 4.4-mile L'Original spur between Hawkesbury and L'Original, Ontario, over a portion of the one-time Canadian Northern L'Original Subdivision. The CNoR trackage was part of that company's main line between Montreal and Toronto/Vancouver. Service is now offered on a 6-day-a-week basis by a road switcher out of Coteau, Quebec. The Vankleek Subdivision was built by J.R. Booth, legendary lumber king of the Ottawa Valley. Booth also built the Alexandria Subdivision as the Canada Atlantic Railway and the Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway, connecting Ottawa with Depot Harbour, Ontario. Part of this line survives as the Renfrew Subdivision operated by CN under contract with the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. This is only one of several lines CN wants to sell. Another likely candidate is the line between Matapedia and Gaspé, Quebec, involving the Cascapedia and Chandler Subdivisions.

19/04/1996 Ottawa Citizen Chalk River

OTTAWA VALLEY LINES TO BE SOLD TO CENTRAL WESTERN RAILWAY HOLDINGS CORPORATION: Canadian Pacific is losing little time in rationalizing its assets in eastern Canada. On April 18, residents of the Ottawa Valley were greeted by news that the company was negotiating the sale of its Chalk River, North Bay and Cartier Subdivisions between Smiths Falls and Coniston (near Sudbury), and the Temiscaming Subdivision between Mattawa, Ontario, and Temiscaming, Quebec, to the Alberta-based Central Western Railway Holdings Corporation. The new railway, to be called the Trans-Ontario Railway, will total 342 miles.

The operation would emulate the highly successful Montana Rail Link in the United States which involves a hand-off of transcontinental bridge traffic by the Burlington Northern Railroad. The TOR would continue to handle CP transcontinental traffic originating or headed to Quebec and the Maritimes as well as exploit any local traffic. For instance, the paper mill at Temiscaming is served on a daily basis by a switcher operating out of North Bay while there is limited local traffic provided at on-line points between North Bay and Smiths Falls. As and when required, there are major moves from the Canadian Forces Base at Petawawa, Ontario.

The deal with Central Western comes after CP was unsuccessful in launching the Ottawa Valley Railway Company, a joint enterprise with Canadian National that would have seen the abandonment of trackage between Smiths Falls and Mattawa in favour of consolidating all through traffic on CN's Beachburg Subdivision between Ottawa and a point near North Bay. The scheme fell through last year, prompting CN to abandon that portion of its Beachburg Subdivision between Pembroke and Nipissing (near North Bay) and route traffic via Toronto.

The CWR, Canada's first modern short line, operates in Alberta as well as having an interest in CN's former Murray Bay Subdivision between Quebec City and Clermont, Quebec.

Wednesday 26/06/1996 Ottawa Citizen Beachburg Brent

End of the Line

Recluse dies in remote shack he called home

Adam Pitz, a craggy-faced recluse who stubbornly resisted every modern convention, be it plumbing, electricity or refrigeration, finally submitted to an ancient one Tuesday when a funeral was held for him in Deep River.

Pitz was found Saturday in the sagging shack he called home on the shores of Cedar Lake in the northern Algonquin Park outpost of Brent. He was 82.

Pitz was born in Roumania, lived in the tiny seasonal community, an outfitter's launch point and former railway junction, for about 65 years. All winter, he was the only resident which led to him being dubbed "the mayor of Brent."

A Citizen reporter and photographer visited Pitz, a life-long bachelor, in the spring of 1994 and were stunned to discover the squalor of his home and the odd circumstances of his life.

The interior of the house was blackened by fire and grime and had several of its windows boarded up. There was a strong scent of oil in the air and his clothes and hands were badly soiled by an oily substance. He had no running water or telephone and, in his later years, his hearing was failing.

The toothless, quiet man saw nothing special about his life and had difficulty understanding why a newspaper would want to write about him.

His disconnection from the outside world led to some fascinating adaptations. Though a pauper in appearance, Pitz, upon being admitted to hospital for treatment of a leg injury, was found to carry a large wad of cash in his pocket. A local man also reported seeing Pitz make trips to a stash of money in an outdoor woodpile. Strangely, he was afraid of lightning, which led to the illogical boarding of the windows.

Pitz said his father arrived in Brent in the early 1930s with the railway. At the time, Brent was a busy train junction and also had a bustling sawmill.

His father is said to have died in Brent in 1967, found frozen to death.

When asked what would happen if he were to have a heart attack in the winter; with help at least 40 kilometres away, Pitz replied: "If I have a heart attack, I'll just be dead. That's all."

Nephew Fred Pitz said Tuesday his uncle, whom he had not seen for about 20 years, died of unspecified natural causes and was discovered by an employee of the neighbouring outfitter's store.

"He just loved that part of the country," said Pitz, a Nepean resident.

"He tried living in Toronto a couple of times, but hated the hum-drum of the city."

He said his uncle occupied himself by feeding his cats and birds, listening to the radio and stockpiling preserves he made himself.

Fred said Adam indeed had kept money stashed at home but, some time ago, relatives managed to convince him to put it in the bank.

Adam's brother died about four years ago. He is survived by two nephews and two nieces.

Pitz said his uncle was to be cremated after Tuesday's service. The ashes are likely to be spread near his home in the provincial park.

How fitting.

After 65 years in Brent, the last 30 in solitude, perhaps he isn't leaving, after all.

WAKEFIELD STEAM TRAIN, RESIDENTS WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH PURCHASE OF RAIL LINE:

Hull, Quebec, taxpayers have vetoed a proposal for the city to finance the purchase of the Laman Spur, running between Laman (junction with the Lachute Subdivision) and Freeman Road. The segment is the last portion of the former Maniwaki Subdivision still owned by Canadian Pacific and was retained following the 1985 abandonment of the line in order to give CP access to the Hull Industrial Park. The trackage is used by the Wakefield Steam Train, even including part of its station and maintenance facilities and is rented by the company.

Back in 1992, when the operation was set up, Hull agreed to purchase the line but received CP Rail agreement to defer the deal for several years. Now it is time to consummate the deal and a way has to be found to raise \$1.41 million. City Council was prepared to borrow the money until a citizens' movement got together and defeated the idea, winning by five votes. Opposition to the purchase is due to a feeling that municipal governments shouldn't be directly helping private enterprise when it means increases in taxes. Said a spokesperson for the citizens' movement, "We are really against this. It's a private enterprise. We are not in agreement with helping that. People are losing jobs, their salaries are diminishing. They don't want their taxes to increase."

A spokesperson for the Wakefield Steam Train has said that the operation wouldn't be doomed if the line were bought by someone else but that it would have to consider relocating all facilities to the portion of the line not owned by CP Rail, a fairly serious expenditure involving the relocation of its shop, station and turntable.

20/07/1996 *Cornwall Freeholder**New York Central**Northfield*

Northfield Station: A Place in the Country

It's a place where kids can be kids and where neighbours are neighbourly. It's not the kind of place that you drive through by accident.

"Where's Northfield Station?"

It's half-way between Dixon and Northfield, and south of the Newington Bog. That doesn't help you? Try 20 kilometres northwest of Cornwall. The easiest way to get there is to drive north from Lakeview Heights, along SD&G 15, then west at Northfield, the next settlement after Harrison's Corners. If you reach Avonmore, you've gone too far.

Two years ago, didn't I suggest you get a 1:250,000 scale map of Eastern Ontario? You can be a true Hometown reader without a detailed map of SD&G! I first discovered Northfield Station while on a mountain bike jaunt out of Cornwall via the former New York Central railway bed. Unfortunately, only parts of the Cornwall-to-Ottawa segment are still useable as a recreational trail today.

In the late 1950s, few people had sufficient vision to preserve the entire right-of-way as a valuable resource for the future. I wonder if we are any wiser today.

There's another railway bed, the recently retired CPR spur line, "The Peanut Line", that connects Cornwall to St. Telesphore, Quebec, via Williamstown and North Lancaster, that could be saved as recreational trail. What an interprovincial cross-cultural link that could be! There are some who care, but not enough that care enough.

Back to Northfield Station. Not since the late fifties has there been a train whistle heard in the hamlet. At one time, special NYC excursion trains brought people to the Avonmore Fair from Cornwall and Ottawa. At Finch they transferred onto a Canadian Pacific train that took them the last way to the fair.

Today the Northfield Community Association strives to maintain a community spirit. At the Northfield Hall, a former United Church, the community gathers for events such as showers and card games for the seniors. In the adjacent yard is play apparatus and a ball park for the younger folk.

These facilities are where the Cornwall Township Summer Special Events program brought Hallowe'en to Northfield this summer. Judging by the numerous parents to be seen relaxing around the shaded yard, it wasn't just the children who were enjoying themselves.

The Township conducted similar summer programs in Long Sault, St. Andrews West.

Friday

30/08/1996 *Ottawa Citizen**Winchester**Dalhousie Mills*

Derailment, toxic leak force 200 to flee. (with aerial photo and location map)

TRAIN SPLITTING: More than 200 people were forced from their homes Thursday when 30 cars of a CP Rail freight train overturned and a fire broke out 155 kilometres east of Ottawa. One car leaked hydrogen peroxide. No one was injured.

DALHOUSIE MILLS, Ont. In what is becoming an increasingly common event, a CP Rail freight train carrying dangerous chemicals derailed on the Ontario-Quebec border, 155 kilometres east of Ottawa, forcing more than 200 people from their homes for six hours.

The derailment occurred at 11:40 a.m. Twisted wreckage straddled the border between Dalhousie Mills, Ont. and Dalhousie, Que. This was the 161st train to jump the tracks this year in Canada the most in a single year since 1985.

No one was injured in the crash, which saw 36 cars at the back of the two-engine, 69-car train break away from the front and plow into each other over a 400-metre stretch of CP Rail's mainline.

Three of the cars were carrying chemicals. Two carrying alcohol remained upright, but one carrying 70-per-cent pure hydrogen peroxide tipped over and leaked the chemical through a broken top valve.

Four box cars caught fire during the wreck, but were put out quickly.

People in this small community reported hearing the sound of the crash more than two kilometres away.

CP officials at the scene said they weren't sure what caused the crash.

"We have to check the tracks, the axles and all the mechanical components before we can say anything about the cause," said CP spokesman Michel Spenard. Area residents were thankful the derailment was not in a populated area.

"That would have been awful," said Colleen Dance, "but nobody is hurt so it's just more of an inconvenience".

In the past six years, trains have been jumping their tracks in steadily increasing numbers.

After a decade of decline due to improved safety measures, derailments fell to just 102 in 1990. But that number rose to 156 in 1995, and this year derailments are on a pace to hit more than 240. While derailments will have doubled, rail traffic has only gone up by about 10 per cent over the same period.

"We really don't know why it's quite perplexing," says Gary McLaughlin who monitors railway accidents as director of investigations for the Transportation Safety Board of Canada.

The board is especially concerned that the number of derailments with multi-car or dangerous goods on board has also gone up.

McLaughlin says the problems could be anything from a rash of bearing and wheel failures to broken rails.

Others say it's because railways are trying to get by with less money

"Travellers should equip themselves with a rosary and a St. Christopher's medal and pray," says Harry Gow of Transport 2000 Canada, a consumer group that follows transport issues.

"The federal government has kept cutting its funding of railways to the point where they can barely survive."

Gow says the elimination of railway freight subsidies and the reduction of funding to VIA Rail have a major impact on the Canadian freight industry. The cuts have resulted in staff reductions, while rail traffic has gone up.

Bob Ballantyne, director of the Railway Association of Canada, says spending on technology better protects safety than does spending on people.

Transport Canada met with the major rail companies recently to create new voluntary safety procedures.

CP Rail and CN Rail will start programs of more frequent track inspections, improved wheel and bearing checks and an extended flaw detection program.

RAILTEX ACQUIRES VANKLEEK SUBDIVISION:

RailTex Inc. of San Antonio, Texas, has reached an agreement to acquire CN's 21-mile Vankleek Subdivision between Glen Robertson and Hawkesbury, Ontario, plus the 4.4-mile L'Original Spur, for \$1.1-million. Operations commenced on November 2 on the line (named the Ontario L'Original Railway) which is the first sale made after passage of the Ontario Labour Relations Act. That law removes successor rights that would have required buyers of small railways to hire previous union employees and honour existing labour agreements. The transaction also represents the first CN asset sale in Canada since the new Canadian Transportation Act was passed earlier this year. The sale is scheduled to close on December 2. The company is expecting to handle 6,000 carloads on the line annually, primarily steel products from the IVACO mini-mill in L'Original, Ontario.