

Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers - 1998

08/03/1998 *Cornwall Freeholder* *New York Central*

Rail Roots

Local Man Digs Into History of NYC Railway, Unearths Family Connection

In the course of digging into the local history of the New York Central railway line, Chris Granger discovered that the vacant land he once played upon as a child was its abandoned railway bed. He began to dig into its history through books, newspaper clippings, topographic maps and family photo albums.

It is his ambition to one day explore what's left of the route, to discover what remnants of bridges, culverts and stations still exist.

If Granger follows the route successfully, he'll pass, by the Cornwall Speedway's 'Pitt Road', Northfield Station, the Newington 'World's Fair' grounds, Finch, Crysler, Embrun, Russell and eventually Ottawa.

Granger, age 25, gradually uncovered his family's extensive historical links with the NYC.

First of all, his childhood home was at 409 Hoople Avenue. The abandoned railway bed was adjacent to his backyard.

His grandmother Amy 'Toots' Asselin, who passed away in 1989, told him of the NYC connection. She and her husband had a coal shovel and bears the stamping 'NYCS 8 46 2'.

Another souvenir Granger has is an octagonal bronze toll token for the Roosevelt Bridge, inscribed with "Seaway City Welcomes You".

Granger's great grandfather, Robert McCleary, was with the NYC from 1900-1918. Harold

Bouck, Granger's great great uncle, also worked for the NYC (1900-1938), as did George Bender, his great great grandfather (1918-1929).

As Granger does his research through text books and newspaper clippings, he painstakingly transcribes them on his computer. One of his reference books is "Ghost Railways of Ontario by Ron Brown," published in 1994.

Detailed topographic maps show the location of current and former railway beds, a great boon to historians, hikers and cyclists who are doing research before going into the field.

Granger has several wishes and goals. "Some day I'd like to be able to cycle the entire length of the railway bed," he said. "It would also be interesting to get an overview of what's left by flying over it in a light aircraft.

"It is unfortunate that all of it wasn't left intact as a recreational trail. The recently

abandoned CP 'Peanut Line' that connects Cornwall, Williamstown, North Lancaster Station and St-Telesphore, Quebec will be cut into pieces too if something's not done soon," he lamented.

"At least some historical markers should be erected."

Granger told of an interesting mural on the side of Home Hardware in Crysler. It depicts a NYC scene.

So little is left to remind us of an age of iron and steam. What is left to tell the next generation of their past?

26/08/1998 *Cornwall Freeholder* *New York Central*

A Blast From the Past

Museum Shows 100 Years of New York Central Rail Line

It was the choice form of transportation before conventional highways, let alone the information highway.

And it is being heralded in an exhibition at the United Counties Museum in Cornwall, across from Duntar.

A wide range of photos and exhibits are on display, in a project by a historical society member depicting 100 years of the New York Central railway.

The railway was abandoned in the 1950s, but Chris Granger has done his best to detail what has happened to buildings, rails and right-of-ways since then.

The project has been a labor of love for Granger for the past 10 years. He began clipping articles on the railway while still in high school.

Included in the exhibit are spectacular photos of the 1898 collapse of the railway bridge crossing the U.S. side of the St. Lawrence at Cornwall, in which 15 workers were killed.

There are also photos of the 1908 collapse of the swing bridge crossing the canal from Cornwall.

They are but a mere sampling of the photos depicting both the rise and fall of the railroad and the contemporary remnants of the railroad.

The NYC line was Cornwall's major link to Ottawa and Upper New York during the early part of the century.

It was constructed at the urging of city residents, with the backing of local politicians, who felt the link was needed to propel the city into economic prosperity.

"Back then we didn't have any highways. The road were in terrible shape compared to today's standards," Granger said. .

With the rail line, an excruciating day trip was turned into an enjoyable ride of a couple of hours by steam.

But the trip stretched even longer in later years because of speed restrictions and poor track maintenance.

"It was almost a joke that you could walk to Ottawa faster," Granger said.

Of the 23 stations that had dotted the railway line between Coniwall Island and Ottawa, only seven remain, Granger said.

And only one has been restored to its original condition. It now rests at the beginning of the NYC bicycle trail in Embrun.

Granger eventually hopes to turn all his research into a book. He already has a rough draft completed, but has been unable to finish it because he keeps coming across more information.

"It just keeps getting bigger and bigger as I find more information," Granger said.

He said there is a lot of information available on the rail line. It just takes persistence to find it

"It's out there. It's just scattered."