

Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers - 2007

Thursday 05/04/2007 Ottawa Citizen Chalk River

Railway employee killed in 'bizarre' accident

Unclear how man was hit when tractor-trailer, car collided near train tracks

A 47-year-old Ottawa Valley Railway conductor who had been repairing a rail car was killed yesterday morning when a tractor-trailer and a car collided north of Carleton Place.

Ontario Provincial Police spent the day investigating the series of events that began at about 6:45 a.m.

A northbound flatbed tractor-trailer, carrying an excavator, collided with a southbound Subaru on County Road 29 near train tracks north of Drummond Road.

The railway employee, a North Bay resident, had been working on a rail car that had cleared the crossing. He was standing on the west shoulder of the road just north of the tracks when he was struck, police said.

Police were trying to determine which of the vehicles hit the conductor, whether he was struck before or after the collision, and the cause of the crash. They were also trying to figure out what the man was doing on the side of the road.

He was discovered after he lost radio contact with his co-worker according to police and Daryl Duquette, the railway company's manager of operations.

"This is a very bizarre accident. It's

just not something any of us would expect," Mr. Duquette said.

Mr. Duquette said the man had been doing routine repairs after an electronic detector had warned of a malfunction. The conductor had started the repairs at about six a.m., after making an unscheduled stop while travelling toward Smiths Falls, he said.

The driver of the tractor-trailer, a 58-year-old Ashton man, was not injured. The Subaru's driver, a 59-year-old Almonte man, was taken to Carleton Place and District Memorial Hospital with serious, but non-life-threatening injuries. He was later transferred to The Ottawa Hospital's Civic campus.

County Road 29 was closed until about 1:20 p.m. The man's name was not released pending notification of family members.

Mr. Duquette, who knew the conductor personally, said he had more than 20 years of railroad experience and had worked with the company for about three years.

"He had high standards and incredible integrity when it came to work," Mr. Duquette said, adding that the man had a wife and two daughters.

"His family was very, very important to him," he said.

Officials were notifying the company's 125 employees of the incident and providing grief counselling.

"We're truly saddened and shocked by this tragic event," Mr. Duquette said. Transport Canada and the Transportation Safety Board were notified of the accident, he said

11/05/2007 Ottawa Citizen Alexandria Ottawa New

OTTAWA STATION WINS AWARD FOR MODERN DESIGN:

Ottawa's 41-year-old railway station is being honoured with a prestigious architecture award that recognizes its enduring design quality. The Ontario Association of Architects bestows only one Landmark Award each year to recognize buildings 25 years or older that are notable examples of architecture in Ontario. Ottawa's train station is "a great example of the purity of good modern design, which is generally lacking in much of Canadian modern from that period and almost wholly lacking in Ottawa," says Ottawa architect and heritage consultant Mark Brandt. The exposed steel trusses of the Ottawa train station give the roofline a dramatic character. The award also draws attention to the need to preserve modern buildings that may be maligned or taken for granted. The traditional view of heritage architecture is of stone or brick buildings from the 19th century. But many heritage activists, architects and planners are lamenting the loss of good examples of 20th-century design.

In fact, the station's heritage quality may already have been compromised. Owned by VIA Rail, the Ottawa station was designated a heritage station under the federal Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act in 1997. However, the designation came too late to protect it from permanent damage. In 1990, VIA Rail, in an effort to "brighten up" the station, coated the beautifully finished concrete columns with a beige epoxy that looks like vinyl wallpaper. Removing it now would ruin the original concrete finish, says Silvio Baldassarra, vice-president of NORR, the successor firm to John B. Parkin Associates of Toronto, which designed the station. Making a non-reversible change runs counter to heritage principles. The rules are stricter today. Last year, NORR wanted to present VIA Rail with a set of black and white framed photographs of the station taken in 1966. Representatives of the firm envisioned the powerful images hung on the walls of the ramp. Mr. Baldassarra said officials with the federal Department of Public Works refused because they didn't want holes in the walls. However, he says the holes would be no bigger than the existing "honeycomb" surface of the wall. He plans to approach Public Works again.

Commissioned by the NCC and built in 1966, the station won a Massey Medal for architecture the following year. Gene Kinoshita and Ted Sievenpiper were the building's designers. "The building is still true to its original intent and design using very few materials and colours," says Mr. Baldassarra. "It echoes the grandeur of the great railway stations in Europe. It's a bit spiritual, almost like a cathedral." The strength of the design is witness to a time when there was less design-by-committee and consultation with "stakeholders." The large roof (45 metres wide, 99 metres long and hovering almost 10 metres above the concourse floor) is supported by eight massive tapering concrete columns. The exposed cantilevered steel trusses give the roofline a dramatic character. The interior features an open plan waiting area, a circular ticket office and a spiral ramp leading to the far platforms. "It really is an inspiring space," says Mr. Brandt, "It evokes the memory of 19th-century train sheds and the dynamism of train transport, but in a thoroughly modern way."

Saturday 21/07/2007 Ottawa Citizen Maniwaki

Torrential rain wreaks havoc on roads, rails and fields.

Steam train forced to make early stop after ground under tracks gives way.

Torrential rain swept through the area overnight Thursday and yesterday morning, washing out sections of a Quebec highway, creating a gully that halted the Hull-to-Wakefield steam train and flooding farm fields.

A section of railroad tracks in Chelsea swung like a rope bridge over a section of caved-in earth after the rain played havoc with the popular Outaouais tourist attraction

Passengers heading from Hull to Wakefield on the Hull-Chelsea-Wakefield steam train had to be loaded onto buses to return to the station and engineers were notified.

"I was shocked to see the tracks hanging," said Fred Ferguson, who was walking his dog along the tracks in Chelsea, shortly before noon.

"The ground under the tracks gave way to a huge chasm, a major mudslide. It's just like something you'd see in a jungle. (The gully) was about 25 feet deep.

Wednesday 22/07/2007 Low Down to Hull and Bac Maniwaki

Old, but she's still got a lot of pull

Steam train named one of Canada's top 25 attractions

It's been a season of downs and ups for the Wakefield steam train. Last month the Gatineau Hills tourism operation suffered a cruel blow when heavy rains washed out a section of track in Chelsea July 20, cancelling trips through one of the busiest weekends of the summer.

But fate had a sweeter surprise in store for the steam train one month later when influential travel website Travelocity.ca listed the operation among its 2007 picks for Canada's Top 25 Gems on Aug. 20.

Somehow, a 100-year-old Swedish steam engine feels right at home in Canada's Gatineau Hills, (slowly) whisking riders on unforgettable excursions from Gatineau to quaint Wakefield and back, the website's description of the train reads.

Travelocity mailed almost a million surveys to its members asking them to nominate attractions that would join a North American listing of Local Secret, Big Finds. The website's editors culled the list down to 10,000 attractions across the continent before naming a select group of finalists for the US and Canada.

Tuesday 15/08/2007 Ottawa Citizen Alexandria

A man was killed after being struck by a train in east rural Ottawa yesterday. Ottawa police said the man was struck by a Montreal-bound VIA train between Rockland and Devine roads just after 7 a.m. The collision forced the delay of passenger train traffic on the busy corridor. The train was held on the single-track corridor with 96 passengers aboard until the coroner was finished investigating. A second train that was supposed to arrive in Ottawa from Montreal at 8:38 a.m. was stopped. Buses were sent to pick up passengers.

Saturday 18/08/2007 Ottawa Citizen Alexandria Walkley

Thomas the Tank Engine visited the Ottawa Walkley rail yard yesterday, much to the delight of Cameron Beech, 3, and his seven-month-old sister, Catherine, who were among the excited children who had a chance to take a ride on the train. It's part of a 'Day out with Thomas' show running this weekend and again Aug. 24-26, which also includes storytelling, music and other activities. Tickets are available at ticketweb.ca. (with picture)

Saturday 08/09/2007 Ottawa Citizen Alexandria

Police probe rail signal tampering.

Ottawa police and VIA Rail investigators are looking for someone who tampered with rail traffic signalling lights and crossing barriers in the city's east end. Twice within the past two weeks, items that cause the barriers and barriers to malfunction - the barriers stay down after a train passes - were put on the tracks at Boundary Road and Eighth Line Road. OPP recently investigated a similar incident at Casselman,

17/10/2007 Brockville Recorder Kingston (CN) Prescott

A new tenant has given the old CN railway station in Prescott, ON, another lease on life. Members of the Grenville County Historical Society have been busy in recent days packing and unpacking records, equipment and furniture being moved from their former headquarters in the Knights of Columbus Crane Building on Edward Street to the historic railway station built in 1856. It's a move the society has dreamed of since 2001 when CN discontinued the practice of picking up and dropping off passengers almost 30 years after ceasing full-service operations at the Prescott station. "We've been wanting a heritage building for our home for a long time," Valerie Schulz, vp of the historical society, said Monday while taking a short break from helping to arrange the incoming material at the train station. The dream came partially true during a town council meeting Monday night that authorized a two-year lease on the property from CN for \$1 annually. The town and CN are working on a longer-term deal - the society is hoping for a 50-year term - but hurdles remain to be jumped with the Ontario Heritage Trust and federal transport regulators before that is secured. Schulz hopes it happens in relatively short order. She said the society has put \$30,000 worth of repairs into the building since last spring and is grateful a temporary arrangement has been struck to allow them to operate at the new site immediately.

Thursday 08/11/2007 Ottawa Citizen Maniwaki

Dispute threatens to let Wakefield train run out of steam

The Hull-Chelsea-Wakefield steam train recently touted by an influential travel website as one of Canada's great tourism gems could be shut down because of an impasse between the train's owner and the municipalities of Gatineau and Chelsea.

Andre Groulx, the train's general manager, said he will have to sell the train this year if Chelsea and Gatineau insist that he pay for an engineering study and unspecified im-

provements that may be needed to prevent washouts from undermining the track the train uses.

The train, North America's oldest-running excursion train, operates from May until October. This year, Mr. Groulx said, it attracted 54,650 passengers and employed 100 people.

Mr. Groulx, who took over the excursion train in 1994, said he cannot sign an agreement to improve the track without knowing how much the work will cost. Gatineau, Chelsea and La Peche own the non-profit Compagnie de chemin de fer de l'Outaouais that manages the rail line, but the steam train owners are responsible for all maintenance and improvements. The steam train is the only train running on the track.

The train operators' five-year contract with the three municipalities expired at the end of 2005. Mr. Groulx said he has reached an agreement with La Peche, but Gatineau and Chelsea want an engineering study he says could cost as much as \$400,000 and expect him to pay for any improvements it recommends.

The municipalities said a study was needed after a July 20 rainstorm undermined the rail bed in Chelsea, creating a gully that left a section of the track swinging like a rope bridge.

Mr. Groulx said the washout didn't put the passengers in any danger because they were on a bus in Wakefield before flooding undermined the track.

"We need to reach an agreement for longer than five years because capital investments are way too high for this type of operation," Mr. Groulx said. "It is expensive to maintain a 100-year-old locomotive and maintain the rail bed, but we are forced to keep everything to the minimum because of the agreement.

"We have reached agreements many times during the last three years, but the municipalities keep going back and changing things. The municipalities want a very expensive infrastructure study that includes the rail line and the station on Deveault Street in Gatineau.

"Let's remember that we are tenants, not the owners of the line. Nobody in their right mind would sign a 25-year agreement without knowing how much they would have to pay to improve the track, or the surrounding land. It would be like buying car without knowing the price."

As long as he doesn't have to write a blank cheque, Mr. Groulx said he would like to have a 25-year contract, which would enable him to get financing to build a new station hi Gatineau, renovate the cars and make unspecified improvements in Wakefield and Chelsea.

Mr. Groulx said maintenance costs are high. The 1907 locomotive needed. \$60,000 worth of new wheels last year and will require a \$100,000 boiler in 2008.

Each passenger car will soon need \$250,000 in repairs.

Chelsea Mayor Jean Perras, who is also president of the Compagnie de chemin de fer de l'Outaouais, would not discuss the negotiations, but said he expects an agreement by Nov. 23 that will ensure that the culverts under the rail line are safe

Monday 12/11/2007 Ottawa Citizen Maniwaki

Outaouais municipalities told it's unacceptable to expect owner of popular attraction to foot bill for yet-to-be named improvements. The president of Tourisme Outaouais has urged Gatineau and Chelsea to sign a 25-year contract with the Hull-Chelsea-Wakefield steam train to prevent one of Canada's tourism gems from disappearing from the region. Jean Thiffault says he can't understand how the two municipalities could let a minor contract dispute jeopardize one of the region's most valuable business assets. He said the train generates more than \$8 million in business a year and employs about 100 people. Andre Groulx, the train's general manager, said he will have to sell the 1907 steam locomotive and its passenger cars if Chelsea and Gatineau insist that he pay for an engineering study and unspecified improvements that may be needed to prevent washouts from undermining the track. Mr. Thiffault said it is unacceptable that Mr. Groulx should be expected to agree to pay for improvements along the 33-kilometre rail line without even knowing how much they will cost. Transport Quebec inspects the line three or four times a year. The tourism chief said five or six culverts under the rail line in Chelsea and two in Gatineau may have to be replaced. The train, North America's oldest-running excursion train, operates from May until October. Mr. Groulx said it attracted 54,650 passengers this year. During the past 15 years, 725,000 people have ridden the train from its station in a Hull-sector industrial park to Wakefield. Mr. Groulx, who took over the excursion train in 1994, said he cannot sign an agreement to improve the track without knowing how much the work will cost. The train operator has signed an agreement with the municipality of La Peche, which includes Wakefield, but not with Chelsea and Gatineau. Mr. Groulx's five-year contract to lease the track from La Peche, Chelsea and Gatineau expired three years ago. He has threatened to close the business unless Chelsea and Gatineau sign a contract by Nov. 23. Mr. Thiffault said it is inconceivable that the Outaouais could lose one of its most important tourist attraction. "This train has been recognized as one of the 25 best tourist attractions in Canada by Travelocity (a travel website)," Mr. Thiffault said. "This is a huge organization and is one of the best images we can use to promote the Outaouais in the regional, national or even international tourism market. "A lot of people come from China or even from Europe to ride the train. I don't how the mayors can even think about not signing the agree ment." Mr. Thiffault said Mr. Groulx needs a 25-year contract to get financing rolling for stock improvements and new stations near the Lac Leamy Casino and in Chelsea. Chelsea Mayor Jean Perras, who is also rpresident of the nonprofit Compagnie de chemin de fer de l'Outaouais, which manages the rail line, would not discuss the negotiations. However, he said he expects an agreement by Nov. 23 that will ensure that the culverts under the tracks are safe.

Friday 16/11/2007 Ottawa Citizen Maniwaki

Steam Train Clears Hurdle over Track. Municipalities, Quebec to pay for engineering study. The operator of the Hull-Chelsea-Wake-field Steam Train has reached an agreement in principle with the municipalities that own the line to keep the train on the tracks for the next 25 years. Andre Groulx, the train's general manager, threatened to sell the 1907 steam locomotive and its passenger cars on Nov. 23 if Chelsea and Gatineau insisted that he pay for an engineering study and unspecified improvements that may be needed to prevent washouts from undermining the track. Mr. Groulx, who took over the excursion train in 1994, said yesterday he could not sign an agreement to improve the track without knowing how much the work would cost. He did not say how much his company will pay to lease the track. The president of Tourisme Outaouais, Jean Thiffault, said the train is one of the region's most valuable tourism assets and generates more than \$8 million in business a year and employs about 100 people during its six-month season. The municipalities that operate the non-profit Compagnie de chemin de fer de POutaouais demanded the study after a July 20 rainstorm undermined part of the line in Chelsea, creating a gully that left a section of the track swinging like a rope bridge. Steam train inspectors noticed the rising water and hired a bus so the passengers could return to Hull from Wakefield before the washout damaged the rail line. Under the tentative agreement, the Compagnie de chemin de fer de l'Outaouais, which is owned by the three municipalities, and the Quebec government would pay for the study. Mr. Groulx said the municipalities, his company and possibly the province would share the cost of improvements to the 33-kilometre line. The study, which could cost up to \$400,000, would examine the culverts,^ bridges and track. "We will pay to the level that we can based on available revenue," Mr. Groulx said. "The important thing for us is that the municipalities have committed to find the financing to do the work.^ "This is good news for the steam' train. But if on April i there is a huge bill that we can't afford, we will go to the province with the support of the three municipalities and ask for help." The train, which the company says is North America's oldest-running excursion train, operates from May until October. Mr. Groulx said it attracted 54,650 passengers this year. During the past 15 years, 725,000 people have ridden the train from its station in a Hull-sector industrial park to Wakefield. La Peche and Chelsea have agreed to the contract and Gatineau council is expected to approve it next week, Mr. Groulx said. He said a 25-year lease would allow him to upgrade the train and build new stations near the Casino de Lac Leamy in the Hull sector and in Chelsea, and improve the Wakefield station. Chelsea Mayor Jean Perras, who is president of the non-profit company that owns the line, said the municipalities want assurance of increased safety along the railway. He said the three municipalities and the train operator will probably sign a contract by next Thursday. Mr. Perras said the municipalities have applied to the federal and Quebec governments for a grant to improve the rail line. He said such grants are intended for regular passenger and freight lines, but money for tourist trains may become available. The mayor said Transport Quebec has examined the rail line, but the municipalities want a thorough study of 50 to 60 culverts and three railway bridges to prevent any safety problems.

Monday 19/11/2007 Ottawa Citizen Canada Starch Cardinal

Senior injured trying to beat train
An elderly woman escaped serious injury after her car was struck by a train in Cardinal yesterday. OPP said the woman was attempting to beat the slow-moving train at a crossing on Bridge Street when her vehicle was struck. Police said the train was a yard engine from a Casco Inc. plant. She was not injured, police said.