

The Chats Falls Horse Railway

The Ottawa River Canals and Portage Railways

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Covers the Carillon and Grenville Railway.

For the convenience of passengers who had to get around the rapids (Chats Falls) before boarding another steamer sailing up the next stretch of comparatively smooth water, a small railway was constructed - another of the isolated portage railways on the main river routes of early Canada. This one was constructed in 1846 and first used in the fall of that year. It was really a tramway on which ran two covered cars drawn by a horse. It operated, apparently, until the cessation of steamer service on this part of the Ottawa in 1879. Although mentioned in the records of the travellers on the Ottawa in those days, it has so far proved impossible to obtain any details of this interesting little line and only one photograph showing the horse and cars is known to exist.

I remember a discussion a while back about the horse-drawn portage railway from Pontiac to Union Village. I've just come across a couple of paragraphs about it in [Kennedy, Clyde C. *The Upper Ottawa Valley*. Renfrew County Council, 1970, pp14-15] which I picked up in a used book store in Penticton of all places. It reads:

'The steamers unloaded at Pontiac, where passengers climbed stairs to this easterly terminus of the railway and goods were lifted on a hoist. An ornate, open sided passenger car was pulled along the three miles of rails by two horses. The passengers transferred to another steamer on Lac des Chats at the settlement of Union Village.

'''The principle of construction was probably derived from an early edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, viz. that a railway should be straight and level," Thomas Keefer said in 1854. "The high water level of the Upper lake (Lac des Chats) was made the starting point, and inasmuch as the difference of level between the two is fifty-two feet, the terminus at, or rather over, the lower lake (Lac Deschenes) was correspondingly exalted. This slight inconvenience is overcome by a winding apparatus for hoisting the pork and flour from the lower steamer into the cars, whilst for the accommodation of live freight, pigs and passengers a convenient staircase is provided. The route of the railway where not in swamp is generally upon a solid foundation of granite rock, the profile of which is similar to that of a camel's back. As earth of any kind is a rarity and timber a drug -- in order to fill up the valleys a vegetable embankment is resorted to, consisting of hemlock logs built up after the manner of an Ohio corn-crib, or that of a country residence for pigs. The motive power employed is -- horses, the track --single, the weight of rail -- considerably under the Grand Trunk standard, and the speed -- decidedly safe."

'The railway was built by the Union Forwarding Company, which operated steamers on the various Ottawa River lakes and channels all the way to Rapides-des-Joachims...'

Later on page 141, Kennedy goes on to remark that the service started in 1847, and there is an unfortunately uncredited and poorly reproduced photo of the Ann Sisson at the Pontiac wharf. Evidently the right of way was a cottage road in 1970, and the depressions of some of the ties were still visible, spaced four to five feet apart.

He speculates that the railway was gone along with the bulk of the steamship trade in the late 1870's.