

## **Background**

Imagine living in the City of Ottawa in the 1870s or 1880s and wanting to travel from one end of the city to the other. You might decide to take a horse car, a simple wooden carriage drawn by teams of horses on a roughly built rail system.

You would have then entered a lightly constructed vestibule, paid your fare, and taken a seat on an upholstered bench installed longitudinally along the side of the compartment. Although the ride was bone shaking and slow, and the vestibule might be freezing cold and poorly ventilated, you would still be appreciative of the service, for the ride was a significant improvement in transportation for the majority of inhabitants of Ottawa who did not personally own a horse and carriage.

The alternative to taking the horse car was travelling by foot, a less than pleasant alternative. Until the late 1880s, the city was unable to provide a durable surface for local roads, it attempted to provide 18 inches of limestone gravel over the principal thoroughfares. This type of macadam tended to quickly wear down and soon became ineffective. In warm weather dust blew in dense clouds. In wet weather so much mud lay on the streets that residents hailing from the several neighbourhoods could be singled out by the type of mud carried on their footwear. Folks from the south east section of town, Sandy Hill, were noted for a type of mud composed chiefly of sand. Centretown residents sported a thick black mixture, while those from Lebreton Flats, as the Chaudiere district was known, displayed a substance well blended with sawdust from the lumber mills on the Ottawa River.

The horse railway was certainly an improvement over these roadways but before 1870 no such alternative existed.

## **Ottawa becomes Canada's Capital**

The first impetus for the construction of a horse car line came in 1857. In March of that year, John A. Macdonald, the future Prime Minister of Canada, referred the question of the location of the capital to the Queen for decision. Governor Sir Edmond Head suggested to the Queen that as a fair compromise, Ottawa was the only place that would be accepted by the majority in Upper and Lower Canada. He further pointed out that the chief objection to Ottawa was, "its wild position", but by transfer of government to Ottawa, improvements to the area would quickly follow. To some, this isolated position in the wilderness along the Ottawa River was a distinct advantage for a Canadian capital. In the unlikely event of another invasion from our neighbours to the south, the American armies would be unable to capture a capital city hidden and protected by miles of dense underbrush and impenetrable swamplands.

In reply, over the signature of Queen Victoria from Windsor Castle on October 27, 1857, a letter stated that, "the choice of Ottawa is the right and politic one." The lumber town then became the capital of the province and later of the country.

Protests regarding the choice of Ottawa were loud and long. However, the Queen's wishes prevailed and in 1860 work on the construction of the Parliament Buildings commenced. The cornerstone was laid by the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. By 1865 the buildings were nearing completion. During the construction interval, temporary buildings accommodated the staffs of the various departments congregating in Ottawa.

## **The Ottawa City Passenger Railway Company**

With the influx of civil servants and their families the need for a public transportation system became increasingly apparent. The city had been built up mainly along the Ottawa River in a strip several blocks thick. Some have described the town at the time as a series of interconnecting settlements nestled along the Ottawa River at its junction with the Rideau.

This provided ideal conditions for the establishment of a street railway. In 1865, a number of leading businessmen met informally several times to discuss the formation of a horse car company. A draft charter was presented to the group and approved. It was introduced by the member for the City of Ottawa, Joseph M. Currier in 1865 at the City of Quebec and copies were sent to several members of Ottawa City Council. No objections were raised to the conditions of the charter.

The bill passed the Lower House but, owing to a lack of time, it did not pass the Legislative Council at that session and the fees were refunded. The next sitting of parliament was held in June 1866 at Ottawa when the same bill was introduced by the city representative and passed without opposition. The charter was finally granted by the Legislative Council and Assembly of Canada on August 15, 1866.<sup>1</sup>

The very next day a set of temporary directors were elected to hold office until September 11 of the same year, the date of the first annual meeting. The directors and promoters of the company were chiefly composed of two groups of Ottawa citizens, individuals who were prosperous shop owners and who wished to increase the accessibility of their establishments and wealthy lumber barons, some of American origin, who had made a great deal of money in the local forestry business, cutting, processing and shipping wood south to the United States.

A member of the first group was Robert Blackburn, who owned a successful general store at the corner of Sussex and John. He was active in several milling companies and the manufacture of wool. Members of the second group included Joseph Merrill Currier MP., a businessman engaged in the lumber industry and known for having built 24 Sussex Drive, now the official residence of the Prime Minister; and Joseph Aumond, lumber merchant and organizer for the first Ottawa fire company. Other notables were Horance Merrill, superintendent of the Ottawa River Works and G.B. Fellows QC who became mayor of Ottawa in 1876.

---

<sup>1</sup> Statutes of Canada 1866, c. 106.

### The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

At a meeting of the directors called at the Russell House, in the offices of the Ottawa Gas Company, at one in the afternoon on September 11, G.B. Fellows was appointed president and Robert Lyon, secretary.

The meeting continued the next day with the appointments of Robert Lyon and Edward Remon as solicitors and William Wake, manager of the Ottawa Branch of the Ontario Bank, as treasurer. The task of organising the company continued by assigning duties to specific directors. Robert Lyon was authorised to procure a seal for company use and to open a stock book for recording subscriptions. Shares were to be sold for twenty dollars each, on the basis of ten percent down and the balance payable within thirty days.

Currier and Blackburn were authorised to obtain information regarding the operation of a street railway and to begin preparations for construction. The solicitors were to prepare by-laws.

The first priority was working capital. Almost immediately, the group had difficulty raising funds. Perhaps owing to the smallness of the city, doubts existed as to a street railway being a paying project. The charter required that \$30,000 be subscribed before the company could go into operation. When two thirds of this amount had been obtained, with great difficulty, an editorial in the *Ottawa Citizen* of February 1867 appealed to the citizens of Ottawa to secure the charter by completing the subscriptions. The article stressed the favourable conditions of this charter as compared to the restrictions which burdened like companies of Montreal and Toronto. As an example, an Ottawa railway would not be compelled to repair the street proximate to the track, thus avoiding an expense which made street and track repairs twenty percent of the working expenses of the Montreal Street Railway. The editorial concluded that the Ottawa City Passenger Railway (OCPR) was destined for success and would be an excellent risk for a local investor to buy into.

The *Ottawa Citizen* also appealed to the civic pride of Ottawans.

“We are about to become the Metropolis of British North America. The Capitals of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, of Upper and Lower Canada, all four have street railways, and shall not Ottawa, the Capital of all be as well furnished?”

“Two thirds of the stock has been taken, and the question now is, shall Ottawa have a street railway or shall it fall through for the want of twenty-five hundred pounds? There are some able to take the whole of this amount - more than half of it - and more than ten able to bear \$1000 each. All which deters them is a fear that the road may not immediately pay. Should we not therefore risk something to secure so much for Ottawa, and show the assembled Confederate Legislature that we are not altogether a ‘one horse’ or backwoods town?”

The efforts of the Ottawa group were successful. By the next annual meeting the OCPR would be in a position to become a bona fide company.

Meanwhile, an important condition of the charter had to be fulfilled if the company were to maintain its franchise. Article three of the act stipulated that, “the Company shall commence the construction of said railway within one year (August 15, 1867) from the

### The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

passing of this act". In order to fulfil the condition, if not the spirit, of the charter, the directors purchased a short section of rail from the Montreal Street Railway and laid it in the roadway of Ottawa (Sussex) Street, in New Edinburgh. Thus officially commenced the construction of the street railway, just prior to the deadline.

The next recorded gathering took place in the offices of the solicitors on September 12, 1867 when by-laws were approved.

A general meeting of shareholders was held on September 24, 1867 in the offices of the McKay Estate at New Edinburgh at which several new shareholders were present. With J.M. Currier in the chair, the first board of directors was elected. They included: J.M. Currier, William McNaughton, Thomas Keefer, W.G. Perley, Robert Blackburn, Horace Merrill, Henry Burritt. Thomas Keefer became the first elected president and Robert Surtees, the first secretary.

Thomas Coltrin Keefer, railway promoter and professional engineer, was the President of the OCPR from 1867 until 1891, when his interest in the company was bought out by Warren Soper and Thomas Ahearn. Born the son of a united empire loyalist, he became the best know civil engineer in Upper Canada following the publication of his book *The Philosophy of Railroads* in 1850. Noteworthy among his accomplishments was his design and construction of the Ottawa municipal waterworks in 1874, which are still in service. This facility provided the first tap water in Ottawa and replaced the old horse-drawn drays loaded with puncheons of water filled in the river (a heavy wagon loaded with large wood barrels filled with water and sold to residents). No doubt, the directors and shareholders believed that an eminent man, such as Keefer, would provide expert leadership and respectability for the newly formed company and perhaps attract badly needed capital for the construction of the horse car line.

Information about construction was also announced at the meeting. Suitable premises had been purchased for car sheds, stabling, and offices in a convenient situation at the New Edinburgh terminal. Contracts had been made for the molding (sic) by machinery of tamarack timber got out for the stringers under the rail while arrangements had been made by which cars could be on hand on six or eight weeks' notice. The estimated cost of the road fully equipped was about \$55,000. This included 320 tons of rails at \$45.00 per ton; six miles of stringers; 75,000 ties; laying 3 miles of double track at \$7,500 per mile; 10 cars, at a total outlay of \$7,000 and 40 horses.

The authorized capital was set at \$100,000 with shares at \$20 each. The stock taken up fell considerably short of the amount estimated for completion of the road. The executive, faced with the prospect of raising insufficient funds locally, began negotiating with foreign interests. Some English capitalists, led by Thomas Reynolds, managing director, who controlled the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Railway Company (StL&OR), studied the charter and agreement entered into with the City of Ottawa. They signified their willingness to invest 500 pounds sterling of the 8% first mortgage certificates of the St.L&OR, in payment for \$25,000 stock of the OCPR. However, a provision of the acceptance centred on an amendment to the charter which would sanction haulage of

freight cars by horses over city lines. The plan was to transport lumber by rail at night from the Chaudiere mills to the McTaggart Street terminal of the St.L&OR.

On January 2, 1868, the directors accepted the proposal to purchase a controlling interest in the OCPR under specific conditions regarding the haulage of freight. Keefer, Currier and Burnt formed a committee to amend the charter.

On January 4, 1868, Keefer, Currier and Perley were appointed members of the managing committee of the OCPR. Robert Surtees was confirmed secretary and William Wade became treasurer. The understanding with Thomas Reynolds and the British investors improved the financial health and standing of the OCPR. The horse railway was able to place an order for rail with a British supplier after the January 4, 1868 meeting. A suitable draft was submitted to the Provincial Legislature and on March 4, 1868, an amendment was assented to.<sup>2</sup> This legislation allowed the OCPR to physically connect with the SL&OR, as well as other companies along the street railway line. It provided that the OCPR be allowed to move freight cars by animal power, except on Sundays or during the hours from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. The act also allowed substitution of sleighs for horse cars during winter months.

## **Opposition**

While the amendment was being passed, a number of shopkeepers owning premises on Sparks and other streets along the route voiced concern. Traffic congestion might result if the company were permitted to construct a double track line on downtown streets and especially over the narrow span of Sapper's bridge. Not willing to risk any decrease in business which might come about, this group lobbied citizens and politicians in order to prevent the construction of a double track line. On March 16, 1868, a public meeting was called and city officials were invited. A joint committee was formed composed of four private citizens and six municipal politicians. The purpose was to persuade the OCPR to construct only a single track line.

The directors of the OCPR formed their own group on March 21, 1868, to defend their interests. This committee was instructed not to act until invited by the joint committee, and then not to give away the rights to construct a double track line. The company committee did have the power to offer to turn over the interests and materials of the OCPR to the Corporation of the City of Ottawa or to any persons willing to construct the line.

At a meeting on March 23, 1868, the joint committee drafted four propositions to be submitted to the directors of the street railway company.

1. that but one track be laid in any street in the city.
2. that the right of the city to repair the streets be acknowledged and that the company should have no claims against the Corporation for damages.

---

<sup>2</sup> Statutes of Ontario 1867-68, c. 45.

### The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

3. that no track be laid across Sapper's Bridge while in its present state, but that the company and the city use joint "exertions" to have it widened and a new bridge erected from Wellington to Rideau Street.
4. the company be required to use sleighs for the winter season.

These were submitted to the company committee at a joint meeting on March 25, 1868. A letter from Robert Surtees, secretary of the OCPR was received by HJ. Friel, mayor of Ottawa and Chairman of the joint committee on March 26, 1868. It was a request for clarification of the propositions received the day before. "In the event of the company consenting, how is it proposed to compensate for any loss on already provided for double track and if, upon trial, it be found that a single track cannot be made self-sustaining, would the objection to a double track persist?"

The correspondence also stated that the third proposition amounted to an indefinite suspension of the whole undertaking, and again the company requested compensation for their outlay if the operation of the line was significantly delayed.

The reply from City Hall dated March 30, 1868 stated that neither the joint committee nor the City of Ottawa was prepared to offer compensation for any losses to the street railway as might result from the propositions. These financial setbacks were to be the responsibility of the OCPR.

The directors of the street railway replied on April 4, 1868, and explained their position in detail. There was no disagreement with the fourth proposition. Both sides concurred that sleighs would be the superior mode of transit while there was a blanket of snow on the streets.

The second proposition could also be settled without conflict provided the company was allowed to maintain service while repairs to the roads were going on, the company would have no intention of making claims from the city.

However, the company could not come to any compromise with the city over the two remaining points.

"With respect to the third proposition, that no track be allowed to be laid across Sapper's Bridge while in its present state; the directors again state that it amounts to an indefinite postponement of the railway without cause. The rails themselves will not obstruct the traffic any more upon this bridge than elsewhere, and as to the passing cars, the track being laid on one side would leave the other free, with far less risk in meeting the car than in meeting any other vehicle, in connection with this matter, the directors assume that the parapets of this bridge will be removed, as they form an obstruction each greater than the combined width of both, for if removed there would be a solid roadway ample for three vehicles abreast."

The final proposition appeared to involve the most serious conflict and "the only point of necessary difference."

"The Directors can only account for this unexpected opposition to the provisions obtained here less than two years ago, without opposition by either the Corporation or any of the citizens, on the assumption that the project was so hopeless a one that there was no prospect of its being realized; and that with reference to

## The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

the double track provision it was supposed that a single track would be probably more than could be accomplished. Experience has established that a double track, while accommodating the public far better, can be worked at much less cost, and will earn much more money than a single one with its necessary turnouts or switches. The Directors have, therefore, come to the conclusion that it was most important to attain the maximum of earnings with the minimum of expenditure, in a case where it was problematical whether or not a street railway could be maintained.

“Wherever there is a switch there is double track, and if it were true, as it has been alleged, that a double track would block up the street, the same result must take place with a single track at every place where there is a turnout, because the two tracks which form the turnout must occupy the same position in the street a double track will. It is capable of proof therefore, that a street wide enough for a single track is, as to the question of room for vehicles to stand before the shops, equally wide for a double one.

“To the driving public, the switches are the most objectionable feature in street railways, because by their connection with the main track at each end the rails cross the street diagonally, and this with a movable bar, and wing rail, affect the roadway, as far as they go, more unfavourable than the parallel rails of the double track.

“To the travelling public, the effect of the switches is detention. When a car reaches a switch, it cannot pass these, unless the one from the opposite direction has arrived, and it is impossible in the varying conditions of the streets in this climate so to work time tables as to avoid delays. In consequence of the necessity of providing for this probable delay the time table for the whole length must be expanded, so that a car must be allowed three quarters of an hour to go on a single line, where *half* an hour would be sufficient on the double line. It follows from this that to make the same number of trips per diem, or rather to run a car every quarter an hour, five cars will be wanted instead of four - the extra car requiring eight extra horses and two extra men. There is an increase of 25% in the working expenses, while it is estimated that the loss of fares by the detention of switches is at least 20%.”

The directors concluded their letter by saying:

“We do not assert that a street railway is an unmixed blessing. We assume that the Legislature and the Ottawa Corporations of 1865 and 1866, in view of the great public advantage of a safe, easy and speedy transport within the easy reach of all, authorized the laying down of rails in certain streets, and in the view of the risk to be incurred financially, a very favourable charter was granted. Under that charter, this Company has been organized after giving full publicity to all its provisions, and not until the enterprise was far advanced, and heavy liabilities had been incurred, was there any whisper of opposition.”

As an agreement between the sides was not forthcoming, the city took action to strengthen its hand by making a request to the federal minister of Public Works, the Honourable William McDougall. In a letter dated June 5, 1868, H.J. Friel stated “[t]hat the most serious consequences may be apprehended if a double or single track is permitted to be laid over either Sapper's or Pooley's Bridge. That the bridges above named are the property of the Government and wholly within its control, and beyond the control of this Corporation. Therefore the Corporation prays that you will direct enquiries to be made, and order that steps be taken to prevent the said Company from laying a track across either of the said bridges.”

A second letter was sent to His Excellency the Governor General in Council, dated June 5, 1868, with the purpose of stopping construction of the street railway.

“That the Legislature of Ontario passed an Act at its last Session entitled, *An Act to amend the Act entitled An Act to Incorporate the Ottawa City Passenger Railway Company, 31 Vie., Cap. 45, granting increased privileges, and an extension of time to the said Company.*

“That the powers granted to said Company by the Act of Parliament of the Province of Canada, and by the Act of the Parliament of the Province of Ontario are subversive of Municipal Law, are calculated to injure

## The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

the interests of the City, and produce ruinous results to the owners of property in streets through which it is proposed to run the said railway.

“The Act of Parliament of Ontario was passed against the protests of the Municipal Corporation of the City of Ottawa.

“That the right of the Municipality to repair and improve the streets is taken away in effect by the said act unless probably on payment of damages to the said Company, and the repair of the streets in the line of the track is thrown upon the city, instead of the private Company thus holding a monopoly.

“That the said Company refused to consent to any special agreement for the modification of its charter, or for the restoration of the Municipal privileges infringed upon by the passing of the said acts, against the desire or consent of the Municipality, although repeated propositions have been made to it with this view.

“The Corporation of the City of Ottawa therefore prays your Excellency that the said Act of Parliament of Canada be disallowed.”

August 15, 1868 had been the deadline for the laying of track within the city limits according to the conditions of the original charter. The amendment, assented to on March 3, 1868, extended the deadline to September 1, 1870. The first annual report for the year ending August 15, 1870, explained the need for a revised date.

“The order had gone forward in January last (1868) but from various causes the rails and fittings were not ready for shipment until June, too late for the spring and too early for the fall fleet. It left Liverpool in the “British Trident” on the 9th of August and may be expected in the St. Lawrence early in September.”

At the annual directors' meeting on September 1, 1868 Thomas Keefer was re-elected president. At a second directors' meeting on September 12, 1868, it was announced that the rails had arrived at Quebec and that Keefer was authorized to engage a Mr. Smith to lay track and to give notice to the City of Ottawa and the Town of New Edinburgh of the Company's intention to begin construction.

The City of Ottawa was determined to stop the OCPR and on October 5, 1868, passed by-law 264 to prohibit the OCPR from laying track in the city. The basis of this municipal legislation was that the “Acts of incorporation (of the OCPR), so far as they interfere with the rights of the Corporation (City of Ottawa) are unconstitutional and void.”

The company refrained from laying any track that fall. As time passed, the antagonism between the two groups seemed to lessen. At a directors' meeting on October 12, 1868, Keefer was authorized to confer with the federal government about improvements which were required for Sapper's and Pooley's Bridges. The meetings were successful and during the next summer (1869) these structures underwent reconstruction.

### Tracklaying Commences

On November 12, 1868, to raise money for the upcoming track construction and other expenses, Keefer was authorized to sell the bonds of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Railway. By January 6, 1869, enough capital was available and he was authorized to proceed with arrangements for stabling and car stock.

Soon after the spring break up in 1869, the OCPR began laying track despite the by-law. According to the City Engineer, single track was laid on Sussex Street to Sapper's Bridge. Two lines of rail were placed over the bridge to Sparks Street. A single line was laid on Sparks and Bank to Wellington Street. Wellington Street to the north side of Pooley's



### The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

Bridge was laid with double track. The final section along Duke and Bridge Streets was also covered with a single track. During the fall of 1869, the company and the city had come to an informal agreement regarding the type of track. The laying of double track was now authorized on any streets the company recommended, provided street works such as water mains, sewers and drainage were completed. The company was specifically asked to defer laying of double track on Sparks Street until after it was paved.

The City Engineer also mentioned in his year end report (1869) that there was no possibility of other vehicles driving between the lines of rail as the gauge was 4' 8½", while most vehicles ranged from 5' 1" to 5' 4" from wheel to wheel. He anticipated great difficulty in keeping in an efficient state of repair those streets with heavy traffic over the rail.

His observations were noted by others. Almost immediately, complaints were made stating that the rails were not laid flush to the street, that careless installation had ruined the roadway and that the city would be burdened with expensive repairs. The company had laid "T" rail which, although suitable for steam railways was not the best for street railways because they had a tendency to become exposed thus causing an inconvenience for wagon and carriage traffic. Very little could be done about the problem as the rail was laid and the company was in no financial shape to replace the track.

On November 22, 1869, the city sent another petition to the Ontario Legislature to amend the OCPR Charter. The municipality sought to compel the company to keep in repair the track between the rails and one foot on either side. The city also wished to force the company to use only one track across Sapper's Bridge. This effort was unsuccessful and the OCPR maintained its track in situ, in preparation for the opening of the system.

Soon after the snow had melted and the ground had thawed, the final arrangements for the street railway began. On May 18, 1870, repairs to Sapper's Bridge were completed and two lines of track were reinstalled. The rolling stock of the OCPR had been ordered from the chief horse car builder of that time, the John Stephenson Company of New York. *The Times, Ottawa* of June 28, 1870, reported the arrival of the new vehicles.

"Yesterday four cars of the Ottawa Street Railway were brought to town. They are of a gauge similar to that of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Railroad and consequently they only had to be attached to the train like any other and drawn in. Some lumber cars will arrive shortly. They will be loaded with lumber at the Chaudiere and be then through to Prescott. Those arrived yesterday, we understand, were passenger and light freight cars."

It must have been a very strange sight if the cars were really attached to the back of a St. Lawrence & Ottawa Railway train as the reporter stated. It is more likely that the cars were brought to Ottawa on railway flat cars.

At the same time, last minute preparations were being made to the track so as to begin service as soon as possible. Work was carried out at night under lamp light to have the system operational as soon as possible. *The Times, Ottawa* encouraged the push to open

the line but cautioned that it would not be prudent to disturb the sleep of the residents of the Russell Hotel by working at night in that area.

No doubt, Company President Keefer and Vice President Reynolds were extremely happy and relieved to see their enterprise on the brink of completion. These men, as well as the other directors, had experienced many disappointments and discouraging delays but their initiative and tenacity won out, and the road was ready to open.

## Service Commences

In the early summer of 1870, Ottawa was an established government town, the capital of the Dominion of Canada. Lumber was important to the area and on May 28, 1870 the largest raft in many years had passed containing 5,200 logs destined for East Burstall, Quebec. On the streets, the topic of conversation was the recent invasion of Canada from the south. This attack on our sovereignty was not sponsored by the United States Government but by an Irish-American organisation known as the Fenian Brotherhood. This radical group had declared its intention of “liberating” Canada from British domination and using it as a counter to obtain Ireland's independence.

On Friday, July 21, 1870<sup>3</sup> at 5:00 o'clock in the morning a trial run was made with a horse car to detect possible difficulties and problems with the track work. A number of labourers then made all necessary repairs and improvements. During this first trip the car was quite a curiosity to early morning pedestrians, and was the subject of avid street conversation.

The line was opened without fanfare around five o'clock in the afternoon the same day. The local *Times* reporter suggested that there were people sufficient to fill six Grand Trunk passenger cars gathered along the route waiting to get a view and to ride on this novelty. He was quite impressed with the quality of the rolling stock and wrote that the cars were extremely modern, elegant and comfortable and were second to no streetcar in the Dominion. The horses were strong and fine looking.

The street railway was operated in an efficient and organized fashion. The OCPR employed one driver on each car. A patent fare box was used to collect six cents fare and dispensed with the need to employ a conductor. The teamster was paid \$ 1.25 a day for a shift of 12-14 hours with two relief periods of 45 minutes for lunch and dinner respectively. Eight horses were required per car, in order to permit change-offs at the end of each trip. As four cars were initially placed in service, 35 horses had to be stabled. One early criticism was that the cars were so quiet that there was a concern that accidents would happen. It was suggested that the horses should carry small bells as was done on horse railway systems in other cities.<sup>4</sup>

The new service became quite a novelty. The cars were crowded each day and it soon became evident that additional cars were needed. An order for two horse cars was

---

<sup>3</sup> Ottawa Times, 22 July, 1870.

<sup>4</sup> Ottawa Times, 27 July, 1870.

### The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

submitted. As summer continued, a pattern could be observed in the volume of patronage. Traffic was heavy in the morning and the afternoon when workers travelled to and from employment. Evenings, especially after a warm day, were very popular as people enjoyed a pleasant trip in the cool, dark air after dusk.

Right from the beginning, the OCPR experimented with their system. On September 8th, 1870,<sup>5</sup> they sent out a car drawn by only one horse. To their disappointment, they quickly found out that a solitary animal was not able to haul the heavy cars. Soon, the company realized that two horses were not really sufficient to haul cars up the grade on Rideau Street to Sparks, over Sapper's Bridge. A third horse was then employed, to help each car travelling up the hill.

The company made improvements to the line. Better service was provided when extra turnouts were installed on Sparks Street at O'Connor and at Bank. The complete horse car route to the Union Suspension Bridge leading into Hull was opened for passengers on 1 September 1870. The last sections of rail having been put into place on Pooley's Bridge on 26 August.<sup>6</sup> Two new cars were delivered about 26 September 1870<sup>7</sup> and, although they had the same passenger capacity as those of the initial complement, they were quite distinctive in appearance. Six cars were now able to provide 15-20 minute headways along the line, a noticeable improvement.

The street railway was a welcome convenience to the travelling public but it could be a nuisance to other vehicles. During the first autumn, a teamster was travelling down Sparks Street with a wagon load of flour, when a horse car driver signalled him to move off the track. In the attempt to get out of the way, the wheel became caught in the rails and broke completely off. The horse car driver asked the teamster to unload the wagon, remove it and allow him to pass but the man refused, telling the driver that he could move it himself if he chose. Neither party did the work, the driver moved his horses around from the front to the back of the car and proceeded back without completing the trip. Although conflicts between horse cars and other vehicles continued to cause occasional delays, the parties gradually learned to coexist relatively peacefully. Besides moving passengers, the street railway had been built to haul freight from the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Railway to local firms. For this purpose, Vice President Reynolds had invested a considerable amount of capital. One day, during the first summer of operation, the OCPR attempted to inaugurate this new service. A boxcar load of pork had to be delivered from the steam railway to the store of Edward McGillivray on Wellington Street. This announcement aroused a great deal of interest among the population and the passing of the car was eagerly anticipated. The OCPR must have wanted to generate a lot of publicity and everyone was out to watch the delivery. The car was surrounded by a crowd which included the president, directors and engineers. The train started slowly and proceeded along with a boy sitting on top waving a large union jack flag in triumph. The train continued on slowly until it reached the corner of Sussex and Rideau Streets where it stuck fast in the rails. Although more than one engineer had supervised the alteration of

---

<sup>5</sup> Ottawa Times, 9 September, 1870.

<sup>6</sup> Ottawa Times, 27 August, 1870.

<sup>7</sup> Ottawa Times, 27 September, 1870.

the track for freight cars, they now discovered that there was no practical way to move the car around the curve. The flag was lowered and from that day on, no attempt was made to carry freight on the horse car line.

Thomas Reynolds retired from the OCPR about the end of 1871 and sold his controlling interests to Mr. T.C. Keefer who was to manage the railway until 1891.

## **Service in Winter**

The OCPR quickly demonstrated that it could provide good public transportation service during the warmer season. However, as colder weather arrived and fall turned into winter, it became evident that it was not practical to maintain rail service after the first major snowfall. By November 24<sup>th</sup> 1870 <sup>8</sup>, it was noted that the car trips were coming few and far between. The snow covered rails became slippery and drawing the cars was extremely heavy work for the horses. Traffic was at one point stopped for five days until sleighs were brought into use and rail was abandoned for the season on 6 December 1870 <sup>9</sup>.

The sleighs were a little larger than the horse cars, and were made as comfortable as possible for the passengers. They travelled over the snow on large runners and provided a fast and smooth ride. Despite this, public transportation in the winter was far from pleasant. Though the ride was smoother than rough rail, heat was not provided in the draughty compartment. For personal comfort there was pea straw on the wooden floor and for aesthetics there were the delicate patterns of frost on the windows.

The sleighs continued in operation until March 10, 1871 when it became possible to run the cars over the cleared rails. These reasonably good road conditions would last only until the spring thaw, when the streets of Ottawa were transformed into rivers of mud. The track became so distorted from the movements of the unballasted roadbed that the cars had a difficult time riding the twisted and uneven rail. Service was erratic for a number of weeks until the soil dried and provided a stable base for the set of track. In fact, during the spring of 1871, service was suspended from March 10 until April 3 when the horse cars were able to go out.

The second year of operation was again successful but brought on a sad occurrence, on 22 April 1871, unfortunately common to early rail transportation. It was the first fatality on the street railway.

“A boy, the son of Henry Duggan, a city street car conductor, was run over about noon, Saturday by a car near the New Edinburgh Bridge and received injuries which it is thought will prove fatal. He is about eight years old, and in getting off the platform, he was swung under the car by a heavy basket which he had under one arm. The car passed over his body in a line from the abdomen to the chest breaking one of his arms” <sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Ottawa Times, 24 November, 1870.

<sup>9</sup> Ottawa Times, 7 December, 1870.

<sup>10</sup> Ottawa Times, 24 April, 1871.

## The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

This was one of many senseless accidents graphically reported by the newspapers of the time. These fatalities continued into the late 1890's, well after electrification of the railway, when the company was finally pressured into installing "life saving" fenders on their cars.

The street railway operated successful through the summer and fall of 1871. Patronage was good and receipts were only slightly less than in 1870. Rail service continued until December 7th 1871 when sleighs took over after a snow. In 1872 winter transport continued until April 4th. The horse cars travelled on the rail for only two days but again all service had to be suspended until April 15, 1872 when the ground was sturdy enough to support both the track and the cars. That summer proved to be uneventful, but problems were on the way for the company in the fall.

### The Great Epizootic

The Street Railway was vulnerable to animal ailments. The most serious of these was the horse disease known as epizootic apthne, or the "Great Epizootic", which spread through the stables in the cities of North America. The disease, previously encountered in Europe, first broke out in Western Canada, grew to epidemic proportions in Montreal and Toronto in 1872, then spread swiftly through the principal cities of the eastern United States. Thousands of horses died from it and many others were disabled from it for periods of up to a month. In a large number of cities, street railways had to be severely curtailed or discontinued altogether. In some, such as Boston, service was maintained only by hiring gangs of the unemployed to draw the cars through the streets.

The epizootic was first reported in Ottawa in local newspapers on October 17, 1872. Authorities believed that it was introduced into the region by horses brought in from Toronto to attend the fall races at Lansdowne Park. The outbreak spread quickly, 150 cases were estimated on the first day, 200 the second and over 1,000 cases reported on October 20th.

There was considerable ignorance and hysteria regarding the nature of this plague. Rumours persisted that the epizootic was a danger, not only to the horses but a direct threat to the local population. A warning to owners of stricken animals was published in the *Ottawa Times* on October 22nd.

"This terrible disease (Epizootic Hippo-Diphthos) may be communicated from the horse to human beings. Persons handling sick horses should be careful of inhaling the breath of diseased horses and must be careful to wash their hands after touching one."

The epidemic affected the service provided by the Ottawa City Passenger Railway but at no time was traffic suspended. On October 19, 1872 the number of trips on the horse car line had to be reduced due to the shortage of healthy animals. The Company refused to acknowledge that the epizootic was interfering with the quality of service but blamed the "unprecedented severity of the weather and the bad state of the streets." Nevertheless, all but six of the horses were sick, and the OCPR had difficulty keeping cars on the road. After a day of rest on Sunday, several horses recovered their health sufficiently to resume harness.

## The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

Good stablemen seemed to be able to treat the disease and save many of the stricken. The ailment seemed to be a form of influenza characteristic to horses. The animal would first develop a slight cough accompanied by watering of the eyes and an impaired appetite due to a sore throat. Later these symptoms increased in severity and the horse would weaken and could finally expire.

The best remedy at the time was probably a horse blanket and plenty of rest in a dry stable but the newspapers at the time suggested for owners to rub coal oil or carbolic acid over the throat of the beast and all around the stable. Despite all efforts, at least one valuable horse of the street railway died but fortunately dry weather seemed to aid the recovery of the sick animals. Two weeks after the outbreak, the company was able to provide regular service to the public with a barn full of healthy animals.

### The Street Railway Matures

As the Street Railway acquired a reputation for good and dependable service, the citizens in other local towns began to inquire about the possibility of a horse car route serving their own municipality. On December 4th, 1872, a letter was received from Aylmer, requesting the assistance of the Company in the construction of a street railway from the Suspension Bridge in Hull to the Village of Aylmer in the Province of Quebec. A reply was given that this was beyond the power in the company's charter. It is interesting to note that, approximately thirty years later, an electric railway was established between Aylmer and the national capital through Hull.

The reconstruction of Sappers Bridge in 1874 caused a number of problems. The railway was laid on a temporary fashion and the horses had to be unhitched. This was one of a number of accidents reported at that time.

“One of the horses attached to a streetcar having been unhitched stepped into the opening, and fell between the girders a distance of 30 or 40 feet to the ground, alighting on his feet and apparently escaped uninjured. That the animal was not killed outright was due to the fact that he was suspended for a long time in mid-air by the harness, and consequently the fall was considerably broken.”<sup>11</sup>

After several years, the company found the need to publish a list of rules and regulations in order to improve the quality and the safety of service. Similar to the rules in our own municipal buses, smoking was prohibited upon all vehicles. The second regulation stated that children were not allowed to stand on the front platform and all persons were forbidden to stand on the steps or enter or leave any of the vehicles when in motion. This illustrated the concern the company had in the possibility of a recurrence of the situation which led to the death in 1871 of the young boy. The third rule would not allow any baggage, barrels of fruit, parcels or parcels which could not be carried on the lap, to be taken on any vehicles. In this case, the OCPR exercised control over the amount of valuable space used by individuals in the small, overcrowded horse cars. This list of regulations was published on March 1, 1875, and was put immediately into effect.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ottawa Times, 31 August, 1874.

## The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

During the same month of March, the snow gradually melted, the frozen ground began to melt and the streets of Ottawa were progressively transformed into narrow swamps of mud. The surface of the roadways, once again, became useless for the passage of sleighs and totally inadequate for a stable foundation for rails which had to support the heavy weight of a loaded horse car. Finally this year, rather than suspending service, the company put buses on the road from March 19<sup>12</sup> to April 30, 1875. This was the first time buses had been used by the OCPR. Several omnibus frames were purchased and the vestibules of the sleighs were placed on the frame which had large wagon wheels designed to navigate the muddy streets in the spring. At times, the horses couldn't go faster than a walk and took 1 1/2 hours for a trip. But even at that rate, the passengers had to hold on for dear life. Travel in that season over the streets of Ottawa must have been akin to riding a roller coaster as the omnibus lurched over mounds and potholes and through seas of mud on the dirt thoroughfares. When street railway service was resumed the omnibuses were run from Dufferin Bridge, along Rideau Street to the Protestant Hospital, providing a transfer into the railway.<sup>13</sup>

Street railway operations did have a lighter side.

“As a car of the street car line was coming up Wellington Street one of the members of the Chaudiere Company, who was employed in watering the streets, turned his hose upon the car, wetting ten of its occupants, and on being remonstrated with, he paid his respects to the driver, who intends having them arrested.”

“McKay, one of the members of the Chaudiere Fire Company, was arrested by the police for wilfully turning his hose, whilst watering the streets, upon an advancing street car and drenching the driver and two of its occupants. Several persons who witnessed the occurrence, testified that it was purely an accident and simply unavoidable, and that the man was not to blame. It seems that the driver of the car demanded his name and caught hold of him, whereupon he turned his hose upon him, compelling the (driver) to beat a hasty retreat. He was arrested at his instance, and notwithstanding the evidence to show that it was unintentional on his part, McKay was fined \$ 13 and costs.”<sup>14</sup>

“Yesterday evening at half past six o'clock as the street car was coming from New Edinburgh along Sussex Street, the passengers heard the cackling of a hen and were much surprised at the same, as they could see nothing in that line on board. At last they noticed a small boy's face getting very red, and, on watching him narrowly, he grew so nervous that he lifted his feet and disclosed a nice white hen, which he had imprisoned under the seat and kept there with his feet. The hen, however, took a mean advantage of the boy's condition and flew out when opposite the Cathedral and took refuge in a vacant lot. The street car was immediately halted and the youth, with several passengers, assisted by a terrier dog, started in pursuit. After considerable time had elapsed, they caught the chicken, and the street car pursued its way as if nothing had happened.”<sup>15</sup>

The street railway continued to run successfully for the next few years. Nevertheless, there were problems of gradually declining ridership during the recession which accompanied the Liberal Government of Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie.

Since 1873, a slump had replaced prosperity in world markets and for the remainder of the seventies the rate of economic expansion in Canada declined sharply. The stimulus of

---

<sup>12</sup> Ottawa Times, 20 March, 1875.

<sup>13</sup> Ottawa Times, 23 April, 1875.

<sup>14</sup> Ottawa Times, 15 and 18 June, 1875.

<sup>15</sup> Ottawa Times, 12 September 1876.

a strong external demand for Canadian produce, such as timber and wood products from the Ottawa market, disappeared as economic conditions in Great Britain and the United States deteriorated. Contraction of credit and declining investment and trade in these countries, struck at the foundations of Canada's short post-confederation prosperity and gloom quickly replaced the optimism of the preceding years.

Depression hit with full force in 1876 and continued until 1879. Trade in Canadian forest products declined and exports of lumber products fell to one-half the volume of 1873. As the impact of the downslide filtered through to the population of the city, car riding increasingly became an expendable luxury and traffic volume fell to alarming depths; the passenger receipts for 1879 were 47% less than those of 1874 when total receipts amounted to \$20,632.

The economic depression was not the sole cause of the company's troubled financial state. In the *Ottawa Free Press* of July 23, 1876, news of embezzlement within the OCPR organization became public. William Proctor was dismissed for misappropriation of funds. He looked after the lamps of the cars and unlocked the money boxes. The company was seeking \$5,000 in damages.

As a result of all of these financial problems, the OCPR declared no dividend; indeed, no dividend would be declared for twelve years after 1879, except in paid-up stock.

## **Trouble with the City**

More trouble was in store for the horse car company from a different source. On November 11, 1878, at a meeting of Ottawa Council, a resolution was passed that an application be submitted to the Ontario Legislature for an amendment to the act incorporating the OCPR, to compel the passenger railway to alter the track and switches using flat rails to new locations which the city might request; also to move the Sparks Street rail to Wellington Street and to maintain and repair the roadway for a certain distance on either side of the track.

In this petition, the City of Ottawa was responding to pressure from a vociferous group of Sparks Street merchants as well as other individuals who already had unfortunate accidents crossing tracks and switches on their wagons or carriages. The problem was the conventional "T" rail that the OCPR had laid in 1869 and rails protruding above street level on neglected roadways. Members of council wanted the company to remove the old rail and replace it with flanged strap rail, spiked on wooden stringers, which in turn would be fastened on to wooden sleepers. This style of rail, the members thought, would lie flush with the roadway and enable carriages and other vehicles with wooden wheels to cross safely without fear of accident or even to travel on the rails.

A more serious hazard to these same vehicles was the passing switches or turnouts which were spaced intermittently along the single track line. If the route were double tracked, the problem could easily be resolved. Unfortunately, many Sparks Street merchants believed that their thoroughfare was too narrow for double tracking and insisted that the line be moved to the more spacious Wellington Street.



## The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

Because the company was in poor financial condition, officials pleaded that they were unable to consider effecting any of these changes at the time. The OCPR reminded council it had planned initially to lay double track, but so much opposition was offered, that they abandoned the idea. The company also commented that shifting the tracks from Sparks Street “is simply absurd, more than one-half of all passengers are taken from between the corner of Sussex and Rideau Streets and Bank.... Between these points is the principal part of the city.”

“It is convenient for ladies and others making purchases, and when they can get on the cars with their parcels and surely it is not to be expected that they would prefer walking up to Wellington Street, and waiting on the street for a car.”

Mayor Macintosh was confident that the railway would be forced to make changes. “In the hands of the Legislature, I am sure that the amended bill asked for will become a statutory enactment.”

The mayor's prediction was not realized. On January 27, 1880, the city's bill was thrown out by a large majority in the Railway Bills Committee of the Ontario Legislature. The city was advised either to compromise with the company, or to establish their rights by appeal to the courts.

Relations between the company and the city improved somewhat. The company agreed voluntarily the labour and the cost of keeping the street in repair between the rails on the condition that the city furnish the materials. By 1883, the company paid the city \$250 annually towards the cost of filler stone. On April 27, 1885, the city gave permission to double track from Wellington to Sussex via Bank, Sparks, and Rideau Streets as long as it was laid with flat rail of “Philadelphia Pattern”. The OCPR accepted these conditions with the stipulation that it had until 1890 to complete the adjustments.

## Daily Operations

The service provided by the OCPR was adequate for the capital until the 1890's. The first car started out at 7:15 in the morning and the final horse car came in at 10:30 in the evening. The time for a return trip on the system was one hour and fifteen minutes. On a typical day, in the year 1879, seven cars were used in the morning and eight in the afternoon. Seventy-one trips were completed using forty horses. At the time, the company had 13 employees, and rolling stock of 8 horse cars, 5 winter sleighs and 5 omnibuses.

Each driver was relieved during his all-day shift for half an hour at mid-day and three quarters of an hour at supper by a man from the barn. In operating the car, the driver stood in front, stopping only when signalled by pedestrians who wished to embark and for whom he would make change, if requested, from a small leather bag which he carried suspended from his shoulders. The passenger then would deposit the fare in a box attached to the end wall of the car before taking a seat. In the winter time, the covered sleighs were managed by a driver warmly clothed in a great buffalo coat, outside of which hung his leather change bag. Working the omnibus alone was especially difficult. The driver had to let the horses jog by themselves as he entered the vestibule to collect

## **The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893**

fares. He was expected to make change and let the passengers walk to the end of the car and drop it into the fare box. With the jolting and rocking of the bus, this feat was a physical impossibility for old people and the ornately dressed ladies of the time. Many very able patrons, to their dismay, ended up sitting on the floor of the compartment after losing their balance when the bus had begun moving. The drivers were provided no uniforms but as a rule they put on their oldest suit for work and were happy enough just to have a steady job for the pay of \$1.25 a day.

In the summer of 1891, there were four miles of track, with 10 horse cars, 12 wagons for omnibuses, 10 snow ploughs and 15 sleighs. Fifty-five horses provided the motive power and fifteen employees worked for the Company.

Horses were the most important aspect of the horse car company. Each car required a team and a tow horse for the hills. By the 1890's the Company was purchasing 8 to 12 new horses each year. The average length of service for a good horse had been five or six years. One horse, the famous "Rat-tail" worked sixteen years and would have still been in commission had it not slipped on the stable floor and broke its leg. Strong horses of 1,000 to 1,200 pounds cost between \$95 and \$100. In 1892, 200 tons of hay and 8,000 bushels of oats were consumed.

### **The Rockcliffe Extension**

During 1888, it was noticed that passenger traffic on the system was unbalanced. The western section of the line, from the Chaudiere through Sparks Street was heavily patronized but on the portion on Sussex to New Edinburgh, the cars were often half-empty. Management decided that an extension through Rockcliffe to the Lookout, providing access to the Gatineau Ferry, would increase business for the eastern part of the street railway. By providing the opportunity to take a pleasant trip into the peaceful countryside along the Ottawa River, to a scenic lookout high above the water, the OCPR planned to attract many more customers.

Construction began in May 1889, on the land of Thomas Keefer, the president, with the consent of the Township of Gloucester. By May 27, 1889, the grading was nearly finished and the track was being laid with the old "T" rail which had been replaced during the track renewal program on the main line during 1885.

On Friday, August 2, 1889, the directors made the first trip on the route and were very satisfied with the quality of the right-of-way. The following day, there was an official opening, with representatives of the Ottawa Press and two hundred invited guests taking part in a guided rail tour.

Unfortunately, the visitors were unable to travel directly from the city line in New Edinburgh to Rockcliffe. In order to connect the new track with the main line, it was necessary for the OCPR to occupy 150 yards of road opposite the Governor General's Estate. This road, formerly in the Village of New Edinburgh, had since become part of Ottawa after the amalgamation of the two municipalities in 1887. Although this connection would have allowed people to travel into the country without transfer,

### The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

permission to make it was refused unless the company would agree to relay all their old track with new rail within five years and to pay an annual rental upon their whole city mileage of track, \$800 per mile of double and \$500 per mile of single track on unpaved road. An even higher charge to the railway was envisioned for roadways which in future would be paved. The company would not agree to the terms, and the city would not compromise. Once again, the conflict between the two groups prevented improvements in public transportation.

A newspaper account of the Rockcliffe line opening graphically described the new route.

“Starting from the office of the company on Main Street (Sussex) New Edinburgh, the old line to the end of that street at its junction at John Street, which for nearly a quarter of a century has lain buried, has been dug out and raised to a new grade by the City Engineer. The passenger on arriving at John Street has to alight and is given a continuous ticket for the Rockcliffe Line but must walk a distance of 400 feet over the Corporation's property.

“One will traverse a mile of probably the most picturesque scenery in the world. Here are the green woods around Rideau Hall, then a steep ascent over old Limekiln Road with bush on both sides and a glimpse of the river below, a sharp curve and open meadow belted with trees, then a genuine piece of wild pine wood looking lovely in the summer sun, an open plateau and the terminus at old Mushroom Lodge, built by Major McNabb in 1815.

“The excursionist descends into probably the most delightful picnic grounds imaginable. On the one side, the bush rises until it sinks in the sky, on the other is the grand river, with the silvery stream of the Gatineau flowing down to meet it, the veil of Waterloo, with its church of St. Francis, the wide undulating land of the Gatineau Valley and beyond all, the bold outlining of the green clad Laurentian Range.”

The new line cost a total of \$4,500, but this included a new three car capacity car shed built on land acquired for the purpose on Princess Street at the eastern border of the Governor General's Estate. The private right-of-way of the Rockcliffe Line was double-tracked for most of the route to avoid delays in service. During the winter of 1889, the OCPR ordered two open horse cars from the Stephensen Company of New York but due to a backlog of orders the cars were not delivered until 1891. These thirty-five passenger capacity cars required both a teamster and a conductor and were the first two-man cars. Their efficiency encouraged the OCPR to place a conductor on most of the other cars of the system. Because the new cars were longer, the sheds in Rockcliffe were extended in 1891.

The Rockcliffe Extension became quite lucrative for the OCPR and an increase of almost \$3,000 in passenger receipts was noted. To ensure continued patronage, a good effort was made to maintain the picnic site and to improve the facilities. A shelter was built at the Lookout, steps were installed down to the water and men were employed to keep the picnic area clean. The Rockcliffe line was a seasonal operation and service ended for the winter months on November 27, 1889. For the next three seasons, the route opened early in April and closed down early in December.

Thomas Keefer, buoyed by the line's success, proposed to the shareholders that an extension of the Rockcliffe line should be built along the river, past Hemlock Lake to Beechwood Cemetery. The line would have been built with old rail that the city wanted removed from Ottawa streets. Old obsolete cars, no longer in use, would serve as rolling stock and the line could have been placed in operation for less than \$4,000. The directors

and shareholders felt that the money would be best spent elsewhere and the Cemetery line was never constructed.

## The Ottawa Electric Street Railway

On November 5, 1890, an agreement was signed between the Corporation of the City of Ottawa with Thomas Ahearn and Warren Soper for the operation of the Ottawa Electric Street Railway (OESR). This new system would provide indirect competition with the OCPR as a public carrier. Although Thomas Keefer, the president of the horse railway, stated that the electric cars were welcome as they would provide accommodation for areas not served by horse cars, he soon learned that the proposed route over Dufferin Bridge and along Wellington Street necessitated crossing over OCPR tracks at several points. A protest was lodged with the city on the grounds that safety would be imperilled. The city, as usual, was not sympathetic with the horse railway.

The controversy was not resolved, so the Ottawa City Passenger Railway petitioned the Ontario Legislature to restrain the OESR from crossing their tracks. When the hearing was held, several points in addition to the rail crossings were raised, which made it evident that the petitioners viewed with some alarm, competition by the new enterprise. The OCPR representative stressed the danger of rail crossing and the fact that use of their rails over Sapper's Bridge which had been offered and refused by the OESR would eliminate rail crossing. The OESR contended that the horse car rails were obsolete and were not suited to their equipment and therefore crossings were necessary in laying their own rails. After lengthy deliberations, the legislature ruled that the OESR was acting in accordance with their agreement with the city and dismissed the petition. Rail was laid over Dufferin Bridge and along Wellington Street where the line turned south on Metcalfe to Albert. It was not until after the amalgamation of the horse car line with the OESR that electric cars were routed over Sapper's Bridge.

On June 29, 1891, the OESR began service between Metcalfe Street and the Union Station (CPR Broad Street). As each electric car line was opened, the management of the horse car road noted a corresponding decrease in patronage over that particular section of the OCPR route. It quickly became evident that modernization was required for the older system if it were to remain in effective competition with Ahearn and Soper's new property. The OCPR directors considered converting the road to electric propulsion, but realized that they were restrained by the conditions of their charter which allowed only cars moved "by the power or force of animals".

During 1891, relations between the City of Ottawa and the OCPR began to thaw and the horse car company was finally permitted to fill the gap between the Rockcliffe Extension and the main line in May. The city also ceased its attempt to alter the charter or appropriate the property of the system.

Despite these favourable developments, there were still concerns about the future. On July 20, 1891, at a directors meeting, an investigation was made regarding battery cars, an experimental form of electric traction which was later found to be impractical. In any case, no action was taken and the electrical storage cars were never purchased.

### **The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893**

As summer wore on, the OCPR had other problems; the loft and roof of the New Edinburgh Stables, on John Street, was struck by lightning and burned on August 12, 1891. Fortunately all of the horses were saved and the entire damage was covered by insurance.

As passenger receipts declined through the summer, Thomas Keefer could see the handwriting on the wall, a horse railway in Ottawa could not compete successfully with an electric railway. Furthermore, the possibility of the city authorizing the OCPR to electrify under favourable terms was so extremely remote that the best recourse was to sell out.

A sudden development on October 9, 1891 surprised many in Ottawa when the news broke that Thomas Keefer, the president of the horse car company, had sold his shares to unknown parties. While neither party disclosed the price paid in the transaction, it was understood that Keefer held the controlling interest valued at approximately \$50,000 out of total assets in the neighbourhood of \$86,000. For several days there was speculation until on October 12, 1891 it was revealed that the purchasers were none other than Thomas Ahearn and Warren Soper of the OESR, who now had the controlling interest. This ensured co-operation between the two companies, and although no attempt was made to amalgamate at that time, the way was open for a unified transit system in Ottawa.

The annual meeting of the Ottawa City Passenger Railway was held in the offices of the Ottawa Electric Railway on Albert Street, December 15, 1891. A substantially different board of directors was elected: Warren Soper, Thomas Blackburn, George Brophy, William Hutcheson, George Perley, Thomas Ahearn, Edward Bronson.

At a meeting of the directors immediately following, Warren Soper was elected president, and Robert Blackburn, who had made an important contribution to the management of the horse car line as secretary, was named vice-president. Redmond Quain became auditor. At this meeting it was decided to electrify the horse car line as soon as practicable and to apply for an extension into Hull. Shareholders of the Ottawa City Passenger Railway were given the opportunity to join the OESR by an exchange of shares on the basis of five OCPR shares for one OESR.

The street railway had originally favoured extending service into the province of Quebec. On April 5, 1870, the bill for the extension from the Chaudiere terminus on the south side of the Suspension Bridge to the village of Hull was withdrawn by the Company following an announcement by Hector Langevin, Minister of Public Works, that the government would not consent to the use of that bridge by the company. For many years following this refusal, the OCPR was not interested in expansion, due to the low rider ship on their main line and the lack of revenue that would be necessary for expansion. In later years, the threat of expropriation or competition from other transit companies dampened any enthusiasm for the extension.

### The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893

Anticipating the passage of a federal charter, on February 20, 1892, two buses were put on between the terminus of the main line at Chaudiere and Main Street in Hull. The buses managed to attract profitable amounts of business and remained in service throughout the year. No efforts were made during the summer to lay track into Hull due to the uncertain future of the horse car system.

The management improved service in other areas during 1892. More horse cars were acquired and coal stoves, discarded from the electric cars, were installed in the sleighs. Children between the ages of four and seven were also given the privilege of travelling at half fare.

Meanwhile, the company, beginning in March, made some exploratory proposals to the city, offering to share tickets and transfer privileges with the OESR in exchange for permission to electrify.

This first offer was not accepted and for the next year, the new management tried to embody some of the favourable terms enjoyed by the old company into a new agreement with the city. It also tried to modify its proposal to conform with the agreement entered into with the OESR.

Improvements continued to the OCPR, workers were equipped with caps on August 3rd and uniforms were on the way. The Hull bus line was extended from Main and Bridge Streets in Hull to the Hull Post Office on December 27, 1892 but on January 4, 1893, after the sleighs began running, all traffic was stopped by the Hull Police Chief who demanded a ten dollar licence. Service to Hull did not resume until May 2nd, when the line was cut back to City Hall Square.

In the spring of 1893, the Rockcliffe horse car line was not opened as usual. Instead, work was begun to improve and electrify the line. On May 16th the new route was opened to the electric cars and on June 24th, transfers from the OCPR were accepted by the electric cars travelling to Rockcliffe.

By July 8, 1893 arrangements were nearly finished for amalgamating the two street railway companies. That day, a decision was made to begin electrifying the horse car road. The work commenced that evening by lamp light. On July 27th 1893, the first electric car travelled down Sparks Street as far as Metcalfe.

“The horsecars were still jogging along Sparks Street today but it is expected that after tomorrow they will be a thing of the past on that thoroughfare. After tomorrow the horsecar line will only exist from the corner of Bank and Sparks, along Wellington to the end of the track at the Chaudiere. The novelty of electric and horsecars running simultaneously on one street attracted a good deal of attention on Sparks Street today. The old pedestrian line, as the horsecar system has been generally called, kept one track going while alongside the dandy motor sailed gracefully along. The street had a very animated appearance with both styles of cars running and crowds of workmen putting on the finishing touches.”

Sometime in late August 1893, on Bridge Street in the Chaudiere District, the last horse car walked the streets of Ottawa. Early in September, the final horses were sold from the

## **The Ottawa Horse Car Era 1870-1893**

stables in New Edinburgh. The entire system had been replaced by the swift and more economical electric streetcars.