

Local Railway Items from Area Papers - 1998

11/01/1998 Ottawa Citizen Brockville

Furious passengers want "sorry" from VIA
Passengers on an ill-fated Ottawa-Toronto train trip want an explanation from Via Rail about a journey they say should have never happened. "I think Via owes passengers a public apology or a sincere letter," Einmar Murchison of Ottawa said. "The train should never have left the station." The train in question left Ottawa at 9:40 a.m. Thursday and didn't arrive in Toronto until 3:30 the next morning, 12 hours later than scheduled. Along the way, it ran out of food. "By 11 p.m. passengers were draining coffee 'milkers' to keep the babies fed," said passenger George Karidis of Brockville. "People were concerned, they were upset. There was anger," said Mr. Murchison, 29, associate publisher of Ottawa newspaper Ottawa Computes. The ice storms that have devastated Eastern Ontario and Quebec had felled trees onto the tracks between Ottawa and Brockville. Several times, the train stopped completely while these trees were removed. At one point, the train went backward for 50 kilometres, hitting a fallen tree along the way, Mr. Karidis said. The passengers were particularly upset that the train's crew didn't have a plan ready in case of a medical emergency, Mr. Murchison said. Some passengers and took it upon themselves to canvass other passengers about any health problems aboard. On the train were several diabetics, an eight-and-a-half-month-pregnant woman and a man who had recently suffered a stroke. The train's staff was unprepared for an emergency, Mr. Murchison said. "You think they would have a plan they could swing into action in case of emergency," Mr. Murchison said. "We expect airplanes to have them, so why not Via?" Via Rail did not return calls yesterday from the Citizen. To add to the passengers' discom fort, the train's snack cart had not been stocked up in Ottawa, Mr. Karidis said. After paying about \$45 extra for a first-class ticket, which includes a meal, Mr. Karidis said he had to wait until midnight, after the train arrived in Kingston, to get a sandwich. "I think Via has to take a really close look at what happened on this train," , Mr. Murchison said. "I hope it doesn't take somebody suffering more than this before they act. "As we crawled along we could see trees uprooted. You could hear trees scraping at the roof of the train," Mr. Murchison said. The trip was frightening, "especially in the dark when you don't know if it's a sapling or a 20-tonne tree hitting the train," Mr. Murchison said. Some passengers cried. Others kept children occupied or played games on laptop computers. Many lined up for a quick turn on a cellular telephone to contact friends and relatives. "One of the great things was that people pulled together," Mr. Murchison said. Much of the passengers' frustration was at the lack of information forthcoming from the crew. "People would've been appeased if they were informed," Mr. Karidis said. Though he usually travels by train about once a week, Mr. Karidis said he will think twice before taking the train again. Mr. Murchison still thinks the train is the way to travel when the weather is inclement. Via offered overnight accommodation to passengers upon their arrival in Toronto. About 60 people accepted rooms at the the Royal York Hotel. "I was pleasantly surprised they put us up at the Royal York and not the YMCA. Everything else they did was bush league," Mr. Murchison said. Via offers refunds when trains arrives more than four hours late, but Mr. Murchison isn't looking for one. "I'll probably frame my ticket," Murchison said.

There were several other items about train delays during the ice storm

22/01/1998 Ottawa Citizen Brockville

VIA Rail was to resume regular service between Ottawa and Montreal today. VIA spokesman Malcolm Andrews said trains haven't operated on the CN Rail line since the ice storm because of trees and power lines on the tracks and failed switches and warning lights.

17/02/1998 Ottawa Citizen Maniwaki

James Bond actor to film aboard Wakefield train
Actor Pierce Brosnan, who has por- trayed James Bond in the last two films about the suave British spy, will make a brief appearance in the Chelsea area in early May to film scenes for his new movie, Grey Owl. Wakefield's steam train will be used for about three days of filming, begin- ning May4. The \$45-million historical epic tells the story of Grey Owl, the pseudonym of Archibald Belaney, who left England in 1905 at age 17 to fulfill a dream of living as a North American Indian. He also served as a sniper with the Canadian forces in the First World War. The film project was announced about two years ago, but ran into difficulties and now is set to go ahead with Sir Richard Attenborough directing. A Montreal-based film company is paying about \$10,000 to use the train, said Andre Groulx, a spokesman for the family that operates the train. All filming is expected to be completed before the regular train excursions through Wakefield, Chelsea and Hull begin May 9.

22/02/1998 Ottawa Citizen Smiths Falls Smiths Falls

Car, train crash, Smiths Falls man killed
Investigators are trying to figure out why a car carrying five people ended up in the path of Via Rail passenger train at a level crossing northeast of Smiths Falls yesterday afternoon, killing the driver. The collision happened at about 2:35 p.m. on Holbrook Road in Montague Township, about 60 kilometres southwest of Ottawa. The car, a 1997 Cavalier, was driven by Thomas Howe, 32, of Smiths Falls. He died of multiple injuries at the Ottawa General Hospital after being taken there in a helicopter. Mr. Howe's wife, Susan Howe, and his sisters Terresa Howe and Moira Carriere and five-year-old niece, Victoria Carriere, were taken to the Smiths Falls Community Hospital with various non-life-threatening injuries after the crash. "The damage to the car was horrendous," said Const. Neil Fennell of the Ontario Provincial Police's Perth detachment. "The fact that four people are still breathing after being involved in this accident is nothing short of a miracle." The train was coming eastbound to Ottawa from Toronto and carried 133 passengers, none of whom were hurt. Mr. Howe's car was .southbound on Holbrook Road. The train was delayed about an hour before continuing on to Ottawa. There are no flashing lights or barriers at the crossing, but it is clearly marked, and the views both east and west from the road are clear for about 200 metres each way. The train hit the car on the front right fender near the wheel well just as it was entering the flat crossing. OPP Const. Leanne Merkley is investigating the accident to try to determine why the car was in the path of the train

Survivor criticizes fatal train crossing

Woman's brother died in Smiths Falls-area accident

A survivor of Saturday's car-train collision near Smiths Falls whose brother, Thomas Howe, was killed, joined a growing chorus of voices condemning the crossing where the accident occurred.

Moira Carriere, 33, of Orleans was one of four passengers in Mr. Howe's 1997 Chevrolet Cavalier when it drove into the path of an Ottawa-bound VIA Rail passenger train at 2:35 p.m. at a crossing on Holbrook Road, situated north of Smiths Falls in Montague Township.

The violent impact shattered the car's front-end and threw its engine 91 metres into a nearby field.

Despite police reports that views both east and west from the road are clear for about 200 metres each way, Ms. Carriere said visibility from the road was severely reduced by the thickness of the trees lining the road leading up to the crossing.

"Those reports are baloney," she said yesterday. "You can hardly see the tracks ... It's very dangerous."

Ms. Carriere suffered bruises and whiplash in the accident that killed her brother and injured his wife, Susan Howe, 29, a sister, Theresa Howe, 33, of Newmarket, Ont., and Ms. Carriere's five-year-old daughter, Victoria.

She couldn't recall much of the accident itself.

Though there are signs to warn drivers of the approaching tracks at the level-crossing, there are no barriers or flashing lights to alert drivers to an on-coming train.

Saturday's fatal accident was but another grim addition to four previous accidents at the same crossing, three of which have occurred in the last two years.

Mr. Howe is the crossing's first fatality.

Coincidentally, Montague Township Council had already scheduled a meeting with officials from VIA Rail and the National Transportation Safety Board for this Wednesday to discuss the dangerous crossing prior to the collision that killed Mr. Howe.

One councillor with first-hand experience to the crossing's hazard is Don Edwards.

In December 1996, Mr. Edwards' three-quarter tonne pick-up truck was split in two by a freight train barreling through the flat crossing.

Mr. Edwards, who saw the train too late and skidded on ice while trying to brake, just had time to jump from his truck before it collided with the train.

"It sounded like a hand-grenade going off," he said yesterday of the impact between the train and his truck, the remains of which were wrapped around a pole.

Mr. Edwards is still paying off the \$20,000 in damages to the engine that VIA sued him for and won.

A long-time resident of Pinery Road, on which Mr. and Mrs. Howe resided, Mr. Edwards said the area's burgeoning population has outgrown the minimal safety measures in place at the rural crossing.

"There was a time when there were just three houses along this stretch of road, but now there's 16," he said. "That means an increasing chance of accidents."

The Howes's neighbours along their quiet, tree-lined stretch of Pinery Road were saddened by the 32-year-old's death, but not surprised that the rail crossing had finally claimed a victim. They say come spring it's not unusual to find car parts from previous accidents strewn along the side of the tracks at the crossing. The tailgate from Mr. Edwards pick-up truck is still there.

"I don't know why they don't put a stop sign in at least," said Armand Chaput, the Howes's next door neighbour. "When I first moved in here, I remember driving right through without even realizing what I'd done."

Last fall, residents complained that trees were obscuring the sightlines along the track as you approached it from the road. The trees were promptly trimmed back.

Mr. Edwards daughter, Lesa, said the stretch of track at the Holbrook crossing is especially dangerous in the winter and specifically after a fresh snowfall.

"The snow swirls around the engine as it speeds along and all you can see is the light on its front," she said.

Trains are supposed to blow their horn as they approach the crossing but Ms. Edwards said they're usually going so fast it hardly makes a difference.

"By the time you hear it, it's too late," she said.

Adam Scott, who lives across the road from the Howes with his wife Shelley, echoed Moira Carriere's disagreement with the police report on the views at the crossing.

"You can't see Ottawa-bound trains," he said. "The trees run right up to the edge of the CN property. You have no warning."

Julie Durocher, a spokeswoman for VIA Rail, could not say whether other VIA trains have been involved in collisions at the crossing.

What is clear is that the residents of Pinery Road have lost a valued, if little known, neighbour.

For a couple who just moved into the area in September, they were quick to make their presence felt during the ice storm in January. Mr. Howe, an electrician working for Kanata Electric, opened his generator-heated house to his new neighbours while he helped them connect their own.

"They were just the kind of people we need back here," said Mr. Edwards

Mr. Howe, who was pinned inside the crumpled car, was airlifted to the Ottawa General Hospital, where he died late Saturday afternoon of multiple injuries.

His wife, Susan, is being treated in the Ottawa Civic Hospital's neurological ward, where she is in fair condition with improving mobility despite what may be a fractured vertebrae in her upper spine.

Theresa Carriere is in good condition at the Ottawa General Hospital, where she is recovering from a bruised kidney and four fractured ribs. Ms. Carriere and her five-year-old daughter, Victoria, were both released from hospital yesterday.

Flashing lights, barriers promised for fatal crossing

Victim's family says improvements long overdue

SMITHS FALLS In the ditches hugging the intersection of the VIA Rail track and Holbrook Road, the snow is still clutching scattered reminders of lives lived and lost.

There is a broken rear-view mirror, endless bits of plastic car interior, fragments of motors and visors, pairs of latex gloves, and items as ordinary as Canadian Tire money. Not far away, there is a crumpled tailgate from a pickup truck.

Yesterday, a group of men stood by the tracks and, with great unanimity but no joy, decided enough is enough. After a brief meeting and site inspection, federal and local authorities decided to apply to spend an estimated \$140,000 to install flashing red lights, bells and barriers at the crossing.

"All the parties, VIA, the township and Transport Canada are on board," said VIA customer service manager Mike Regimbal.

It all comes too late for Thomas Howe, 32, an area resident who was killed Saturday when his 1997 Chevrolet Cavalier collided with an Ottawa-bound VIA train. His wife, Susan, 29, was seriously hurt as was one of Mr. Howe's sisters.

Two other passengers escaped major physical damage. It was the second serious accident in two months and the third in three years,

Montague Township Reeve Gary Doyle said the municipality will take immediate action while the application works its way toward ministerial approval.

Stop signs should soon appear at the tracks, he said, in addition to more signs warning about the approach of high-speed trains. The township also wants to include a warning letter in its upcoming tax bills.

It could take several months before the new warning systems are installed. Transport Canada should cover 80 per cent of the cost, with VIA picking up 7.5 per cent and the township 12.5 per cent.

When asked why action wasn't taken sooner, Reeve Doyle said: "It's just a tragic thing. I really don't know what you can say."

It is unclear exactly why drivers are not seeing the trains coming. According to OPP Const. Don Fawcett, a specialist in accident reconstruction, Mr. Howe did not take evasive action before striking the train.

Hollbrook is a curving, dirt road with thick tree growth close to the edges. It opens up briefly where the tracks cross, but there are still outcrops of trees that obscure a complete view.

The tracks also cross at an angle and the trains, 10 on a regular day, travel at speeds of up to 150 kmh.

When one of them crossed yesterday afternoon, its horn could hardly be heard over the roar of the engine, the whole train only being in view for a couple of seconds.

"You don't really hear it too well, do you?" commented Const. Fawcett as the train disappeared into the distance.

"Now imagine you've got five people in the car, the windows are up and the radio's on."

Steve Richards, a Calgary resident and Mr. Howe's brother-in-law, briefly attended the meeting to reinforce the family's view that the intersection is a life-threatening hazard and that improvements are long overdue.

He was surprised to hear the train could have been travelling as fast as 150 kmh.

"This is not out in the bald Prairie where you don't have people for miles around. This is the main line from the biggest city in Canada to the fourth biggest."

Mr. Richards said he's been told by neighbours that several vehicles have been pulled from the ditch after near-misses with passing trains.

He took little comfort in the fact that the authorities could take several months, possibly even a year, to install the lights and barriers.

"The speed at which these things change has taken another life."

Mr. Howe's funeral is today.

03/03/1998 *Ottawa Citizen**Kingston (CN)**Lyn*

A portion of Canadian National's main east-west rail line was closed temporarily after a 25-car derailment west of Brockville. The westbound CN freight train derailed at about 1 a.m. There were no injuries. Mechanical problems are suspected.

04/03/1998 *Ottawa Citizen**Kingston (CN)**Lyn*

Ottawa - Toronto train service to resume today

A derailment that caused thousands of train travellers to take the bus between Ottawa and Toronto should be cleared by today, VIA Rail Canada reports.

The derailment, involving 25 freight cars, occurred on Monday on Canadian National's main east-west line between Brockville and Kingston.

There were no injuries reported, but until last night the accident caused havoc with VIA Rail trains that use that CN line. Passengers travelling between Toronto and Montreal had to be taken off trains and put on buses to get past the blockage, VIA spokesman Malcolm Andrews said, while passengers travelling between Ottawa and Toronto had to make the entire journey by bus.

"Well over 5,000 people have been disrupted by this," said Mr. Andrews.

"We are certainly pleased things will be back tomorrow and people won't be inconvenienced any further. By the time your paper hits the streets we will be back to normal."

It's been a trying winter for VIA Rail, which was also forced to alter its schedules during the ice storms in January.

"Even without this, if (our only problems has been) the ice storm, it's already been a tough winter," Mr. Andrews said.

Passengers who have purchased train tickets but were forced to take buses instead will be allowed to use the value of their tickets towards future VIA fares, he added.

The cause of the derailment is still unknown.

05/03/1998 *Montreal Gazette**Kingston (CN)**Lyn*

Full Via service back

Via Rail services on the Montreal to Toronto and Ottawa to Toronto routes have returned to normal schedules, the company has announced. The services had been interrupted or delayed after a CN freight derailment near Brockville, Ont, Monday morning.

Rail Roots

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"At least some historical markers should be erected."

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

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

01/08/1998 *Ottawa Citizen* *Kingston (CN)* *Johnstown*

The Ontario Provincial Police have concluded their investigation into the death of a 47-year-old man who was struck by a freight train near Johnstown about 5:30 yesterday morning. The man, whose name hasn't been released, was walking on the tracks where they meet Highway 16 at Johnstown, about 85 kilometres south of Ottawa. Police have ruled the death as accidental.

Hollywood-style pursuit includes smashed vehicles, train collision, manhunt

It was a real-life police takedown that could put anything seen in a big-budget Hollywood movie to shame.

Yesterday afternoon, after a highspeed car chase down train tracks, a train crash and a helicopter search, the Ottawa-Carleton police tactical unit arrested a man suspected of several break-and-enters as he lay cowering in bushes near Carlsbad Springs.

"It was intense operation," said Insp. Sue O'Sullivan, minutes after the suspect, who was bleeding from several wounds to his face, was ushered into the back of a police cruiser.

The chase began shortly before noon yesterday when a break-and-enter was reported in the town of Carlsbad Springs, just on the outskirts of southeast Ottawa. A witness to the crime called police and the force put out an all-points bulletin for a grey Chevrolet Celebrity seen leaving the scene of the crime. Police were also informed that the car may have been stolen.

Shortly after noon, an officer travelling down Russell Road in Gloucester spotted a Chevrolet Celebrity coming towards him. It matched the description of the wanted vehicle, which by then had been determined to be stolen.

The officer made a U-turn, flashed his cruiser's lights and zoomed up behind the vehicle to get the driver to pull over. Instead, the driver of the suspect car sped up and turned down Hall Road, a dusty side road that runs off of Russell. With the officer in pursuit, the driver of the stolen Celebrity raced down Hall Road and then, in an attempt to avoid capture, turned right onto the CN railway tracks that intersect the road. The officer followed.

The two cars made it about 500 metres down the tracks when the wheels of the stolen vehicle became jammed. With his car stuck, the driver jumped from the vehicle and ran into the bushes. The officer, who had already called for backup, pulled his cruiser behind the stalled Celebrity and left his police lights on to warn any trains that might be coming down the tracks.

He also called CN to make sure they alerted trains that the tracks were blocked.

To the officer's horror, as he was still on the phone trying to divert any trains, the 10:15 VIA passenger train from Montreal to Ottawa with 123 people aboard came rumbling over the hill, getting ready for its arrival at the Ottawa terminal.

The conductor tried to stop the train in time, but failed. The train hit both the police cruiser and the stolen car. Both vehicles were complete writeoffs.

Nobody on the train was hurt.

Meanwhile, backup for the officer arrived in the form of the Ottawa-Carleton police tactical unit, the police canine unit and a swarm of police cruisers. By 12:15 p.m. they had sealed off a square of land more than a kilometre wide and began searching for the driver of the stolen car.

For more than two hours the tactical and canine units scoured the bush, even enlisting the help of an RCMP helicopter to keep an aerial lookout.

Shortly before 3 p.m., the suspect was found in a bush just 10 metres from the train track and less than 20 metres from where a horde of more than 40 media, onlookers and police personnel were watching the search unfold.

The suspect, who had several gashes to his face, was taken into custody.

"It's a difficult thing when you set up a perimeter, you never know for sure if the suspect is inside or whether he managed to escape before you got in position," says Staff Sgt. Andy Avery of the Ottawa-Carleton police.

"In this case, it worked."

Police were also trying to determine if there was a second suspect in the case. Some witnesses said there was a woman in the car at the time of the break-and-enter, but police could not confirm that and ended the search after they had the man in custody.

Shortly after 3 p.m., the train tracks were finally cleared of the wreckages of the police car and the stolen vehicle. The stolen vehicle had an assortment of items in its back seat, including speakers, a television and a cooler.

The train arrived in Ottawa before 3:30 p.m.

"We never like to see a delay, but in this case, police were focused on the manhunt and thought there was a bona fide risk to the passengers if they left the train," says Ted Bytalan, a spokesman for VIA rail.

Among the many onlookers were several Carlsbad Springs residents whose houses had been broken into in recent weeks. When they heard a break-and-enter suspect was being sought, they came down to the scene to see if it was perhaps the same man who had hit their homes.

Insp. O'Sullivan would only say that the investigators will be looking at the suspect for both the break-and-enter yesterday morning and "any other incidents that come up that may be connected."

The suspects name was not being released by police last night. They said no charges had been laid as yet.

A Blast From the Past

Museum Shows 100 Years of New York Central Rail Line

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Freight train kills man in Kingston A male whose age isn't being released died last evening after he was struck by a freight train in Kingston Police were having trouble identifying the victim, who carried no iden- tification. Police said they didn't suspect foul play. A post mortem is scheduled today.