

Just A. Ferronut's Railway Archaeology December 1994  
"Art Clowes"

Last month that I was working on an article about the rail lines of Northern Quebec. Well, I am getting there, I got basic maps done for our Editor to put in readable shape. Then I started to worry whether I have enough material to fill a couple of pages. As you will note, this did not become a problem, for with my verbal diarrhoea, these rail lines will take two months to cover. This month, I will concentrate on the rail lines that extended into the Lac St. Jean area and the independents of that area.

Back in July 1994, I covered some of the rail lines along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River between Québec City and Montréal. It is now time to take a peak at the rail lines north of this narrow strip of agricultural land along the St. Lawrence River. In looking at this vast northern territory, we will travel from the foothills of the Laurentians as far west as Cochrane, Ontario, 72 miles west of the Quebec – Ontario border. Our map shows many of the rail lines along both the St. Lawrence and Ottawa River valleys, however, I will be concentrating on the more northern rail lines.

We will look at the rail lines that cross the Laurentian Mountains and transverse the pre-Cambrian shield areas north of them. This rocky area consisting of 50% lakes and muskegs is best known for its raw materials, mainly forest products and mineral resources. The construction of many of the rail lines in the north-west part of Quebec (west of the Lac St-Jean basin) and the adjoining areas of Ontario were driven by the strikes of gold, silver, copper, etc. about the turn of this century.

The railways of northern Quebec and eastern Ontario can be grouped by three quite separate reasons for construction. In Quebec, the early pressures to open these northern lands resulted from the limited lands for farming in the St. Lawrence River valley and the province's growing rural population. The rich farming lands around Lac St-Jean was one of these targets. In pre-railway days, this area was reached by travelling up the Saguenay River. It was soon realized that a railway would eliminate the problems of seasonal water transport and the deep rutted roads of land travel resulting from the narrow tyred heavy wagons.

A similar transportation story was developing in the rich clay belts areas of north-eastern Ontario around Lake Timiskaming, north of North Bay.

The second reason for railway construction was the "national issue" of envisaged need for more transcontinental railways to ensure competition with the Canadian Pacific. That should no doubt read "greed!", since various politicians and railway promoters were more interested in filling personal coffers from the government subsidies than any real concern about shippers getting a good service and freight rates.

The National Transcontinental Railway resulted from the Grand Trunk Railway convincing the federal government to play one-up-manship with the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian Northern. Quebec feeling left out of early plans, insisted that the eastern terminal for any Grand Trunk expansion venture should be in Quebec, not North Bay, as first considered. In addition there was also the on-going struggle between the business communities of Montreal and Toronto. This was particularly true in the struggle for the mineral and forest traffic, as the officers of the government-owned federal railway in Montreal pressured and promised the Quebec Government to support their endeavour against the efforts

of the Government of Ontario as well as from the Canadian Pacific Railway. This influence probably help cause the rerouting of the NTR from its original eastern terminal at tidewater on the Saguenay River to a route through Québec City and on to Moncton, NB. The results of this conflict continued to shape northern Quebec railway construction in the third group of railways until about the start of World War II. This infighting caused many extra route miles that in more recent times has contributed to some of the area's rail abandonments.

The final type of railway construction extended over a much longer period of time than the first ones. While the early railway construction to the Lac St-Jean area was encouraged by the provincial government and the church to spread settlement, the latter two groups were entwined in national politics and corporate power scheming woven around the expanding mining and forest endeavours of this northern land. The political influences around the National Transcontinental definitely influenced much of the rail construction in the final or mining development stage of northern Québec railway construction.

This northern land is a land of anomalies, besides the 50% of water and muskeg; there are miles of rock, and large of rich agricultural clay belts. These clay belts are the home to many of the major forests and form hundreds of thousands of acres suitable for prosperous farming, especially those related to animal grazing. These clay belts formed of sedimentary material exist in numerous of the wider river valleys and former areas of the larger and older lakes. It was the clay belt around Lac St. Jean that fed the first wave of railway construction, however, the best known of these clay belts is the large crescent one that extends from the north end of Lake Timiskaming on the Québec – Ontario border north to Lake Abitibi and eastward towards Senneterre. An article in the October, 1927 issue of the *Canadian National Magazine* states: "... The peculiar thing about this country is that its advantages hold it back. The market for pulp-wood, the ease with which the settler can get work for his team (of horses), tends to draw him away from the farm and check the process of clearing the land. Still, year by year, the crop area grows and gradually conditions improve. Between Bell River, 15 miles east of Senneterre, and the Ontario – Quebec boundary, a distance of approximately 135 miles 6,000 settlers have gone within the last few years – that represents over 600,000 acres of land, a not unsubstantial element in the increase of the productive area of the province. ...." This article also points out two advantageous these pioneers had: "... The clay belt is pioneer country but it's not the same as the stubborn forests out of which our forefathers hewed the homes of the Province of Ontario. Here the settler starts with a railroad. ...."

Armed with this back ground, let look at the various railway endeavour as they were constructed to open and exploit this vast northern domain. Having served their role in the mining industry, their number is now in decline as the mines have been depleted or their current needs are better served by air and motor transport.

#### **Quebec and Lake St. John Railway**

**Q&LS&J (CN)** - Riviere-a-Pierre to Roberval & Chicoutimi – Part of CN's Lac St. Jean and Roberval Subdivisions.

If you recall, I mentioned that the Québec and Lake Saint John Railway Company was renamed the Québec and Lake St. John Railway Company in 1883. This Company, backed by the established “Old Families” of Québec City saw their rail line reach Rivière-a-Pierre from Québec City on November 2, 1885. Construction continued northward and the line to north of Linton was opened in 1886 and the last 7.6 miles into Lac-Edouard, about 112 miles from Québec City, was opened about January 9, 1888. The next 69 miles to Chambord (Junction) was opened on June 18, 1888. This provided a northern rail terminal on Lac St-Jean, but as the saying goes “Darn near bankrupted them!”

The Québec and Lake St. John Railway however, showed its true pioneer spirit and added a few more cards to its house. The Saguenay and Lake St. John Railway Company had been incorporated to build a rail line from Chicoutimi to Lac St-Jean and was granted a federal subsidy. The Québec and Lake St. John Railway Company made deal to acquire the privileges of this charter complete with its subsidies for \$6,000 and the permission for the Bishop of Chicoutimi to name a Chicoutimi resident as a director of the Québec and Lake St. John Railway Company.

With this extra source of money it was able to manage a 13.32 mile westward extension to Roberval which opened in December 1890. This line permitted the railway to make better connections to the communities bordering the Lac St-Jean by steamboat. Again using the new found subsidy, the Québec and Lake St. John Railway completed a line east from Chambord to Chicoutimi, that opened to traffic on July 17, 1893.

On November 15, 1906, the Mckenzie, Mann and Company purchased a large block of capital stock of the Québec and Lake St. John Railway and gained controlling interest in 1907. This stock was turned over to the Canadian Northern in 1914 and with the financial collapse of the Canadian Northern, this property became part of the initial group of railways folded into the Canadian National Railways.

Canadian National still operates all of this Québec and Lake St. John Railway Company trackage north of Rivière-a-Pierre except for the last 5.31 miles into downtown Chicoutimi. This short section of track with its steep grades was abandoned effective May 1, 1988, as a follow up to earlier agreements with the Roberval and Saguenay Railway that permitted joint access to the total terminal area. While 5.31 miles of track was legally abandoned, the western 2.1 miles was kept in the Arvida area as industrial track and is operated as the Alcan Spur. CN had started its program in July 1985 to reduce duplication of trackage when it relocated its team track from downtown Chicoutimi to an industrial park located on the Roberval and Saguenay Railway south of Chicoutimi.

VIA Rail still operates tri-weekly passenger service on this line although the CN abandonment did cause VIA Rail to terminate its trains at Jonquiere, (Alma) about 10 miles west of the old station in Chicoutimi.

### **Quebec and Lake St. John Railway**

**Q&LStJ (CN)** - Linton Junction to La Tuque - (abandoned)

The Québec and Lake St. John Railway Company also constructed a short-lived 39.6-mile line from Linton (Linton Junction) (22 miles north of Rivière-a-Pierre) to La Tuque. This line was opened on November 23, 1907, just as the National Transcontinental Railway construction was getting established in the La Tuque area. Records show that construction supplies were ferried into La Tuque for the NTR project over this line. The

remote and isolated NTR workers welcomed this extra route for obtaining supplies. However, one must wonder, noting the timing of the intrusion of the Canadian Northern interests into the arena, if perhaps they were not hoping to have the Québec and Lake St. John Railway line's from La Tuque to Québec City form that portion of the National Transcontinental route. However, from pure railway engineering and operating perspectives, the design and construction standards of the two railways were so different that the Canadian Northern's lines would have needed to be almost totally rebuilt to meet the government standards on the NTR.

This line, known in CN's days as the Linton Subdivision, crossed the NTR a couple of miles south of La Tuque and entered the community on the west side of the NTR. This line, like the remainder of the Canadian Northern owned Québec and Lake St. John Railway came under the operating control of the new Canadian National Railways, January 1, 1919, following the financial collapse of the Canadian Northern.

Canadian National Railways discontinued operation over the full 39.6 mile Linton Subdivision on February 27, 1921, except for 1.23 miles at La Tuque that became a siding. This 1.23 miles (later known as the Linton Spur) remained until it was abandoned on November 24, 1986. Parts of the line was dismantled, but a 1931 railway diagram indicates that 2 sections totalling about 32 miles may have been leased with rails still in place to sports clubs. Later records indicate these sports clubs eventually converted the old rail bed to private roadways.

### **James Bay and Eastern Railway**

**JB&E (CN)** - From Roberval west to Triquet (Junction) – Part of CN's Roberval Subdivision.

This was an attempt by the Canadian Northern Railway System to add a major link to its transcontinental railway chain and the last one in the Quebec. The James Bay and Eastern Railway was incorporated on May 4, 1910 to construct and operate a railway from Lake Abitibi (on the Quebec – Ontario border) via the south of Lac St. Jean to the mouth of the Saguenay River.

Nine days later, on May 13, 1910 the Canadian Northern Railway System made application to the federal government to renew an earlier approved subsidy in the name of the James Bay and Eastern Railway. When questioned about this application, Counsel for Canadian Northern replied that the Québec and Lake St. John Railway Company was in the hands of Receivers and that the James Bay and Eastern Railway was incorporated to take up the subsidy for the construction of this rail link.

Needless to say that Canadian Northern didn't get their line across northern Quebec. Seven years later on November 21, 1917, some 19.4 miles was completed from Roberval to LaDore (CN Triquet Junction). This was the last track constructed by the Canadian Northern in northern Quebec and it like the rest of their system became history 13 months later with the formation of the Canadian National Railways.

### **Canadian National Railways**

**CNR (CN)** - From Triquet to Dolbeau. – Part of CN's Roberval Subdivision.

While a number of railway enterprises had promoted a rail line around the north of Lac St. Jean, Canadian National with its 26.6 mile line from Triquet Junction (end of the James Bay and Eastern Railway construction) to Dolbeau (Mistassini) penetrated farthest into this timber rich area. This line, west of Lac St. Jean

and the Mistassini River extends to the pulp and paper mills at the junction of the Mistassini and Ouasiemsa Rivers northwest of Lac St. Jean. This line was officially opened on November 22, 1927.

A glance at the map will show that while direct access from Riviere-a-Pierre and Quebec has been abandoned, access is still available via Hervey. Today, CN's Lac St-Jean Subdivision extends from Garneau via Hervey, Riviere-a-Pierre and Chambord to Arvida (Jonquière) and with connection to the Roberval & Saguenay Railway is able to serve rail customers in the Saguenay River Valley from Port Alfred to Lac St. Jean. CN's Roberval Subdivision permits service from Chambord around the west of Lac St. Jean to Dolbeau as well as connection at Triquet Junction with the Cran Subdivision.

### **Roberval & Saguenay Railway**

**R&S (Indep)** - Port Alfred (La Baie) to JonquiPre (Arvida) and LaterriPre, Bagotville and Grande Baie – R&S Saguenay Subdivision – 19 miles (30.5 km) between Port Alfred and Jonquière.

As previously mentioned the second half of the 1800s saw the influx of settlers to the area around Lac St. Jean and the adjacent Saguenay River valley. So about 1883, while the "Old Families" of Québec City were pushing their Québec and Lake St. John Railway north to Lac St. Jean, the businessmen of Chicoutimi and Bagotville were discussing the possibility of building a rail line over the rough terrain between the two communities. This remained a dream and topic of discussion for about 25 years.

This dream started to become reality in 1908, when the Quebec Legislature passed an act incorporating the Ha! Ha! Bay Railway Company (Compagnie de chemin de fer de la Baie des Ha! Ha!). This provincial legislation permitted the construction of a rail line from a point on the Québec and Lake St. John Railway between JonquiPre and Chicoutimi to Bagotville on Ha! Ha! Bay. Construction didn't get under way until 1910, but on December 10, 1910, the first passenger train made a trip between Chicoutimi and Bagotville.

The Ha! Ha! Bay Railway Company was known locally as "Le chemin de fer à Dubuc" in honour of its promoter and President J. E. Alfred Dubuc.

It was during 1911, that the Roberval & Saguenay Railway Company was incorporated by an act of the Quebec Legislature. This act authorized the construction of a rail line from a point near Jonquière on the (Québec and Lake St. John Railway) crossing the Saguenay River and passing around the north side of Lac St. Jean to rejoin (the Québec and Lake St. John Railway) at Roberval. The goal was to access the bountiful forests along Mistassini River, and the line would enable pulpwood, etc., to be brought out from the country north of Lac St. John to deep water navigation on Ha! Ha! Bay. While there were generous subsidies for this line, most of it didn't get off the drawing board.

In 1912 another act was passed that authorized the Roberval & Saguenay Railway Company to connect with and purchase the Ha! Ha! Bay Railway Company. Control was taken during 1913 and the complete Ha! Ha! Bay Railway was transferred to the Roberval & Saguenay Railway on January 1, 1914.

This small isolated railway continued to serve the area until the creation of the Canadian National Railways, when efforts were made by its owners to have that new crown corporation take them over, but without luck.

The Roberval & Saguenay's saviour no doubt came in

1925 when the Aluminium Company of Canada (Alcan) purchased the Roberval & Saguenay Railway Company. This was the start of the heavy industrialization of the Saguenay valley around Ha! Ha! Bay.

Alcan's first President was Arthur Vining Davis, and the area around their new plant east of Jonquière was named "Arvida" in his honour. This name uses the first 2 letters of each of these three names.

Rail service was suspended between Ha! Ha! Bay (Grande-Baie & Port Alfred) and Jonquière (Arvida) in 1930 for much of the depression.

The establishment of a Commonwealth Air Training facility near Bagotville resulted in a branch being constructed to serve it in 1943.

The growing need for more rail service resulted in consideration being given in 1945 to study electrification to overcome the problems steam engines were having on some of the grades near Chicoutimi. This problem was overcome with the purchase of diesel powered locomotives.

The Roberval & Saguenay Railway Company purchased the Alma and Jonquières Railway (Compagnie de chemin de fer Alma et Jonquière) on December 26, 1967, and took over its operation. The charter of the Alma & Jonquières was transferred to the Roberval & Saguenay Railway Company in September 1968 and an amalgamated rail service for Alcan was commenced on July 1, 1971.

With the construction of a new Alcan plant at Laterrière, south of Chicoutimi in the late 1980's, the Roberval & Saguenay constructed a new branch south from their Port Alfred to Jonquière line, that was opened in 1989.

### **Alma & Jonquières Railway**

**A&J (Indep)** - Saguenay Power to Alma (Isle Maligne) - R&S Lac-St-Jean Subdivision - 10 miles (16 km) between Saguenay Power and Isle Maligne near Alma.

Alma & Jonquières Railway was incorporated by the Québec Legislature to build a line of railway from Hébertville on the Québec and Lake St. John Railway northerly to Lac St. Jean between Grande Décharge and Petite Décharge, 20 miles, and from St. Joseph d'Alma easterly to Jonquière, 30 miles.

Indications are that service on the line from the Québec and Lake St. John Railway near Hébertville Station (Saguenay Power) 10.25 miles to the dock on Isle Maligne (Grande-Décharge), near Alma, was started on March 19, 1923.

*Canadian Railway and Marine World* in 1927 states that Alma & Jonquières Railway asked the Government for, and received a five year time extension for the completion of its 10.5 mile line extension to Jonquière. This line didn't get built.

During this same 1927 period, Canadian National was negotiating with the A&J to get running rights over their line to Isle Maligne in order that CN could build a line northward to supply new hydro power projects and access more forest lands. This didn't get off the ground, so the Alma & Jonquières, like the Roberval & Saguenay Railway, squeaked by until the coming of Alcan that provided the need for industrial switching around its Isle Maligne plant and to the CNR.

As indicated above the Roberval & Saguenay Railway Company purchased the Alma and Jonquières Railway on December 26, 1967, and took over its operation and merged their services and charters.

The merged version of the Roberval & Saguenay

Railway has 11 locomotives in operation, and with the current agreements with CN, enjoys access between the two parts of its company over CN's Lac St-Jean Subdivision between Saguenay Power (CN Mile 183.2) and Arvida (CN Mile 201.1). In addition to the earlier mentioned benefits for CN, these changes permit the Roberval & Saguenay Railway to access 50 miles (80 km) of trackage from the Baie des Ha! Ha! to Alma (Isle Maligne).

While we jumped from the settler driven railway to the industrial roads, hopefully it made sense to cover all the railways in the Lac St. Jean area. With these private ventures out of the way and the area around Lac St-Jean covered, it is probably a good point to end for this month. This will mean that next month we can have a look at how the federal government built its railways and the railway squabbles for gold in western Québec.