The Ferrophiliac Column *November 1991*
Conducted by Just A. Ferronut

With winter just around the corner it is definitely time for me to get back to some more serious work. My coasting over the last couple of months has let me get in a fall vacation. While this vacation included travelling many miles, the highlight was travel in the fourth dimension – time. Yes, for one night and the early morning of the next day, there was no doubting that we had lost the better part of a century. This occurrence was more accidental than planned. Chris Martin of London, Ontario and I had spent a day in Colorado on the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, a typical modern day attempt to recreate a turn of the century historic scene. A good try, but too much 1990 in all directions. However, late in the afternoon, as planned we headed for Chama, New Mexico with plans to have a look at the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad the next day.

We arrived late in Chama and found the tourists seeking fall colours had taken about all the rooms in town. The night sky was clear, but moonless and the temperature was creeping down towards the freezing point as we checked the last motel we could find in town. After getting the standard reply of the night that there was no room at the inn, the lady said we should try Foster's Hotel a few doors down the street. We had noted the building earlier but had only noted the dim lights coming from the front windows and the street level sign offering beer at the bar. Now on closer inspection we noted the sign in the form of a train hiding in the dark environment over the wide verandah. The sign not only stated that the building was Foster's Hotel, but stated it was built in 1881. The two storey structure with verandas on at least two sides was like many buildings of the region encased in stucco.

The entrance door at the side of the building carried a plaque issued by the State of New Mexico defining the building as a heritage structure and the oldest building in Chama. Passing through this door we entered a dining room with a light level almost as great as a couple of kerosene. Several people were sitting around enjoying both a late evening snack as well as the warmth radiating from the wood burning heater in the middle of the room. Our watches showed that it was nearing 2200 hours, but what year was it? There were no loud or artificial sounds only the murmur of people talking and the general atmosphere took me back more years than I care to remember to the times I can recall reading by kerosene lamp light warming first one side and then the other from the Quebec heater in the corner of the room. Our battery powered radio was only used for the newscast and those special weekly programs.

The registration for a hotel room took us to the bar or saloon. This room gave the feeling that the half a dozen people sitting around having a brew and talking were really range riders or railway workers from the turn of the century talking over their day's work.

It was agreed it was time to head to bed. While the room had an electric light and an indoor john, not much else had changed the days this room was first opened. The painted wrought iron bedsteads were no doubt brought to Chama by trains in the early years. While the beds had modern mattresses, their high height made one think back to the many nights spent resting deep in thick feather ticks, covered with feather filled puffs. A check out our window showed that we were directly across from the coaling tower area of the C&TS rail yard. Sleep came quickly to our tired bodies.

Then what came first, the smell of coal smoke; the sight of my breath in the morning air; the hum of a locomotive generator; or my wondering where I was? My built-in alarm clock had told me it was dawn, but that was all. As I tried to clear the cobwebs from my grey matter, I had to convince myself that this was 1991. The cold air of the room soon brought me to my senses, although I still expected to hear Chris break ice in the sink in the john. Soon, it was down to the dining room, it was great to open the door and feel the heat from the wood stove. Morning coffee seemed extra tasty or was it just the mix of wood smoke in the room. Reality soon returned, but for a few moments during the last few hours, the sights, sounds and smells made me vividly remember the days as I knew them before all the modern conveniences.

Ian Caie, who recently moved to Oshawa, like several others has raised the question about the old railway roadbeds in the area east of Oshawa. Maybe it is time to jot a few lines on the subject. Ian asked about the old roadbed near Bowmanville, which was part of the **original Grand Trunk Railway** alignment, so that is the one we will look at. Today, many rail enthusiasts don't stop to think that probably 25 percent of the CNR line between Montreal and Toronto today is different alignment as the original Grand Trunk line that opened in the 1850's.

The Grand Trunk railway between Canada's two major cities, was constructed and opened as a single track 5'-6" gauge line reflecting the technology of the day. Andrew Courtice outlined his observation of railway construction in *"Annis Annals,"* when he wrote, "The Grand Trunk Railway construction through my father's farm, with the shovel navvies and the trained horse with the dump, making the fill". The line was built without the benefit of the years of detail study that would be undertaken today. Also, these early engineers did not have records of the water heights in the streams and rivers that could be expected from the spring freshets, nor the rate of erosion along the edge of Lake Ontario. Since water transportation played such an important part in life at the time, nearness to it and adjacent paths of least resistance set the course of many early rail lines including the Grand Trunk line between Montreal and Toronto.

Compared to water and horse transport, railways were fast, but that was still only about 20 m.p.h. Before commencement of rail service, it was almost impossible, in certain seasons, for carts laden with goods, to wade through the muddy roads. In the winter time, snow blocked the roads; iced jammed the harbours and made navigation on the lakes impossible. So while the construction of the GTR was a boom to industrial progress, one of the adverse effects was a gradual decrease in shipping goods by water. Railways also dealt the teamsters of the time a bad blow. This change in modes of transportation also meant the demise of many taverns along the old roads and the custom of hoisting a drink with friends on arrival at the various communities.

While there were express passenger trains, many early trains even on the mainlines were mixed which didn't make them any faster. The time it took to keep the locomotives loaded with fire wood didn't help train schedules. Grand Trunk used these wood fired locomotives until 1875. Just for interest it took 16,436 cords of cordwood to fuel the Grand Trunk locomotives at Stratford, Ontario in 1875. If this was stacked in a single pile, it would be 40 feet wide, 20 feet high and almost exactly half a mile long. It should be remembered that in 1875 the Grand Trunk was still separate from the Great Western and the line

through Stratford to Sarnia was GTR's main line. Early railways were definitely progress when compared to the pre-railway methods of transportation, but primitive by today's standards.

Perhaps a bit of rambling, but hopefully these couple of paragraphs will provide a better idea of the environment and social conditions that existed in the 1850s. The Grand Trunk Railway scratched the landscape of eastern Ontario, then placed their 'U' shaped rails on a few cross ties and called it a railway. A look at any light branch line ready for abandonment in the 1960s would give you an idea of the class of the original Grand Trunk Railway.

While this rail line was a quantum leap forward, the forces of nature soon showed the railway some of their construction mistakes. The first deviation, some 1.75 miles long was made between Brighton and Colborne to avoid "The Dangers". Another 3.35 miles was deviated west of Cobourg in the area of Duck Harbour. This area is immediately west of the CPR crossing of the CN in the west end of Cobourg. A trip along the CN line from the east end of Oshawa to Port Hope will show many signs of the relocation of the Grand Trunk. The main telltale in this area is the hydro pole line along the old alignment coupled on closer inspection with traces of the old road bed.

A field trip will show the original GTR line crossed the 401 just east of the new General Motors building east of Oshawa. A portion of the CLO&W (CPR) is on the old right-of-way. The alignment of the GTR stayed generally south of the present CPR. The old road bed, especially some larger cuts and fills in the area are quite visible from Baseline Road north of the 401 in this area. The alignment swings back to the present CN alignment at the curve just west of the Bowmanville station site. West of Waverly Road, (actually at the foot of Martin Road) there is an old stone culvert on the north side of Highway # 401 (now in the middle of grading for a development).

Moving east, the alignment was north of the present alignment. East of the Bowmanville station, west of Bennett Road you can again see parts of the old roadbed. In the field west of Bennett Road there is a pile of fill still in the middle of a farm field. At the east of this field, near Bennett Road there is a substantial cut. East of Newcastle to Newtonville the original alignment was south of the present right-of-way in several locations. There are several places where the road bed is still well defined, but the hydro line helps identify it. At CN Newtonville, just east of the road at the CN radio transmitter the line swung south again. There were still a few ties in the roadway just south of the tracks. From here the line swung farther south and a considerable amount of roadbed can be seen along the lake shore in the area of the Wesleyville power plant. Again a couple of stone culverts are still in place.

From Cobourg east to Trenton, realignments become harder to spot and identify partly since the Canadian Northern Railway line ran next to the CN line and there were fewer relocations. East of Belleville, the original relocations are even more difficult to spot due to the sparser road network and the time span since they were undertaken.

The causes of earlier realignments resulted from problems with road bed stability, such as being too close to the lake or unstable ground conditions. Other causes were related to the regauging of the line in October 1873 and the double tracking that was undertaken in the later years of the 1800s and completed in December 1903. Development in construction techniques can be identified as the cause for changes in some rock cuts.

There were major relocations that are exceptions to the above. Miles of track in the area of Cornwall and especially eastward were relocated in the 1960s as part of the St. Lawrence Seaway Project. Another modern relocation was the curve realignment at Kingston about 1970.

A substantial story could be written on the track changes that have taken place over the years within the general areas of the terminals at Toronto and Montreal. Both cities have moved their stations several times that caused track changes, then of course many other changes resulted from their urbanisation.

Our man in Holland Landing, Dave Stalford, has sent us another update on the saga of the **Aurora GO station**. The first of October 1991 finally saw the start of physical renovation work on this station building that GO Transit expects to spend $500,000 on by the time they are finished next April. This station building will get a solid foundation and a new roof. The building will be restored like an old-fashion station, but will be modern. The renovated structure will have a larger waiting room with modern washrooms and ticket booth. Another $500,000 will be spent by GO Transit outside of the station. This money will go for the doubling of the parking lot to a 205 car capacity as well as expansion of the station platform and addition of new shelters. Indications from GO Transit are that they currently plan to carry out similar restoration at either Maple or Bradford commencing next year.

While we are verbally roaming the railways north of Toronto, let's look a CP Rail bridge replacement on their MacTier Subdivision at Bala as reported in the Muskoka Sun and sent along by Dr. Gerald D. Hart.

This north-south CP Rail line was constructed as the Sudbury – Kleinburg Branch starting in 1903 to joint the company's rail lines near Toronto to its transcontinental line near Sudbury. By 1905, construction was well underway in the Bala area. There were two sub-contractors with construction camps in the area. At the north end of Long Lake, south of Bala, Richie and Osborne, of Beamsville, Ontario, the contractor for work to south, had their camp. Keefe and Bradshaw of Butte, Montana, who were working to the north had their camp and office on Burgess's Bay (near the present site of Weismiller and Sons lumber mill). Mr. Fred Sutton in his History of Bala wrote of an interesting day at the camp and construction site Richie and Osborne. A log cabin at the Long Lake site stocked with dynamite and blasting powder caught fire one March day. A young unnamed Italian boy was the hero of the day. He warned the workmen in a nearby rock cut of the fire and pending danger. The workmen were able to clear the site before the explosion filled the cut with derricks, drills and boilers. This explosion also shattered all the windows in the area, torn off many doors, etc., but the miracle was that no one was killed.

A 85 foot long bridge at CP Mile 114.789 MacTier Subdivision was placed in 1906 as part of the construction of this line. June 14, 1908 saw the start of operation of CP passenger trains over this line that was referred as the "Muskoka Route".

Bridge inspections in 1987 showed that this bridge, a half-deck plate girder was in need of replacement. Both of Canada's major railways regularly replace a number of similar aging bridges each year. These bridge replacements are usually ballasted deck structures designed not only to take the heavier rail loading but the design also provides a smoother ride. This bridge replacement would have just been another routine job except that the bridge had a mind of its own and wanted to become a legend early in life. The replacement was to be undertaken starting on Sunday, September 15, 1991. Preliminary work had been previously completed.

The Sunday was spent placing temporary supports near the old bridge so that the new span could be placed on them

ready for its final placement on Monday. All appeared ready as the two large on-track cranes started to lift and place the new span on its temporary supports. As the span was being lowered, the bridge decided it was time to show everyone who is boss. The Toronto end didn't stop for the temporary supports but continued a downward journey until it was visiting the rock bass and sunfish in Bala Bay. A railway employee on the bridge during its downward trip made a hasty trip to keep above the rising water line. This unscheduled bath did not hurt this wayward bridge. Monday saw it placed in its place of work on the concrete abutments where the railway expects it will carry their trains for most of the next century. So the residents of Bala now have a story of a bridge and the fishes that they can embellish and past on for many generations.

A sunny Sunday got Dr. Gordon Shaw and yours truly out for a drive to the Tavistock Ontario area. This community was targeted partly because Michael P. McIlwaine had tipped me off that the former Tavistock station from the CN line (nee BB&G) was still in existence. Our visit confirmed that this single storey frame station is still alive and well. It is now located on the south of Jacob Street East at civic No. 20. The station has been turned, with the end facing the street, a carport added on the east side. Our return trip was by way of Brantford where we had dinner at the Ironhorse Restaurant. This restaurant constructed on the site of the TH&B Market Street station using three of its original walls. The interior is well done with a reasonable number of railway photographs, etc. They have is a good range of food, well prepared and served. We were seated in an area that has been designed to provide the effect of being in an early dining car. This was a very worthwhile experience.