

The Ferrophiliac Column Conducted by Just A. Ferronut

December 1990

The last month of another year. Based on our column last month and comments on Atherley and Kingston, Ray Corley in his usual knowledgeable way has passed on considerable extra data on both as well as considerable information on Orillia. First Atherley. Armed with Ray's maps and a sunny day (major items from Ray's maps relating to Atherley shown on map **ABOVE/BELOW** which I should have had in last month), I headed north to cover the area and visit the library in Orillia. I went up the east side of Lake Simcoe, a history book in itself, but we will leave it for another time.

Starting in the Udney area CN's present Bala Subdivision, I started looking for signs of the old Canadian Northern Ontario Railway roadbed on its westward trek towards Atherley. While most of the roadbed grading may not be high enough to show up on newer topographic maps, it is still not difficult to follow. West of Udney it is about 200 to 300 metres south of Regional Road 46. This road turns into a concession road (Concession 10 & 11) at Lot 19. However, the former CNOR right-of-way follows along the south side of this concession road until about lot # 22 where the road crosses it. For the next four lots the roadbed skirts along the north edge of the road and then swings north west to parallel along the north of the Georgian Bay and Seaboard on its final assault towards Atherley. Following the Concession 10 & 11 westward one can spot the former roadbed of the Midland Railway edging towards the road and then crossing it. New housing is starting to eliminate parts of these roadbeds east of Atherley. The cuts for the east to north connection from the Midland Railway towards the Toronto, Simcoe & Muskoka Junction Railway can be seen as well the west mainline of the old Midland Railway along the road. Travelling north on Regional Road # 44 about 300 metres from the junction with Highway 12 one can see to the east the cut where the CNOR connected to the GB&S and this later road headed west to its crossing of the TS&MJ and the waters of the Atherley narrows. Between Regional Road 44 and the CN Newmarket Subdivision (nee TS&MJ) one can see what appears to be the cut to bring the CPR (nee GB&S) down to the level of the CNR. Out in the narrows one can see the slumping causeway approach for the CPR bridge over the narrows.

Enough rambling about the present physical conditions around the area, but if you are in the area and don't mind the odd muddy road, it is an interesting tour to see how the Atherley Narrows forced four railways so close together.

Armed with maps and notes from Ray Corley, I headed to the local library in Orillia so see what else one could find.

Based on Ray's information plus a few pieces from the library, lets tries to reconstruct the developments, etc. of the railway bridges over Atherley Narrows and some of the trackage at Atherley. While Ray forwarded considerable data on trackage, etc. in Orillia, I am presently going to concentrate on the area around the narrows.

As we said last month the Toronto, Simcoe & Muskoka Junction Railway was the first railway to operate over the narrows with their first official train over to Atherley on September 15, 1872. The Orillia newspaper in its issue of August 29, 1872 states that the first Northern Railway train passed over the narrows bridge the previous day, August 28, 1872.

The Midland Railway of Canada had reached

Beaverton in January, 1871. Travel to Orillia from Beaverton was normally by boat across Lake Simcoe. Based on various accounts, it would appear that the Midland was trying to beat the T,S&MJ across the narrows. While there are numerous stories over various early railways fighting over rights in crossing another railway, by this date, seniority was being accepted as the basis as to whom would pay for the costs to cross another railway as well as to maintain the crossing, i.e. the junior party Midland Railway of Canada pays.

This race seems to have had some interesting effects on the Midland Railway. First, an Orillia newspaper in its, Thursday, January 2, 1873 issue carried the following story. "On Wednesday, January 1, 1873, considerable interest was awakened by the statement that the first Midland passenger train would be run to Orillia that afternoon. At about 2:30 p.m., it arrived and was welcomed with cheers by a crowd of admiring spectators. The train was in charge of Conductor John (Cheen?)... there were about fifty passengers, amongst whom we noticed Christopher Robinson, Esq., Reeve of Thorah, and a number of others from Beaverton. Trains now run regularly between this town (Orillia – ED.) and Port Hope."

However, according to a May 13, 1873 news item, this good news turned sour. Midland Railway's new president, Mr. Hugel, made an inspection of the entire line, stations, etc. and while he gave orders to have improvements made where needed, he cancelled at least all passenger trains if not all trains on the section between Beaverton and Orillia. This was due to the poor condition of the track. Whether this poor track condition was due to its hasty construction a few months before or the general attitude of the former president, is anyone's guess. However, a gentleman reported in the May 1871, about a trip he took on the Midland from Lindsay to Beaverton that "the frightful speed at which the trains passed over the irons, being somewhat over four miles an hour, shook him so violently, that the crystal of his watched was smashed all to pieces."

During the next two months with the aid of at least two construction trains and several hundred men the line was rehabilitated. So on Tuesday, July 22, 1873 the line was reopened with considerable fanfare.

The Orillia Times in its Thursday, July 24, 1873 carried the following comments "On Tuesday the work was sufficiently completed to justify the management in re-opening the line and the event was celebrated by a grand excursion from Port Hope and the intermediate towns.

The train which was gaily decorated, arrived at the station here about 2:30 p.m., our village council was awaiting their arrival, and as soon as the excursionists disembarked, the Reeve, Mr. James Quinn..." addressed the crowd. Mr Hugel made a suitable reply and the official party retired to the Queen's Hotel for a sumptuous repast.

So during the remainders of the 1870's and most of the 1880's there are two railway bridges over the Atherley narrows. The Midland Railway bridge was the southerly of the two. These two bridges lasted until 1889. It should be remembered that in 1884 the Midland Railway of Canada was amalgamated with fourteen other companies and named the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada. Also the T,S&MJ had become part of the Northern Railway Company of Canada and this later company was amalgamated with the Grand Trunk

in 1888 under the GTR's name.

The Orillia Times carried a short article in its March 12, 1889 issue to the effect that the old Northern bridge across the narrows was being demolished, since all rail traffic was running over the Midland bridge. Ray Corley's notes indicate the junction of the two railways west of the narrows was called Couchiching Junction. Ray also reports that the Midland crossing of the narrows consisted of 846 feet trestle plus a 137 foot.

The Orillia Expositor stated in its October 28, 1875 issue that a Mr. Jacob Meyers has finished his contract for building a station house for the Midland Railway at Atherley.

In last month's column my math wasn't very good when I spoke of the time frame between the construction of the first two railway bridges and the construction of the Georgian Bay & Seaboard bridge across the narrows. Ray reports the date for the opening of the GB&S (CP) line east to Atherley as December 25, 1911 and the opening on east to Dranoel on May 4, 1912.

The NEWSLETTER map shows one extra piece of track not shown on any of Ray Corley's material, and that is the connection from the CPR to the GTR. I found this on a sketch in the Orillia Library and it shown as removed in the 1920's. Presently, I would not want to say for sure that it did actually exist or not. One reason for this is that the 1914 topographic of the area doesn't show it. Also, I didn't notice any signs of it on the ground, although I may not have been looking in the right area. Anyone has any comments?

On site indications are that the CPR crossed the GTR (CN's Newmarket Subdivision) at grade. If so, it would be interesting to know the layout of the interlocking.

Information that Ray forwarded indicates the opening of the CNOR line from Udney to its connection with the CPR at Atherley as being June 12, 1914, not the three years early I quoted in last month's NEWSLETTER which was based on figures in CN's Historical data. Noting the dates of the GB&S this date does make more sense.

Well, its time to leave Atherley for the time being and I have intentionally ignored Orillia, since from the amount of data that Ray has forwarded, I will need to request the Editor for some extra space the month I tackle Orillia with its myriad of crisscrossing tracks and numerous station locations over the years.

While we are still in the north country, a note from Dave Stalford about the track layout currently being used to store the Barrie GO train. Dave writes that at Barrie the passing siding used for train meets is to the east or lake side of the main line. Off this passing track are two back tracks which Dave believes have turnouts at both their north and south ends. The second or most easterly of these tracks is used for the storage of the GO train. This track has a bumping post added near the south end. This makes the GO train enter and leave this track by the south end. Dave found this interesting on a track that has switches at both ends. I guess the answer no doubt lies in the agreement between GO and CN so as to define what responsibilities each have.

Another note from Dave is about the conversion of some 32 kilometres of the abandoned CN Meadford Subdivision between Meadford and Collingwood to trails. The former right-of-way is being converted for use by cyclists and hikers, skiers, etc. It is planned to have most of it paved. The first phase is to have it gravelled and then covered with compact crushed limestone. The full conversion program is expected to take about three years.

Dave figures that if you are not interested in hiking along an old abandoned rail line maybe you like models. So, Dave advises that to all the model railway enthusiasts in Southern Ontario who do not have a television antenna to watch the series titled 'TRACKS AHEAD' there is good news. It now announced that this series will be broadcast on Buffalo's WNED-TV, channel 17, a station available on cable. The TRACKS AHEAD series is scheduled to start at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, December 29, 1990.

Last month we were speaking of Listowel, Ontario, but forgot about the present station on the CN station. This station has been sold to the local Kiwanis and has been refurbished for a Senior Citizens Centre under the name KIN STATION. Its exterior has been redone in a board and batten style and stained a fairly dark brown.

Keith Pratt of Fort Richey, Florida who received a copy of some of our material on the Prince Edward Island Railway from a friend sent along a some more information about its conversion to standard gauge (see August 1990 Newsletter). Mr. Pratt writes that he is formerly from Bloomfield Station, P.E.I. and was a teenager at the time of the change over from narrow to standard gauge. He adds that German Prisoners of War were brought over to work on the conversion program.

To close out, a little note about a book I picked up recently in the K Food Market in St. George, Ontario. The name of the book is 'Harrisburg, fading portraits of a railroad town' by Douglas A. and Richard W. Mannen. While I have not read this 59 page book yet, it does appear that at \$8.25 to be worth adding to any railway historians collection.

Speaking of this type of book on local history including railways that are often published and distributed on in the local area. Should there be one in your area how about letting us know with a few details on how is may be obtained. I am certain some of our readers would like to hear about them.

Its time to sign off, so all the best of the Season to you all and a special thanks to all my contributors who make this column go.