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ACROSS THE ISLAND

P.E.I. Railway Dates From April, 1871 Act

By NEIL A. MATHESON

A LOOK at the early history of the Prince Edward Island Railway is interesting. It began with the Railway Act which was dated April 17, 1871.

The Act stipulated, among other things, that the total cost of the railway, including rolling stock, stations, etc., in fact everything needed to operate the road, "shall not exceed five thousand pounds per mile".

To keep the cost within that minimum the Act further directed that the gauge shall be three feet, six inches – the width of the track or the distance between the rails.

No curves of less radius than 600 feet would be allowed and any grade should not be steeper than 60 feet per mile. The track was to be laid with iron rails 40 pounds to the yard.

Equipment Is Listed

THE EQUIPMENT was to consist of 10 locomotives, 10 first class cars, six second class cars, six combined postal and baggage cars, 100 box cars, 25 platform cars, three snow plows and three flangers.

The road was to be constructed between Alberton in Prince County and Georgetown in Kings County, a distance of 161 miles.

A short time later branch lines were constructed. They were from Mount Stewart to Souris, 38 miles, and Alberton to Tignish, 13 1/2 miles

The Chief Engineer, J.E. Boyd, came to the Island on May 10, 1871; the survey for the road commenced on June 1.

The contract for the construction was awarded to Messrs Schrieber and Burpee on September 11 and the ground was broken October 5.

The railroad came under the operating management of Thomas Swinyard, Commissioner for the Government, in the autumn of 1874. But the road had to be closed in the month of December "owing to the lack of powerful equipment" to keep the road open during the winter months.

In the early spring of 1875 C.J. Brydges, chief superintendent of the Intercolonial Railway at Moncton, supervised the reorganization of the staff of the railway here.

William MacKechnie was named superintendent, James MacKechnie became chief train dispatcher; G.C. Cunningham was engineer, Robert May was named assistant engineer.

L.M. Poole was bridge master. Harry Houle was track master, F. Roper was accountant and auditor, F. Hodgen was chief clerk in the accounting office. A. Stronach was mechanical superintendent, F.O. Faulkner travelling auditor, S.H. Brown, storekeeper.

W.A. Glassford was ticket agent, G.A. Sharp, freight agent; Charles MacNeil and G.A. Hughes were telegraph operators. Benjamin Davies was paymaster and J. Murray was express agent and all of these people were located in Charlottetown.

Big Curve Is Removed

ANOTHER INTERESTING reference to the old railway operation comes from The Guardian of 1898, and it describes the straightening of a big curve. The item goes like this:

“Amid salvoes of torpedoes and continuous blowing of whistles, the first train passed over the straightened part of the big curve between North Wiltshire and Colville this forenoon.”

It consisted of passenger cars and the superintendent's car, in the latter being Supt. Sharpe, His Worship Mayor Warburton, Hon. Benjamin Rogers, Hon. A.B. MacKenzie, L.B. Prowse, MPP, and a number of others, including F.M. Nash of the Patriot and McInnis (first name not available) of the Examiner. The train was in charge of Conductor J. A. MacDonald and Mr. Love was the driver.

The old paper said the curve was the worst on the Prince Edward Island Railway and its removal shortens the distance by three tenths of a mile.

The work was begun on October 6, 1897 and the first train passed over the new road bed on November 21, 1898. The new part traverses seven farms and is almost straight with the exception of a slight, easy curve.

In miles the saving effected is 1,000 a year; in cost \$60, besides three miles of snow fence at \$600. The entire savings is estimated at \$1,000 yearly, the old story stated.

Both of the above stories are taken from “Old Charlottetown”, which contained items gleaned from old newspaper files by Frank Walker, and condensed and reprinted in The Guardian. Mr. Walker is the chief editorial writer for this paper.

The clippings have been made available to me by my friend Warren Burns, Charlottetown.

That Navy Balloon Story

THE U.S. NAVY balloon referred to in last week's column landed in the yard of Hugh John MacPhee, Canavoy. It was John MacAdam who took an affidavit to indicate that the two navy officers did indeed land their balloon in the area, so they could claim the victory which they had achieved in the endurance balloon race that had started from Pittsburg two days previously. Mr. MacAdam also packed up the balloon for shipment back to the United States, I am told.

Date of the landing was noon on May 6, 1929

I'M STILL getting letters and call about the old race tracks. I have a half-dozen additional ones. I'm going to wait a week or so before writing about them in case some more are brought to mind.