

The Grand Trunk -- Canada's Pioneer Railway, 66th Anniversary -- A Great National Asset

There is no great institution in Canada to-day more worthy of public sympathy than the Grand Trunk Railway, "the Old Grand Trunk," the pioneer railway of the Dominion. That railway system, for many years an integral part of the business fabric of Canada, is observing this year its sixty-sixth anniversary.

Yet the Grand Trunk is taken more or less as a matter of course. Whatever the psychology of the thing, that is the fact. A railway man, talking of this very thing, said the other day:

"The Grand Trunk, in its relation to the people of this country, is like the old arm chair at home. When a visitor comes in you show the latest piece of furniture in the house, and extol its beauties. But when you are looking for a quiet rest you sit in the old chair. You enjoy its comfort and then you forget all about it until the next time you want to use it. Same thing with the Grand Trunk."

CANADA'S PIONEER LINE.

Seeing that it was practically, if not actually, Canada's pioneer line, the history of the Grand Trunk is the story of early day railroading in the Dominion. One of the most interesting epochs in Canada history is that in which transportation by rail was first mooted and became an active, living reality. During this period many economic changes and improvements were accomplished in Canada. The whole municipal system was thoroughly organized, education was placed in tune with the most approved principles, the feudal tenure in what is now the Province of Quebec, a great barrier to progress, was abolished on equitable principles, representation of the people in Parliament was reformed and extended, civil and criminal laws were revised, amended and coded, reciprocal free trade in natural products was established with the United States, and the canal system perfecting the navigation of the St. Lawrence was completed. In the year 1849, there was in reality only one railway, of 16 miles in length, in the whole country, but a decade after that, there was completed and in operation 1750 miles, of which the main trunk line was that of the present Grand Trunk Railway, by which the inland navigation and trade of the Great Lakes was secured and brought to the Atlantic at Portland, and the ocean navigation of the St. Lawrence at Montreal and Quebec.

In Great Britain the first real railway, the Stockton and Darlington, was constructed and opened for traffic in 1825, but generally speaking, not only in Britain but in parts of Continental Europe, the period from 1840 to 1845 showed the most marked activity in railway construction. Soon afterwards similar projects were mooted for Canada.

In connection with the earlier period, however, it may be recorded that as far back as the year 1832 a charter was granted in Canada for the construction of a line from Laprairie to St. John's (now part of the Grand Trunk system) and this line was opened for traffic in 1836. This particular line was then known as the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad but ultimately, through a series of transfers and amalgamations, it became in control and ownership part of the Grand Trunk.

In 1845 the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad Company was chartered to construct a railway from a point opposite Montreal (now Longueuil) to the boundary line between Canada and the State of Vermont. In the charter mention is made that the road is to connect at the boundary line with the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad, to be constructed from Portland in the State of Maine. The Legislature of the State of Maine had, during the session of 1845, previously passed an Act similar in its provisions for a railroad from Portland to the boundary. By the two Acts, the entire line between the St. Lawrence and the seaboard came under the control of these two corporations. The requisite stock was subscribed, and in the spring of 1846 a committee of directors from both companies met and entered into an agreement on the part of their respective corporations with reference to the execution of the surveys, determination of the point of junction of the two roads, and uniformity in the general plans of construction. The surveys and location commenced almost simultaneously at both ends of the joint line.

But the real period during which railway construction in Canada had its serious beginning was from 1853 to 1856 -- and it was during this period the parent stem of the Grand Trunk acquired definite existence and ultimately led to the building up of the

present great system, which has become one of the most important carriers of commerce on the continent.

In the year 1851 an Act of the Province of Canada was passed, the general terms of which approved the idea of a main trunk line of railway throughout the length of the province, and also from the eastern frontier thereof through the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to the city and port of Halifax. The next year another Act was passed recognizing the advantages to the province of such main trunk railway being under the management and control of one company, or of as small a number of companies as might be practicable.

In the year 1850 a charter was granted for the construction of a railway to be known as the Quebec and Richmond Railroad, from a point opposite the city of Quebec to Richmond on the line of the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad. This line, which was opened for traffic in 1854, became the means of substantially developing the city of Quebec, which had been without railway facilities of any kind.

In the period previous to 1852 charters were obtained for the construction of several other railways, known respectively as the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada East, the Montreal and Kingston, the Kingston and Toronto, and the Toronto and Guelph -- the latter having power of extension to Sarnia. These several projects were entered into with the ultimate object of union, and as they were to become part of the main trunk line of railway, already referred to, they were amalgamated by Act of Parliament, dated December 18, 1854, under the name of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada. They were opened for traffic in various sections between 1854 and 1860, the act of incorporation of the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada having been passed on November 10, 1852. The section from Montreal to Brockville was opened in 1855, Brockville to Toronto, in 1856. Toronto to Sarnia in 1856, Richmond to Point Levi (opposite Quebec) in 1854, Point Levi to St. Thomas (Montmagny), in 1855, and St. Thomas to Riviere du Loup in 1860.

During the early struggle of the company for existence many materials of construction had to be imported from Britain under conditions very different to those prevailing to-day, and the obstacles to be surmounted were further accentuated by the outbreak of the Crimean war at a time when it was essential to the building of the railway that the company should have the most favorable opportunities for financing the enterprise. As a result of the Crimean war financing became almost impossible, and it was little short of a marvel that with practically no Government assistance the Grand Trunk Railway was pushed through to completion.

NO FEAR REGARDING TRAFFIC.

In the early days there never was any fear as regards the amount of traffic to be obtained from the West, as it was only limited by the carrying capacity of the road, but west-bound traffic from Quebec and Portland was always a source of anxiety, as it was impossible to secure a balance of traffic or equitable return loading.

Business in the country was varied and fluctuating. During certain portions of the year there was all the traffic that the power could handle. At other times the trains ran light. Further, there was the fact that the character of the traffic was such that on portions of the road a certain number of trains were required, even if the business was light, and therefore the relative cost of maintenance was unavoidably high.

Notwithstanding every cause of political and other embarrassment and anxiety the road steadily improved in stability and fully demonstrated the views of its promoters in regard to its necessity and value as a great national highway of communication. However, it soon became apparent that although Sarnia was its nominal western terminus the city of Detroit, 60 miles west of Port Huron (opposite Sarnia), ought to be its real terminus, as that city was then connected with Chicago and the west by several routes. A company was accordingly organized under the name of the Chicago, Detroit and Canada Grand Trunk Junction Railway Company, and this company obtained power from the State of Michigan for the construction of the necessary road. This special authority was necessary, as the Grand Trunk itself held no statutory rights in the United States.

The gauge of the track of this portion was fixed at

four feet, eight and a half inches, which was similar to that of the American lines terminating in Detroit and conformed also to the general American standard. The gauge of the Grand Trunk in Canada had been previously fixed by the promoters and the Government at five feet six inches. The line between Port Huron, and Detroit was constructed by Messrs. Gzowski and Company, who had built the road from Toronto to Sarnia. It was leased by the Grand Trunk for 999 years from the year 1859.

An acquisition of the Grand Trunk in 1858 was the railway from St. Mary's to London, twenty-two miles, which had been chartered in 1856 as an independent concern, called the London and Grand Trunk Junction Railway Company.

As has been stated, the promoters of the Grand Trunk and the Government had decided that the gauge of the railway should be five feet six inches. The difference between it and the American standard subsequently caused inconvenience to traffic, both passenger and freight, to and from the United States, and despite the partial remedy of the third rail on some parts of the line, hampered the movement of international traffic through the necessity of trans-shipment at frontier points. In 1872 the St. Mary's London branch and the line from Sarnia to Buffalo via Stratford were changed from the broad to the standard gauge. In 1873 the line from Stratford to Montreal, 421 miles, was similarly changed, and the balance of the line east of Montreal was changed in 1874. The Montreal and Champlain Railway, south of Montreal, purchased by the Grand Trunk in 1872, was originally constructed of the four feet eight and a half inches gauge and therefore did not require alteration.

If it had not been for the means provided to renew the line as was done in 1872-73-74, that is, to change the gauge and renew the rolling stock, the railway would never have been able to get through the great commercial and industrial crisis of that period, for in addition to the crisis itself there was a rate war waged by all roads running to the seaboard. This war was especially felt by the Grand Trunk, for it was on the transport of through business that the road at that particular time mainly depended for revenue, and the ruinous war was carried on very fiercely against it by some of the American lines.

Various negotiations had taken place from time to time with a view to agreements tending to better relations between the Grand Trunk Railway and the Great Western Railway, which would effect savings in their respective expenses and consolidate their interests respectively, as well as provide more equitable facilities for the public in general. These negotiations, however, were not wholly satisfactory, and it was a source of much satisfaction to both companies when, after much previous discussion between the shareholders of each company and their final approval, the two lines were amalgamated on August 12, 1882, under the provisions of a deed of union dated May 25, 1882. The name of the united companies was fixed as the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada. Through this fusion, 823 miles was added to the Grand Trunk system.

It having been realized that the Grand Trunk could afford better facilities for the development of the territory served by the Northern Railway, and the Hamilton and North-Western Railways respectively, and that expenses could be reduced on certain situations where the Grand Trunk and these lines were mutually interested, these two roads were amalgamated with the Grand Trunk under a deed of union dated January 24th, 1888. This system of railways, which was made up of a number of organizations of original separate corporate existence, embraced the territory between the Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe points, and Port Dover on Lake Erie via Toronto and Hamilton. The additional mileage thus brought in was 493 miles.

The Midland Railway Company, which was also an aggregation of many individual roads having original separate corporate existence, occupied the triangular extent of territory between the Georgian Bay, Belleville and Toronto. It embraced 473 miles and had been leased to the Grand Trunk in 1884, though finally amalgamated with that company April 1, 1893. The Canada Atlantic Railway, also an aggregation of several organizations with original individual corporate existence, and occupying the territory between the Georgian Bay and Lake Champlain by way of Ottawa and Coteau, was added to the Grand Trunk by amalgamation in 1914. It embraced 466 miles of line, and under an agreement had been in control of the Grand Trunk since 1904. By an agreement dated October 1, 1892, which was confirmed by Act of Parliament of April 1, 1893, several other smaller railways which had been oper-