



Reference Papers

Dept. of External Affairs
Min. des Affaires extérieures
SEP 10 1993
RETURN TO DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARY
RETOURNER A LA BIBLIOTHEQUE DU MINISTERE

doc
CA1
EA9
R111
ENG
1973
November

No. 111
(Revised November 1973)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

(Prepared in the CN Public Relations Office, Ottawa.)

Canadian National is today one of the great transportation and communications companies of the world. It is the largest industrial enterprise in Canada in its total assets — \$4.9 billion. It has 82,000 employees and is one of the top five companies in Canada in gross annual revenues — \$1,405.8 million last year.

It is wholly Canadian and dedicated to the interests of Canada.

The history of CN goes back 128 years, to 1836, when the first railway service in Canada was begun between Laprairie and St. John's, Quebec. CN came into being because the vision of Canada's great railway pioneers of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century far exceeded the resources and traffic available to finance the great transcontinental systems that were being built.

When, with the outbreak of the 1914-1918 war, foreign sources of financing available to Canada dried up, several of the country's smaller railroads were threatened with bankruptcy. To prevent embarrassment to the financial institutions of Canada and its credit position, the Federal Government took over the ownership and operation of the lines that were in danger of failing.

A proprietary Crown corporation, to be called Canadian National Railways, was set up. The properties were handed over to the company with instructions to operate "as one united system, on a commercial basis, under their own politically-undisturbed management, on account of and for the benefit of the people of Canada".

Birth of CN

Canadian National came into being in the autumn of 1922. In that first year, the managing board of the new company had to face a loose agglomeration of five railroads, with 22,000 miles of track, built for competition, much of it overlapping. The task ahead was that of unifying and integrating this huge, unwieldy system, rebuilding the sagging morale of the thousands of employees inherited from the old systems and earning respect for the new company.

Sir Henry Thornton, the man chosen to head the new company, was American by birth and British by adoption, with a phenomenal reputation for the successful and efficient operation of railroad

53998453