

July, 1950 - Number 54

THE CANADIAN NORTHERN ONTARIO RAILWAY AND
TORONTO

By Andrew Merrilees

Although Sir William Mackenzie and Sir Donald Mann were both Toronto citizens, their first exploits in railroad construction took place in Manitoba, and in Ontario west of Lake Superior. Three years after the start of their western enterprises, the head office of Mackenzie and Mann was opened in Toronto, in 1899.

At that time, the Toronto Railway Company's building at the corner of King and Church Streets was not all required for street railway purposes, and the railway contractors rented three rooms at the back of the top floor, the architectural firm of Pearson and Darling having the front offices. After a year, the whole top floor of the Toronto Railway building was occupied by the railway contractors.

The Canadian Northern did not long remain with desk accommodation on a friendly floor. Negotiations were concluded for the purchase of the building at the corner of King and Toronto Streets (1 Toronto Street), and early in 1903, as renters from the Rice Lewis Estate, they took possession. About 1908, the company required still more room, thus space was rented in the building at the corner of Toronto and Court Streets.

The first Canadian Northern construction took place in 1905, when to sustain the charter of the James Bay Railway, which Mackenzie and Mann had bought, construction was begun on a four mile line from the Grand Trunk, south-east of Parry Sound, into Parry Sound. One engine, a few coaches and a crew were maintained at Parry Sound until such time as a main line James Bay Railway could be built up to, and through the town.

In 1906 construction commenced at

Parry Sound southward towards Toronto, the contractor being Angus Sinclair, the famous railroad economist and author of New York, who refused to offer a competitive bid for the work, but did it on a cost plus basis. The work was pushed rapidly to completion, and arrangements were made with the Canadian Pacific Railway to use its North Toronto Station as the Canadian Northern Toronto terminus. The first Canadian Northern train to enter Toronto arrived at this station from Parry Sound in November of 1906.

As the Canadian Northern was devoting all possible capital toward further construction in other parts of Canada, comparatively little of its resources were devoted to operating and maintaining the lines it had already constructed. As a result of this, it was decided that until the Canadian Northern could appropriate money to build a costly bridge over the Don River, it would use the CPR bridge. Later, the CPR began the grade separation scheme for its line across North Toronto; this involved the construction of a new North Toronto station at Yonge Street, and subways at Yonge Street, Avenue Road, Davenport Road, Spadina Road, Howland Avenue, Bathurst Street, Christie Street, Shaw Street, Ossington Avenue and Dovercourt Road. The Canadian Northern, anticipating expansion westward from Toronto toward London, Hamilton and Niagara Falls, concluded an agreement with the CPR. whereby the Canadian Northern constructed for its own use a service track across this section, the other four tracks being two union tracks, a CPR service track, and a CPR through freight track. As a result of this, the Canadian National to this day enjoys switching rights over the CPR line between Leaside and Dovercourt Road in the west end of the city.

Late in 1906, the James Bay Railway was built to Oriole Station, and thence over what is now a branch to a connection with the CPR at Donlands Tower, which is a half-mile

east of the Don River Bridge. From here it used the CPR tracks over the Don River into a specially constructed James Bay Railway yard at Leaside. After completion of the James Bay

The Canadian Northern thereupon proceeded to build up the townsite of Leaside and laid the foundations for many houses. It also built a substantial car shop, a 10-stall roundhouse, and lastly a wooden station on the north side of the CPR main line, which is now the C.N.R. car shop office. It is unique that these extensive Canadian National facilities are even to-day divorced from any physical connection with the C.N. system, all approach to them being over CPR property. Although the C.N.R. Leaside car shops are still being actively used, the roundhouse (except for one stall) has long since been turned over to material storage purposes. One switcher is stationed at Leaside roundhouse to move cars about the car shop yard.

During 1908, the CNOR Railway was extended north from Parry Sound, through Sudbury Junction to Capreol, which was to be the junction between the Toronto line and the later-built line from Capreol down the Ottawa valley to Ottawa and Montreal. In 1910, a number of old-established lines were bought by the Canadian Northern Ontario Railway. These were: The Central Ontario Railway, built from Trenton to Picton in 1879, from Trenton to Coe Hill in 1883, from Ormsby Junction to Maynooth in 1901, and from Maynooth to Wallace in 1907; the Irondale, Bancroft and Ottawa Railway, a decrepid, almost bankrupt, old road built in 1884 from Howland (Kinmount Junction) to Irondale, and in 1891 from Irondale to Baptiste; the Bay of Quinte Railway, a prosperous line built by the Rathbun Company of Deseronto, from Deseronto to Napanee in 1904, from Napanee to Tweed in 1883, from Yarker to Harrowsmith in 1889, from Harrowsmith to Sydenham in 1894, and from Tweed to Bannockburn (junction with the Central Ontario Railway) in 1904. Lastly, there was the Brockville, Westport and North-Western Railway, built from Lyn

Railway, its name was changed to the Canadian Northern Ontario Railway, and this name thereafter identified all further Canadian Northern construction in this province. Junction to Westport in 1888 and from Lyn Junction to Brockville in 1889.

As soon as these lines were acquired, a concentrated raid was made on them by Canadian Northern officials, who made a tour of them in a train of baggage cars. They were stripped of all but the barest essentials in office and shop supplies; the rest was removed for use on other parts of the Canadian Northern system. For a time, these lines also operated completely divorced from the rest of the Canadian Northern system. In 1912, however, construction began on a line to link Toronto and Deseronto, and the following year construction began at the opposite end of the Bay of Quinte Railway (Sydenham) toward Rideau Junction, near Ottawa, connecting there with the Ottawa valley-Hawkesbury-Montreal line of the Canadian Northern.

At last the Canadian Northern had revealed its hand, and the CPR, stabbed in the back as it were, hurriedly began surveys and construction of a line from Agincourt to Glen Tay, tapping the more densely populated lakeshore towns, which had formerly been missed by the main line through Peterborough.

Meanwhile, the City of Toronto, ever anxious to aid railway companies which brought trade to it, was petitioned to aid in improving the terminal facilities of the CNOR Railway.

Therefore, heavy pressure was put upon the Grand Trunk for the joint use of the Union Station by itself and the Canadian Northern.

The Grand Trunk tentatively agreed, and the Canadian Northern began construction of what is now the main line from Oriole Station down the Don Valley, through Todmorden to Rosedale, on the old Toronto Belt Line Railway, which was owned by the Grand Trunk.

Upon arrival at Rosedale, the CNOR gangs found the GTR track blocked with a coal car, which they had no authority to move, although they did have authority to run to the Union Station. Unwilling to be stopped

by a technicality, Mackenzie and Mann found it easier to blow up the car of coal and pay the Grand Trunk damages, than it was to argue about the blocked track in court, and this was done. The first CNOR train arrived in Union Station from Sudbury against bitter protests from the Grand Trunk.

Shortly afterward, a junction was effected between the CNOR Sudbury line and the line being built from Deseronto at Todmorden, and the first CNOR through train from Toronto to Ottawa ran in 1913. The CNOR built a sizeable yard at Rosedale, at the junction of its line with the Belt Line, and rented the old Belt Line offices at that point from the Grand Trunk. These were for several years the headquarters of the CNOR Ontario

At Little White Otter River, a point 254 miles east of Port Arthur, 616 miles north-west of Toronto, and 60 miles north of White River Station on the CPR Lake Superior District, Sir William Mackenzie, on New Year's morning (January 1, 1914), drove the last spike of the new line connecting the eastern and western provinces of Canada. When, in 1915, the last spike of the Canadian Northern mountain section was driven by Sir William Mackenzie at Basque, B.C., the Canadian Northern had a main line from Vancouver to Quebec, of which the CNOR was the Ontario section.

The story of the effect of the first World War on the Canadian Northern, and its absorption by the Canadian government in May of 1918, are too well known to bear further reference here. The system was operated substantially as previously by the Canadian government until 1923, when the Grand Trunk system was also taken over by the government.

Having taken the name Canadian National Railways in 1919, the CNOR lines paralleled considerable Grand Trunk mileage, and, as time went on, some of the largest abandonments in Canadian railroad history took place. In 1923, the first section of the ten-year old Deseronto-Toronto line, comprising 22 miles from Cobourg to Brighton, was abandoned. In 1925, seven miles from

District.

A few years later, however, the City of Toronto forced the CNOR to close its engine sheds and yards at Rosedale, because the exclusive residents on the hill above complained of the smoke nuisance. The office, nevertheless, was used until about 1915, when it was torn down and the last vestiges of the yards and buildings removed.

During this later period, CNOR freight trains tied up at the GTR's Cherry Street Yard, and freight engines were kept at Main Street (Danforth) GTR roundhouse, since torn down.

Passenger engines, after being forced away from Rosedale, used the GTR Spadina Avenue roundhouse.

Cobourg to Ronnac followed. In 1926, 24 miles from Greenburn to Todmorden were also abandoned. In 1931, the section from Deseronto to Trenton was abandoned, and in 1932, the section from Trenton to Brighton.

Of the purchased branch lines, the section from Tweed to Bannockburn (former Bay of Quinte Railway) was abandoned in 1935 and that from Yarker to Tweed in 1941. In 1936, the last section of the Deseronto-Toronto line, that from Ronnac to Greenburn, was abandoned; finally, in 1939, the old CNOR main line from Hawkesbury to Hurdman (near Ottawa) was abandoned, all Ottawa-Montreal traffic being diverted over what were formerly the Grand Trunk (Canada Atlantic) tracks.

Thus ended an era in which three separate and almost parallel lines provided service from Toronto to Montreal.

G.R.R. - L.E. & N. REVIVAL

As most members have probably heard by now, the application by the CPR electric lines for abandonment of their passenger service was refused by the Board of Transport Commissioners after an elaborate case was presented by the municipalities affected.

Cars 953 and 955, which were damaged in a spring flood of the Speed River, and which, it was thought, would never again turn a wheel, have been repaired and repainted and

are back in service.