

Just A. Ferronut's Railway Archaeology "Art Clowes"

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Some Montréal rail lines

J. M. Harry Dodsworth, sent me a question about a street sign reading "rue de la Station" he had spotted while driving west on rue Notre Dame, west of Atwater and wondered what station did it refer to? I had my suspicions, but took a drive down to check it, and remembering the number of people who have reminded me that the rail lines around Montréal are more confusing than our language, I considered this would be a good time to see if I could start to change that. While the CP Rail family of railways have had their track changes and relocations, compared to those within the CN Rail group, they are minor. The section *How far is it from Montréal to Toronto* on page 9 of the July 1992 *Newsletter* alluded to some of the changes made on that route. So with Harry's question lets look at some of the changes that have gone on within a few miles south-west of Montréal's Central Station.

The first rail line on the Island of Montréal was the Montreal and Lachine Rail-Road Company. This company incorporated in 1846, opened its 9 mile line from just east of what is now rue Peel (GTR Bonaventure Station) to the Lachine Wharf on the Saint Lawrence River, above the Lachine rapids on November 22, 1847. The M&L line extended west along the south side of rue St-Jacques and then followed the north side of the Lachine Canal. Most accept that the name Bonaventure for this Montréal station comes from the earlier name of rue St-Jacques, it had been called St. Bonaventure Street in the area of the station.

The M&L's east terminal station was on the west edge of Montréal's business centre of the time which was along the harbour (north shore of the St. Lawrence River) almost a mile to the east.

Shortly after the opening of the M&L, the development of the rail system that was to become the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada was gaining momentum. Back in 1846 the Montreal and Lachine Rail-Road Company wasn't the only company getting a charter, the Montreal and Kingston Railroad Company also obtained one. As its name states it was to build a railway from Montréal to Kingston.

In 1851 two other companies were chartered, one was the Kingston and Toronto Railway Company and the other was the Montreal and Kingston Railway Company. The M&K's charter also permitted it to purchase the Montreal and Lachine.

With the rail line construction pot really starting to simmer, the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada came on in force in 1852 with three charters that not only permitted it to build a rail line from Toronto to Montréal, but also to unite the two smaller companies mentioned in the above paragraph and reimburse their shareholders for expenses. The third charter was for the construction of a bridge across the St. Lawrence River at Montreal.

Traffic through the M&L "Bonaventure" station increased in 1852 with the opening of the rail line from Caughnawaga to Mooers, New York. This new south shore line that was connected to the M&L by ferry service between Caughnawaga and the Lachine Wharf. This service was an alternative for New York traffic that had been directed over the Champlain and St. Lawrence through Laprairie until 1851, when it was diverted through St. Lambert (see January 1993, Column).

So, at this point of time our map would have one rail line, the M&L, from Bonaventure heading for Lachine. The second rail line would be added with the official

opening of the Grand Trunk line from Montreal to Brockville on November 19, 1855. Now, while the GTR had gained control of the M&L in 1853, the GTR did not use the M&L "Bonaventure" station as its first Montréal terminal. The GTR instead used a station called Point St. Charles, near rue Wellington. The first Point St. Charles station was a combined station and freight shed and not greatly appreciated by Montréal's business travellers.

The M&L station wasn't used since the M&L had been constructed to a 4'-9" gauge, whereas the GTR was built using the 5'-6" (Portland) gauge. This fact also raises another question, and at present I don't have an answer for, maybe some readers can steer us to the answer. A look at our map shows the Point St. Charles station location, and then the line passing the Hibernia Road station – but because of the gauge problem, the question – did the GTR follow the present route via St. Henri Junction, or did it follow its St. Paul Branch past the St. Paul station (not shown) then across the Lachine Canal and the M&L and on to Montreal West and Blue Bonnets. These stations are not shown, but listed as 4.95 and 5.39 miles respectively from GTR Bonaventure in the 1907 GTR Inventory. A check of a 1856 list of stations doesn't help, since it lists Montréal and then Blue Bonnets at mile 5. Anyway by the end of 1855 our map has its second railway extending from Point St. Charles to the top left corner of our map.

December 17, 1859 was an important date in the railway history of Montréal with the opening of the Victoria Tubular Bridge across the St. Lawrence River. This bridge completed the connection between the GTR lines at Point St. Charles to its lines on the south shore and permitted passengers to travel directly in the comfort of a train from the year round seaport of Portland, Maine to Montréal, Toronto and beyond. The Prince of Wales formally opened this structure on August 25, 1860. So with this opening, our map gets a little more track, the line from the Point St. Charles station along what is known today and shown as the Freight Connection and along Bridge Street to the Victoria Bridge.

As I mentioned Montréal wasn't pleased using the GTR's Point St. Charles station, "room at the end of a freight shed", especially after it became the hub of the GTR rail network. Starting in 1860 and for the next couple of years efforts were made to have a new GTR terminal constructed near the waterfront downtown (east of our map). The Montreal Railway Terminus Company was incorporated in 1861 for this purpose, but the physical and financial obstacles were too great, so the decision was not to tear down half of the city, but to upgrade the existing M&L "Bonaventure" station.

The Grand Trunk added a third rail into Bonaventure Station with dual gauge rail service in the station starting on January 26th, 1862. Other work to upgrade and expand the M&L Bonaventure terminal began in the spring of 1864. The third rail configuration was also extended across the Victoria Bridge to permit Vermont Central trains to travel into Montréal. This three track configuration would last until the early 1870's when the GTR converted to standard gauge. This track construction and upgrade definitely established the wye configuration trackage at St. Henri. My 1907 GTR Inventory lists a station at St. Henri (1.50 miles from Bonaventure) as being a single storey brick station 27 x 98 feet with a slate roof, other plans show it on the south side of the former M&L line. So, rue de la Station is the short street that would have

provided entrance from rue Notre Dame to this station. All trains to and from Bonaventure station whether heading across the Victoria bridge or to the west would pass the St. Henri Station. This location was originally called Tanneries Village, and no doubt some form of station had existed at this location since the opening of the M&L.

Rail traffic in Montréal continued to increase. GTR industrial trackage was extended eastward into the harbour area. The Harbour Spur, constructed eastward from Point St. Charles station area had an extra 2 miles of track added to it in 1871. A 1952 track diagram shows the spur to Windmill Pointe Basin was 1.04 miles long.

The next rail line to appear on our map was competition – what we now know as the CPR's line from Windsor station to the West Island and on to Smiths Falls. The Canadian Pacific had leased the Ontario and Quebec Railway in 1884. The O&Q had been chartered originally in 1871 to construct lines in Ontario that would connect with railways in Québec. The line was finally extended into Montréal and the CPR opened its line from Windsor Station to Smiths Falls on August 15, 1887. The station opened at the eastern end of this line in 1887 was not the Windsor station we know today, but rather a frame structure that was used for about two years. The structure we see today, designed by Bruce Price was opened for rail service on February 4th, 1889. This line and these stations were not the first for the CPR in Montréal. The CPR's first line and stations were a mile or so to the east. While not part of this story, CPR's first transcontinental train (to Vancouver) left from Montréal some three months before the Smiths Falls line was opened. However, it left from a small red brick station built in 1883 at Dalhousie Square, a mile or so east of Windsor station. It was also from this east end station that CP's first *Pacific Express* left for Port Moody at 8:00 p.m. on June 27, 1886. In the realm of Montréal stories, it is also interesting to note that since the CPR didn't have their line completed through Northern Ontario, Mr. Van Horne with an official party left the GTR's Bonaventure Station for Chicago and the west in August 1883 for the opening of the CPR line into Calgary.

The new Windsor station made the GTR to reconsider the status of its Bonaventure station – the result was the spending of \$300,000 for the demolition of the old wooden station in 1887 and the construction of the magnificent new three storey, three towered brick structure, that was opened in 1888. The plain two storey structure we remember from the late 1930's was the results of the reconstruction of this depot after a fire in 1916. A second fire in August 1948 that destroyed the adjacent freight sheds also damaged the station to the point that the remaining commuter service was transferred to Central Station and the old depot demolished.

Another section of track that is important today, but which I haven't been able to track down its origin, and that is the Butler Street Connection used for freight trains to by-pass the rail traffic congestion between the Point St. Charles shop, the VIA Rail Maintenance Centre and Central Station. While it is in conflict with dates shown in a CNR bridge list, a 1929 map shows a proposed connection and new yard trackage to the west of the Point St. Charles shop about where the Butler Street Connection is.

While the Canadian Northern Railway had reached its new town of Mount Royal, Québec by 1916, it wasn't until October 4, 1918 that electric trains were running through the Mount Royal Tunnel to Tunnel Station (Central Station). Work on the tunnel was started in 1912 and some trains operated through it as early as 1916.

The formation of the Canadian National Railways in 1919 created the situation that it had two

stations in Montréal. While numerous plans were developed it was about fifteen years before a final decision. Proposals in the late 1920's included a tunnel connection between CP Windsor station to the CN Mount Royal tunnel to access a new "central station" that would replace Tunnel station. CN trains to and from the west would access the new station by a new belt line from the west island to the CNOR line north of the Mount Royal tunnel. Finally the decision was to build what we know today as the viaduct from Central station south the connect to existing GTR/CN freight lines near CN Cape and the older GTR mainlines near Point St. Charles. So 1942, saw this last main line segment of our map put in place.

The GTR/CN lines on our map have been identified with various subdivision names over the years, but that is a topic for another time. However, before we close this chapter on this area, a quick look at its stations. The CPR has its limestone Windsor station, with its castle-like architecture. They also have the single storey brick station located 1.9 miles west at Westmount, although now out of use. When opened in 1889, this station was known as Cote St. Antoine.

CN Central station, now buried amongst the surrounding skyscrapers is a clean lined brick structure with a functional grand hall. A few railway offices are located over part of it. This station replaced the previous Tunnel station with its canopy covered open platforms located in a hole below Dorchester Boulevard.

CN Cape is just a timetable station for the switch located where the trains from the west and the east join for there final 1.2 miles into Central station.

In the commuter days to the south shore, there was a commuter station at Bridge. The underpasses and stair wells for this depot still exist. This station near the end of the Victoria bridge was used by shop workers from the Point St. Charles shops and the residents of the former community known as "Goose Village" on the east side of rue Bridge. This community was demolished to make way Expo 67.

I have mentioned the early station at Point St. Charles. The GTR built a new single storey brick station here in 1901. This station that had a sheet iron roof was 13 x 73 feet.

The GTR's 1907 list shows the Hibernia Road station as a small octagonal wood shelter that was 6.5 feet on each side.

The St. Henri station has been mentioned. The 1887-88 Bonaventure station was 98 feet by 235 feet.

St. Paul on the branch of the same name had a wood frame station constructed in 1894 that was 18 x 36 feet.

Hanna, Alberta – clarification

I slipped up again, I had used a piece from *Telegraph Lines*, on Hanna in the February 1993 without fully checking my files. Bob Sandusky sent me a note to point some out that some of the information was a bit out of date. Bob had an article in the October 1992, *Rail & Transit* on a trip he took though southeastern Alberta in August 1992.

Bob points out that on his inspection last year, the track was on the turntable but nothing beyond that to any of the stalls, only a single track came from the yard to the turntable. No track was visible in any stalls.

CP Rail's St-Gabriel Subdivision

Sandy Worthen has sent also a number of interesting questions about Québec rail lines. A couple of them relate to the reference about the abandonment of a portion of CP Rail's St-Gabriel Subdivision in the January, 1993, *THE RAPIDO* column by Gord Webster.

One of Sandy's questions was about the origin

of this line, as some of the lines in this area are among the oldest in the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. The 27.6 mile long St-Gabriel Subdivision was built by two companies northward from Lanoraie on the CP's Montréal – Trois Rivières – Québec line. That line had been incorporated by the North Shore Railway Company (Quebec) in 1853 but the first train from Québec did not reach Montréal until February 1879. This same company built the 16.7 miles of the St-Gabriel Subdivision from Lanoraie to Saint-Félix-de-Valois (St. Felix - CPR). The remaining 10.9 miles to St-Gabriel was constructed by the Joliette and Brandon Railway Company that was incorporated in 1886.

The second point, is one more of clarification. The NTA order that permitted the abandonment (sale) of the line from the north side of Joliette to a point at mile 17.80 (north of St. Felix) merely relieves CP Rail from its obligations to maintain and operate this approximately 10 miles of railway. This means that Bell Gaz Ltée now owns the track like any other private siding. If Bell Gaz Ltée operates over the line it would need to comply with provincial requirements. If CP operated on it, it would need to be deemed safe under federal requirements.

Sandy also sent along some interesting notes on passenger train operation over this branch line, but I am going to beg your indulgence and add it to my pile for future columns.