

Just A. Ferronut's September 1996

Railway Archaeology

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It is that time of the month when I must see if I can sit still for a few minutes and jot down some of the items that have turned up over the last month or so. And as always, where does one start?

Once Upon A Time

Back in our November 1989 column we carried an item on this restaurant that had been converted from a Montreal & Southern Counties station, its formal name was *Il Etait Une Foie*. This single storey brick station building has been back in the news a couple of times recently. Without getting into details, this station, at 600, rue d'Youville, just west of McGill, a couple of blocks from the old Grand Trunk Railway Headquarters Building was the northern or Montréal terminal of the Montreal & Southern Counties Railway until it ceased operations into Montréal in 1955. The story of this railway is well documented by Tony Clegg in his book "*Catenary Under the Counties*" published a number of years ago by Railfare. Perhaps one of these months we take a closer look at this road. Tony tells me that one of the video outfits here in Toronto obtained the use of his old movies to do a video of the operation of this line.

Anyway, you may recall the UCRS had a trip to Montréal in August. Some members from Toronto and Montreal met with a group of Montreal fans, and one of the features of the trip was dinner at *Il Etait Une Foie*. The restaurant specialized in eight varieties of hamburgers concocted by the owner Vern Rosenberg. On our August visit most of the dozen and a half or so railfans enjoyed one of his "Grand Trunk" burgers.

At the end of our joyous meal, the gang was wandering out. I nearly had a heart attack when a voice from behind says "Hi Art!" Never being the best at remembering faces, I turned while this gentlemen continued to ask "how things were going, etc." Scratching my head, I finally asked where we had met? – the reply was that we hadn't. It was Vern Rosenberg, and he said he got my name from some of the other fans talking to me. This will be a highlight that I remember from this restaurant. On the way back to the hotel, it was suggested that we should consider making this an annual event.

Well that won't be for late in September Vern Rosenberg got word from Montréal that they weren't extending his lease, and that they were going to convert this former station into a mini-plaza as part of a new condominium project. In a news clipping that Doug Brown passed along, it indicated that the *Il Etait Une Foie* had been at this location for 16 years. During this time the restaurant, besides being the home to great food, became the home for a myriad of mementos of the Montreal and Southern Counties, and its era of operation. With the closing of the restaurant, this memorabilia was disposed of at an auction on September 29.

Besides the article on the *Il Etait Une Foie*, Doug Brown also passed along one on the former CP Park Avenue station. This large stone station, constructed in the Italian-

Renaissance style was closed to passenger train service with the rerouting of VIA Rail's north shore service between Montréal and Québec City effective June 3, 1984.

This station at the head of Park Avenue on the north side of Jean Talon in the northern part of the City of Montréal was opened on November 1st, 1931. It superseded the former Mile End Station which was located about a mile closer to Place Viger, or the centre of Montréal. This rail line was built by the Québec, Montréal, Ottawa & Occidental Railway and the Mile End station had opened in October 1876.

CP's Park Avenue station always reminded me of what formal style architecture can do. The street grid in the area is rectangular. However, the rail lines past the station are about 75° to Jean Talon. The station platforms were parallel to the tracks as expected. Now the oddities start, since the station building sits with its walls parallel to the street lines and at an angle to the tracks. The station has a green space in front of it, to permit formal gardens between Jean Talon and it. The centre portion of the station the front has 4 large multi-storied stone columns. To keep the symmetry, the central multi-storied section is flanked on each side by single storey wings. Under the rules of formal architecture, this is all great, but the complication at Park Avenue is that the tracks passed to the east or right side of one of the single storied wings. The result was that one always felt as if the station was turned about 75° to the more common practice of the station being along the track.

Anyway this classical structure has been sitting empty and gradually decaying except for a section in the west single storey wing that has been modified and incorporated into an entrance to the Parc Métro station.

The current flap is that several proposals have been put forward to the city council outlining uses that could be made of this former station. As always, in addition to the normal questions over funding the conversion and restoration, estimated about \$20 million, the locals are concerned that they won't be consulted in the process.

The reincarnation proposals before the City of Montréal include: a Loblaw's supermarket, Holocaust museum, subsidized housing, reactivated train station, community centre or some other vocation.

Perhaps Doug will keep us posted on the City's decision.

The Electronic Scrapbook

You have often heard me mention the use of a computer for tracking railways and their histories. Well what started out as a way to keep track of a few news items, has like "Topsey" – just grew! But I guess this is natural, since this is also how I got interested in Canadian railway history. That interest started from my needing to know the corporate history of a railway company for a legal document.

I am mentioning this subject at present for a couple of

reasons. The files on my computer just keep growing, and now I am beginning to look upon this collection as an electronic way of keeping a scrapbook. You'll note this month's column is shorter than usual, partly because I have been pestering our Chris Spinney to make changes and additions to the hardware in my computer to be give me more space. Secondly, I have spend extra time since my return to Toronto to reorganize my computer files on Ontario. What seemed a great arrangement a few years ago, evolved while I was in Montréal, and now my Ontario information needs revamping. This brings me to part of the reason for this topic, data format. In discussions with various railfans, it appears there are almost as many formats for keeping railway data, be it by hard copy or on computer, as there are fans. Therefore, while I am in this reformatting, I would appreciate hearing from those who have what they consider are good formats for railway data.

During my effort to get rid of tons of paper by transferring the data to the computer, I came across an interesting article about a circus and railways. The Ottawa *Citizen*, back in April 1975 carried an article about the Canadian who started the move of circuses from the railway to the highway for their travel. The man who started this was Andrew Downie McPhee who was born near Exeter, Ontario back in 1863. The family moved to Stratford while Andrew was still a child. In this community he became interested in vaudeville and was soon involved in numerous aspects of this show life, using the name Andrew Downie. In 1891, after several years of running a circus with partners, he went on his own with the *Andrew Downie's Dog and Pony Circus*, and played communities along the Erie Canal, moving his show along this waterway by boat.

During the winter of 1902-03, Downie organized a repertory company toured with it from Winnipeg to Vancouver. This show was intended to be set up in vacant buildings such as stores, warehouses, etc. It is noted that this show was presented for two nights in the Canadian Pacific Railway roundhouse in Red Deer, Alberta.

By 1914 Downie had a show called the *La Tena Wild Animal Circus* that needed 10-rail car to move it. During the 1916 season this show toured central Canada in a 15 car train.

Downie's next transportation evolution came in the spring of 1926 when he launched his *Downie Brothers Motorized Circus* using trucks with customized bodies built on them to move his circus. For the circus aficionados, Andrew Downie was the only brother in *Downie Brothers Motorized Circus*.

While Andrew Downie may have started the trend towards the use highway vehicles for the transportation of circus, the Canadian circus train survived for many decades. Again one of the interesting facets of Canadian railroading.

Speaking of the circus, the old adage that "the show must go on" was very true in Charlottetown, P.E.I. on Tuesday evening, July 22, 1930. The Al. G. Barnes Circus performed that night following a train derailment at Canaan Station, New Brunswick two days before in which four circus people were killed and nine of the twenty-nine cars either totally wrecked or severely damaged. The five ring show only missed only one day's performance as the result of this derailment, that in addition to the fatalities, lessened the number of performers by injuries.

Canaan Station is about 20 miles north of Moncton on the Intercolonial line to Miramichi (Newcastle) and

Campbellton. The derailment scene was both a strange and erie one with cars of the Al. G. Barnes' special scattered randomly amongst the torn up track and around station, some of the telescoped cars showing the remains of gaily decked circus wagons.

The verdict of coroner's jury was that the probable cause was that a flawed arch-bar of one of the trucks broke and fell under the wheels.

The Moncton, NB news reports of this derailment highlight another of the evolving aspects of transportation. "One of the famous Ringling Brothers who is a leading official in the Al. G. Barnes circus, was reported as having left by aeroplane from Montreal for Moncton last night on account of the serious accident. Last night, however, it was felt here the plane must have made a landing for the night en-route. Search lights and flares were kept burning at the Speedway until late last night in order to guide the airplane should it have shown up."

And of course an electronic scrapbook is great to turn up little odds and sods like the fact about British Columbia and the penny. Previous to 1904 pennies "coppers" were not used in British Columbia. People returning to British Columbia from the east would throw any coppers that had in their pockets from the trains as they neared that western promised land.

Then there is the story about the near battle between the railways at "Fort Whyte", Manitoba on the outskirts of Winnipeg. In 1888 the Canadian Pacific Railway enjoyed a monopoly for rail traffic west of Winnipeg through Portage la Prairie. In April of that year the provincial legislature authorized the Railway of Commissioners for Manitoba to build a railway, known as the Red River Valley Railway from Winnipeg to West Lynne, as well as a line from Winnipeg to Portage la Prairie.

The C.P.R. objected strongly and the crisis came on October 20, 1888 when the new railway line had to cross the C.P.R. tracks. As the Red River Valley Railway workers got close to the place where the crossing must be made they saw a derailed locomotive blocking the way. It had been placed there by order of the C.P.R. superintendent William Whyte. There were also five railway cars nearby carrying about 250 workmen who had been sworn in as special constables.

It looked as though there would be a battle. The Manitoba Attorney-General, Joseph Martin, swore in a number of special constables for the government, and hundreds of Winnipeg citizens volunteered to fight for their new railway, if necessary. A special train took them to the scene, about one mile south of St. James bridge. The situation was tense as the track-layers grew closer to the crossing. Another urgent message was sent to Winnipeg to send soldiers.

Fortunately the "war" didn't take place. The Red River Valley track-layers were still a few hundred yards from the crossing when they had to stop for the night.

Most people went back to Winnipeg, and only a few men were left to guard the equipment. Cooler heads prevailed by the next morning and it was agreed to refer the dispute to the Supreme Court of Canada. It ruled that the provincial government had the power to charter railways within the bounds of "old Manitoba" and the new railway was allowed to go through. The site of the near-battle became known as "Fort Whyte" after the C.P.R. superintendent. How many times did this type of squabble take place across Canada in the peak days of railway construction?

The Red River Valley Railway was taken over by the

Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railway. It later became part of the Canadian Northern Railway Company and finally part of CN.

Anticosti Annotate

Bill Reddy sent along a few tidbits following our article on Anticosti Island in the June issue of *Rail & Transit*. Bill points out that the late Benjamin F. G. Kline Jr., in his book "*The Heisler Locomotive 1891-1941*" stated that Anticosti Engine No. 2 was delivered to the railway new, not nearly new, as we had mentioned, and carried builder's No. 1221. Anticosti's Heisler No. 3 carried builder's number 1229 and that both of these engines had cylinders of 14 x 12 inches.

Bill continued that there were at least two other Heisler locomotives sold to firms in Quebec. Number 1064, built in 1902 was sold to the R. W. Potter as their No. 2. This engine was a 42" gauge engine and later sold to the Johnsons Company at Thetford Mines, Québec. The other Heisler was No. 1290, built in 1914. This standard gauge engine became Finch-Pryn & Company's No. 3 at Laurier Station, QC (about 15 miles west of Québec City on the south shore of the St. Lawrence). This engine was later sold to Consolidated Power & Light Company at Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin.

In the same letter, Bill mentioned a couple of pieces of Canadian equipment near his home in western New York state. TTC car No. 4424 is still sitting about 5 miles west of Hornell, NY, and former CN Business car No. 54 is on the Tioga Central Railroad, near Wellsboro Junction, PA.

While I still have numerous letters on my list to reply to, I am going to take this opportunity to thank all my readers who have written, sent E-Mails, etc., commenting on our column.