Just A. Ferronut's Railway Archaeology

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Well, the warmer summer days, makes one want to relax and lay around in the sun rather than bomb around the country side pestering the various archives, libraries and museums! But to keep my nasty image alive, I have been visiting a number of the Maritime establishments to learn what interesting stories and data that they may have buried deep in their dark vaults and dusty storage rooms.

Another reason for some of these wanderings has been trying to check a few details for some of the crowd that are busy compiling books. While attempting to straighten out some corporate names and histories of a couple of Nova Scotia industrial railways, for Don McQueen, I made a visit to the Nova Scotia Museum of Industry in Stellarton the other day. While they had a few paragraphs on the Intercolonial Coal Mining Company, Limited of Westville, one of the industrial railways of the central Nova Scotia coal mining region, I also turned up a few more details about a couple of more Canadian railways that were built using wooden rails.

While I am getting somewhere near the point, that one of these months, of doing a sizable article on these unique railways around Canada. This would be an article with maps, detail photos and sketches, etc., as well as comparing some of the similarities and differences in these lines, but using these recent titbits from Nova Scotia, I figured I would whet your appetite with a quick glance at a few of these wooden roads.

It appears that there were two types of rails used, those using squared timber and those that kept the top surface curved. Some of this latter type did have their bottom and sides squared, but the top was curved to permit the use of double flanged wheels.

The findings, so far, indicate that the first of these railways were started about 1870. A second group appeared in the 1890s, and the most recent one I came across was started in 1939.

Of the early group, it appears that an American named J. B. Hulbert, went to Québec, where he was able to talk the Provincial Legislature into approving six railways using his style of wooden rails. Two of these were built, probably the best known, the "Québec and Gosford Wooden Railway," that extended slightly over 25 miles from Québec City to the Lac-St-Joseph area. The second, the Richelieu, Drummond and Arthabasca Railway, extended about 50 miles from Sorel to Drummondville, Québec. Among the other railways in this group of six, was a part of what we know today as Quebec Central Railway.

In New Brunswick, it was proposed in 1871 to construct the St. Martin and Upham Railway as a narrow gauge line with wooden rails. While this rail line was constructed, wooden rails were not used.

Different accounts show up of early railways replacing broken rails with lengths of wood, until metal ones could be obtained.

Locomotives for the first group of railways used wheels with wide tyres that would bear the full width of the squared wooden rails.

Nova Scotia had two railways constructed in the 1890s using wooden poles. At least one used poles with the bottom and sides squared. Unlike the early Quebec ones that used wooden wedges to connect the squared rails to the ties, the Nova Scotia railways simply used square wharf spikes to fasten the poles to the ties.

One of these was the Castlereagh Railway or Bass River Pole Railway. This railway was constructed to carry silica sand from Lilica Lake, near Castlereagh, to the Bass River Wharf. This railway used spruce poles for rails and operated for about ten years from 1895 until the processing plant was destroyed by fire in 1905.

The second Nova Scotia pole railway, the Weymouth and New France Railway was also started in 1895. When finished two years later it extended some 12 to 14 miles from Emile Stehelin's mills in a community called New France via Southville, to a connection with the Dominion Atlantic Railway southwest of Weymouth. The Weymouth and New France Railway lasted until 1907, when its tracks were totally destroyed by fire.

The Weymouth and New France Railway's first engine, called the "Flyer" was built on site, and referred to as consisting of a boiler and a twenty horse power engine setting on a small four-wheeled truck with a tender suitable to hold cordwood for its fuel.

Robb Engineering of Amherst, Nova Scotia got into the locomotive construction business and built locomotives for both of these Nova Scotia pole railways. Now whether these railways were the first to use a double flanged wheel or not, these do appear to become "the standard" for future Canadian pole railways. This arrangement was shaped somewhat like a car or truck rim, that permitted it to bear on the curved top surface of the pole rails. The Weymouth and New France Railway's second locomotive, built in 1897 was the *Maria Theresa* had a wood-burning boiler fuelling a four cylinder 80-horse-power engine, mounted on two four-wheeled trucks. The tender was on 2 single axled trucks.

This company followed an approach similar to that of its locomotives for its coaches. Stehelin's company built its first coach that was described as "a gem of ingenuity and artistry". Later it had Rhodes and Curry, of Amherst, build it a coach called the *Caribou*.

While I have not collected much on them, but a number of west coast lumber companies built and operated pole railways. Their cheapness and ease of construction made them quite suitable for the task of hauling lumber.

One of the most recent pole railways was one constructed about the beginning of World War II to access mining and prospecting sites in Bourlamaque Township, a little

south east of Rouyn, Quebec. This pole road, as described by Marcel Deschambault, in the April 1975 issue of *Canadian Rail*, was used to haul material and food to the mining camps. This line known as the Bourlamaque Central Railway, was built by a Louis Abel, and lasted until it was destroyed by fire in 1944.

Unlike the other eastern wooden railways, the Bourlamaque Central Railway used internal combustion engines in its motive power. This was the same approach used by most of the western lumber operators. Mr. Deschambault details how the railway used a Ford 4-cylinder 1933 truck as the mainstay of its motive power.

So hopefully I can get things in gear and use the various pieces I have collected along with Robert R. Brown's writings on the Québec and Gosford Wooden Railway, to take a broader look at these wooden roads from a present day perspective.

A NON-OPERATED MYSTERY

Among some of the other goodies that I came across at the Nova Scotia Museum of Industry, was a short item on a railway that was apparently built, but was condemned before opening, and therefore never operated. Sounds like a bit of a waste of someone's money!

The Cumberland Coal and Railway Company was federally incorporated in 1883 to acquire the Springhill and Parrsboro Coal and Railway Company's property, and to extend the line to West Bay, and to Oxford, etc. The goal was to permit Springhill coal to be moved to the ports of Pugwash and Wallace, etc., where it could be shipped, by boat, to compete in the central Canadian markets more favourably with Cape Breton coal. Cape Breton coal was being shipped by water at a cost of $1.25 per ton, while Springhill coal was costing $2.50 a ton to ship by rail.

The Cumberland Coal and Railway Company with a federal subsidy in hand completed fourteen miles between a point on the Springhill – Parrsboro route and one on the short line at Oxford. Today, the line we remember through Oxford was Canadian National's Oxford Subdivision. This line had been originally touted by Sir Sandford Fleming, as part of his plan for his global "All-Red-Route," with which he planned to show the British mastery around the globe. The Canadian railway portion was to be known as the Great American and Short Line Railway Company. While CN's Oxford Subdivision did finally connect Oxford Junction, NS, on the I.C.R. with New Glasgow, NS, Sandford Fleming dream remained just that, for on the North American side of things he had seriously underestimated the roughness of the Newfoundland terrain and its effect on his equation for train speeds, and of course he was never able to find backers with pockets deep enough to back his grandiose scheme.

So at this point, the faux pas relating to matters surrounding this fourteen miles of railway, that didn't get to see regular rail traffic, is one more cloud among the many in Canadian railway history.

THIS SWITCHING WAS HEAVY WORK

Another interesting item from the Stellarton Museum. The above mentioned Intercolonial Coal Mining Company, Limited built and opened a rail line from their "Drummond" colliery in Westville, NS through Mount William to Granton (7.25 miles) in 1868. This was a narrow gauge line.

Shortly after, in 1868, the Nova Scotia Coal Company opened a rail between its Bear Creek mines in Westville, through Alma, to an outlet on Pictou harbour also at Granton, on the Middle River – six miles. The Nova Scotia Coal Company stopped operating in 1875. In 1887 their properties were bought by the locally owned Black Diamond Company. Part of the Nova Scotia Coal Company's line had been sold to become a portion of the of the "short line" to Pictou, i.e. CN's Oxford Subdivision mentioned above. After this sale, the Black Diamond Company built a siding from it that crossed the Intercolonial Coal Mining Company, Limited line near the wharves at Granton.

Possibly to avoid capital costs, or perhaps corporate politics dictated, but this rail crossing near the Granton wharves had no fixed or permanent diamond. Black Diamond coal trains would come up from Westville and stop just short of the Intercolonial Coal company line. The Black Diamond train crew would then place specially made high ties in position, and then on these laid rails across and over the ICC tracks. The coal train moved slowly over the temporary crossing. They would unload their coal, and on the return journey, after crossing back over the ICC's track, the crew would dismantle the intersection. And you thought train crews had it easy!

The Black Diamond Company was sold to Acadia Coal Company in 1891. The Acadia Coal Company was taken over by the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal, which later became a subsidiary of Dominion Coal Company, Limited.

SPEED

At different times we have published articles on train speeds and how they have changed over the years. While doing some digging about an early New Brunswick and Canada Railway locomotive, I came across a couple of articles about a locomotive that was rebuilt in 1892 at Canadian Pacific's McAdam, NB, railway shops and its first operations thereafter.

The locomotive known as "The Flyer" (local name for it, and not the same Flyer mentioned for the Weymouth and New France Railway) was assigned to by Tom McKenna as driver. Under the watchful eye of Mr. G. A. Haggerty, the mechanical superintendent of the division, Mr. McKenna first ran his engine up and down the old main line between McAdam and St. Stephen; then two trips, north, on freights to Woodstock; and finally on the Atlantic and Pacific Expresses. The McAdam division operated the portion of this express train between Saint John, NB, and Brownville Junction, Maine.

Then on Friday, July 29th, 1892, the real test came, as this engine was to operate from Saint John to St. Andrews, via McAdam, a distance of 127 miles, pulling a train carrying Mr. VanHorne and his party. The trip took 2 hours and 33 minutes at an average rate was forty eight miles per hour, including stops, which occupied some considerable time, as one was of 5 minutes and another of 8 minutes were made.

From Saint John to Fredericton Junction, the train ran at the rate of fifty-two miles per hour, and the whole run, Saint John to McAdam, in one hour and forty minutes. Between McAdam and Watt Junction the crew achieved the rate of one mile a minute. The articles concluded by noting that this train had covered the 13 miles between Welsford and Hoyt, (on the Saint John – McAdam section) in 9 minutes. And your ambition was to become a fireman on a steam engine!

MORE TRAILS FROM OLD RIGHT OF WAYS

One item that I missed from last month's column related to the conversion of 14.2 kilometres of the long abandoned Salisbury and Albert Railway's right-of-way to a

trail. The trail extends from Riverside-Albert northward along the Shepody Bay, through the Hopewell Hill marshes. At the opening of this trail in May, it was noted that it had a couple of distinctions. It is apparently the first trail in Canada to be multi-use, permitting horses, as well as hikers and cyclists. In addition, it is the first trail to utilize the services of St. John Ambulance Cadets to patrol the trail on bicycles. These patrols are equipped with cellular telephones, first aid kits and bicycle repair tools.

MORE STEAM FOR CANADA

While this item will no doubt be covered under news, it is interesting to note that Canada is obtaining another steam locomotive to its collection of active ones. Well known Western Canadian, Tom Payne, founder of Central Western Railway in Alberta, had purchased ex-Reading T1, 4-8-4 #2100. This locomotive had prior to its sale been on the Ohio Central Railway at Coshocton, Ohio, where it had operated up until recently. Mr. Payne, for publicity purposes had Canadian National separate the ex-Reading 2100 and a tool car it had in tow, from west bound Train 402, as it crossed between Niagara Falls, New York and Canada on Wednesday June 24, 1998. As these two pieces of historical equipment sat at the centre of CN's Suspension Bridge, an awaiting helicopter arranged by Tom Payne proceeded to take pictures for about ten minutes prior to the equipment beginning its Canadian journey to the Canada Southern Railway shops in St. Thomas, Ontario.