



EARLY NARROW GAUGE RLYS

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Narrow Gauge Railways in Canada

With the passing of the steam locomotive from active duty on our railways, the Association has noticed a slight resurgence of interest in historical research on other facets of Canadian railways. Quite a number of requests for information of a general nature have been received in recent months, and as a result, a few publications intended as "survey courses" upon various aspects of Canadian railway history are now being prepared, or are planned for publication.

The first of these, under the above title, and including outline histories, pictures and maps of all Canadian common-carrier narrow-gauge railways, and some of the more significant private lines, will be released by the Trains & Trolleys Book Club, probably in March. This monograph is intended to give a broad picture of narrow-gauge development for the casual amateur, but its condensed information will serve as a point of reference from which detailed studies of individual companies or systems may be made.

It is very painful to realize that Canadian rail hobbyists as a whole are largely ignorant of the existence, let alone the background, of narrow-gauge railways in Canada. The Association frequently receives requests, some of them rather plaintive, asking if there "has ever been any narrow-gauge railway in Canada", the writers surprisingly unaware of the fact that Canada possesses North America's largest existing narrow-gauge network, in the form of the 708 miles of the Newfoundland lines of Canadian National Railways, 22 miles of the Grand Falls Central Railway in the same Province, and 90 miles of the Canadian portion of the White Pass & Yukon Route.

Moreover, we are destined to retain this distinction, since none of these systems are threatened by foreseeable

abandonment. Quite the contrary; all have modernized plant and operations without sacrificing an inherent regional charm. For there are few stronger contrasts in culture, locale, geography or climate than those which exist between the three-foot-gauge Yukon carrier, and the forty-two inch width of the Newfoundland lines.

But the story does not end there -- not by any means. The narrative embraces many other facts about Canada and its narrow-gauge lines which are worthy of more general circulation.

For example, Canada possessed the first narrow-gauge public railway in North America, and probably in the whole of the western hemisphere as well, in the Toronto & Nipissing Railway which was opened to service in July, 1871. We are also justifi-

ied in advancing the claim that Canada had the first truly* narrow-gauge steam-operated railway of any kind in the western hemisphere, in the form of the 1½-mile 42-inch-gauge carrier which functioned at the Lingan Colliery in Cape Breton as early as 1866.

This was but three years after steam operation was adopted by the Festiniog Railway which, still happily existing in the hands of a Welsh preservation society, makes undisputed claim to being the first steam-operated narrow-gauge railway in the world. Yet only three years after the Welsh line adopted steam traction, a little 0-4-0 tank locomotive, "Fairy", operated on the Lingan Colliery tramway, hauling coals from the mine to the ships.

We can even claim precedence in the three-foot-gauge "department", with the Glasgow & Cape Breton Coal & Railway Company, whose operations commenced in May, 1871, over a ten-mile line connecting the pier at Sydney with Reserve Mine, also in Cape Breton.

That all of these small-gauge railways were influenced by the Festiniog to a marked degree is evidenced, for example by the Fairlie Patent double-ended steam locomotives which were first used on the Welsh road, but were later exported liberally across the Atlantic, principally to Mexico. One, however ("Mountaineer") went to the Denver & Rio Grande Railway ostensibly as a gift of the Duke of Sutherland, while five more, three of them 36" gauge, and the other two 42" gauge, went to three of the very first Canadian narrow-gauge lines, the Glasgow & Cape Breton, the Toronto & Nipissing and the Toronto, Grey & Bruce systems.

The Sydney line, with its 36" gauge, tended to be the exception in the first decade of narrow-gauge in Canada, and while other systems were built in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island in the 1870s, they were all of the forty-two-inch persuasion.

The 1880s saw the beginnings of Newfoundland's extensive system followed by a "rash" of three-foot-gauge building, in Alberta and in Quebec. The two lines in French Canada were constructed by colonization societies supported by the Catholic Church. Another settlement line in Alberta in the 1890s had Mormon money behind it.

It remained for the Nineties to produce the most scenically spectacular systems, redolent of the railways of Colorado rather more than other Canadian lines - the Kaslo & Slocan, the Trail Creek Tramway (dealt with in a recent News Report) and the oft-publicized White Pass & Yukon.

While a few lines made their appearance in the Twentieth Century (the smallest but perhaps the best-known of all being the 3'8½" gauge Portage Railway of the Huntsville, Lake of Bays & Lake Simcoe Railway & Navigation Company), the years following 1900 were noted mainly for the decline of the narrow-gauge in this country; the largest unit loss occurred in the 1920s, when the whole Prince Edward Island system comprising more than 250 miles of 42" gauge was converted to standard width, the last narrow-gauge train running from Murray Harbour to Charlottetown in September, 1930.

But the era of new lines was not over -- quite. As late as 1941, the United States Army built a ten-mile line connecting the Newfoundland Railway at White's Road, Nfld., with the Harmon Air Force Base at Stephenville, on which they operate

*- Meaning more than a foot narrower than the standard or Stephenson gauge of 4'8½".



their own diesel locomotives.

Apart from the two principal groups at each end of Canada, vestigial traces of many other lines can be found in the countryside of every Province except Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The CNR lines in P.E.I. still twist about aimlessly from side to side of the Island, just as they were laid in the early 1870s; CN travellers riding from St. Sauveur to Sixteen Island Lake in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec, are forcefully reminded of the Montfort Colonization Railway of the Nineties which laid this line to 36" width, the present CN track following every turn and grade variation of the original line, including a near 4% grade at Lac Chevreuil.

In the Caledon Hills northwest of Toronto, the scars of the Horseshoe Curve which surmounted the Niagara Escarpment for the Toronto, Grey & Bruce Railway are still plainly evid-

ent on a tract of land imaginatively named "Horseshoe Farm".

Visitors to Lake Louise in the Canadian Rockies can hike along the abandoned roadbed of the Canadian Pacific's Lake Louise Tramway, which carried hotel guests and baggage from the railway station to the hotel in gasoline railcars, from 1912 to 1930, and a short distance away, near the highway to Field, B.C., there lie the remains of a 3-foot-gauge 2-6-0 built by Baldwin in 1885 for the railway which ran over the Canadian Pacific's present standard-gauge line from Dunmore to Lethbridge. This little machine was being shipped out, in the Nineties, after CPR had acquired and standard-gauged the railway, and apparently tumbled from a flat car while descending the famed 4% "Big Hill" from Stephen to Field and there it rests to this day, with its tender.

In the remote mountains of

the Slocan, the 3-foot rails of the Kaslo & Slocan are said to exist still, isolated and abandoned, on rock ledges on the sheer mountain face near Sandon, the tracks rendered inaccessible after landslides and forest fires sealed the fate of the K&S more than half a century ago.

Three of the lines spilled over into the United States. Best-known example is the 20-miles of the White Pass & Yukon which lie in Alaska. The present Great Northern (USA) branch from Shelby, Montana to Sweetgrass, was a 36-inch-gauge appendage (Great Falls & Canada Ry) of the Alberta Railway & Coal Company which ran from Coutts to Lethbridge, Alta., with a branch from Stirling to Spring Coulee. In northern Maine, the 42-inch-gauge of the New Brunswick Railway "sneaked" over the frontier into Caribou, Maine, from Aroostook, NB, as the Aroostook River Railroad.

Economically, many diversified reasons lay behind the construction of more than twenty distinct Canadian narrow-gauge common carriers. In the east, the reasons were largely developmental; indeed, in Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, the railways were provincial government projects, gladly turned over to Ottawa after each of

these colonies joined Canada, in 1949 and 1873 respectively. Hay intended for consumption by horses in the mercantile cities of the eastern USA was largely responsible for the Lake Champlain & Saint Lawrence Junction Railway, which ran from Stanbridge, Que., to St. Guillaume and was narrow-gauge for only a year-and-a-half. The Toronto & Nipissing was owned by a distillery (-- therein may lie the reason for the Fairlie double-ender "Shedden" exploding!).

The lines in Cape Breton owed their existence to coal, but the Rocky Mountain systems were the result of mineral strikes of a more precious nature, silver-lead in the case of the Kaslo & Slocan, gold-copper for the Trail Creek Tramway, and just plain gold for the White Pass & Yukon whose territory contributed two new words to the English lexicon, "Bonanza" and "Klondyke".

If the foregoing whets your appetite to know more, watch for the appearance of the book at an early date. Concise histories of the various roads will be supplemented liberally with photographs, maps, locomotive rosters and, for the model railway buffs, scale diagrams of as many locomotives and cars as we can get before deadline.