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The **ERIE & ONTARIO** **Rail Road**

Furthur information on Ontario's third oldest steam railway.

by C.W. Kenneth Heard

In the January, 1961, number of the News Report, we were favoured with an article by Dr. R.V.V. Nicholls on the Erie and Ontario Rail Road, which originally appeared in C.R.H.A. Bulletin No. 11, December, 1939. Since that time, however, some furthur information concerning the locomotive history of this line has come to light. This new information is founded on the material which was contained in the Keefer Report of 1859-60, which was discovered in 1940. It is the purpose of this present article to summarize the locomotive history of this road in the light of this discovery, the researches of Mr. R.R. Brown on the subject, and, last but not least, the humble additions made by the present writer.

In discussing the reconstruction of the road following the revision of its charter, assented to on 10th November, 1852, (16 Vic., Cap. 50), whereby it was rebuilt as a locomotive railway Dr. Nicholls states, "In accordance with the law of 1851, the line was doubtless broad gauge." This statement is a little misleading owing to some confusion as to what actually happened in 1851 over the gauge question. Actually there was no law of 1851 which categorically specified the gauge to be used by Provincial railways. Since the line's 1852 Act did not specify the gauge, and in the absence of a ruling by the Railway Commissioners on the subject, conceivably the company could have used any gauge it wished. Thus, in ascertaining the gauge actually used, we must rely on evidence stronger than a hitherto misunderstood law of 1851.

There are three other pieces of evidence which support the contention that the line was broad gauge, one of which Dr. Nicholls mentions later in his article. He says, "It is interesting to note that the last cars of the G.W.R. to be converted from broad- to narrow-gauge were some nineteen that had been reserved in 1871 for use on the Erie & Niagara."

Secondly, the 1852 Act of the company empowered them to cross and connect with any other railway. Since the G.W.R. was as yet the only other nearby railway, it is safe to assume that it was with this railway that the Erie and Ontario would connect. In the interests of interchange, then, the E.&O. would adopt the same gauge of the G.W.R. at that time.

Finally, the Erie and Niagara Ry. Act of 1863 (27 Vic., Cap. 59), which railway became the successor to the Erie and Ontario, empowered the company, in Sec. 29 of the Act, "to lay down a six foot gauge track besides the usual five feet six inches track of this Province" and the Erie and Atlantic and Great Western Railroads of the United States were given running rights over the Erie and Niagara. It is therefore safe to assume that in 1852 the Erie and Ontario was reconstructed to the Provincial gauge.

After discovery of the Keefer Report in 1940, Mr. R.R. Brown analysed its contents and published the results in bulletin

56 of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society under the title Early Canadian Rolling Stock. In this article, under 'Locomotives' for the Erie and Ontario Railroad, he listed:

'Niagara' -- (I) 4-4-0 16 x 20 60" 18 tons.
Amoskeag 1854.

"Probably this was the 'Clifton', Amoskeag No. 169, built for Zimmerman and Balch.....
..This locomotive was disposed of sometime early in 1860 and was replaced, perhaps, temporarily, by the following leased engine. There is no record of where the second one came from.

'Niagara' -- (O) 4-4-0 18 x 20 66" 30 tons.
Amoskeag 1854.

Referring back to the 1859 Keefer Report, we find the following entry in Appendix No. 71 concerning the locomotive stock of the Erie and Ontario Railroad:

No. 1, 'Niagara' (I) 4-4-0(?) 60" 16 x 20 18 tons.
Flues - 155, 10' long, 1-3/4" dia.
Tender Capy. 1800 gals. 12 tons loaded. Combined weight of engine and tender loaded - 30 tons.
Built Amoskeag Works, Manchester, N.H. First put into use 1855.

Mr. Brown apparently equated the above engine with his first 'Niagara'; and I think he was right in so doing. I don't think he is right, however, in assuming that this engine was the 'Clifton', Amoskeag No. 169, for reasons which I will discuss later. Then, assuming that this is not the 'Clifton' but another locomotive similar to it, it would seem reasonable that the railway received in 1855 a locomotive, either new from Amoskeag or second-hand from somewhere, to replace that owned by the contractor. It is possible that a check with the surviving Amoskeag records may reveal something about this 'Niagara'.

If, then, we do not accept Mr. Brown's premise that the 'Clifton' was the 'Niagara' or vice-versa, then where did the 'Clifton' come from and where did she go to? It is ironic that when I was doing research on the Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton Railway, I came across another 'Clifton'. Mr. A.A. Merrilees suggested to me the possibility that the two 'Cliftons' might very well be the same locomotive, and I was thereupon prompted to look further into the matter.

Referring again to Mr. Brown's article in Bulletin No. 56, there is the following entry under Port Hope, Lindsay, and Beaverton Railway:

P.H., L. & B. No. 3 'Clifton', (I) 4-4-0 15 x 20 60"
22 tons Manchester, 4-1858.

The corresponding entry in the Keefer Report is as follows:

P.H.L. & B. No. 3 'Clifton', (I) 4-4-0(?) 16 x 20 60"
Flues - 154, 10'6" long 1-3/4" dia. Wt. of engine 22 tons. Tender capy 1400 gals., wt. loaded 12 tons. Built Manchester, N.H.. Put into service April 1858.

For some reason or other, in transposition from the Keefer Report to the article in Bulletin No. 56, the cylinder diameter of this locomotive shrank one inch. Apparently it did not occur to Mr. Brown that this locomotive might be the 'Clifton' referred to in respect to the Erie and Ontario Railroad; or, if it had, he must have dismissed the idea from his mind. The differences between Brown's version above and the Keefer version are significant. Keefer's "Built Manchester, N.H., put into service April 1858" becomes Brown's "built by Manchester (Locomotive Works), 1858." These assumptions may not necessarily follow. In fact, I think Mr. Brown confused the 'Niagara' and the 'Clifton' -- the 'Niagara' being the second and permanent locomotive of the Erie and Ontario, and the 'Clifton' being Amoskeag No. 169, built in 1854 for Zimmerman and Balch, contractors, which started service on the E. & O. and later ended up on the Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton. The bases for this assumption are as follows:

Keefer, by saying, "Built Manchester, N.H.," could have meant "Built in Manchester, N.H., -- not necessarily by the Manchester Locomotive Works. Also, the reference "put into service April, 1858" could refer to when the engine started service on the railway -- not to when the locomotive itself was put in service. The fact that there were two locomotive building firms in Manchester, N.H., at that time (Amoskeag and Manchester Locomotive Works) was and still is a source of confusion. It is necessary that in reading Keefer one does not surmise from his Report anything more than what he actually says -- unless of course there is other conclusive supporting evidence.

This locomotive entered service on the P.H.L.&B. in April, 1858, four months after the opening, on 30th December, 1857, of the railway between Port Hope and Lindsay. Thus, the locomotive was either elsewhere, or at least not available to the railway for use. Samuel Zimmerman was the contractor for the G.W.R., the P.H.L.&B., and also for the reconstruction of the Erie and Ontario. It is quite conceivable that after the E.&O. had received its permanent locomotive, -- the 'Niagara', Zimmerman might have used his own locomotive -- the 'Clifton' -- as a construction engine on the P.H.L.&B.. Zimmerman died on March 12th, 1857, in the Desjardins bridge collapse; and it is possible that his executors sold the 'Clifton' to the P.H.L.&B.. It is also possible that the 'Clifton' found employ in other locations before ending up on the P.H.L.&B.. I hope that in my studies of the latter I will come across further evidence -- one way or the other -- on this matter. For the time being, however, here is where it stands.

There is, unfortunately, one further mystery to be discussed concerning the locomotives of the E. & O. Brown (but nobody else apparently) in his R. & L.H.S. article mentions two 'Niagaras' (Remember?) Where did he get the other one? The first 'Niagara' could hardly have been rebuilt to the second one; because the dimensions, even for those days, are too dissimilar. Amoskeag did not build a locomotive with the same or similar dimensions for either the G.W.R. or the G.T.R.. If the E.&O. leased it from somebody, it could hardly have been the G.W.R. or the G.T.R.; but who else had broad gauge locomotives answering this description built by Amoskeag? There is the possibility that this second 'Niagara' was the one supplied to the railway to replace the 'Clifton'. I don't think so; for the dates are too far apart, and in 1859 Keefer described both the 'Niagara' and the 'Clifton' as two separate engines, apparently by the same builder,

but with detail differences. Again, the surviving Amoskeag records may shed some light on this as well.

Apparently the road in its independent days was never prosperous, for 25 Vic., Cap. 32 of the Province of Canada, assented to on June 9th, 1862, tells an interesting story. This Act mentions in passing that the Town of Niagara(-on-the-Lake) had advanced money for the reconstruction of the road after 1852. This money was raised by municipal borrowing, which was guaranteed by the company with a first mortgage on the road. In view of the fact that neither interest nor principal on the mortgage was paid by the railroad, the Town of Niagara therefore applied for and received powers to sell the road at foreclosure sale. I daresay that the one person connected with the railway who ensured that his financial interests were adequately protected was the contractor -- Samuel Zimmerman, who doubtlessly suffered no financial loss whatsoever. The sale was consummated by Indenture dated 10th August, 1863. The purchaser was a William A. Thomson, of the Village of Fort Erie, who was one of the provisional Directors of the Canada Southern Railway.

Meanwhile the Fort Erie Railway had been incorporated by the Province of Canada on 10th June, 1857, (20 Vic., Cap. 151) with power to build from Fort Erie to Chippewa, to connect with the Erie and Ontario Railroad and the Port Dalhousie and Thorold (Welland) Railway, and to purchase, lease, or otherwise acquire from the E. & O. the line between Clifton (Niagara Falls) and Chippewa. By Act of 15th October, 1863, (27 Vic., Cap. 59) this Company was empowered to change its name to Erie and Niagara Railway Company and to purchase the Erie and Ontario from Mr. Thomson, whereby the E. & O. was to be merged with the E. & N.. The new company also had powers, subject to the laws of the State of New York, to build from opposite their wharf in Fort Erie to Exchange Street, Buffalo, a distance of some six miles. As I have said before, the company could lay a six-foot gauge track in addition to the normal five-feet-six-inches track for the benefit of the Erie and the Atlantic and Great Western Railroads. These powers were never exercised. The company was given two years; i.e., until 15th October, 1865, to complete their new works.

The date of opening of the section between Chippewa and Fort Erie has so far escaped detection; but in view of the above mentioned time limit, and in view of the fact that in April, 1865, the G.W.R. was to lease the line as from its completion in the Autumn, it seems most likely that the line was opened somehow by the 15th October, 1865. The Great Western Railway leased the line on a commission basis apparently until 1873, when the Canada Southern leased it.

In 1872, the Great Western, fearing that the Erie and Niagara's control by a hostile road might pose a threat to their exclusive use of the Suspension Bridge (which fear, as events proved, was well founded), made overtures to buy the road. Their offer of £75,000 (not £750,000 as A.W. Currie has it in his book, The Grand Trunk Railway of Canada, (U. of T. Press, 1957), p.203), was considered inadequate by the E. & N. bondholders; and the sale thereupon fell through.

cont'd on Page 17

THE ERIE and ONTARIO RAIL ROAD, continued

To wind up the story of the road in its broad gauge and independent days, we must mention the Act obtained from the Dominion of Canada on 23rd May, 1873, (36 Vic., Cap. 86). Sec. 2 of this Act enabled the Directors to determine the gauge of the line as they saw fit. Finally 38 Vic., Cap. 66 of 8th April, 1875 enabled the Canada Southern to absorb the Erie and Niagara. The stage was therefore set for the Canada Southern to use the E.&N. for its own purposes; and the future history of the road is tied up with the story of that line.