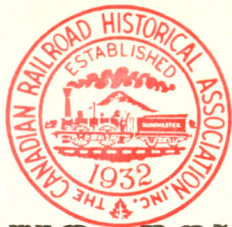


ST.L + A
A + ST.L.

Canadian Rail



NO. 261

OCTOBER 1973

ISLAND POND ALL CHANGE !

John Carboneau

Sandy Worthen

Some railway historians claim that Canada's first "Main Line" railway was the Grand Trunk from Montréal to Toronto, which was opened in 1856. The more intelligent know that there was already in existence - and in operation - a main line of railway almost as long and certainly several years older than the line west to Toronto.

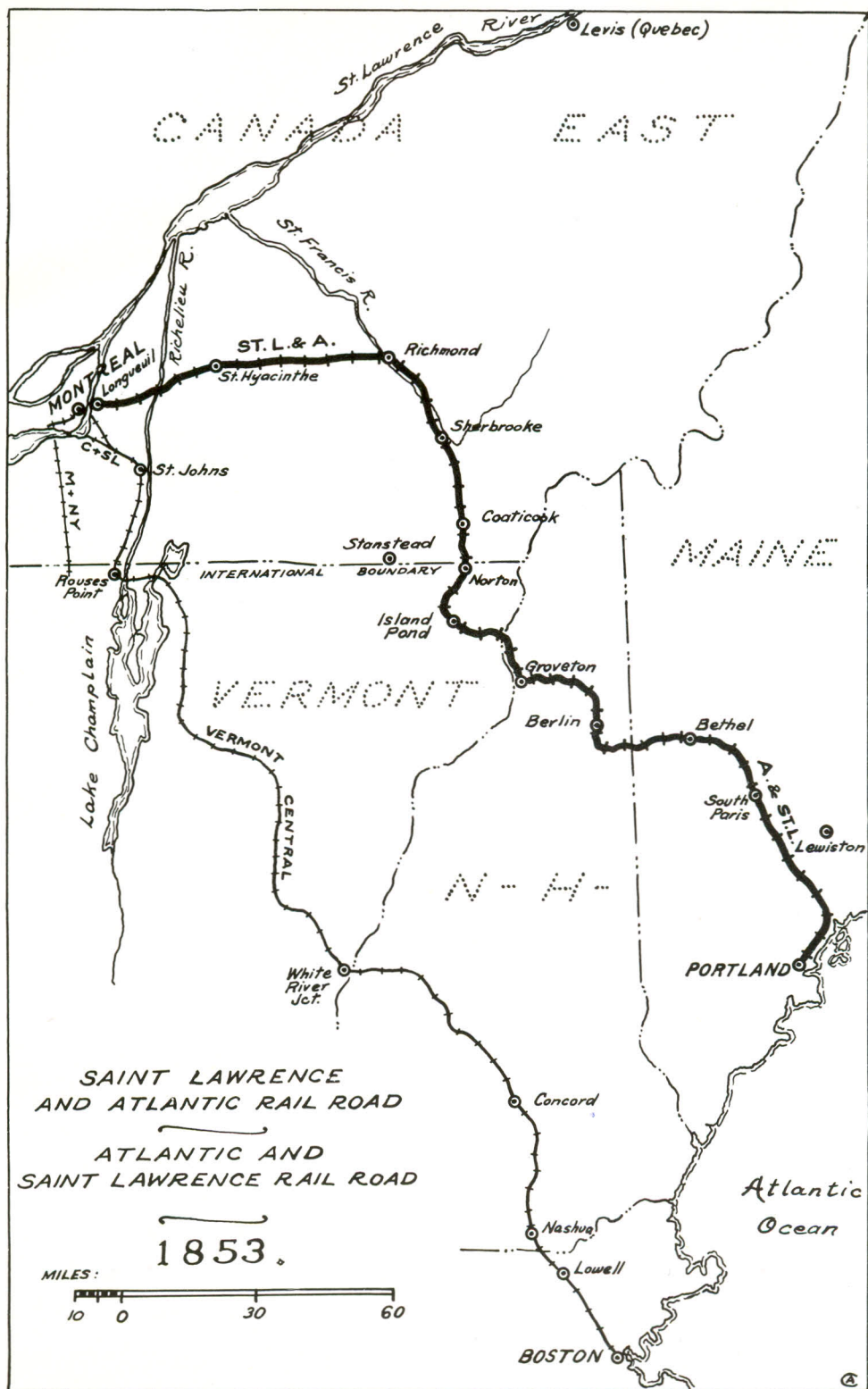
Moreover, it had the added distinction of being an "international" railway and its construction and completion have since been emulated by many other, similar, international cooperative ventures,

The original St. Lawrence and Atlantic-Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railway of 1853 was, as its name suggests, two halves of a corporate whole. Obviously, since the purpose of its construction was to join the ice-free Atlantic port of Portland, Maine, with the growing city of Montréal on the St. Lawrence River and the summertime, water-borne traffic to and from the Great Lakes, one-half of the railway was entirely useless without the other half.

It is therefore not surprising to find that when the company constructing the United States portion of the line fell on hard times in 1853 and could not find the money to complete the railway from Island Pond, Vermont, 15 miles northward to the International Boundary, the Canadian company was able to arrange the necessary legal and financial details to build this distance for its United States twin. Surely this was the very first of an innumerable series of enterprises undertaken jointly by Canadian and United States' enterprises.

In the nearly 120 years since the Atlantic & St. Lawrence - St. Lawrence and Atlantic has been in operation, first under lease to the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada and later under the ownership of Canadian National Railway Company, the location of the right-of-way has changed very little. The railway facilities in the towns and cities along its route have also remained much the same, although the divisional points have been relocated, with consequent modification of essential structures, and rural stations have been demolished with the advent of "customer service centres". Sherbrooke, Québec, was once a large and important divisional point in the 1850s and '60s, but the shop and enginehouse, the latter an enclosed "Turkish mosque" type with indoor turntable, were demolished when the divisional point was relocated to Richmond, Québec, on June 9, 1872.

For a hundred years, Island Pond, Vermont, almost midway on the railway between Montréal and Portland, was the principle divisional point. For the first twenty years of the railway's history, passenger and freight trains in both directions terminated at this Ver-



mont town. For the passenger, it was an overnight stop, with the onward train to Portland or Montréal departing early the following morning. Freight trains were generally reclassified in the large freight yard in front and to the south of the station. The formalities, for both passengers and freight, associated with the crossing of the International Boundary, were discharged at Island Pond.

In the winter of 1856, only three short years after the opening of the railway, the town of Island Pond suffered a disastrous fire which destroyed half-a-dozen large buildings and some smaller ones. However, a history of the town implies that at least one of the existing large buildings survived the holocaust. This was the pretentious brick railway station of the Grand Trunk Railway, which accommodated in addition to the railway's offices, the passengers, the express and the representatives of the United States Customs and Immigration Department. This building was to exemplify the stature of the Railway Company in the community until the turn of the century.

About 1900, if one can judge from the railway buildings remaining along today's Montréal-Portland main line, the Grand Trunk embarked on a programme of renewal of structures, many of which dated back to the early years of the railway. New stations were built at such important places as St-Hyacinthe, Richmond and Sherbrooke, Québec, Island Pond, Vermont, Groveton, New Hampshire and Portland, Maine. The historic stopping-place at Gorham, New Hampshire, gateway to the White Mountains since 1853, was extensively rebuilt.

Not the least of these new structures was that planned and constructed at Island Pond. It was an important part of the new facilities which were centralized at this point in 1900. The car-repair shops were relocated here, partly from Richmond, Québec and partly from Gorham, N.H. The railway purchased land to the value of \$60,000 east and south of the town along the right-of-way, including a portion of Back Pond, a small inlet of the main lake. A 40-stall round-house was contemplated. The new repair shops employed three to four hundred men and a 50% increase in the town's population was anticipated. A small hill at the northern edge of the property was used to fill in a portion of Back Pond. The long line of old freight sheds between the railway and the town's main street were demolished. The freight yards, which formerly had a capacity of some 700 cars, were greatly enlarged to accommodate 3,000 cars.

Construction of the new station began late in 1900 and was completed in 1904. It was a model of modern station design. On the main floor, there was a spacious ladies' waiting room and a similar large room for gentlemen. The former was later converted to the agent's and operator's office, while the latter was modified to serve as a waiting room for both the fair and the dominant sex, when society began to tolerate "mingling". Representatives of the United States Customs and Immigration Department were on duty at Island Pond from the beginning of rail transportation and the new station included a bonding room and office for their use. In addition, there was a baggage room, the yardmaster's office and the ubiquitous Railway Express Agency.

On the second floor of the new station was the office of the United States Collector of Customs, the general offices of the Customs and Excise Department, the Immigration offices, a detention room for women and, in the original design, the station agent's office.

The GTR Chief Dispatcher's office for Districts 1 and 2, Montréal to Richmond and Québec and Richmond to Island Pond, was located on the ground floor, with accommodation for four or five assistant dispatchers. In the late 1920s, the dispatching offices were transferred to Richmond and the vacated space thereafter became the bunkroom for Canadian train-crews whose passenger runs terminated at Island Pond.

The "attic" on the third floor, while rather small and not exactly suited to normal use, was reserved as a detention room for undesirable male persons, apprehended while effecting unauthorized or illegal entry into the United States. There is the usual story about two "undesirable" males who, being detained in the "attic", made their escape by tying together sheets and blankets from their beds and thereby lowering themselves from the top-floor window. The escape is said to have taken place in the winter and, once out of their snug attic retreat, the two desperados, exposed to the bitter winter cold, soon decided that it was better to return to the station and surrender themselves, so that they would be re-detained in their cosy top-floor cell, considering this a small sacrifice to that involved in facing the rigors of liberty in the icy northern Vermont weather.

The new (1904) station at Island Pond was constructed of brick with granite facing and was the most outstanding structure in the business centre of the town. The roof was of slates salvaged from the old enginehouse formerly located about one-quarter of a mile south, that had been razed in 1900-01 to make room for the expansion of yard facilities previously described.

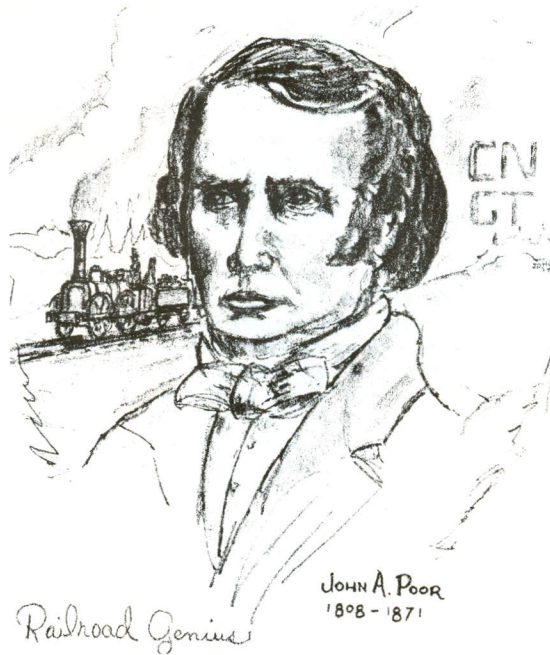
Today, more than 70 years later, Island Pond's railway station is still in good condition and very few of the "original" roof slates have had to be replaced.

From the earliest days of the railway in Island Pond, communications between the east and west sides of the town were complicated by the tracks. Passenger and freight trains frequently blocked the road and pedestrian crossings. Of course, the citizens could use one of two level crossings about half to three-quarters of a mile north of the station. While these crossings were an alternative for wheeled traffic, it was ridiculous to imagine that pedestrians would walk the additional mile if they could avoid it. They climbed over and under trains without giving it a second thought. The consequent hazard to public safety was worrisome to the GTR.

Accordingly, the railway company constructed a wooden footbridge on the north side of the station and, for many years, the younger citizens - and not a few of the older ones, too - watched the steady procession of long trains rumbling up and down the tracks beneath the footbridge. Most of the mothers in the town condemned the affair as a "dirty place". In that era of coal-burning steam locomotives, it was!

The rising popularity of the automobile created yet another problem, or perhaps just another addition to the chronic complication. Motorists demanded a more direct route from the south and east to the town's centre. The upper crossings just weren't a reasonable alternative. Continuing agitation finally obliged Canadian National, the town of Island Pond and the State of Vermont to construct jointly a lengthy and curious wooden viaduct over the tracks.

The viaduct was unique when it was built in 1904 and continued to be unique to the day it was demolished in 1973. While in the opin-



Railroad Genius

↑ THIS EXCELLENT CHARCOAL SKETCH OF JOHN A. POOR WAS DRAWN BY MR. J.D. Henry for the MICHIGAN RAILFAN of the Michigan Railroad Club, Detroit, Michigan, and is reproduced here with the permission of the Editor-Emeritus, Mr. John "Fred" Gibson, to whom our thanks are expressed.

ion of some, it did not enhance the town's appearance, it performed what others described as a very useful service. In fact, it joined the eastern and southern portions of the town with its business centre, carrying the traffic over the railway yard. It was a series of wooden spans - "a carriage way 24 feet wide, with a footwalk on one side six feet wide" - erected and maintained by the railway for a term of 99 years as a vehicular overpass. The five-span structure, upon reaching the west side of the railway tracks, accomplished a right-angled turn north and descended to the level, discharging its traffic in front of the station on the square.

A width of 24 feet was, in the past decade, just about enough for two automobiles and then it was a tight fit. In order to save wear and tear on the planks, the bridge floor was faced with four metal strips, supposedly placed at a distance apart appropriate to the wheels of a car. Towards the end of its existence, these metal strips became loose, as did the floor-planks and the resulting clatter was startling and ominous. But the bridge still stood until the authorities decided that the risks to users was of greater importance than its anachronistic appearance.

The Canadian National Railways' station at Island Pond became a rather notable structure with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which came into force on January 1, 1920. All at once, a very large proportion of the population of the United States found that they could no longer purchase or possess alcohol or alcoholic beverages except, of course, for medicinal purposes. This entailed a doctor's prescription. It was not very long thereafter before some clever entrepreneurs began to "import" various forms of alcohol from foreign countries, such as Cuba and Canada, where restrictions on the sale and possession of alcohol did not apply.



▲ CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION AT ST-HYACINTHE, Québec, was built about 1899 by the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada. It is of brick construction and is in good condition. In design, it resembles other CN stations at Richmond and Sherbrooke, Québec. Ken Goslett took this photo on 4 February, 1973.

But the U.S. authorities charged with the responsibility of preventing unlawful importations were not idle. Indeed, before long it was to be expected that the United States Customs authorities at Island Pond would find some quantities of whiskey (Fr.Gael.: uisge-beatha: water of life) on the persons and in the baggage of travelers entering the U.S. from Canada, by trains of the Canadian National Railway. The various containers of spirituous preparations were immediately seized - according to law - and were placed in the "bonded warehouse", which was a room in the station. And the room was firmly locked - and double-locked!

But what man can devise, he can also frustrate and, before long, a railway employee - so it was said - had managed to make a duplicate key to the wonderful storeroom. But since the quantity of forbidden liquid did not seem to diminish, no one was the wiser.

For a few weeks, the station at Island Pond became a paradise for the tipplers. The authorities were quite unable to explain this situation or to discover the source of the "elixir vitae", since the contents of all of the containers in the bonded warehouse apparently remained undisturbed.

Periodically, the firmly-corked bottles and other containers were duly taken to the town dump, under guard, where they were officially destroyed and their destruction duly witnessed. No doubt the odour pervading the town dump effectively masked the odour of the contents of the containers.

But while rosy cheeks, red noses and happiness were commonplace, Mother Nature finally outwitted the gay deceivers! The wonderful storeroom was, alas, not heated and so, the first time that the mercury dropped below zero, every one of the darned whisky-bottles broke and the contents seeped out. It was light brown and wet, but it sure didn't smell like whisky! It smelled like tea! And, in fact, that is exactly what it was. The pilferers had been opening the containers and replacing the whisky with cold tea - of which there was plenty thereabouts.

The stratagem was immediately detected. The days of copious quantities of free booze were over and the rosy cheeks and red noses now were the result of the frosty winter weather. Happiness was a sometimes thing!



Grand Trunk Railway Station at Island Pond, Vt.
(1971)

Station agents at Island Pond have been remarkably few, over the years. From the year of Canada's Confederation (1867) until the end of the Second World War, only two Company agents were employed. Mr. John Reeve assumed the duties of Company agent in the old station in '67 and, when he retired, Mr. William A. Gleeson succeeded to the position. Mr. Gleeson himself retired in 1945. As of that time, he and Mr. Reeve had shared an incumbency of 78 of the 92 years that a station at Island Pond had been in operation.

Mr. Gleeson, not content to sit on his front porch with his feet up, opened a customs brokerage office in the station and pursued this activity for a time. Mr. Reeve and Mr. Gleeson are still well remembered in Island Pond, having been in and around the present and former stations for more than three-quarters of a century - a remarkable record.

From time to time, the Customs and Immigration Service of Canada had an office in the station, but since the termination of passenger service and the closing of the United States Customs and Immigration Service in the same building, the east end of the structure now houses the railway's Maintenance-of-Way offices and some of their equipment. The large coaling-stage, the freight car repair shops and the multiple-stall roundhouse are now entirely demolished and the remaining local railway operations are centralized in the station.

In August 1968, an historic marker was raised by the State of Vermont in the small square in front of the station at Island Pond, to commemorate the accomplishment of John Arthur Poor of Portland, Maine, in his tenacious and ultimately successful attempt to promote the construction of a railway from Portland, Maine to Montréal, Québec (see CANADIAN RAIL, No. 211, June 196^o). In 1969, Canadian National Railways, owner of this small park, donated it to the town of Island Pond.

The clattery wooden viaduct on the south side of the station was "officially" closed on April 23 1973 and was thereafter demolished within two weeks. A concrete bridge, much smaller, will replace the wooden viaduct and was nearing completion in the fall of the same year.

Island Pond's railway station is now almost 70 years old and is still as solid as the day it was built. Moreover, it is one of the finest buildings in the Town. Hopefully, when the railway ceases to consider the station as essential to its operations, the Town will be able to acquire it for other important purposes.

Even in the hustle and bustle of the "Swinging Seventies", this historic New England landmark can still be the place for the time-honoured pause in the journey along "The Road to the Sea".

Postscript

The tall smokestack of the former Grand Trunk Railway's shops at Island Pond was brought crashing down by a dynamite charge, planned at its base, on April 13, 1973. Simultaneously, the former engine roundhouse, unused for almost a decade, began to be demolished.

On April 23, nearly 100 persons gathered at the west end of Island Pond's unique wooden pedestrian and vehicular viaduct over the Grand Trunk tracks, to bid the structure a fond farewell. After 69 years in service, the bridge was closed at 09:00 hours, after a last automobile, driven by Chairman of the Board of Selectmen Mr. Joseph A. Wade, had made the crossing.

John Carbonneau.