



Newsletter

MEMORIAL - ISLAND BOND
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MEMORIAL

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Island Pond, Vermont, in the northeast corner of the state, is Mile 0.0 on CN Rail's Sherbrooke Subdivision and Mile 149.5 on Grand Trunk Corporation's Berlin (New Hampshire) Sub. It is noteworthy for being the town where, in midsummer 1853, the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad Co. of Montreal, having built the last 15.8 miles from the International Boundary at Stanhope, Quebec/Norton Mills, Vermont, made an end-on connection with its United States counterpart, the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad Co., to form an international railway.

More than a century and a quarter later, on Aug. 2, 1986, at a gathering in the park in front of CN's station in Island Pond, a granite marker, given in memory of the Stafford family, was unveiled and dedicated to commemorate this accomplishment. The inscription on the marker reads:

"1,366 feet west of this marker on the railway right-of-way the Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railroad from Portland, Maine was linked to the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railway from Montreal, Quebec in July 1853. This linking formed the first International Railway in North America, the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada. This historic marker is a gift in memory of the Stafford family. Erected by the Island Pond Historical Society and dedicated August 1986."

The Town of Island Pond was represented at the ceremony by Mr. William Shepeluk; Mr. Paul King represented the Canadian National Railway Co. Messrs. Ed Quinn and Francis Manning spoke on behalf of the Island Pond Historical Society. Also present was Mr. Norman Grearson, whose Barre, Vermont company donated the monument to the Town. Mr. Quinn was chairman of the project.

The distance of 1,366 feet from the marker leads to the west switch of the former extensive freight yard in Island Pond. Over the years, it has been contended that this was the point where the railway builders made the end-on connection between the two railways. The Atlantic & St. Lawrence was forced to stop construction here; it had run out of money! Alexander (later Sir Alexander) T. Galt of the St.L.&A. financed personally the construction of this segment.

A communication received from Mr. John Carbonneau, President Emeritus, Island Pond Historical Society, has thrown light upon the 1366-foot distance inscribed on the marker. Mr. Carbonneau has worked for 20 years to establish the importance of Island Pond as an international railway centre.

He describes how the location of the end-on junction between the St. Lawrence & Atlantic/Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railroads was determined. Explanatory insertions, indicated by parentheses, have been added by this reporter: "Jeff Holt (Mr. Jeff Holt of Montreal, author of the soon-to-be-published book on the Grand Trunk Railway in New England) and I spent a day in the National (Public) Archives of Canada and I obtained a copy of an 1873 map giving the exact distances from the (international) border to the spot at the west end of the Island Pond yard where the Canadian (built) segment ended. This location was reinforced by many old-timers who said (that) the Canadian end of (the) line ended at (the) west end of the yard. Bill Gleason, station agent for 50 years up to the late 1950s, was one who confirmed this data.

Further, as a child attending the Convent (school) nearby, I played with a classmate who lived just north of a storage track (siding) near this spot and there was an iron marker which indicated where (the) American section began and the Canadian section of track ended. This was in the early thirties and when I began researching (this) link in 1966, it was gone. It was just a plain iron post with no inscriptions.

About 10 years ago, Paul King, the CNR man in charge of tracks on the New England lines, one day let me ride with him to Norton (Norton Mills, VT., on the US/Canada border) on his section-man's track motor car and we actually measured the distance, using the (1873) map as a guide.

When we checked out the possible sites for the (1986) granite marker, the area (in Island Pond) on Railroad Street or the (CN/GT) right-of-way was not conducive for the public to view it, so we decided to place it near the John Poor marker (erected by the Vermont Board of Historic Sites in 1968) and again Paul King measured the distance from the end of (the) Canadian segment to the (town) square; hence the actual footage ("1,366 feet west of this marker...")."

But the joining of the two railways hardly created the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada, which had been chartered previously on Nov. 10, 1852. (1)

Nor was it the first international railway between Canada and the United States, which honour must belong properly to the Champlain and St. Lawrence Rail Road, Canada's first public railway. (2). Its extension from St. Johns (Saint-Jean sur Richelieu), Quebec to Rouses Point, New York and a connection with the Northern Railroad (of New York) and the Vermont and Canada (Vermont Central Railroad) was opened for traffic on Sept. 4, 1851. (3) With the completion of the pontoon bridge over the Richelieu River at Rouses Point, first used in January 1852 (4), there was a continuous line of railway from Longueuil, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River opposite Montreal, to Boston, Massachusetts, and tidewater.

Over the years, railway activity at Island Pond has diminished. Passenger train service between Montreal and Portland was discontinued in September 1960, although a summertime service lasted until 1966. Thereafter, only the motive power for the Montreal-Sherbrooke-Coaticook passenger train was serviced here. When CNR "Railiners" (RDCs) terminated at Sherbrooke and locomotives were assigned to the Portland freights on a run-through basis, the roundhouse, backshops, coaling facilities and much of the freight yard were demolished and removed. Today, the imposing structure which once was the Grand Trunk's passenger station in Island Pond is in good condition, apparently, and is used as a bunkroom and for crew lockers. The position of operator was abolished on Sept. 5, 1986. Now, since freight crews are called from Berlin, N.H.,

51.6 miles further south, the fate of this landmark building is somewhat uncertain.

Additional information on the date of incorporation of the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada and the nature and date of the first crossing of the Canada/United States border by a railway is being sought.

Notes: 1. "Canadian National Railways", Vol. 1, p. 87, G.R. Stevens (1960) says Nov. 10, 1852.

CNR official records give July 1, 1853 as the date of incorporation.

2. C. Loudon Terroux, Vice-President, Canadian Railroad Historical Association, Montreal, at a meeting in 1945.

3. O.S.A. Lavallee: personal communication.

4. "The Rutland Road", Jim Shaughnessy (1964) (r1981), p. 58.