

ONTARIO WEST SHORE RAILWAY — by Art Clowes

(UCRS Newsletter #513 July 1992)

During a number of the various trips I have made through the Bruce Peninsula this year, the subject of the ill-fated Ontario West Shore Railway project has surfaced. While I haven't got that far into the details on this venture, on the surface it appears like the construction efforts would make great material for a comedy movie. More on that later, but first to report that at least the abutments for one small bridge and some roadbed still exist just on the southern outskirts of the village of Sheppardton.

Travelling north on Highway 21 there is an S-curve just as you approach the Colborne-Ashfield Town Line Road. There is a short gravel road connection on the east side of Highway 21, between it and the Town Line Road. The roadbed and concrete abutments are on the east side of this short connecting road. Nothing great, but it's interesting to compare their design features to those of highways and heavyweight steam railways.

One of the principal promoters of the Ontario West Shore Railway was a Mr. J. W. Moyes of Toronto. Mr. Moyes had been previously involved with the construction of the Metropolitan radial line in Toronto. While the OWSR project made some progress, it could not be compared with the Metropolitan. It is a wonder that the OWSR got as far as it did, when reviewing some of the blunders.

Stories are told of the OWSR tracks being systematically tom up and abutments smashed during the night. Progress was slow at times, as the day's work was often destroyed at night. At one point, some of the railway's workers decided they had the remedy to the problem. The plan was hatched during an evening at Glazier's Hotel in Sheppard ton. It was decided that these workers would spend the remainder of the night in a barn behind the hotel, expecting that they would hear any vandals at work and be able to intervene. Perhaps the culprits were sitting near the workers in the hotel, as there was no vandalism that night.

Local farmers took advantage of working for the contractors.

Other workers, who were a considerable distance from home, boarded with local farmers. However, one group of enterprising workers built a mobile bunkhouse. It was a caboose-like structure on wheels which could be moved as the construction progressed. It had cooking facilities that could provide hot meals not only for the nine workers that slept there, but also extra meals that could be sold to other workers.

Then there is the story about the construction of the trestle over the Nine River near Port Albert. This structure was large enough to require wooden piles to be driven for its foundation. Preliminary work was done, including cutting down the river embankments in order to keep the trestle as small as possible. The pile driver was being moved to the site on a flatcar pushed by a small construction engine. A temporary track was constructed down the slope of the river bank and it was planned to tie the pile driver to the engine and, with a man on the machine, to operate its brakes and with the brakes and the power of the construction engine it was expected that the machine could slowly and safely be let down the incline.

The operation was started and - you guessed it - the cable broke! The brakeman on the pile driver leapt for his life. The uncontrolled pile driver accelerated down the track, shot across the river and crashed into a barn on the other side of the hill. No one was injured and with some work the pile driver was finally put into working position. The bridge was finally completed and track-laying resumed northward.

A few days after the track-laying was resumed, Mr. Moyes, along with various other company officials, did a line inspection using the construction engine. It was later revealed that the officials had received a few extra thrills on the Nine River trestle. It seems that as the engine had started down the grade onto the trestle, the intention of the engineer was to stop part way across, since tracks were not completely laid up the grade on the other side. However, the engineer had forgotten that the track-laying gang had put some grease on the rails to facilitate their removal from the flat cars. Some of this grease had, of course, remained on the rails. The result was that the locomotive wheels locked and slid when the brakeman tried to stop the train. The engine slid along the tracks down the incline, across the trestle, and approached the section on the opposite upward incline where tracks had not yet been laid. Fortunately for the passengers, the incline on the north side of the trestle was steep enough to slow down and let the locomotive stop before it ran out of track.

The small construction locomotive used on the OWSR was numbered 999. It pulled two flat cars in addition to its tender back and forth along the line during construction. Since the line did not have

any wyes or switches the train had to back into Goderich from the work sites.

The track on the OWSR was eventually laid from Goderich to Kintail. The train not only travelled this 14 or 15 miles for construction, but it made a number of revenue trips. It carried at least a few loads of grain to Goderich as well as occasionally hauling coal northward. One Ashfield Township resident who lived along the line had the cement for the concrete for his barn transported from Goderich by the OWSR train.

An evening pastime for the children along the OWSR was to borrow the workers' hand-powered jiggers and pump them up and down the line.

To make a long story short, construction of the OWSR ended in scandal when all of the \$385,000 raised for construction had been spent, but records could only be found to account for \$228,000. According to *The Intercity Electric Railway Industry in Canada*, by John F. Due, Mr. Moyes refused to co-operate with the investigation by the Ontario Railway and Municipal Board, and was last seen at Scotia Junction, heading for Algonquin Park to evade arrest. Many questions remained, but could some of the construction blunders have been a contributing factor?

Corporate Data from A Statutory History of the Steam and electric Railways of Canada 1836-1937
Department of Transport, Compiled by Robert Dorman

1902 – Incorporation of the Huron, Bruce & Grey Electric Railway to build an electric railway from Town of Goderich, southerly through the townships of Goderich, Stanley, Hay and Stephen, to the boundary line between Huron and Middlesex Counties; and from the Town of Goderich northerly to Owen Sound, with branches to ... etc etc

1903 – Name changed to Ontario West Shore Electric Railway Co.

1909 – Name changed to Ontario West Shore Railway Co.

1913 – Property, rights etc of the Ontario West Shore Railway Co. vested in Thos. Stothers as Trustee for Municipalities which guaranteed the bonds of the railway company.

1919 – Cites sale, by Trustee, of assets of the above railway company; ..., etc etc.

Below:

Article on the Ontario West Shore Railway:

Huron Historical Notes 1993 Vol. XXIX,

Published by the Huron County Historical Society.

Ontario West Shore Railway

This has-been railway had a very short life span for the president of the company and some of his close associates went off with the funds. This railway was to have run from Goderich to Kincardine along the Saugeen Line which was later named the Bluewater Highway and is now Highway 21. The most interesting aspect of this railway was that it was to be powered by electricity which was to be supplied to the train through an overhead cable making it similar in operation to the present day street car.

The fact that no one completely understood the source of the power in 1905 is demonstrated by an anecdote recalled by a local resident. The local residents were not fools and knowing the snow problem in the winter asked the promoters how the railway intended to operate during this season. They were told that since the mode of power was electricity which produced heat, the train in passing over the snow would melt the snow that had accumulated.

It must be remembered that travel facilities were extremely limited and the promise of a railway with frequent service was enticing. As well, the trains were to run often enough to transport children to and from school with special rates being offered to students. Around 1905-1906, Ashfield council received a petition signed by 54 freeholders in the western division requesting that the council guarantee the bonds of the Ontario West Shore.

ELECTRIC RAILWAY TO THE AMOUNT OF \$125,000

By 1908, the company under the presidency of John W. Moyes had managed to procure guarantees for \$400,000 of their bonds from Goderich, Ashfield, Huron and Kincardine. The proposed route of the railway involved building through Colborne Twp., but no bonds were ever guaranteed by them. Ironically it was the only township not to want the railroad but was the only one to have the tracks completely laid through it. Apparently residents were less than enthusiastic about the railway being situated along their roads. Stories are told of the tracks being systematically torn up and abutments smashed during the night. As the railway company had planned to lay tracks on the road, residents said that trains were a hazard to

traffic. Also, the people said it would be impossible to see the southbound trains at Dunlop; therefore the trains going south were required to stop at the corner and sound a bell before proceeding.

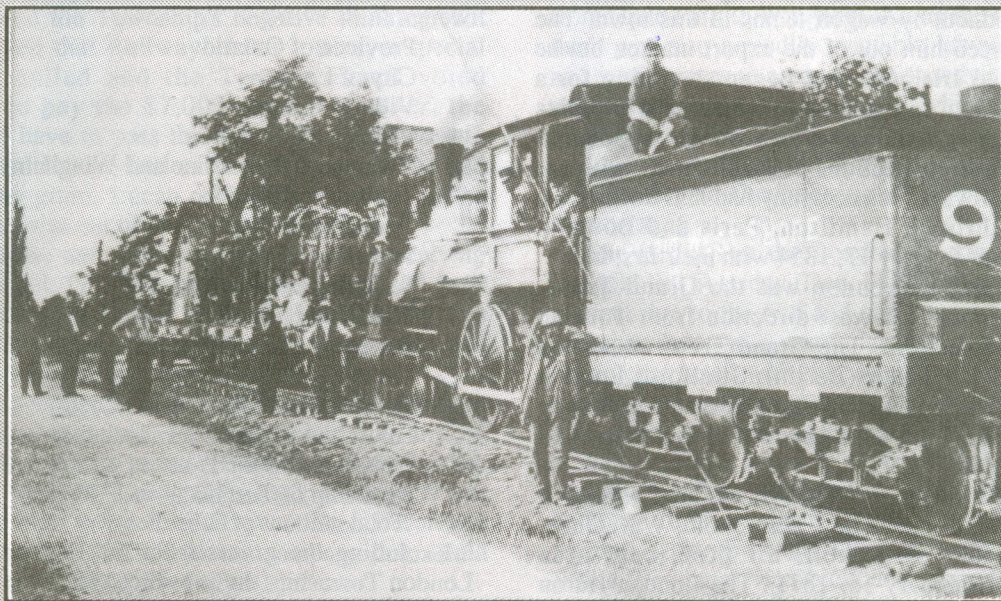
The railway started in 1908 and continued until the fall of 1911. A man and his team were paid \$3.50 per day. A trestle near Port Albert was built over the Nine Mile River and the hills cut to decrease the incline. A spur was to be built into the village of Port Albert. However, the line was only built as far as Kintail. Engine No. 999 pulled two flat cars in addition to its tender. Cargoes of grain were taken to Goderich and on the return trip coal and even a load of cement were carried. A less glorious means of transportation along the track was provided by jiggers used by the men to move between the work sites. They also provided illicit entertainment in the evening for local children who pumped them up and down the line.

NO ENTRIES IN THE LEDGER

By January 1912 the municipalities' worst fears were confirmed when they learned after a hearing that Moyes had made no entries in the company's ledger books for the years 1909, 1910 and 1911 when most of the expenditures for construction had taken place. It was also learned that Moyes had owned the Huron Construction Company which was contracted to build the railroad – a contravention of the Railway Act. Another report stated that Moyes had opened eight bank accounts, five in Toronto and three in Goderich. The findings from the hearings were that John W. Moyes had organized the railway company on fraudulent grounds.

In the years 1912 to 1938, \$520,000 in interest had been paid by the municipalities. When added to the principal of \$400,000 a total cost of \$920,000 resulted. It's an understatement to say that this was a considerable outlay for a railway that was never completed. For Ashfield to recoup \$6,250 each year, a special levy was added to the taxes of those in the Western division, called the Railway Tax, which was paid off in the early 1940s. In 1943 Ashfield Council agreed to accept \$100 per acre for the right-of-way of the railway when Highway No. 21 was being widened.

– By Marion Zinn, *The Village Square*, August 1980.



West Shore Railway at neighbouring Kingsbridge, Ashfield Township.

– Reprint of photo with permission Colborne Township