The Massawippi Valley Railway, and its lease to the Connecticut & Passumpsic Rivers RR – by Carl Riff

The Massawappi Valley Railway Company was chartered in 1862 to provide a northern connection between the Connecticut and Passumpsic Rivers Railroad and the Grand Trunk. In 1869 work commenced on grading the line. At the same time the Massawippi Valley entered into an agreement with the Passumpsic to lease the railway for 999 years provided trains ran by July 1, 1870. The Massawippi raised money in Canada from various towns along the proposed route - and from the Passumpsic itself.

July 1, 1870 saw both the formal opening of the Massawippi Valley Railway, and the lease to the Passumpsic for 999 years. The railway ran from the Passumpsic connection at North Derby north along Massawappi Lake to Lennoxville, with a short spur that ran to the border town of Stanstead - Rock Island - Derbyline. Interchanges were made at Lennoxville with the broad gauge Grand Trunk. An express train ran at this time, leaving Lennoxville at 4:40 PM and arriving at White River Junction at 11:42 AM. The return train left White River Jct. at 8:20 PM and arrived at Lennoxville at 3:27 PM the next day.

It was in May of 1871 that the *Stanstead Journal* disclosed that the Passumpsic had decided to run trains into Sherbrooke over three miles of the GTR by dual gauge track into the Grand Trunk Station. This proposal aroused the ire of more than one Ascot Township resident, for several weeks later a letter of complaint was sent to the *Journal* editor . It recalled

> *"that only a few short years earlier when the railroad was soliciting funds that meetings were held in Ascot for the purpose of inducing the ratepayers to authorize the said municipality to take $40,000 of said stock without which, said road cannot be built. That at first only $25,000 was asked from Ascot but that subsequently the sum was increased to $40,000 on condition that the terminus should be at the village of Lennoxville."*

The third rail between Lennoxville and Sherbrooke was laid between July 1 and July 4, 1871. Delays due to protests and the dual-railing did not allow the Passumpsic to send its first train into Sherbrooke until November 1, 1871. Besides laying a third rail on the inside of the Grand Trunk tracks, two tracks on the north side of the GTR yards were dual-gauged. Two stalls in the round covered brick engine house were used by the Passumpsic. The annual rental was $1,750 plus track maintenance costs of $450. The engine house rental was $20,000 for a 99 year lease.

The dual rail system did not always work out, for according to the *Stanstead Journal* an

> *"unusual collision occurred in June 1873 between a Passumpsic freight train and the southbound passenger train of the broad gauge Grand Trunk. The latter overtook the former on that part of the line with a third rail and smashed up one passenger car attached to the rear of the freight train and injured a number of cars. The engine of the Grand Trunk was disabled."*

This was not the first wreck to occur on the Massawippi Valley. That event occurred in August 1871 when the southbound mail train derailed at Ayer's Flats after the tender of the engine crashed through a culvert. The engine that took the wrecked cars to the Passumpsic shops at Lydonville was itself involved in a collision with another train at Newport latter that day. The Passumpsic innovated the use of refrigerator cars in June 1873, as part of the Monday stock train that ran over the Passumpsic and the Boston, Concord & Montreal Railroads through to Boston.

The Passumpsic found that the connection with the Grand Trunk wasn't the prosperous venture it

should have been. The GTR preferred to route its traffic bound for Boston via its Portland connections rather than tum it over prematurely at Sherbrooke. The Passumpsic looked for its own Montreal connection, and to these ends, the Southeastern Railway came into the plan to play an important role.

The Southeastem Counties Junction Ry (later the Southeastern Railway) ran from the Stanstead, Shefford & Chambly RR (S.S.& C) at West Farnham to Richford, Vermont. The Passumpsic backed the Missisquoi and Clyde Rivers RR to connect Newport with the SER. Passumpsic notes were issued in 187l to build the Missisquoi & Clyde Rivers Railroad to fill the gaps, and the road opened shortly afterwards. The sum of $350,000 was advanced to the little road, and the Passumpsic held all the first mortgage bonds. In addition the Passumpsic lent some $60,000 to the Southeastern Railway which agreed to lease the Missisquoi & Clyde Rivers Railroad to enable the road to be opened to Newport sooner than expected.

The Southeastern Railway therefore made connection with the Passumpsic at Newport, Vermont and this provided a shorter route to Montreal than via Sherbrooke and the Grand Trunk.

The Southeastern made an arrangement with the Passumpsic whereby the SER would run their Montreal trains from the S.S. & C. Junction at West Farnham to Newport. Then their trains were to run north over the Passumpsic line to Stanstead (Beele) Junction and then to run over the short branch to Stanstead (Rock Island) Station. Stanstead-Rock Island was to become the eastern terminus of the Southeastern. The SER was to be given the exclusive use of the branch line between Stanstead Jct. and Stanstead, with both passenger and freight trains to Montreal using this route without a change of cars. The Passumpsic built a turntable, and the SER built an engine house at Rock Island in the fall of 1873.

Through train service between Rock Island and Montreal started running over this route via Newport December 15, I873. This arrangement was shortlived with the management of the two railroads falling into a disagreement. After six months of Southeastern trains running over the Massawippi Valley, they stopped running past Newport July 1, 1874, and instead settled to interchange with the Passumpsic at Newport. The Passumpsic began running a shuttle train on the Stanstead Branch from Stanstead to Newport.

In 1873 the International Railway, whose terminus was at Lennoxville, was given running rights over Passumpsic's dual gauge line to Sherbrooke. In the fall of I874 the Grand Trunk changed the gauge of its line from Broad Gauge to Standard Gauge, and the necessity of the dual gauge between Lennoxville and Sherbrooke was no longer required.

Through direct express trains ran between Montreal and Boston with the joint lease of the SER by the Passumpsic and the Boston, Concord & Montreal railways in April 1875. Problems arose with the Vermont Central portion of the route between St John's, Quebec and Montreal, forcing the Passumpsic to build their own entrance into Montreal. The Passumpsic and the Southeastern acquired the Montreal, Portland & Boston Railroad that ran from West Farnham to St Lambert, opposite Montreal. When the lease of the Missisquoi & Clyde River RR (that portion of the SER in Vermont) expired in 1876, it continued to be operated under a temporary contract.

Then in October 1877 when the Passumpsic lease of the SER expired, Colonel Foster, President of the latter road, entered into a dispute with the Passumpsic that the popular press described as a "Railroad War". Colonel Foster attempted to seize the SER and Missisquoi & Clyde Rivers Railroad. Track was tom up at North Troy, Vermont, and a northbound Passumpsic freight was seized at West Farnham. Tensions increased with SER trains seized in Vermont. Colonel Foster was arrested at Newport for the debt owed the Passumpsic. With the SER – Central Vermont Ry route severed, the Passumpsic retumed to routing express trains over the Massawippi Valley route to Sherbrooke. Talks were held with the Grand Trunk to extend Passumpsic running rights to Richmond where the GTR line connected with the Sherbrooke - Montreal route.

Eventually the Passumpsic took over the complete responsibility of the Southeastem and made arrangements whereby the SER was extended to Sorel, on the St. Lawrence; and it secured a direct line,

the Montreal, Portland & Boston, from West Farnham to Montreal.

The GTR engine house fire of 1882, besides forcing the Quebec Central to move to Newington, also forced the Passumpsic to build a new engine house in Sherbrooke.

George Baker describes the system of railways developed between Newport and Montreal

"cost the Passumpsic much money most of it lost. The Southeastern went bankrupt in 1882, and the Passumpsic ceased to operate it and the Montreal, Portland and Boston after its sale, while the Missisquoi & Clyde Rivers Railroad was foreclosed two years earlier to reappear as the Newport & Richford".

The Canadian Pacific Railway acquired both the Southeastern and the Newport & Richford Railways in 1883.

An extension was made to the Massawippi Valley Railroad in the summer of 1896, when a contract was awarded to M. M. McCarthy of Sherbrooke for an extension from Rock Island up the hill into the town of Stanstead. This was an extension of about one mile. The line left the old line, just before the Rock Island Station and engine house, climbed the hill to the new Stanstead station. Facilities included a small turntable for turning engines, and a single-stall engine house. The first train service commenced in November 1896. The old station and terminal at Rock Island - Derby Line were converted to a freight shed. A small shelter half way up the mile spur was also built from Linesboro to the Stanstead Granite Quarry. The Boston & Maine switched the quarry.

The operation of the two mile Stanstead spur has been interesting from the earliest days of the Passumpsic. The operation was officially called the "Stanstead and Derby Line" but local residents preferred "Pollywog" and "Shoofly". Its usual consist was an old locomotive and an ancient combination baggage passenger car. It ran on a frequent schedule between Stanstead and Beebe Junction, meeting all the trains between Newport and Sherbrooke, a couple daily trips to Newport and performed all local switching on both the Stanstead and Graniteville spurs.

Although the run was short, wrecks occurred on the Stanstead Branch. In 1893 the Stanstead train collided with a CPR freight train diverted to the B&M due to construction on the Pacific line, about two miles north of Newport. The CPR engine was wrecked.

In April 1899 the branch train derailed on the Martin Curve above Beebe Plain. The engine had been running tender first when the flange on the tender broke. The tender first fell on to the tracks and then twisted across the rails.

October 1900 saw another serious collision when B&M light engine 89 ran into the Stanstead Branch train at Lineboro.

A number of new structures were built around the tum of the century by the Boston & Maine. These included new stations at North Derby and Newport after fires destroyed them in April 1901 and January 1902 respectively. A new turntable and a two stall engine house were built at Sherbrooke.

March 15, 1904, a northbound Boston and Maine freight train that was running over the Grand Trunk, just northwest of Lennoxville, met with a serious accident. B&M engine **754**, a Manchester Ten Wheeler, ran into the side of a CPR double-headed freight pulled by CP engines **991** and **997** at the diamond crossing where the mainlines of the Canadian Pacific and Grand Trunk crossed.

There were thoughts in 1910, when the B&M and Grand Trunk were at odds over the latter's plans to extend into New England, of terminating B&M trackage rights. Thoughts were expressed of moving the B&M terminal to the CPR yards. Nothing more was done to this proposal, for relations between the GTR and B&M improved.

The Boston & Maine in conjunction with the Canadian Pacific began running a milk car in 1897. The car ran from Stanstead to Lennoxville then to Montreal.

The only named train that ran over the Massawippi Valley exclusively was the "*Golden Gate*". The Boston & Maine inaugurated it in 1893 to North Hatley. This provided service to the rapidly expanding resort area along Massawippi Lake between Ayers Cliff and North Hatley.

The Boston & Maine dispatched many locomotives from White River Jct. through to Sherbrooke. The locomotives used by the Boston & Maine on this route were composed originally of engines of the Passumpsic, Boston, Concord & Montreal and other earlier B&M components. In the early 1920s B&M B class 2-6-0s, K-8 2-8-0s, (class) 4-6-0s and even P-2 Pacific-types ran north.

The driving rod on the northbound mail train broke in January 4,1909, 1½ miles north of Capelton. The broken rod, hit the cab, went right up through the cab, tearing off the entire side. Engineer Rickaby was thrown through the roof, then fell back down, but the seat and the whole side of the cab was gone, and he ended up beside the rail only slightly bruised. The rod on the fireman's side then broke, the air brakes on the train went on and the whole affair finally stopped.

The Boston & Maine for official purposes in 1916 had three passenger, seven freight, three switching engines, nine first-class passenger coaches, six baggage-mail cars and 440 boxcars,180 flat cars, 5 caboose and 5 work cars assigned to the Canadian Massawippi Valley.

June 1, 1926 saw the lease of the Passumpsic and Massawippi Valley Railroads to the Canadian Pacific. The Quebec Central was assigned the task of operating the Massawippi Valley from Lennoxville to the Boundary and from Beebe Junction to Stanstead. The portion from the border to Wells River was leased by the CPR subsidiary Newport & Richford. The Quebec Central was given running rights over the Newport & Richford from Newport to the border.

The last Boston & Maine train left Sherbrooke at 9:15 PM pulled by B&M engine 2115. That night the Quebec Central ran a special train of three locomotives and 25 loaded cars as well as the necessary cars needed to establish operation of the line. Engineer Whitecombe took the first Quebec Central train to Newport, pulled by QCR engine 42.