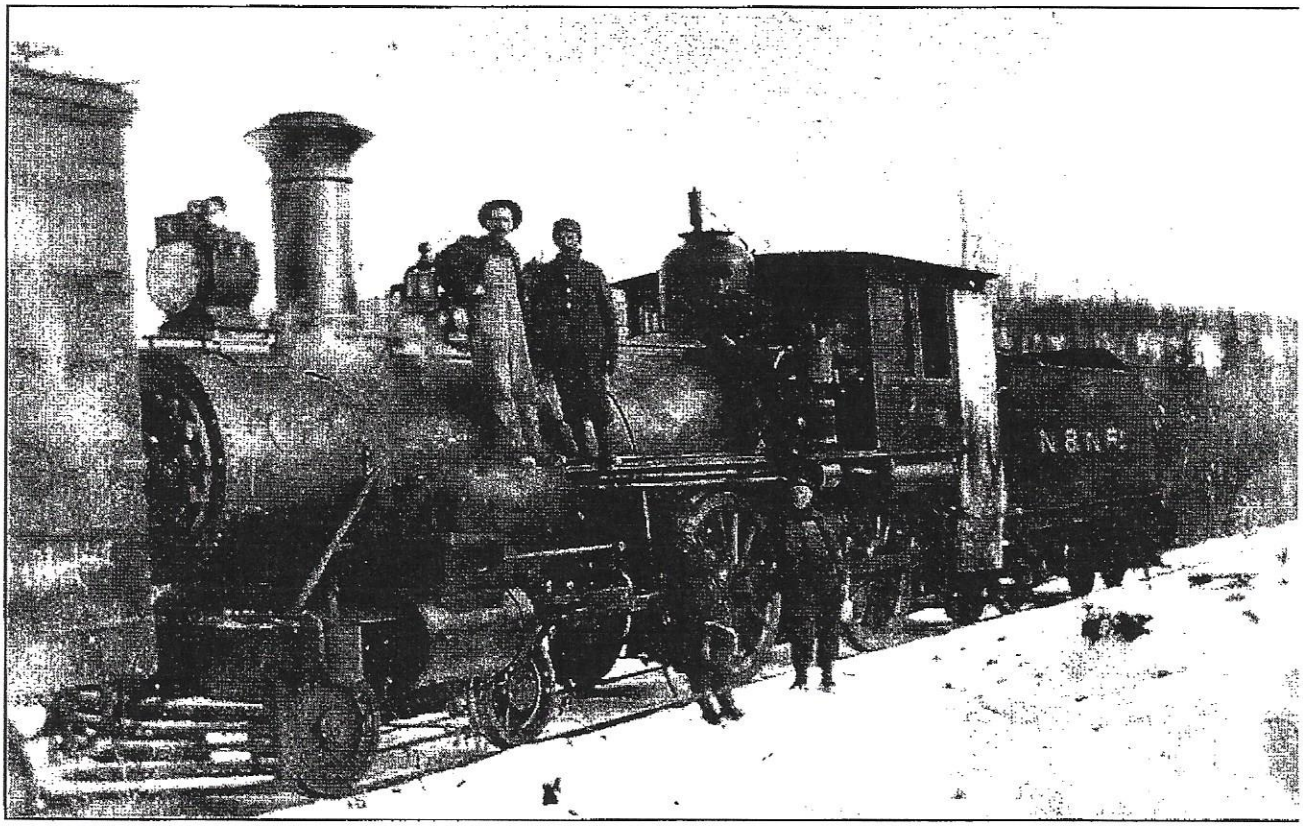
NOSBONIPISSING AND NIPISSING RAILWAY

C H RIFF

COLIN CHURCHER'S RAILWAY PAGES

The Nosbonsing and Nipissing Railway



National Archives Photo PA213288

On August 8 1884 the Pembroke Observer wrote:

"August 1st 1884, ten new flat cars made their way up the line of the CPR through the Ottawa Valley, being hauled by a very powerful locomc inscribed "Nosbonsing & Nipissing, J. R. Booth." At Bonfield the locomotive and cars were ferried across Lake Nosbonsing to where the railw

A search of "A Statutory History of the Steam and Electric Railways of Canada 1836 – 1986" by Robert Dorman/D.E. Stoltz indicates that the and Nipissing Railway was incorporated under the statutes of Ontario in 1886 (c. 74) to purchase a railway built by J.R. Booth from South-Eas (Callendar Bay) of Lake Nipissing on Himsworth Township to Lake Nosbonsing in Ferris Township. The statute also granted power to operat connection with the railway.

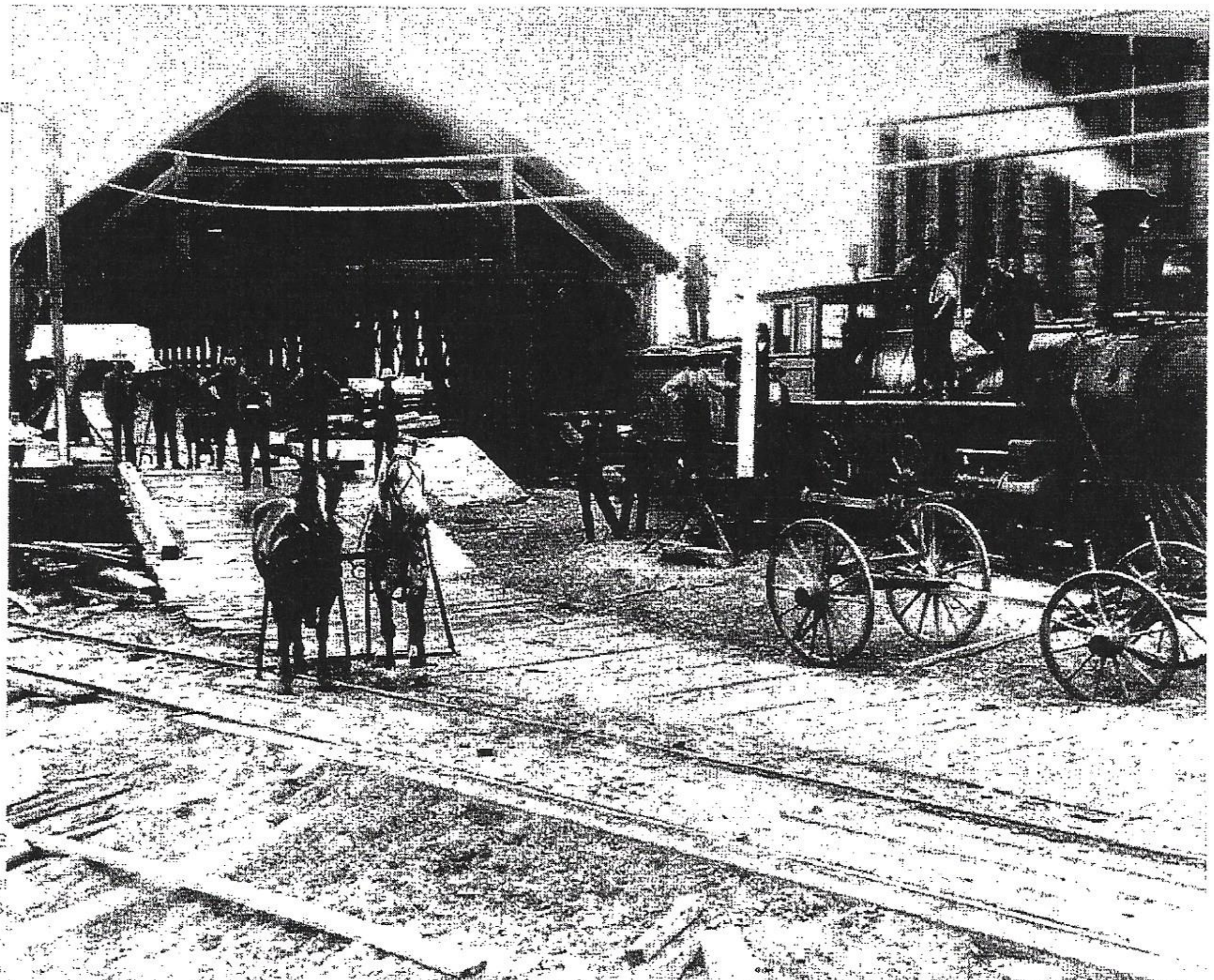
The full story about the railway and its operation is to be found in the Canada Lumberman of December 1896

"J.R. Booth's Logging Railway

To our readers the name of Mr. J.R. Booth, the great millionaire lumberman and railroad magnate, is quite familiar, but the system he uses in t logs from the timber limits to Ottawa will perhaps present some interesting and novel features.

"There is no waterway between Lake Nipissing and the Ottawa river, or its tributaries, but back of Lake Nipissing is a small lake called Lake N with an outlet by two small rivers and a lake into the Mattawa river, which empties into the Ottawa. The desired object, therefore, was to conv from Lake Nipissing overland to lake Nosbonsing, at the greatest speed and lowest possible cost, and twelve years ago Mr. Booth built a railro the two lakes for this purpose. The terminus at Lake Nipissing is Wisawasa, where the creek of the same name empties into the lake, but the b steep, being 65 feet above the level of the lake. This creek was harnessed to draw the logs up to the top and load them onto the cars. A buildin into which the logs were carried to be loaded. The building is 220 feet long by 45 feet wide. The rear end is on a level with the ground, and th supported by heavy framework, is 65 feet above the level of the lake. A jack ladder, 150 feet long, conveys the logs to the building by an endl which is operated by a rope drive 500 feet long. A raised platform extends the full length of the building, and in the platform, or table, is an en operated by another rope drive, 1,150 feet long. These rope drives derive their power from a water wheel 44 inches in diameter, under a heavy passing down a flume 6 x 8 feet. The water wheel, by means of a frictionless clutch, drives a fire pump when required, by which the railroad c supplied with water. The shafting is 3 7/8 inches in diameter, and on this shaft are two grooved wheels around which the ropes rotate.

Alongside the platform are shunted four flat cars with two inch stakes on each, against which the logs run from the table. Each car is 18 feet lc built of red oak lumber on tamarack bunks. As the jack ladder chain dumps eight logs per minute on to the platform, the chain carries them alc



Back to photostream

Brian We

Western te
Wassi Falls

[illegible]

[illegible]

This photo is in 3 groups

- History of Canadian Science and Technology — 9,104 items
- Canadian Short Lines — 1,889 items
- Canadian History — 11,570 items

Brian Westhouse 6y
The Pembroke Observer, in its issue of August 8, 1884, reported seeing this locomotive named the J.R.Booth, under its own power travelling up the CPR on August 1, hauling ten flat cars. At the village of Callander Station (Bonfield), the engine was placed on a barge and ferried to this remote location on Lake Nosbonsing, the flat cars followed over the next few days and the railway was put into immediate service.

In 1886 when the Northern & Pacific Jct. Railway attemted to cross Booth's track, a battle broke out over the rights to N&PJ's previous serveyed right-of-way. Booth obtained a provincial charter for the N&N, but by the time his trains were in full operation after the spring thaw, the Northern thretened to take up Booth's track to put down its own. To settle the argument J. R. Booth provided a diamond track, which the Northern's construction crews (Hendrie) installed. A connecting track was also built between the two railways.

In 1884 when Booth took over the Parry Sound Colonization Railway (Scotia to Bear Lake) the Nosbonsing locomotive was used during the winter on that extension of Booth's Ottawa,

Tags BETA

Logging Railroad
blackandwhite
monochrome
outdoor

Additional info

Viewing this photo	Public
Safety level of this photo	Safe

Provide feedback on the new photo page

Arnprion & Parry Sound Railway.

When the Nosbonsing & Nipissing Railway was abandoned in 1912, its charter was continued for the operation of Booth's logging railway at Egan Estate.

Brian Westhouse 6y
I was over the Lake Nosbonsing Road a few weeks ago, that is about where the track crossed the present Highway 11. At the east end where the highway curves south toward Astorville, there is a laneway that was the N&N grade to Lake Nosbonsing to a timber dock at its end. The dock was still there 2 years ago, but there has been local concern to have it removed.

When the log trains were running, the track along the dock and on the shore was built so the cars leaned toward the water. There were only car stakes on one side so that when the chains were released on that side all the logs tumbled into the lake on the low side.

Add a comment

S Search | ☐ ☐ Photo navigation | < > Thumbnail navigation | Z Zoom | B Back to context

The Nosbonsing & Nipissing Railway Company

Location: The subject rail line is located in northeastern Ontario just south of North Bay.

History: Incorporated in 1886, the Nosbonsing & Nipissing Railway Company (N&NR) was a pure logging railway venture that bisected the watershed between Lakes Nipissing and Nosbonsing, south of North Bay (Wasi Falls to Astorville). Built and owned by the Booth Lumber Company, the operation was initially constructed as a jack ladder operation in 1883. The demand greatly exceeded the ability of the jackhammer to operate so it was determined that a railway would be constructed in its place. Company owned steamboats would transport the logs from various points on Lake Nipissing to the terminus where they would be loaded onto flatcars. Here, a small community known as Wasi-Wasi developed. Once being transported to Lake Nosbonsing, the logs would be transferred to the Mattawa River and hence down the Ottawa River to the Booth mills at Chaudiere Falls. The journey would sometimes take as long as two years but Booth was able to avoid CPR freight rates in the process. With the demise of the lumber industry in the area, the railway was abandoned in 1914 and converted into a road. Of interest, up until the line was abandoned, the N&NR had the right-of-way over train movement on the Northern Extensions Railway that extended between Gravenhurst and Callander, thus having the ability to hold up the crack passenger trains for whatever time it took.

Approximate Milage: 6 miles.

Current Status: The line was abandoned after the demise of the lumber industry in 1914. Few if any traces remain today of the line.

Principle Stations: Wasi Falls and Astorville.

Remaining Stations: There were no passenger stations constructed on the subject line.

Last Updated: February 21, 1998

Return to Other Ontario Railways

Return to ORHP Home

Past Forward Heritage Limited

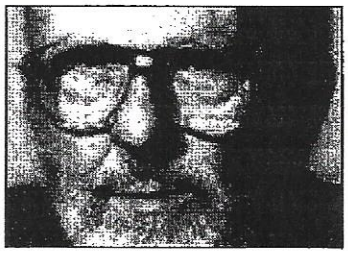
Writers and publishers of social and oral history

Heritage Perspectives

November 10, 2000

Jackladder, railway great investments for Booth

By Doug Mackey

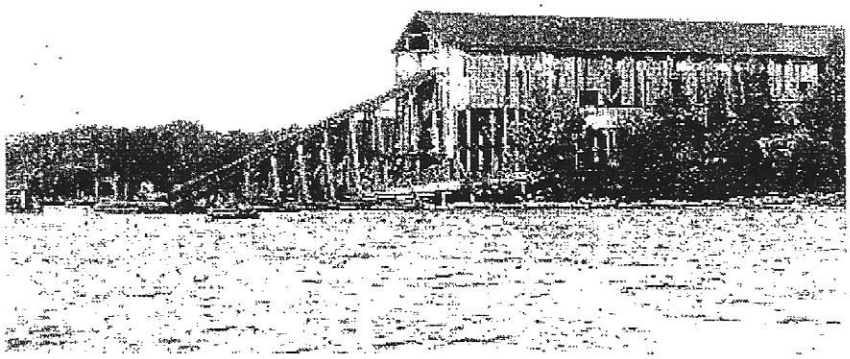


When J.R. Booth wanted to transport his logs from the Wasi River watershed to his mills in Ottawa in the 1880s, he had to get over the high ground between Lake Nipissing and the Mattawa-Ottawa River route.

When booth considered that there were several other rivers and miles of shoreline of relatively unharvested logs, he realized that it was worth a major investment.

Booth and his engineers decided to build a depot beside Wasi Falls that would include a 150-foot jackladder to lift the logs up the 75-foot escarpment onto the high land (see photo). He then built a standard gauge railway, approximately 8-km to Lake Nosbonsing.

The J. R. Booth jackladder



Here the logs would be dumped north of Astorville and towed to Bonfield by his steam tug the Nosbonsing, and sent down the Kaiboskong River and through two lakes to the Mattawa-Ottawa route to his mills.

The logs were dumped into Lake Nosbonsing on an angled ramp on the shore. A long dock was built to allow the engine and flat cars to extend beyond the dump as the cars were unloaded. The rock base of this dock still projects above the water today.

One of the earliest Lake Nipissing communities, Wisa Wasa, was soon developed at the Wasi Falls. There were a dozen houses, a bunkhouse, a cookhouse, a blacksmith/machine shop, and a school, church, post office, and a water tank on high ground. There was also a farm to raise feed and a barn for the animals.

The Cronkite Woolen Mill on the Wasi River near highway 634 drew additional people to the area and employed many women.

Booth sent one of his bright young men, Tom Darling, to Wisa Wasa. The Darling family became well known in the area. I will profile the family in a future column.

The Wisa Wasa jackladder was powered by a 44-inch water wheel driven by a heavy head of water coming down a 6ft by 8ft flume from the river. A friction clutch was used to run water to a fire pump, if necessary, and to supply water to the railroad engine. A 30-foot by 50-ft building covered this area. The water wheel had a four-inch shaft with two grooved wheels on which the rope that drove the jackladder rotated. The jackladder had a 500-foot endless chain with hooks and was driven by a 500-foot rope to hook and pull the logs up to the train.

A log dam was built at the head of the Wasi Falls to control the water flow. The logs were sent down a long slide beside the falls. Several other control dams were built on the river to store water for those periods when the flow was weak.

A 220-ft by 45-ft wide building was built at the top of the jackladder. The jackladder end of the building was supported by a heavy framework, and the rear end met the railway, which ran into the building. Seventeen men handled the logs as they came off the jackladder and were pulled into the building.

Once in the building the logs were rolled onto one of four flatcars. Loose bark from the logs dropped from the floor of the platform to a space underneath. Birch stakes on the far side of the cars held the logs in place. The flatcars were 18-ft long and were made of red oak with tamarack bunks.

When the four cars were loaded, chains were then pulled across the loads and tightened by a ratchet wheel and dog. These four cars were pulled out and replaced by four empties. The railway had two miles of sidings and switches. When 22 cars were loaded, they were taken to Lake Nosbonsing and dumped. By the time the engine returned, four other cars had been loaded and empty cars were quickly loaded until 22 were ready for another trip.

The logs were boomed by the screw tug Nosbonsing, which towed the logs to the Ottawa-Mattawa route, past Bonfield, to start their long and tortuous trip to Ottawa.

The railway, called the Nipissing and Nosbonsing, had 35 flat cars and one locomotive, affectionately known as "Betsy."

Workers for J.R. Booth's railway

The locomotive was originally brought across Lake Nosbonsing from Bonfield on a large raft and was pulled on shore at the Astorville end of the railroad. The locomotive had an engineer, a fireman and four brakemen. The railbed was quite level and the train ran easily. The round-trip took about one-hour, and the logs were dumped in two or three minutes. Ten trips were made each day, six days a week.

Tom Darling, the Booth manager, kept a diary where trainloads and significant events were recorded. I have copies of three of these diaries, and they make fascinating reading. The usual schedule of ten trips a day was pushed to fourteen at one time, and the diary states that the men went on strike.

Darling had to replace a man named Burke because the men would no longer work for him. The daily log loads ran from 2800 to 3200 logs. The diaries make reference to visits by Robert Booth, J.R.'s cousin, and A.W. Fleck, who was married to J.R.'s daughter Gertrude.

There are other casual human comments like "the schoolchildren had a picnic today" and "went to council meeting this afternoon" (Darling was a councillor and later Reeve on the North Himsworth council).

The diaries also record numerous problems: "the jackladder chain broke today" and "Smith and Fishbourne's cattle on the track this afternoon."

One of the biggest fights was with the Northern Junction Railway (later the Grand Trunk and the CNR) going to North Bay. The Booth railway was there first, but the Northern Junction Railway was bigger and did not want to stop to get approval to cross the Booth line. When the engine was up for repair on one occasion, A.W. Fleck insisted that it appear that the train was still running and that there be men at the crossing clearing snow and cutting firewood.

One other reference provides a total of the number of logs shipped in four seasons-an incredible 1,115,302 logs.

Wisa Wasa was a fascinating little community from 1884 to 1912.

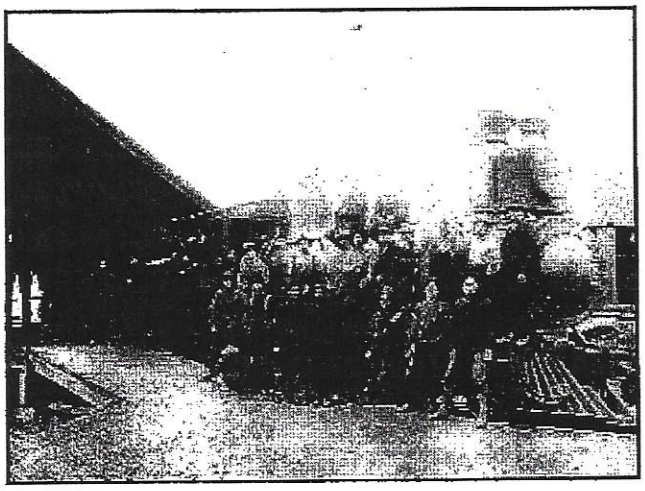
Hartley Trussler visited Wisa Wasa several times and wrote about it in his "Reflections" column in the Nugget in the 1960s where he wrote about the "busy, thriving little village" and remembered "dozens of French river drivers running and bobbing over the logs in the lake like teeter-assed snipes."

In a future column we will look at Booth's activities on Lake Nipissing, including the many Booth boats.

Heritage Perspective Home Page

Past Forward Heritage Limited:
330 Sumach St. #41, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5A 3K7 Tel. (416)-925-8412

THE BOOTH TRACK



The Story of the Nipissing and Nosbonsing Railway (1883-1912)

Using newspaper articles, archival materials, interviews with descendants and the diaries of Tom Darling, the manager of the operation, this book will tell the story of a five mile long railway built by lumber baron J. R. Booth to carry logs between Lake Nipissing and Lake Nosbonsing. It is the story of engineering ingenuity, conflict between rival railways, a large paddle wheel steamship, Conflict and cooperation between the French and English communities, life in the lumber camps and the small villages that developed near by. Excerpts from diaries reveal day to day life in Northern Ontario's early days. This book will be of interest to logging and train buffs, the local community and a general audience interested in Ontario social history.

Approximately 150 pages long, Photographs, Illustrations and Maps.

THE FIRST RAILWAY IN CANADA.

The first railway not only in this Province but in Canada was the old Champlain & St. Lawrence line between St. Johns and Laprairie. It was opened in August, 1836. Lord Gosford, the Governor-General, and other distinguished gentlemen were present at the inaugural and participated in the banquet, which was served in the station—the time-honored building, which, defying the ravages of time, still does duty as freight shed. One of the chief promoters of the railway was the late Mr. Jason C. Peirce, father of Mr. C. S. Peirce, of St. Johns, and associated with him were the late Hons. Peter McGill and Robert Jones, Mr. John Shuter, &c. Mr. James McDonald, of St. Johns, was also connected with the early management of the line. The road was originally built of scrap iron—that is, thin plates of iron nailed on to wooden sleepers, and the rolling stock was very light. For about fifteen years after construction the road was not operated in the winter time. Then the track was changed from Laprairie to St. Lambert, and the line continued from St. Johns to Rouse's Point.