23d The Victoria Railway (Lindsay, Fenelon Falls, Kinmount, Haliburton)

THE BACKGROUND

The Railway Age began in Upper Canada in 1849 with the passing of the Railway Guarantee Act for loan interest on the construction of railways not less than 75 miles in length. Before then, travel and the movement of goods in Upper Canada had been primarily dependent on waterways, and to some extent on such trails that passed for roads. Railway development then followed quickly in Victoria County. The Victoria Railway was the second pioneer railway to make a connection with Lindsay in 1875 at what was then its Midland Railway station at King and St. Paul Streets (The Midland Ry was originally the Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway, which had been the first to arrive there in 1857).

In 1877, the Victoria Railway applied to Lindsay for permission to extend its railway down Victoria Ave to Glenelg St. to connect up with the Whitby, Port Perry & Lindsay Railway. Upon the town's approval, a brick station was built on the east side of Victoria at Melbourne to serve those two railways as a "union" station. The Victoria Railway was therefore also the second railway to reach downtown Lindsay.

This 55-mile long line was built to the standard gauge (4' 8½") from the outset. It was initially intended as an immigrant settlement project, whereby those recruited would be encouraged with land concessions to settle along the line they had built, and give the railway their business. The project began as the **Fenelon Falls Railway** in 1871, changed its name in 1872 to the **Lindsay, Fenelon Falls & Ottawa River Valley Railway**, and again (to improve its promotional prospects) in 1873 to the **Victoria Railway**, by which time other motivations for the railway were the reputed iron ore deposits in the Haliburton Highlands and the stands of timber in what is now Algonquin Park. Politically, conflicts over the necessary subsidies for the line caused 23 northern Peterborough and Victoria County townships to secede and form the provisional County of Haliburton.

GEORGE LAIDLAW 1828 – 1889

The railway's first president was George Laidlaw who emigrated from Scotland in 1855, obtained a position as a grain buyer with the Toronto distillery firm of Gooderham & Worts, and persuaded his employers to invest in the (3'6") narrow gauge concept in sponsoring feeder lines for their business. He subsequently became a railway promoter in his own right, and was the predominant influence in bringing about the Victoria Railway. He retired in 1881 to his estate at Balsam Lake.

THE VICTORIA RAILWAY

At its Lindsay end, the Victoria Railway did not originate from downtown, but started out from the top of William Street in 1875 with a triangular wye formation connected to the Midland Railway line to create Victoria Junction (near present-day William St. and Orchard Park Road), permitting direct traffic from the north with both Port Hope (through Lindsay along the Scugog) and with Beaverton, but as noted, also enabling it to use the Midland Railway station at King and St. Paul Streets in Lindsay as its initial terminus. The first sod was turned on August 5, 1874 in the vicinity of Victoria Junction, with the Hon. Oliver Mowat (then Premier and Attorney-General of Ontario) presiding. The chief engineer was James Ross, and William Mackenzie (of Kirkfield) did some bridge and building work. (They both started their railway construction careers on this line, Ross later a prominent contractor with the CPR, and of course Mackenzie the later co-founder of the Canadian Northern Railway empire.) The first 33 miles to Kinmount were reached in 1876 with several significant engineering works, including a trestle across McLaren's Creek and a Howe Truss trestle (replaced by a plate girder bridge in 1893, then converted to a swing-bridge in 1906) across the Fenelon River. The only actual settlement scheme was some 300 Icelander immigrants who were good workers, but spent a miserable 1874 winter with dysentery, and then moved on to Manitoba. (They are commemorated by a cairn at the Kinmount station.) After a major engineering challenge with a huge sinkhole at Kendricks Creek three miles north of Kinmount, the line reached and terminated at Haliburton in late 1878. Like so many of its pioneer contemporaries, it was not a viable line for very long. It was acquired by the Midland Railway in 1882, then in turn by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1893, and by the CNR in 1923. Stations were Cameron (f)[flag stop], Halls (f), Fenelon Falls, Fells (f), Burnt River, Watson's Siding (f), Kinmount, Howland (formerly Kinmount) Jct., Gelert, Lochlin (f), Dysart (f), Donald (f), Gould (f) and Haliburton. Regular passenger service ceased in 1960, regular freight service lasted until 1972, and then "as required" until 1978. The CNR abandoned its Haliburton branch in 1981.

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