

**BENEDICT, ROSWELL GARDINIER**, civil engineer and businessman; b. 9 Dec. 1815, possibly in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., son of Daniel Davis Benedict and Phoebe Hedges; d. 5 Feb. 1859 in New York City.

Roswell Gardinier Benedict began his career as a civil engineer about 1833 and like other engineers of the period obtained practical training by working on numerous railways in New York and Ohio. About 1847 he moved to Upper Canada and secured a position with the reconstruction of the Welland Canal. On this project he met Samuel Zimmerman, a Pennsylvanian contractor who was building several locks and an aqueduct. From this meeting developed a professional association that would last until Zimmerman's untimely death in 1857. Benedict also participated in surveying a route for a railway from Toronto to Georgian Bay (probably the Toronto, Simcoe and Huron Union Rail-Road) and in 1847, in addition to his connection with the Welland Canal, he became assistant to Charles Beebe Stuart, the American-born chief engineer of the Great Western Rail-Road.

Following Stuart's return to New York as state engineer in January 1848, Benedict acted in his stead on the Great Western, resurveying the line and rerouting some sections. During a temporary suspension of operations that summer, he worked briefly on a railway between Lockport and Rochester, N.Y. He nevertheless retained his job on the Great Western. Although he was well known to leading American railway financiers such as Erastus Corning and Lewis Benedict, a distant relative, it was his position within the tightly knit group of American contractors and engineers then operating in Canada that proved most crucial in his relations with the Great Western.

In 1849 he was instrumental in persuading its board of directors to grant the building contract for the railway's eastern division to the firm of James Oswald and Samuel Zimmerman. Construction began in 1851 and later that year, largely through Zimmerman's fast-growing influence and Benedict's own enthusiastic promotion of the railway, Benedict was named chief engineer. His appointment effectively assured Zimmerman's control in a key department, as payments to contractors were contingent on the chief engineer's estimates. Although this sort of sympathetic association was almost standard practice in the construction of early North American railways, it angered the few Canadian engineers who felt qualified for the post but were overlooked. Walter Shanly\*, particularly piqued, stated that "as to serving under the auspices of Roswell Benedict – alias Sam Zimmerman – it is absurd, and never can be so long as I could obtain a Rodmans berth any where else." Within months of Benedict's appointment, he had brought into his department several American engineering friends, including Ira Spaulding, with whom he shared a house in Hamilton, Charles L. McAlpine, and Silas Wright Burt.

As chief engineer, Benedict had control over employment policies, estimates, supply purchases, the letting of contracts (which left quantities and costs unspecified), and matters that were strictly engineering. By December 1851 the degree of managerial power held without accountability by Benedict and shared by Zimmerman was attracting mounting critical attention from Peter BUCHANAN and the Great Western's board of directors. The slow pace of construction eventually prompted American investors to push for the appointment of a supervisory commissioner and for an inquiry into Benedict's department. The inquiry exposed the slipshod nature of Benedict's engineering work and the extent of control actually wielded by Zimmerman, to whom he had shifted the contract for building the central division. In a bid to gain control, Isaac Buchanan\* and other shareholders and directors forced Benedict's resignation in November 1852, ostensibly for his gross underestimation of costs, and Charles John Brydges\* was named managing director.

Benedict nevertheless remained in demand as an engineer. In the spring of 1853 he was engaged as chief engineer by the Hamilton and Toronto Railway, which had been organized by a number of Great Western directors to provide a connection with the Grand Trunk at Toronto. Benedict, who seems to have made some amends to Canadian engineers by hiring Francis Shanly\* for this railway, did not stay long with it. Within months he had moved to the London and Port Stanley, where he was joined by the contracting firm of Moore and Pierson, which had worked for him on the Great Western. By that fall he had also been named chief engineer to the Woodstock and Lake Erie Railway and Harbour Company, which soon engaged Zimmerman as contractor. Although construction was terminated in 1854, Benedict probably remained with this company until 1856.

By the mid 1850s he had purchased a house in Clifton (Niagara Falls), the eastern terminus of the Great Western and the crossing point to New York, and had become involved in two business ventures with former railway associates. In 1856 he and Ira Spaulding purchased a large portion of Zimmerman's extensive land holdings in Clifton. With Charles Pierson they formed R. G. Benedict and Company, which subsequently developed the property, donating land for a public market, a town-hall, and several churches. Benedict and Pierson were partners as well in 1857 at Niagara (Niagara-on-the-Lake) in the "Niagara car factory," which evidently specialized in the production of railway cars.

Benedict, who apparently never married, died in a New York City hotel in 1859 after being in poor health for some months. His will, which specified the disposition of his Clifton estate, reveals much about him. Among the possessions left to various members of his family were his technical books and instruments; sporting equipment and trophies; a large collection of photographs, prints, and genre paintings by Cornelius Krieghoff\*; testimonial plate from the Great Western; a "life preserver" travelling case; and two seal-rings, one inscribed "Let her rip" and the other "I range free."

[CHRISTOPHER ALFRED ANDREAE](#)

AO, MU 2756; RG 22, ser.289, R. G. Benedict. McKinney Library, Albany Institute of Hist. and Art (Albany, N.Y.), Erastus Corning coll., Forbes to Corning, 11 Sept. 1852. PAC, MG 24, D16, 3: 1564; 5: 2823-31; 14: 11927-28; 31: 25789-92; 94: 65441-67; D80, 1, 4; MG 29, B6, 1: 2, 7. S. W. Burt, "An engineer on the Great Western: a selection from the personal reminiscences of Silas Wright Burt," ed. A. G. Bogue and L. R. Benson, *Western Ontario Hist. Nuggets* (London), no.17 (1952): 4. Can., Prov. of, Legislative Assembly, *App. to the journals*, 1849, app.QQQ, examination of R. G. Benedict regarding Great Western Railway. *Daylight through the mountain: letters and labours of civil engineers Walter and Francis Shanly*, ed. F. N. Walker ([Montreal], 1957), 83, 177-78. *Daily Spectator, and Journal of Commerce*, 19 March 1857. *Hamilton Gazette, and General Advertiser* (Hamilton, [Ont.]), 26 Dec. 1853, 23 Jan. 1854. *Mail* (Niagara [Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.]), 9 Feb. 1859. *Weekly Dispatch, St. Thomas, Port Stanley, and County of Elgin Advertiser* (St Thomas, [Ont.]), 25 Aug. 1853. H. M. Benedict, *The genealogy of the Benedicts in America* (Albany, 1870), 313. *Canada directory*, 1857-58: 102, 177, 472. P. A. Baskerville, "The boardroom and beyond; aspects of the Upper Canadian railroad community" (PHD thesis, Queen's Univ., Kingston, Ont., 1973). Walter Neutel, "From 'southern' concept to Canada Southern Railway, 1835-1873" (MA thesis, Univ. of Western Ont., London, 1968). G. R. Stevens, *Canadian National Railways* (2v., Toronto and Vancouver, 1960-62), 1: 105. P. [A.] Baskerville, "Professional vs. proprietor: power distribution in the railroad world of Upper Canada/Ontario, 1850 to 1881," *CHA Hist. papers*, 1978: 47-63. R. D. Smith, "The early years of the Great Western Railway, 1833-1857," *OH*, 60 (1968): 205-27.