

Looking Backward: The Story of the Corporation of Parry Sound

By Bystander

North Star, April 9, 1903

"...In January of 1895, the engineers of the Parry Sound Railway are busily engaged in making the final survey and location for the remaining portion of the road. They are examining two alternative routes INTO THE TOWN. By February, this number of alternatives had increased to four, on each of which the engineers had laid out sites for docks and switches. It is very evident therefore; that if any difficulty had at that time presented itself it was not the one of want of route, but rather that the multiplicity of ways by which access could be obtained to the Bay waters was the stumbling block. It would be strange indeed if even for once Parry Sound could be of one accord in regard to anything and as we go along we may probably find that jealous tinkering's amongst ourselves had a deal to do with the matter. In the end of March, Mr. J. R. Booth accompanied by Messrs. E. J. Chamberlin and Geo. Mountain visited us and examined "Several favourable sites which had been located at the Sound, but the matter of settling which of these shall be made the terminus has been left to Mr. Booth to decide."

At the beginning of April, we read of rumours of the line going to Depot Harbour whilst next week "the surveyors are again engaged in taking levels and sticking up stakes all along Bay Street. It looks like the permanent survey but...WE DO NOT YET KNOW". That's right, WE DID NOT YET KNOW. There were some who did, but not everybody.

On the 4th of April, we read that a suit is in the courts between Judge McCurry and W. G. Reid for services in promoting the Parry Sound Railway.

On the 11th of April, there are rumors that the railway is going to Depot Bay, a week later the route is changed, the papers are saying, and now the terminus is to be at Jenkins Bay for the nonce. Two weeks still later Mr. Geo. Mountain of the O.A. & P.S.

Ry. Co. calls the Star office and informs us that the Railway Company had decided finally on Depot Harbour as the terminus of the line.

Now the cat is out of the bag, and we see what Parry Sound is going actually to get in the matter of railroad accommodation in consideration of having handed over the franchises of their Colonization Railway and at this point it would be well to go back and look over the history a little to find out why this sudden change of terminal base was made and who was responsible.

When the Colonization Railway was first mooted by a number of gentlemen who undoubtedly had the interests of this town at heart, it was a purely local enterprise and assistance in obtaining, and subsequently renewing, the charter was given by the ratepayers. It was to be a railway INTO Parry Sound. At one meeting which was held at Parry Sound it is recorded that Mr. Wm. Beatty warned, nay, pleaded with the people, whatever they did to be sure and begin the railway from this end - be certain that it would be inside the town limits or perhaps it would never reach the town at all - and the Governor was prophetic whether he intended it or not for here we are in 1895 - eight years after the Governor spoke, with the condition of affairs just as he had predicted.

However, the advice of Mr. Beatty was unheeded at the time and whether it was expedient to begin at this end or not it is hard now to say. Finally the railway was started from Scotia this wards and in course of time the local Company entered into an argument with Mr. W. G. Reid, whereby he was to construct the road and all the houses and eventually the charter was to be handed over to him. After a time Reid, with the full approval of the local Company, handed over his rights to the Ottawa, Arnprior & Parry Sound Railway, or as it was more commonly known, "Booth's Road." This road was heading for Parry Sound from the Ottawa end, it was coming into a strange country, and it was certainly a great advantage to them to obtain an already existing charter for

a road, to the rights of way of which the people of the district were agreeable, and they no doubt fully appreciated the fact that if they applied for a charter for a parallel road it would be fought out thoroughly by the Parry Sound Colonization Railway. There were of course at the time little bluffs put up that the Booth line really aimed at French River as a terminus, but they were bluffs intended for Parry Sound and they had a good deal of the desired effect. However, one stipulation put in the agreement for transferring the charter was that the railroad had to come to the Georgian Bay WITHIN THE TOWN LIMITS, and at the time of the transfer a Citizen Committee was elected to look after the safeguarding of the town's interest. This committee held within its keeping all the documents in the case and to be perfectly sure as to their safety they were handed over to one of the committee - Mr. John McClelland - to be kept in the vault of the Parry Sound Lumber Co.

And here we are in 1895 - the conditions of the charter violated and the railway going to Depot Harbour. Was it a wonder that the people at the time were indignant, and it was therefore surprising to read that at the council meeting held on April 30th, 1895, it was moved by Councillor John McClelland and seconded by Councillor John Moffat as follows: "Whereas from reliable information obtained from Mr. Mountain, chief engineer of the Parry Sound Colonization Railway, it appears that Depot Harbour, Parry Island, has been decided upon as a terminal point where the Railway Coy. contemplate erecting elevators, building docks, etc., and that the intention of the Company is to build only to the waters of the Georgian Bay, one mile distant from the town land, and from the statement made that the question of building a line into the town cannot be raised till the expiration of the time given by the Government for the completion of the railroad, whereby the interests of the town may be seriously damaged, be it resolved that the Mayor, the clerk and the mover (Mr. McClelland), be a committee to secure advice from S.H. Blake as to the legal rights of the Parry Sound Colonization Ry., in so far as they may affect the general interests of the town, AND TO REPORT TO THE COUNCIL. - Carried.""

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By Bystander

North Star, April 30, 1903

“And now we come to a season of turmoil and unrest in our municipal life. At the nomination meeting held on 30th Dec., 1895, there were five candidates nominated for Mayor, viz; John McClelland, Dr. Walton, S. B. Purvis, J. W. Fitzgerald and John Galna, and there were also 15 names put up for the six seats in the council.

The meeting was rife in personalities. The excitement got very high over the disappearance of the papers and bonds compelling the Canada Atlantic Railway to reach the lakeshore within the Town limits. It will be remembered that these were handed over to Mr. John McClelland for safekeeping and when the time came he was called on for their production they could not be found. Mr. Fitzgerald made some startling statements and among others things he charged Mr. McClelland with having surrendered the documents. About this time an alarm of fire was sounded – it turned out to be false, however – and the meeting was incontinently broken up and the information was never obtained, and like everything else it simmered out of existence. That is a state of affairs, which unfortunately is chronic in Parry Sound. Boiling up over some supposed injury, we froth to the lip of the pot and then somebody slyly at the critical moment takes us off the fire and we go flat instantly.

At this particular time, it was surely unfortunate that such should have been the case. In the first place, if there had been anything crooked about the disappearance of these important papers there were several in the deal and it was surely the right of the ratepayers to know it and in the second place ever since that time there has been, and is to-day, an ugly feeling with very many that “somebody” was bought, and if such an imputation is unjust it is unjust to those blamed that it should still be left a mystery.”