Passage to Point Edward: Survival of a Railway Town

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Overview

- Historical significance of transportation in Canada
- Great Western Railway in Sarnia
- Grand Trunk Railway in Point Edward
- Prosperity and Decline
- Station Stories: Tales from the Grand Trunk in Point Edward
Transportation in Canada: Current Network

- 1,400,000+ km of roads
- 10 major international airports
- 300+ smaller airports
- 72,093 km of railway tracks still in use
- 300+ commercial harbours with links to Pacific, Atlantic, Arctic oceans, Great Lakes, St. Lawrence Seaway
- Canada: 9,093,507 km²
- France: 640,427 km²
- Spain: 498,980 km²
- Sweden: 410,355 km²
Early Settlers

- No existing transportation infrastructure
- Native Americans used canoes, traveled by foot; no domesticated animals eased transportation of people or goods

“Long-nose” Objiiwa canoe, Wabigoon Lake, near Dryden, ON ca. 1900 (from Canadian Museum of Civilization)
Early Settlers cont.

- Poor road conditions; swampy landscape
- Sarnia to London, 18 hour trek (reported by Jean Tumbull Elford in Canada West’s Last Frontier)
- Need to facilitate transportation of both people and goods to speed up settlement of Southwestern Ontario
Railway: Altered Canadian Landscape

- New potential for personal transportation and trade
- National unity: Canadian Pacific Railway (last spike hammered in 9:22am November 7, 1885 in Craigellachie, BC)
- Encouraged development of towns and villages throughout Southwestern Ontario
Rail Lines Creep to Lambton

- 1836: Richard Vidal petition
- Twenty years later line Komoka-Samia announced
- December 27, 1858: Great Western Railway depot opens in Samia
- Lambton County’s fortunes change!
Railway and Oil Frenzy

- 1858: James Miller Williams discovers oil in Oil Springs
- 1862: Year of the Gushers (33 oil gushers struck)
- Dilemma: getting the oil to market
  - “Stone boats”
  - Floating down the creek
Grand Trunk Station, Point Edward

- Built at narrow, fast point of St. Clair River
- Three-storey white brick building, 200 ft. long, 40 ft. tall
- First and second class waiting room; dining facilities; apartments for stationmaster/family; overnight accommodations
Grand Trunk Station, Point Edward cont.

From the sketch by J.C. McArthur, “Crossing Mails and Passengers over the St. Clair River at Point Edward, in the Iron Steam Ferry.” Canadian Illustrated News, April 8, 1876, vol. XIII, no. 15, 228.
Lambton County Railway System

- **Grand Trunk:** connections to Toronto/Montreal, further to Maine, further to entire Atlantic seaboard
- **Great Western:** poor connections
Sarnia Street Railway Co.

- Established 1875
- Bridged distance from Point Edward to Sarnia stations
- Originally horse-drawn streetcars; service electrified in 1901
The New Cars.—The two new cars for the Sarnia Street Railway, arrived here on Friday last, by Great Western Railway from London. They are a good deal smaller than those which have been temporarily used on the road since its opening, being intended to be drawn by one horse. The cars are very tastily got up, and are named “Sarnia” and “Huron.” A larger one, we believe, a “palace car,” is being made, and will arrive shortly.
Prosperity

- Development in the US meant increased traffic for Lambton County stations
- Point Edward incorporated as village in 1879
Prosperity cont.

- 1884 census, population 1,661; second census (new boundary), population 2,361
- Majority of men employed at Grand Trunk
- But…
St. Clair Tunnel

- Environmental hazards for ferries included:
  - Ice in winter
  - Fog
  - Other vessels

Dignitaries wait to board the inaugural train for first official trip of the tunnel
St. Clair Tunnel cont.
Decline

- With tunnel in Sarnia jobs moved out of Point Edward
- Two-thirds of population left
- 1900s, only major employer left in Point Edward was the Northern Navigation Company

Many residents physically moved their houses to Sarnia, as seen above.
Station Stories: The Fire

- Discovered by stationmaster John McAvoy
- Red brick telegraph and ticket office at south end of building spared
- Plans to build new station announced by September 22

Samia Observer, and Lambton Advertiser, September 15, 1871
Station Stories: The Fire cont.

- New station many of the same features as the old:
  - Customs office
  - Agent's office
  - Waiting room
  - Ticket office
  - Ladies waiting room

- Bar dining room
- Kitchen and pantry
- Agent's private dining room on the second floor
- Fifty apartments in total
- Cost $20,000 for the reconstruction

Image from shortly before fire
Station Stories: Prince of Wales

- Albert Edward (later Edward VII) scheduled to stop in Point Edward and Sarnia
- Arrived 10:45am September 13, 1860
- Between 6,000 - 8,000 visitors attended reception
Mayor Thomas W. Johnston address:

“\text{We have not very much to show your Royal Highness in Sarnia, as evidencing the prowess of the people in the subjugation of the rude natural elements to the uses of civilization; but when we add that there are standing here to-day [sic] many of the pioneers who first, in this locality, cleared homes for themselves in the unbroken forest, destitute then of any roads, and Railroads all unhoped for, - even steamboats uncommon on that beautiful river in front, - it may be acknowledged, after all, we still inherit a portion of the energy and perseverance which make the Anglo-Saxon a conquering race on every soil upon which they undertake to live and labor.}”
Station Stories: Prince of Wales cont.

- Chief H.P. Chase address:
  - "Great Brother, Our hearts were made glad when we heard that our Great Mother had sent her eldest son across the Great Salt Lake to visit her Canadian subjects... We pray that the Great Spirit, who sits upon the everlasting blue clouds, beyond the stars, may be please to encircle your brow with brilliant laurels - make your heart full of wisdom and mercy - your arm powerful to protect the innocent, as well as terrible to the enemies of the Crown, which you are destined to wear at some future day."
Station Stories: Prince of Wales cont.

- Procession:
  - Marshals on horseback
  - The Band in a carriage
  - Native Americans on foot, superintendents in Carriages.
  - Warden and City Council, County Officers.

Arch from Governor-General visit, 1874 (example)

- The Prince and Suite.
- Mayor and Town Council.
- Magistrates and Clergymen.
- Privates Carriages.
- Citizens on foot.
Station Stories: Interesting Visitors

- Charles Monck, Governor-General, August 1865

- Ulysses S. Grant
  One reporter: “… it seemed Grant would rather face an army of 50,000 Southerners than expose himself to the prying eyes of 1000 Canucks having for their object the gratification of mere curiosity."
Station Stories: International Park?
Station Stories: Immigration Hotspot

- Beatty Transportation Company transported immigrants across Great Lakes; also men, horses and tools for construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.
- 200 passengers, surveying party and horses embarking on the Manitoba.

Station Stories: Immigration Hotspot cont.

- October 1875, 266 Icelandic immigrants traveling to Northwest Territories

Thank You!

- Questions?
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