

# Harwood's Rail Heritage

## A Brief History in Four Parts *by Ted Rafuse*

### Part 1. The Railway

It was the Cobourg & Peterborough Railway that created Harwood as a railway terminal in the mid nineteenth century. As a rail terminus Harwood glimmered briefly but its rail heritage has endured. Remarkably a few years after the first commercial railway operated in England, and after a very few railroads were constructed in the United States, a number of Cobourg and Northumberland citizens commenced the process of creating a railway company to be constructed between Cobourg and Rice Lake.

It was anticipated that the railway would tap the natural resources, primarily the wood in the forests, as a means of ensuring the company's economic success. It was also anticipated that the railway would not operate in the winter as the primary means of transportation, the waterways, were frozen and most bulk transportation ceased.

In 1831, Provincial Land Surveyor F.P. Rubidge was contracted by several Cobourg citizens to survey several proposed routes for a railway from Cobourg to Rice Lake. The following year he produced a map depicting the route of a such a rail line. The line exited Cobourg harbour eastward towards the vicinity of present day D'Arcy Street then turned north following several valley routes before ending at the Rice Lake community of Sully (Harwood).

A large group of men including E. Perry, J.G. Bethune and G.S. Boulton canvassed for support of a railway. Perry and Bethune were successful local entrepreneurs and Bethune was active in promoting a variety of land and water transportation enterprises. G.S. Boulton was a successful lawyer and he was one of two representatives of the Legislative Council from the Newcastle District (which included Cobourg and Sully at that time).

On March 6, 1834, the **Cobourg Rail Road** Company received a charter to construct a railway under certain conditions to the south shore of Rice Lake. Little action towards building the line took place as subscriptions to stock were not forthcoming. Part of this inability to raise private funds may have stemmed from Bethune's bankruptcy and subsequent fall from influence.

A reinvigoration to build occurred the following year. A second survey conducted by N.H. Baird and Rubidge suggested three possible routes each terminating at a different community: Bewdley, Claverton (Gore's Landing) and Sully (Harwood). These men confidently predicted the railway could be constructed for about £26,000. Despite further pleas for subscription to the stock of the CRR, the effort to raise money failed. The failure in part may have been due to the popular dogma that the development of the Trent Water System would better serve the transportation needs of the area, especially for the new settlers north of Rice Lake.

The political and economic upheaval associated with the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion made a victim of the Cobourg Rail Road Company. Although there were several feeble attempts to resuscitate the company, the concept of railway transportation fell dormant and disappeared from the vision of almost all local inhabitants.

By mid 19th century a stable political and economic environment allowed government to create new railway legislation. A group of Cobourg citizens, led by D'Arcy Boulton, promoted once again the concept of constructing a railway north from Cobourg, but this time to a more northerly destination, Peterborough. Late in 1851, as reported in the Cobourg Star, lawyer, entrepreneur, land owner and municipal politician Boulton proclaimed that within three years a railway would be opened between Cobourg and Peterborough. Most received his proclamation with a large tinge of skepticism.

However Boulton along with E. Perry, H. Ruttan, A. Jeffrey, T. Dumble and others succeeded in obtaining the necessary legal charter to authorize the construction of the **Cobourg & Peterborough Railway** on December 10, 1852. The following February 7, 1853, at the northeast corner of Railway (Spring) Street and Seminary (University) Avenue a large crowd witnessed the mayor's wife turn the first sod in the construction of the C&PRy.



A locomotive used on the Railway c. 1870

A construction contract was awarded to Zimmerman & Balch, a contract that in the future would prove to be to the decided advantage of the contractors and to the decided disadvantage of the Company shareholders. It would later become known that the chief engineer, Ira Spaulding, who was thought to be an independent professional, was surreptitiously in the employ of the contractors. However immediately grading work commenced in a decided spirit of optimism and the bridging of Rice Lake did not dampen the enthusiasm for the project. During the first season of construction many local farmers were engaged in the work by providing lumber from their land and by engaging their horses in various aspects of road work. Financial problems arose in 1854 with the advent of the Crimean War which created a labour shortage and wages rose to one dollar per twelve hour day. By May 1854 the railway was completed to Harwood and many citizens of the area accepted the company's offer of a free ride on the railway from Cobourg to Harwood. Most were awed by the experience of this new mode of transportation whose speed approached the unheard of pace of twenty miles per hour. Work on Rice Lake Bridge continued throughout they year and the whole line through to Peterborough was opened on December 29, 1854. Once again the company offered the local populace a free junket. Throngs of passengers boarded the flat cars to sit on crude benches or stand between the planks in the bone chilling cold weather as the train rode the rails for the 28.5 miles to the northern destination. There was no report whether the train mercifully might have stopped in Harwood to allow passengers to warm up. Perhaps in the days of little liquor control, alcohol consumption partially negated the frigid experience for some.

Calamity quickly impacted the fortunes of the Cobourg & Peterborough Railway. On January 1, 1855, shifting ice on Rice Lake caused extensive shifting and damage to the bridge structure so that it was closed for several weeks for extensive repairs and reinforcement. Never on a stable economic foundation, this problem was a precursor to the continued ice woes and financial brinkmanship of the company.

The railway when it operated was a boon to the area transporting millions of board feet of lumber, timber and agricultural products to Cobourg's harbour. Northbound trains carried a variety of goods and implements. But the railway struggled financially for the rest of the decade.

During this turbulent fiscal period the railway underwent a series of management changes through leases. The most successful lessee was John H. Dumble who recognized that the Rice Lake trestle had to

be filled in to stabilize that structure and to create a causeway. As this engineering reinforcement showed ongoing success, the shareholders wrested his lease in an act of duplicity. They leased the C&PRy to several stockholders of the Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway. This cartel had once been active in the construction and operation of the C&PRy but fell out of favour with the C&P shareholders of the time.

Operating two railway lines so close together and tapping somewhat the same resources, these men one evening surreptitiously removed the C&P locomotives to their Port Hope property. Later they approved, by action of stealth, the removal of the irons stays, pins and bolts from Rice Lake Bridge. This caused several sections eventually to crash into the water and float away. By the early 1860s the Cobourg & Peterborough Railway was effectively moribund, an extravagant white elephant costing the community more than one million dollars, a debt not paid until 1937.

Moribund but not forgotten during the mid 1860s efforts were undertaken to revive the railway. Area residents were unable to raise the necessary funds locally but a delegation to the United States interested several American entrepreneurs to invest in a resuscitation. Several Pittsburgh steel magnates expressed interest in using the railway as a means of bringing iron ore from Marmora to Cobourg's harbour for transshipment to the U.S. To that end they purchased the Marmora Iron Mines and the C&PRy and created an amalgamated company, **The Cobourg, Peterborough & Marmora Railway & Mining Company** in January 1867. The line to Harwood was refitted, new ore cars were ordered from James Crossen, a new rail line was constructed from Trent Narrows to the Blairton mine on Crowe Lake and two new locomotives were ordered from the Kingston Locomotive Works.

For the next several years the railway proved moderately successful under the management of American William Chambliss. He was insistent that the main purpose of the road was to transport iron ore but if the citizens of Peterborough and Cobourg would work together and provide assistance, and if the profits of the company warranted, then the line from Harwood to Peterborough would be restored.

An unprecedented depression throughout North America occurred in 1873, coupled with unprecedented municipal bickering between the two terminal towns ended the efforts to refurbish the northern link. The railway itself struggled over the ensuing decade operating only sporadically. The last shipment of ore left Cobourg's harbour in 1882. The railway was sold in 1886 to T.P. Pearce of Belleville who was interested in the Marmora property's timber stands. Re-organized as the **Cobourg, Blairton and Marmora Railway & Mining Company** this operation fared no better as a railway. In 1893 the Grand Trunk Railway purchased the remnants of the former C&PRy and amalgamated the CB&MR&MCo into its own corporate structure. Rarely used by the GTR, the rails to Harwood were apparently lifted during World War I and sent to France for military use there.

Remnants of the railway exist north of Cobourg as the berm is visible in several locations both north and south of Rice Lake. Most of the line near and in Harwood has been used for highway and street locations. In Cobourg a small section of track running north from the CNR rail yard towards the Canada Pallet Company plant still has rails in use, these rails being on the old C&PRy berm.

The several 19th century railway companies that created and operated on the line held two noteworthy distinctions. They were amongst the earliest rail lines to be constructed in what is now the province of Ontario and they were the second longest operating Broad Gauge lines in Canada. Broad Gauge rail lines were built to a 5 foot 6 inch width between the rails as opposed to the Standard Gauge lines which operate today at 4 feet 8½ inches between the rail heads.

Today's boaters on Rice Lake are occasionally reminded of the old railway across the lake when their propellers strike the submerged former road bed. Few however know that the level of Rice Lake was raised approximately eight feet when the Trent Severn Waterway was completed in the early 1920s. Their anger at the railway is misdirected however as the berm when originally built was 4 feet above the high water mark. The true culprit for their wrath should be the agency that created their water play ground!