

# the SwitchStand



A quarterly publication of the Guelph Historical Railway Association, charity # BN 89131 4973 RR0001. For submissions, membership issues, change of address, contact: GHRA: Box 21054, 35 Harvard Rd, Guelph Ontario. N1G 4T3. E-mail: [info \[at\] ghra.ca](mailto:info[at]ghra.ca). Price: Free. To join GHRA see details in newsletter below.

**Special Edition, April 25 2009**

**vol.5, issue 2**

## Welcome

The GHRA's new mailing address is Box 21054, 35 Harvard Rd. Guelph, Ontario N1G 4T3

125 years ago the Guelph Junction Railway was chartered to build a rail line to service the needs of the City of Guelph. Today, the City of Guelph owned Guelph Junction Railway is still active in the community. In celebration of this milestone and with the GHRA's Tour of the Guelph Junction Railway on April 25, we have dedicated this issue to its history.

## A brief history of the Guelph Junction Railway

by Chris van der Heide

### **Guelph's Early Railway History**

The story of the Guelph Junction Railway begins with the Grand Trunk Railway. The GTR was incorporated in 1852 to construct a railway line from Montreal to Toronto, although the charter was soon extended eastward to Portland, Maine and westward to Sarnia, Ontario. In 1856, the GTR officially opened service between Toronto and Guelph, and two years later the line was open all the way to Sarnia, via Guelph and Stratford.

Also in the early 1850s, the Great Western Railway had constructed a railway from Niagara Falls to Windsor, Ontario via Hamilton and London. In 1852, the GWR sponsored the incorporation of the Galt & Guelph Railway, to construct a link between Guelph and a GWR branchline from Harrisburg (near Paris) to Galt, which was then under construction and completed in 1854. The Galt & Guelph opened for service in 1857, connecting the Great Western to the Grand Trunk. In 1854, the Wellington, Grey & Bruce Railway was incorporated (again under the sponsorship and control of the GWR) to construct an ambitious extension of the Galt & Guelph to lake ports at Southampton and Owen Sound. An economic depression during the 1860s got the WG&B off to a slow start, with the first section of the line from Guelph to Elora only opening in 1870. Ultimately, the WG&B would build to Southampton via Palmerston, with a branch line to Kincardine.



Great Western Railway #82 "Wm. Wier" at GWR Toronto station in 1856. Used with permission of Rail Archive Stephenson.

During the 1870s, local businessmen and railway promoters felt that some healthy competition between the railways could only be a good thing for shippers and began lobbying for a third railway in Guelph. In 1878, the Wellington & Georgian Bay Railway was incorporated to construct a line from Guelph to Owen Sound. (In 1879, the Wellington & Georgian Bay Ry. was renamed Georgian Bay & Wellington Ry., probably to avoid confusion with the Wellington, Grey & Bruce.) The route of the Georgian Bay & Wellington was meant to compete with the already established Toronto, Grey & Bruce Railway which ran north from Toronto to Owen Sound via Orangeville. However, in 1880 the GB&W fell under the control of the Grand Trunk, and in 1881 was merged with two other railways (the Stratford & Huron Ry. and the Port Dover & Lake Huron Ry.) with the resulting corporation solidly under the control of the GTR. Ultimately, the charter of the GB&W would only be used to construct a 26.75 mile segment from Palmerston north to Durham, which was completed in 1882 and would eventually become part of GTR's line to Owen Sound. The GB&W towards Guelph was never built, as in 1882 the GTR took control of the Great Western, including the Galt and Guelph and the Wellington, Grey and Bruce. Thus Guelph found itself served not by three railways, but just one – the Grand Trunk.

### **The Guelph Junction Railway**

Quickly following the merger of the Grand Trunk and Great Western Railways, Guelph once again began to consider building a new railway. This would connect Guelph directly to a lake port and another railway in order to break the Grand Trunk's monopoly. So in 1884, the Guelph Junction Railway was incorporated, with a charter to build

south from Guelph to a point on Canadian Pacific Railway's Credit Valley Railway line, somewhere between Milton and Galt. In 1886, the charter was expanded, allowing the GJR to build a line from Guelph to Goderich on Lake Huron. Work on the railway got off to a slow start, but by spring of 1887, the route had been surveyed and plans drawn up. By the end of 1887, construction had begun, and in August of 1888, the Guelph Junction Railway was completed from Guelph Junction to Guelph, with the GJR yard and station located along the bank of the Speed River just south of Eramosa Road (the current site of the River Run Centre theatre and concert hall). The line also extended half a mile north to Goldie's Mill (the ruins of which still stand today) where it connected with the GTR.



The Priory (Built in 1827 as Guelph's first building) in use as a CP/GJR Station around 1888.

In 1887, to avoid a repeat of what had happened with the Georgian Bay & Wellington, the directors of the Guelph Junction Railway signed an agreement with Canadian Pacific Railway to lease and operate the line upon completion. In 1888, this agreement was revised to a 99 year lease. The extension to Goderich was delayed until the early 1900s when an agreement was made with Canadian Pacific for the CPR to complete the line. Therefore in 1904, the GJR incorporated the Guelph and Goderich Railway to build the extension to Goderich under the GJR's charter. The Guelph and Goderich was then leased to the CPR for a period of 999 years. The line was completed to Goderich by the end of 1907.



Guelph's 1911 Canadian Pacific Station with a passenger train, October 18 1958. R.J Sandusky photo, used with permission.

With the extension to Goderich completed, freight traffic along the line picked up considerably, but passenger service along the line never really became significant. For years a gas-electric railcar (a type often known to railfans as a “doodlebug,” and known locally as “Old Sparky”) shuttled back and forth between Guelph and Guelph Junction, providing connections to CPR trains on the main line, and servicing the rural communities of Arkell, Corwhin and Moffat. Passenger service to Goderich was provided on daily mixed freight and passenger train. By the end of the 1950s, passenger traffic was dropping, and service between Guelph and Guelph Junction was reduced, and finally cancelled in the fall of 1960. Passenger service on the mixed train to Goderich ended in the summer of 1962.



“Old Sparky” at Guelph Junction, April 26 1958 just prior to retirement. R.J Sandusky Photo, used with permission.

## Recent History

While freight traffic remained steady through the 1960s, it declined through the 1970s and 1980s, and in 1987 the Canadian Pacific applied to abandon the line between Guelph and Goderich, permission for which was granted by the Canadian Transportation Agency in December of 1988. Also in 1988 the CPR's lease of the Guelph Junction Railway expired and CPR had little interest in keeping it. Eventually an agreement was reached with the CPR to renew for a ten-year period, and the city began looking for a new operator for the line. A contract to operate the railway was let to Ontario Southland Railway Inc., and on December 31, 1997, the last CPR freight train ran over the Guelph Junction Railway. The following day, the Ontario Southland assumed operation of the line.

Since January 1998 the Guelph Junction Railway has sustained 17% annualized traffic growth spanning some 15 customers, including the tourist train you are riding on right now. The future is very bright for Canada's only federally chartered shortline, the Guelph Junction Railway.



Ontario Southland Railway freight train, Guelph, Ontario. November 24 2006, Dave Young Photo.

## About the GHRA

### Upcoming meeting schedule:

May 11, 2009

June 8, 2009

July 13, 2009

September 14, 2009

**Where we meet:** Regular meetings are held at the Cooperator's building, 130 MacDonnel St. in downtown Guelph. Start time is 7:30 PM. Visitors welcome.



**To join the GHRA:** Send in your dues according to the schedule below to our mailing address. Including your mailing and e-mail address if you have one.

**2009 Membership Dues**

Junior: \$25/annual (under age 25)  
Regular: \$50/annual (ages 25-64)  
Senior: \$40/annual (ages 65+)

Membership dues and any donations above are tax deductible. (The GHRA is a Registered Charity # BN 89131 4973 RR0001)

For more about the GHRA including our up-to-date meeting, event and work date schedule visit our website, [www.ghra.ca](http://www.ghra.ca)

**GHRA Board of Directors 2009**

A vacancy in the Board of Directors is immediately available. Please consider joining to assist with group administration.

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(519) 836-7186  
steve [at] hostovsky.com

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(519) 824-8254  
sshergold [at] sympatico.ca

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(519) 993-6344  
chris [at] vanderheide.ca

**Bruce Lowe**

(519) 821-3828  
pinetree07 [at] sympatico.ca

**Trevor Blatherwick**

viarailfan [at] gmail.com

**Photo Corner -** Send submissions by e-mail to inquiry [ a t ] ghra.ca or by postal mail



Opening day of Guelph Junction Express. From left to right: Tom Sagaskie (Manager, Guelph Junction Railway), John Carroll (President, Guelph Junction Express), and Ben Boehm (President, Guelph Junction Railway). September 20 2008.



Former B&M 6206 in 1977 at Rockport, MA, USA – sold to MBTA in 1976 but still retaining B&M lettering in photo. Built in 1955 by the Budd Company and rebuilt in 1982 by Morrison-Knudson as a cab-control car lettered MBTA #1404. It is now lettered VTRX 106 and is used on the Guelph Junction Express tourist train. Photo by George W. Hamlin and used with permission.