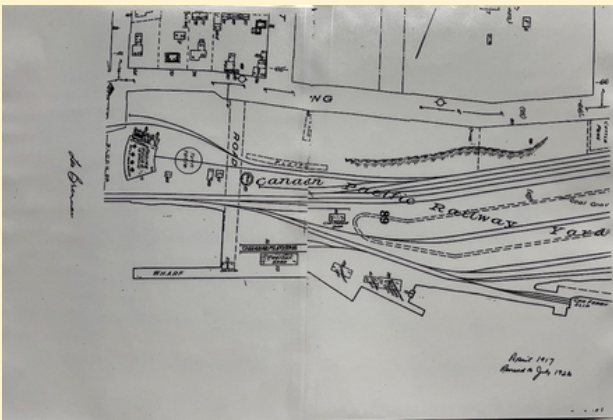


The History of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Prescott

By The Prescott Museum & Visitor Centre

The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) is a transcontinental railway spanning from Eastern Canada to British Columbia, connecting the newly formed western provinces to the rest of Canada. Construction for the project began in 1875 and lasted until 1885, when the final spikes were nailed in Craigellachie, B.C. To expedite the construction of the CPR line, the company began purchasing pre-existing rail lines across Eastern Canada, Quebec, and Ontario. One of those to be purchased by CPR was the Ottawa - Prescott Railway (the Bytown Prescott Railway). Constructed in the early 1850s, the Ottawa-Prescott railway was a vital line connecting Ottawa to the rest of Canada. In 1884, CPR signed a 999-year lease on the old Ottawa-Prescott railway and immediately breathed some new life into the line.

During the decades following CPR's acquisition of the Ottawa-Prescott Railway, Prescott evolved into a key hub for freight. By the 1890s, CPR had built an extensive network of rail yards and freight facilities next to the Prescott Wharf, located across from Fort Wellington. This development took place due to the area's proximity to the Prescott Junction and the railcar ferry docks, which were operated by the Canadian Pacific Car and Passenger Transfer Service (CPC & PT).



CPR railyard map

In 1895, after the completion of the Prescott grain elevator, a spur line was connected to the elevator, facilitating grain shipments between the ships and trains docked at the Prescott Wharf. These spur lines were extended further down Water Street to the Dominion Lighthouse Building west of Centre Street to speed up the process of shipping goods such as Alcohol from local breweries and distilleries and navigation equipment constructed by DLD.

Around the mid-1890s, the company also became involved in the special trade known as the "Silk Trains." These special trains transported carloads of raw silk from the Orient to the west coast of Canada on CP ships, and from there, by rail to silk factories in New York City. These highly valuable cargoes, averaging prices upwards of \$3,000,000, were often inspected at the Prescott Wharf prior to shipment across the St. Lawrence on the railcar ferry. Ed McNally, a CPR employee, oversaw these inspections. Unlike other freight trains of the era, the silk trains were much smaller, allowing for faster travel. Throughout this period, stations along the silk train routes were kept informed of the trains' progress by telegraph so that engines could be replaced at regular intervals. These silk train services continued through Prescott until the late 1930s, when the Great Depression, the development of alternative fabrics, and the impending war ended the trade.



By the turn of the century, CPR overshadowed the Grand Trunk Station in Prescott for freight shipment. The GTR managed mostly passengers and light freight, while the CPR managed all the bulk imports and exports of goods with the United States. In 1908, Prescott became the coal depot for CP's eastern region, resulting in the expansion of the Prescott rail yards and Wharf westerly on what is now the Sandra Lawn Marina. This expansion included replacing the old engine house with a new roundhouse building for the locomotives, redesigned trackage, new dock facilities, and a conveyor system for the coal. Samuel Dowsley was involved with these projects. First getting his start in the locomotive industry in 1865, with the Ottawa-Prescott Railway as a manager for the rolling stock of locomotives. He rose to become foreman and worked for the company for many years after it became the CPR. The 1908 refitting was his last major project prior to his retirement in 1911.



The decline in the CPR service in Prescott began around the start of the 1930s. With the Great Depression ending the silk trade and the construction of a vastly larger state-of-the-art grain elevator in Johnstown, the Prescott CPR yard's main source of freight was coal.

CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY				
Name	J. J. Macdonald		Date	Jan 14 1914
No. of Receptor	13	Employee's No.	18	Shop
Engine, Car	25 Jan 14		No. of Machine Operated	4
No. of Receptor	3301	DESCRIPTION OF WORK	45	2
Engine, Car	3508		43	30
No. of Receptor	6110			
Distribution of Time Correct				
Canadian Pacific Railway Employee Transcripts, January 1914				

The company experienced its last major boom in service during the war effort of WWII in the 1940s, as a lead distributor of military equipment and navigational aids produced by the DLD. However, by 1946, traffic outside of the CPR rail yards returned to normal. The last major renovations came in the 1950s when new coal yards were built on the waterfront. However, by the 1960s, with the expansion of diesel-powered locomotives, these coal yards were phased out of operation. When fire struck at the Ogdensburg port and destroyed the buildings in 1970, it was decided to close the railcar ferry service, which CPR now owned and to close the CPR track from Ottawa to Prescott.

Today, little remains at the site opposite Fort Wellington except for some cement footings in the grass and the rotting pilings of the ferry boat wharf jutting out into the St. Lawrence. With most of the site now playing host to the Riverwalk trail and Prescott Pop Up's site.



The riverwalk, 1920s vs 2020s

The Prescott Museum & Visitor Centre
Open Wednesday - Saturday, 11-5
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