

## CHAPTER IV.

*Development Of Railroad Transportation*

The development of Aroostook has been perhaps more largely one of transportation than any other single factor. Immigration of a sturdy people, with the courage, fortitude and strong fiber of mind and body required for such a task, came in and broke down the physical obstacles which the climate and the wilderness presented. But such activity and efforts could carry the work of development forward only to a limited point, hampered by inadequate means of transportation.

The period within which the growth of the County was circumscribed, and development commensurate with natural resources, was held in check, was the period—a long and very weary one—during which Northern Maine waited for means of railroad transportation for its products. This period went back some years before the Civil War. Prior to that time there was little in the way of population and developed industries to base a public demand upon for the investment of capital in the construction of a railroad into Aroostook. There was sound argument, however, even then for such an enterprise, but from the standpoint of capital, and in the eyes of the outside world, Aroostook was a terra incognita, a wilderness of which far less was known than we know today of the great expanse of forest domain, which awaits development—whenever success shall have rewarded the efforts now in progress to open it, by the building of the Gould line, known as the Quebec Extension Railroad.

To make matters worse for Aroostook, it had for a competitor in development the then new West, which was pulling from Maine and all New England its surplus capital and its wealth of young and vigorous blood. This not only brought the rural communities of Southern Maine and other sections of New England to a standstill, but inflicted upon them a serious blight in decrease of population, and decadence of business industries. The great magnet which was thus pulling from the East Westward, affected Aroostook unfavorably, in common with other sections.

It is aside from the purpose that this fever to go West, and to plant every available dollar of Eastern savings and Eastern capital there, had many examples of individual failure to reap expected returns. It brought wealth to many, and perhaps to as many more it brought loss and disappointment, and, broadly considered, the rule it established in practice of putting Maine

energy and Maine money into channels of enterprise and investment outside Maine, has been a bad one, and kept our State on the lower rung of the ladder, while other commonwealths have been climbing upward in wealth and population. It is sufficient to say that Aroostook had peculiar disadvantages in securing means of development such as her resources warranted, and that they were secured at last only by a persistence and energy which would not be denied, and by the possession of resources which, in the nature of things, could not be permanently overlooked and neglected.

In the old, pre-railroad days horse power was all that Aroostook had to move her surplus products to market outside the County, and to bring into the County the list of things the simple habits and limited business of the County called for. Up to the time the Civil War broke out there was not invested in all means of transportation between Aroostook and Bangor, as much value as is to be found in any single garage, of the many hundreds now scattered throughout the County. As much was not brought into Aroostook in three months as is brought in a single day now by the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad. As much tonnage did not go out in six months, as is moved out now in a single day in the busy season of freight movement out of Aroostook. The value of what was raised and marketed in the season of 1919 in Aroostook was twenty-five times the entire valuation of the County in 1860. Had capital waked up to an appreciation of what there was here to develop and had a direct railroad been built into the County twenty years before it was built, both valuation and population would have run to much greater figures than they have reached.

The first railroad enterprise from which Aroostook ultimately derived benefit, originated in New Brunswick. There was conceived at a very early date in New Brunswick, as far back as 1840, a railroad project, which, if it had materialized, would have followed much the same course across what is now Northern Maine soil, as the route of the proposed Quebec Extension Railroad. This ancient road as planned had its eastern terminus at St. Andrews and its western end at Quebec. St. Andrews was then a provincial seaport town of importance; there were men of financial weight and influence there, and this old-time scheme of a cross-cut line of communication between Quebec and St. Andrews, received the approval of London bankers.

Just what caused the miscarriage of the enterprise we do not know, but we surmise that the settlement of the Northeast-

ern boundary dispute adversely to the British claims, put a quietus on the project. After that railroad development in the Province was in abeyance, for a time, but at length the St. Andrews to Quebec movement resulted in the building of a line from St. Andrews to Richmond, which afforded an outlet by teaming freight between Houlton and Richmond. Subsequently the branch from the main line to Richmond was abandoned, after which a branch into Houlton was built from Debec Junction.

The European & North American from Bangor to Vanceboro was built in 1860—70. It connected with the European & North American for extension from St. John westward. The two were united into the "Consolidated European & North American Railroad." This was projected as a great international highway, and the junction of the two lines at the boundary was of such supposed significance and importance that the imposing ceremonies commemorating the event were participated in by President Grant and other high officials on the part of the United States, and by equally high dignitaries representing the British Government. Great things were predicted for this enterprise which was to link the two countries together in closer bonds of commercial and social relationship. It was expected that passenger traffic via Liverpool to New York would be diverted to this line at Halifax, and that American travelers would largely turn to the Canadian seaport as a more pleasant and expeditious route to England. In all these respects the thoroughfare opened with such joyful acclaim and enthusiasm, has proved a disappointment, and as has been stated, the promoters of the American end of the scheme looted Aroostook of a timber land domain of almost untold prospective value, by offering as a bait to the Legislature which granted the subsidy, the promise that the line would be extended into and afford an outlet for Aroostook.

The Consolidated European & North American road failed in 1875. Reorganized with the title "St. John & Maine," it was leased to the New Brunswick. The section of the European & North American in Maine went to the Maine Central in 1882.

Nevertheless, the American section of this so-called international line was destined to become a part of a system of transportation which, though circuitous, and merely accidental and incidental in its relation to Aroostook interests, for many years afforded our County a very useful though limited and imperfect bond of communication with the outside world.

In connection with the other Provincial railroad developments, somewhat later than the period which marked the opening of the European & North American line, Alexander Gibson, a Provincial lumber king, conceived and carried out a project of building a narrow gauge railroad from Gibson, near Fredericton, to Woodstock, his line following the course of the St. John on the east side of the river. The Gibson narrow-gauge was carried first to Northampton, opposite Woodstock, and later was built through to Andover, Grand Falls and Edmundston. The promoter of this line received from the Canadian Government 10,000 acres of land per mile of road as a subsidy.

When this narrow gauge line was pushed up the St. John, Fort Fairfield, the nearest North Aroostook town to the new Provincial railroad, eagerly sought to avail itself of this opportunity to secure a rail outlet. Agitation to that end was begun, and the Fort Fairfield people, with characteristic energy, persisted, until finally their efforts were crowned with success, and a spur from the Gibson line was completed into Fort Fairfield village. Later on the same sort of strenuous effort Fort Fairfield had exerted was put forth by Caribou citizens and the helping hand of an extension of the line was given them.

It was now Presque Isle's turn to boost and boom to make the branch line let out another link, The boom commenced early in 1881, and those who recall those days, remember what a strenuous campaign it was. The upshot of it was that a proposition was made to the New Brunswick Railroad to extend its line to Presque Isle on payment of \$15,000 by the towns interested, together with a guarantee of right of way. A railroad mass meeting was held at Presque Isle April 2, 1881. The result was that on April 8, 1881, the town of Presque Isle voted \$10,000, and on the following day Maysville voted \$5,000, and individuals in adjoining towns subscribed toward the right of way. On the 28th of May Messrs. Isaac and E. R. Burpee, contractors for the New Brunswick Railroad, accompanied by F. A. Wilson of Bangor, and Llewellyn Powers of Houlton, as attorney for the towns, met in Presque Isle, and the contract was completed. Work was at once commenced and energetically pushed, and on Dec. 1, 1881, the first train steamed into Presque Isle. Messrs. Burpee and other gentlemen interested were upon the train, and were given a most enthusiastic reception.

This was the greatest event in Presque Isle's history up to that time. It eclipsed all that had gone before it, and the enthusiasm over finally being linked by a railroad with the out-

side world was the occasion of a jubilee such as Presque Isle never saw before and has not witnessed since. It was like the firstborn in an expectant home. Others that come later may be fairer, brighter and more promising, but the first has in it the real peach bloom of joy, pride and happiness.

When Presque Isle assumed an indebtedness of \$15,000, and in exchange therefor secured connection with the Provincial line in Dec. 1881, she made perhaps the best investment in her history up to that time. Her rail communication with the outside world was long and roundabout, and had the disadvantage of running through a foreign country, but it was a vast improvement on the old order of things. Property values advanced, population began to increase, and there was a distinct step forward in wealth and prosperity immediately following the advent of railroad facilities.

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## CHAPTER V.

### *The Direct-Line Railroad Agitation.*

When the railroad outlet a community gets has a superfluous distance from the objective to be reached of something like 90 miles; when personal travel or the transportation of freight has to go out of its way scores of miles, first in an exactly opposite direction, and then scores of miles more in a rambling and weary detour from a direct line to its destination, it can not be a permanently satisfactory arrangement. And the old-time railroad via New Brunswick had these drawbacks.

The result was that Presque Isle had not had its newly acquired railroad facilities half a decade before there was agitation started for other and better facilities. This agitation took definite form with the return of Hon. Joseph B. Hall to Presque Isle in October, 1884, and his resumption of publication of the Aroostook Herald. Mr. Hall was a good newspaper man, quick to discern and seize upon the immediate and pressing need of his field for better railroad facilities, and had the faculty of bringing that need to the front and agitating it so as to create public interest and enthusiasm. Advocacy of what was termed a "Direct Line Railroad," started very shortly after Mr. Hall revived the Herald, and it was not long before the persistent agitation in its columns bore fruit in a local association of citizens to forward the scheme.

The first to enlist in the movement and to add their influ-