



## PORTRAIT

### History of the railway

The railway system in Témiscamingue was built in three phases. The first phase which began in the 1880s, involved the construction of a man-made railway along the rapids and engineered by the *Société de colonisation du lac Témiscamingue* (SCLT) to meet the needs of land settlement and improve the means of travelling for new settlers coming to the region of Témiscamingue. The road to Témiscamingue was very long and filled with numerous obstacles such as rapids. In 1885, to improve this access route, the SCLT built a narrow-gauge railway along the six Long Sault rapids on which a steam locomotive pulled tramcars. At the same time, a narrow-gauge tramway was built along the other rapids on which the tramcars were pulled by horses. The narrow-gauge railway was 13-kilometre long. Between the rapids, settlers travelled in canoes on the rivers and in steamboats on the lakes. The work was completed in 1886. The Gendreau tramway, named in honor of Father Gendreau, founder of the SCLT, operated on the Long Sault railway. However, since the SCLT wanted to concentrate its energy on land settlement and land clearing in the Duhamel and Guigues townships, it established a company to be in charge of transportation only. This company, called *Compagnie de navigation et du chemin de fer de Témiscamingue*, was in charge of building the railway from Mattawa to Long Sault and then on to Kipawa starting in 1888.



## Buy out by the Canadian Pacific Railway

In 1891, Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) who owned the railway between Montreal and Mattawa, bought the existing infrastructure. In the mid 1890s, CPR replaced the original railway with standard width tracks and connected Mattawa to Lumsden's Mill and then to Kipawa. Alex Lumsden and later on, the Riordon Pulp and Paper Company, used the new railway to ship their forest products.

## Construction of the railway

The third phase of construction was carried out over several years. It began in 1912 with a grant from the Federal Government. The Quebec Government transferred 1,619 hectares of land for every 1,6 kilometres of railway, for the realization of an 80 kilometres project to link Témiscamingue to Ville-Marie. Work was interrupted during the First World War (1914-1918).

1921 was marked by the uprising of the developers of Témiscamingue. Construction of the railway had not yet begun despite promises made by CPR and the Quebec Government. During that time, supporters of the colonization movement and the industrialists squared off over the alignment of the railway. The first group wanted it to serve the new communities, while the industrialists favoured the shortest route possible to reach Lake Des-Quinze by going past the heart of the older agricultural communities.

After a series of debates, construction of the railway finally began on October 6, 1921. The chosen alignment met the needs of the forestry companies and was also beneficial to the region's business sector in view of the fact that CPR always had high regard for its feasibility. The population of Témiscamingue was too small to ensure on its own the feasibility of the railroad company. It was therefore decided to bring the railway to Angliers by passing through existing communities. This was the shortest and least costly alignment. The company also offered train service to travellers. The railway had a double purpose: allow for the transportation of supplies from the mill in Témiscamingue to Riordon's lumbering camps, and allow farmers in the old farming communities to ship pulp wood cut on their land.



## Construction carried out in phases

The railway was built in three phases. Hence, 3 sections were completed before the Témiscamingue-Angliers section. The first section that linked Kipawa to Fabre was built in September of 1922. Then came the construction of a section connecting Fabre to Laverlochère, including a branch line to Ville-Marie at Gaboury near Béarn. This line was 12 km long and reached Ville-Marie in 1923. Finally, the last phase of construction linking Laverlochère to Angliers at the foot of Lake Des Quinze was completed in 1924. The railway terminus was established at Angliers. The distance between Témiscamingue and Angliers was approximately 123 km and 135 km when going through Ville-Marie.

Starting in 1923, the common belief was that construction would continue until the line reached the Transcontinental junction (linking Québec to Winnipeg) near Amos. In 1924, there was some talk about extending this line to the mining region of Rouyn and further. So in 1935, CPR obtained a charter from the Quebec Government to extend this line to Rouyn. Unfortunately, this charter was cancelled when the Second World War erupted (1939-1945).

## Use of the railroad

The train was widely used for the transportation of various types of products by forestry companies, general merchants, farmers, retail businesses, individuals, and later on for gas stations. At the beginning, large and small types of merchandise were delivered by train including agricultural instruments, furniture and food. Mail arrived by train – it used to arrive by boat at the docks in Ville-Marie from Haileybury.



The train also carried passengers. One could travel to Montreal in approximately 15 hours. Also, with the arrival of new diesel railcars, people could make a return trip to a neighboring town in the same day. During the Depression, the Vautrin Plan was adopted to create work by opening new land to attract people from the cities. New settlers arrived by train and many of them established their homes around the train stations. CPR offered a reduced transportation fee to settlers and their merchandise.

In the 1930s, a regular ticket to Montreal from Angliers via Mattawa cost \$14,25. A settler could do the same trip for only \$10,20. If a settler came to the region with as a result of the Vautrin Plan, he would get a reduced rate of \$7,40.

## Railway Employees

Many labourers worked on the construction of the railroad while many others carried out various duties to maintain the line, engines, freight cars and provide services at the station. The railwayman ensured proper maintenance and safety of the railroad lines and operated the handcars (pump trolley). The task of pumping the crank was physically demanding, especially when it would reach a slope. The maintenance foreman was another of the duties which involved supervising the railwaymen and ensuring the railroad was always in good condition. The station master or the station agent accomplished administrative tasks mostly and was responsible for the management of the merchandise and operated the telegraph. Many individuals from Témiscamingue devoted their lives to the railroad. These were good years for many employees. Working for the railroad provided stable employment compared to other occupations in those days.



## Train Station

The railroad was important, but so was the train station. It was a place of meeting and an exchange point where visitors arrived or left for long journeys. It was also a place of gathering full of novelties and curiosities. The station platform replaced the wharf where the boats on Lake Témiscamingue used to dock. Most train stations had a waiting room, a wicket to purchase tickets, toilets and an apartment for the train stationmaster. Sheds were located behind the stations. The arrival of the “big cars” generated a lot of interest as people would often go to the stations to see who was arriving. Telegraph service was also available at train stations, and they were often the first places to get electricity and telephone service.

## **Decline of the railroad**

In the 1950s and 1960s, improvement of the road network resulted in the progression of the trucking business. From this emerged competition between these two cargo carriers as some trucking companies set their prices at the same level as the rail carriers. As a result, CPR incurred significant financial losses – in 1976, the company ran a deficit of \$390,000. So in 1977, CPR presented an abandonment application to the Canadian Transportation Commission to discontinue the Témiscaming and Ville-Marie subdivisions. The line was in poor shape: the ground was caving in, bridges were poorly maintained and off limits and this was all very expensive to repair. Service was reduced in some areas and offered only on demand. After much discussion between both parties, two proposals were made to the Canadian Transportation Commission. The first proposal involved closing the Laverlochère-Angliers line because it was virtually no longer in use and because of the small number of inhabitants in that area. The second proposal was to maintain the service to transport goods from Gendreau to Laverlochère and from Gaboury to Ville-Marie. A five-year delay was then decreed in order to pursue a review of the abandonment application.

After the five-year delay, CPR maintained its request to abandon the Témiscaming and Ville-Marie subdivisions. In November 1985, a second meeting was held between the Railroad Transportation Committee, representatives from CPR and the Témiscamingue community. After that time, transportation by train was offered based on demand only and October 5, 1984 marked the last day of train operations.

Afterwards, the transportation of merchandise was mainly done by truck. The Committee proposed the end of railway operations on these subdivisions invoking many reasons. Abandonment was officially announced in January 1986.

In 1988, CPR officially asked the National Transportation Office to abandon its service on the Témiscaming Gendreau line because it was no longer cost-effective despite its good condition. The Town did not oppose this abandonment so the Office granted the request and CPR ceased all services on this line in March 1989, marking the end of the railroad era in Témiscamingue.