

CHAPTER THREE:

The New Brunswick Railway

So long as a locomotive traverses the New Brunswick Railway, so long will the name of Alexander Gibson be honored throughout the length and breadth of the land, and any attempt on the part of a factious Press to write him down on account of his present procedure in connection with the timber lands of the country, will only serve to elevate him more highly in the estimation of every fair and reasonable man in the community.

- Fredericton Reporter, September 16, 1864.

FROM THE BEGINNING of his tenure at Marysville, Gibson took an active interest in railroad building, as all lumbermen dependent on river transportation, and thereby frozen out of business for a good part of the year, naturally did. When he purchased the Rankin properties there were only a few railroads in the province. The first, the so-called “European and North American,” connecting Saint John with Moncton and Shediac, was begun in 1853 and opened in 1860 to great acclaim. In its original conception, it was planned to be part of an international high-speed railway linking New York, Boston and Portland with Halifax and thereby shortening a lengthy sea voyage to London. The province’s second railway, begun in 1846, was the St. Andrews and Quebec Railroad. Its projectors hoped a rail link would make St. Andrews Quebec City’s winter port on the Atlantic, as the St. Lawrence was frozen solid for most of the winter months. This project, after many stops and starts, had halted just short of Woodstock in 1862.

As a businessman needing rail access to Saint John and the United States, Gibson and fellow businessmen in Fredericton saw immediate potential in the further development of the old European and North American. In 1864 the Facility Act had offered a subsidy of \$10,000 per mile for railroads that would help complete it, with special emphasis laid on a line from the Maine border to Saint John through the Douglas Valley as opposed to a shore route. A line from Saint John to City Camp (present-day McAdam) nicknamed the Western Extension was begun in 1865 by Saint John businessman William Parks, and while it was under construction Fredericton businessmen, seeing that linking with this railroad would open up trade for the city, formed the Fredericton Railroad Company in 1866.

Eventually it was decided that Hartt's Mills (Fredericton Junction) would be the best location for a junction point.

The *Fredericton Reporter* described the new Company's first meeting as "the first murmurings of an agitation which is destined to ring throughout the length and breadth of the land." That pronouncement did not sound grandiose at the time, for Fredericton was effectively landlocked for five months of the winter when the river was frozen and all traffic to Saint John had to be conducted by either ice-road on the Saint John River or the ancient Nerepis stage route. One alderman pointed out the unfortunate necessity of Fredericton businessmen having to bid before the river congealed at prices which might be lower later on, as for example, in the case of a gentleman who purchased 1,500 barrels of pork, but shortly after the river froze saw prices drop by one dollar per barrel leaving him with a straight loss of \$1,500. Another complained that he personally had experienced the effects of winter isolation, having had to import a wife from the United States, and little doubted that if all the other councillors had to import their wives from the United States, there would soon be a locomotive running to Hartt's Mills.

In March 1866 Gibson put down a \$40,000 bond to the Commercial Bank of New Brunswick to secure a mortgage on four properties just to the south of Fredericton along the Saint John River, the route the newly proposed Fredericton Branch Railway was to take. These comprised about 13 acres and contained mills and mill buildings conveyed to Charles McPherson, George Morrissey, and Alexander Shives in 1852. He also took over the lease of a contiguous lot from millman John Morrison. (Later, at the termination of the lease in 1871, Morrison would secure full possession of these properties from Gibson and re-open them as the Phoenix Mill, one of the larger sawmills in the area.) Just below this mill site was another mill known later as the Victoria Mill, alongside which the railway was also to pass. Gibson became a director with the Fredericton Railroad Company in 1867, with Fredericton High Sheriff Thomas Temple as President and A. F. Randolph Treasurer, both of whom, like Gibson, were lumbermen and businessmen of considerable means. Contracted to build the line were lumberman John Pickard, Liberal member for York, and Egerton Burpee of Saint John, chief engineer also on the Western Extension. Mr. Burpee was the brother of noted businessman and politician Isaac Burpee of Saint John, a close personal friend of Gibson's.

Gibson was not reported as being at the official sod turning which took place in November, 1868, at Salamanca Lodge Gate near the city limits, where, in a ring roped off for the purpose, Mrs. William Needham, wife of the newly elected member for York, himself a stockholder in the railroad

Company, wielding a tiny spade, deposited the turf in an ornate mahogany wheelbarrow built specially for the event. Nor it seems was he at the following luncheon, where needless apologies were offered for the absence of wines, as just about all the members of the company were members of the Temperance Society. He no doubt read the "Song of the Fredericton Locomotive," which appeared in *Head Quarters* for November 4, 1868, and included the heartening promise that it would soon "bring you lumber from the woods, no matter how heavy or large / In quarter the time the tugs could do, and just at quarter the charge." He was definitely there for the grand opening of both railroads, the Fredericton Branch and Western Extension at City Camp in the fall of 1869, along with a bevy of shareholders, politicians and press from Fredericton, Saint John, St. Andrews, St. Stephen, Woodstock, Calais, Bangor and Portland, Maine. And he may well have been in Saint John for the grand celebratory banquet, featuring a trudge from the train station to the banquet hall through ankle-deep mud, French service and 50 waiters imported from Boston. If so, he would have been glad to return finally to Fredericton, two days later, after a near-death experience on the next morning's train home, when crossing a cutting partially washed out by rains the wheels of the baggage car came partly off the rails, requiring the car to be backed off the line, an alarm fire kindled, and the passengers returned to Saint John for an overnight.

The Fredericton Branch Railway and Western Extension were a great advance for businessmen and lumberman alike. Track conditions permitting, and the slight delay occasioned by a stage trip between the border and Mattawamkeag in Maine, to which the Americans had laid tracks earlier in the year, Frederictonians now had connection at all seasons of the year with "the outer world," as it was sometimes called, being able to leave Fredericton by the 9 am train, reach Bangor by 6 pm and Boston the next morning at 5:30 am; transact business and leave Boston at 8 in the evening, reaching Fredericton again at 4:30 the next day. Or within the country, to leave Fredericton at 8:30 in the morning, arrive in St. John by 3:45 in the afternoon, and be home that night. "What would our grandmothers have thought," declared the *Reporter*, "who used to spend a week or ten days on the 'voyage' between Fredericton and St. John?"

WELL BEFORE THE completion of these two railways, Gibson and his friends were looking north to the New Brunswick - Quebec border. At Rivière-du-Loup the Grand Trunk Railroad had its eastern-most terminus on the St. Lawrence River and was the closest point at which a New Brunswick railroad could connect with Quebec City or Montreal on an all-Canadian route. It was to Rivière-du-Loup that the St. Andrews and Quebec Rail-

Song of the Fredericton Locomotive

Puff, puff, puff, through sleet and snow and rain,
I whirl along my iron track, dragging a clattering train.
I'll beat by many a measured mile, the fastest going steed,
And yet so mild my mighty power, a child may check my speed.
I want no fodder, no rest, no sleep, to aid me in my toil,
But a drink of water, a log of wood, and a little drop of oil.

I'll bring you lumber from the woods, no matter how heavy or large,
In quarter the time the tugs could do, and just at quarter the charge.
I'll bring you poultry, cattle and fruit, from all the country round,
And I'll lower the price of molasses and tea ever so much the pound.
And a boon I'll be to the Dry Goods men - none of them now need fail,
For I'll bring a crowd of country folks to every "Clearance Sale."

I'll bring each member of the House, from his homestead, right away
To spend his time in lively debates, and his four dollars a day.
I'll bring the lumbermen to town, to swarm each street and lane,
And when they've squandered all - but the fare - I'll carry them back again.
I'll bring the Halifax boys if you like, nor charge for a single ticket,
To be challenged, and licked, "as they were before," at a friendly game of cricket.

I'll bring you news almost as fast as the telegraph can send,
And the sweetest thing, in bonnets and skirts, including the Grecian Bend.
I'll do no harm to man or beast, so Teamsters don't look blue,
For I'll share your toil, like a brick as I am, and double your wages too.
And Stage-coach Drivers, never say die, you'll meet with ample rewards,
For every mother's son of you I'll choose for my special Guards.

And my whistle long, and loud, and shrill, shall wake this slumb'ring town,
And rouse her sons from inert case, to strive for renown.
And Trade will flourish, and extend, and wealth and fame pursue
Your labours, if with manly zeal you emulate the few
Whose enterprising spirit sought my aid, and my opinion,
And I foretold your town would be the first in the Dominion.
- Oromocto

Head Quarters

Nov 4, 1868

road, having been shut out of a shorter line across Maine, had finally settled on, though it had stopped well short of its destination. Where St. Andrews speculators had hoped to secure Quebec's rail traffic to the Atlantic, Fredericton businessmen had similar aims. Confederation had guaranteed an Intercolonial railway to connect the Canadas with a winter port at Halifax, and just as Halifax was universally agreed upon as the best Canadian seaport on the Atlantic, so Rivière-du-Loup was chosen as the best place for a New Brunswick railway to link with it.

The insoluble question was by which route. Sandford Fleming had conducted numerous surveys beginning in 1863, and in 1868 published his findings in his *Report on the Intercolonial Railway Exploratory Survey*. He mapped out seventeen possible routes, divided into three categories. 1) The Frontier Routes, which ran down the Saint John River close to the Maine border, crossing to the west side of the Saint John River, touching the end point of the New Brunswick and Canada Railway (the former St. Andrews and Quebec Railway) at Richmond Station near Woodstock, and heading east via Saint John to Halifax. 2) The Central Routes, which kept to the east bank of the Saint John River, touching around the head of Grand Lake on the way more or less directly to Saint John. 3) And the Bay de Chaleur routes, which passed down the Gulf of St. Lawrence on the east coast of New Brunswick, touching at Moncton on the way to Halifax.

Fleming diplomatically noted advantages and disadvantages to each line, the Frontier routes being best for local traffic and in the winter heavy freight; the Bay de Chaleur routes for European passenger traffic, mail and express freight; and the Central routes for through freight. As far as developing the lumbering business in New Brunswick, Fleming gave preference to the Frontier and Central routes. As most of the timber trade was being carried on in the upper regions of the Saint John River, supplies had to be brought to Saint John from the United States and then boated upriver before the ice set in. This trade would be materially changed by an Intercolonial Railway on a Frontier route, wrote Fleming, "and the resulting traffic therefrom would form an item in the revenue of the contemplated work," as 80,000 barrels of flour, pork and other goods were imported annually to the lumber camps north of Woodstock, and the population of the area, including the lumber districts of nearby Aroostook, Maine, was estimated at 40,000. The Central routes, too, would serve the same interests, though the population was fairly sparse, there being few settlements between Miramichi and the St. Lawrence. And of course, either route would be an invaluable means of getting out lumber at all times of the year, especially after the river froze.