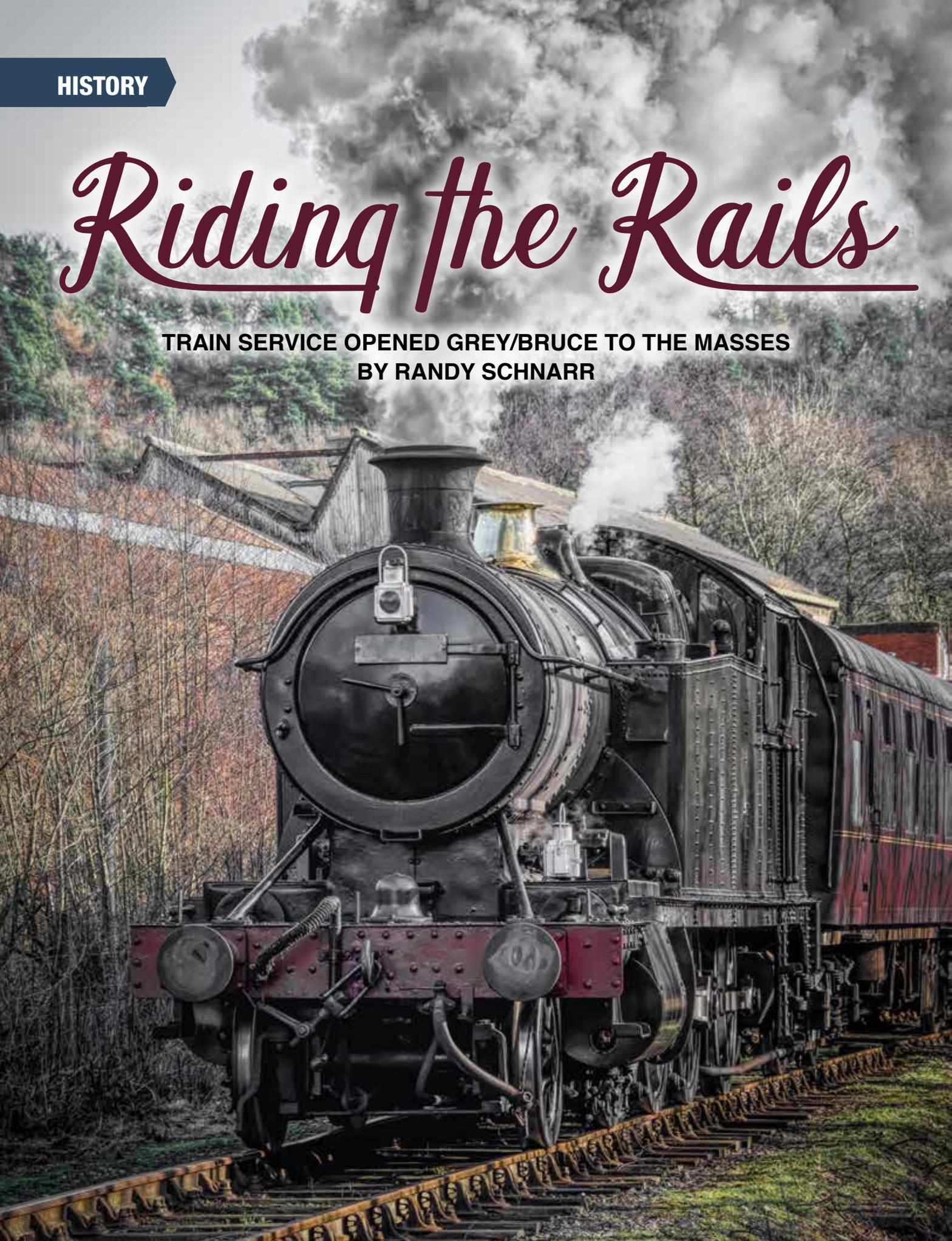


HISTORY

# *Riding the Rails*

**TRAIN SERVICE OPENED GREY/BRUCE TO THE MASSES  
BY RANDY SCHNARR**



In the early-1800s, access to Grey and Bruce counties was primarily by lakes and rivers, in season.

By the mid-1800s, roadways were cut through the bush and swamp, providing a land route to major cities. Swampland roads were made by laying cut trees side-by-side to create 'corduroy' roads... passable in summer and winter, but usually too muddy in spring and fall.

The Garafraxa Road reached Owen Sound (Sydenham) by 1848, and the Elora Road reached the shore at Southampton by 1851. By today's standards, travel was slow, uncomfortable and often difficult. Primary power on these roads was by ox, foot, horseback and horse-drawn wagon/buggy. A return trip to Toronto (140 miles) could take as long as a week. A better mode of transport was drastically needed.

By the 1850s, plans to build railways were drawn up to service the 'bush' lands to the north.

In 1864, charters were granted to the Wellington Grey & Bruce Railway (WGBR) to build rail lines from Southampton to Guelph. The line was completed in December 1872, with additional subdivisions added in Kincardine in 1873, Wiarton and Durham in 1881, and Owen Sound in 1894. WGBR was initially operated by the Great Western Railway. By 1882, the Great Western faltered, leaving the WGBR right of way to the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR). In 1923, the GTR operated the WGBR until it was absorbed into the Canadian National Railway. Last construction on the line was a spur from Port Elgin to Douglas Point in 1971 to supply heavy water to the country's first commercial nuclear reactor, located on what is now the Bruce Power site.

In 1868, the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway (TGBR) received a provincial charter to build a railway in competition with the WGBR. A 3-foot, 6-inch narrow gauge was chosen to reduce costs of development. The TGBR was opened to Owen Sound and Teeswater in 1874. By 1880, the railway ran into financial trouble and

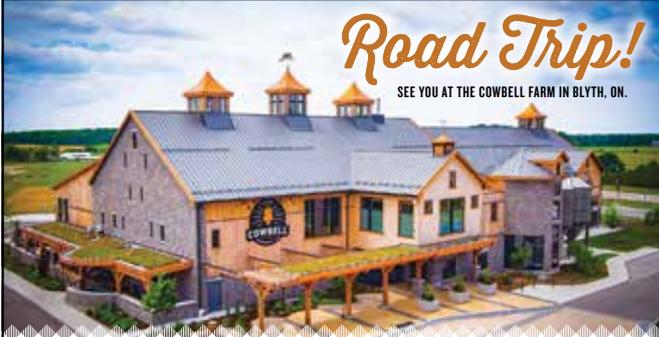
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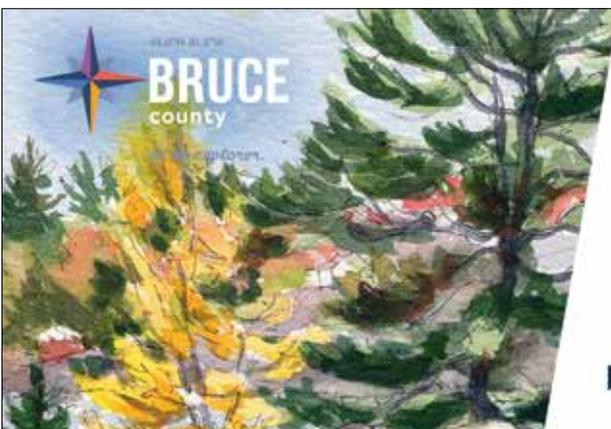
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**Tourists arrive in Southampton by train in this undated photo, courtesy Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre.**

was acquired by the Grand Trunk Railway. In 1881, the gauge was changed to the more popular 4' 8 1/2" standard gauge. In 1883, GTR ran into financial difficulty and sold the TGBR right of way to the Ontario and Quebec Railway, which ultimately became the Canadian Pacific Railway. When the railways were completed to Grey and Bruce counties, a return trip to Toronto would now take only one day. The good life had arrived.

The commodities of life were now more readily abundant. Mail and big city newspapers arrived the next day, five days a week. Coal, fuel oil, and gasoline were readily available to keep buildings warm and vehicles fuelled. The selection of building materials increased dramatically for roofing, framing and finishing of homes and commercial and industrial buildings. Food choices expanded with products from major meat packers, bakeries, dairies and grocery distributors. Fresh fruit arrived from southern climates, made possible by refrigerated rail cars. It was easy to order household appliances and furnishings from big retailers like Eaton's and Simpsons. It felt like the sky was the limit for resources.

Communities blossomed with factories and jobs that enriched the life of all inhabitants. Factories now had ready access to raw materials and reliable transport to deliver their products to customers across Canada and the U.S. Furniture factories in Chesley, Hanover, Hepworth, Southampton, Walkerton, and Warton produced product with names like Bell, Fitton Parker, Knechtel, Krug Bros,

Bogden & Gross, Hepworth, Peppler, Spiesz, Watson, Malcolm & Coombe, Wolfe, Heirloom and E.F.R.

Larger towns had grist mills to produce flour, sawmills to produce sized lumber from local and imported trees, dairies to produce a variety of products, and woolen mills to process wool fibres.

Some towns had foundries like Lobsinger Bros of Mildmay, which produced 'Lion Threshers.' Warton factories processed Portland cement, sugar beets, and frozen fish. Other area products included RCA Victor radios, paint and varnish, brooms, and potash. The wealth of the area's natural and human resources could now be realized.

Every rail stop along the right of way had pens to ship and receive livestock for the local breeders, and Co-ops to gather local grain for shipment to major mills and export. During the first year of the railway's operation, over 200,000 bushels of grain were shipped.

Every weekday morning, a load of fresh white fish would leave Southampton en route to the Ten Eyck Fish Company in Brooklyn, New York. Rutabaga (turnips) was shipped to customers all over North America from Mildmay, where the soil is ideal for growing this root vegetable. Stone and gravel was shipped from the pits near Durham. In the 1950s, 100 car trains would move gravel to build roads and concrete structures across the booming post-war Ontario.

Before the Welland Canal, the ports of Owen Sound and Wiarton received lake freighters with western wheat for overland shipment to major mills in the south, and export through the seaports of Montreal and Toronto.

The railways served more than the commodities markets. Passenger travel was a large part of its business in the early years. Travellers to the west would depart from Owen Sound by ship en route to Thunder Bay with renewed connections by rail. Tourists from Toronto, Hamilton, Guelph, Galt/Preston, Kitchener, Stratford and London would travel north to enjoy the sandy beaches of Bruce County, fostering an extensive hotel and resort industry.

Over 100 years of operation, the importance of the railway gradually declined as roads improved and cars and trucks became more reliable. Trains became less competitive, until operating the railway in Grey/Bruce could no longer be supported. Mail delivery service was stopped in 1957, while the last scheduled freight train was in '59. The passenger train, a self-powered dayliner, ran until 1970. Only freight specials operated, like the train to the Bruce Nuclear Generating Station, but the tracks were removed during the 1980s.

The trains are gone, but the memories live on. There are still some traces of the railways including Southampton Station (private residence); Paisley bridges (two, with remnants of the 1872 structure under the north end of the bridge over the Teeswater River); Cargill station, which was relocated to Bruce Rd. 3; Owen Sound CNR Station; and the Wiarton Station (relocated).

Rail Trail groups have saved the right-of-ways to create

walking and biking trails, which link communities. Many are lined with kiosks, gazebos and murals. We can still imagine the might of the trains as locals and tourists alike walk and ride on these trails.

**Newsworthy events**

- On Oct. 15, 1954, Hurricane Hazel washed out the roadbed under the track in Southampton. At 11 p.m., as the night train approached the station, the train toppled over, killing Engineer Gord McCallum and Fireman Stewart Nicholson.
- Winters required snowplows, usually pushed by two or three locomotives, to keep the railways open. In 1947, the snow was so heavy that regular equipment could not keep the rails clear. The solution was to bring in a huge, rotary snowblower from Montreal to provide a clear passage.
- In 1975, 13 cars from a train carrying heavy water derailed just south of the Paisley bridges, next to the home of Jim and Gladys Teeple. It was a night-time accident. Jim said he slept through the whole process and awoke the next morning to find an overturned tank car in his yard.

**Railway history**

Several books have captured the history of development, stories, and pictures of Grey/Bruce railways, including:

- 'Steam Over Palmerston' by Ian Wilson, a description of the travel along the CNR subdivisions.



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*Lisa V the Realtor to see!*

- ‘Two Divisions to Blue Water’ by Pete Bowers, documenting the development of the CNR in Grey/Bruce.
- ‘Narrow Gauge Through the Bush’ by Rod Clarke, documenting the development of the CPR in Grey/Bruce.
- ‘Saugeen, The Valley of the Railways’ by George Calder, a collection of historical documents and photos.
- ‘Ghost Railways of Ontario’ by Ron Brown, a tour of railway haunts.

There are even steam trains in the works, though in much smaller scale than the originals. The Paisley Heritage Farm is the site of Tom Thumb, a full size 0-4-0 steam engine, which is being rebuilt by volunteers. It is planned to pull full-scale coaches around the heritage site. Until recently, the Port Elgin and North Shore Railway ran during the summer months. The Grey Roots Museum & Archives has a volunteer team working to lay tracks for a 1:8 scale live steam locomotive. The engine was built by Bob McDowell and has been donated to the museum by Mrs. McDowell, while Clive Morgan, of Lion’s Head, has a private live steam locomotive 1:12 scale with tracks around his house.

Local museums are busy telling the story of the trains. The Marine Rail Museum (at the former CNR Station in Owen Sound) features original rail cars, model trains and history. Grey Roots has an ‘N-scale’ diorama of the CPR railway at the Owen Sound harbour, circa 1925. The Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre has an ‘HO-scale’ model train that runs from mini-Palmerston through five dioramas of the towns along the CNR Southampton subdivision, Mildmay to Southampton.

The younger generation can get a feel for what the railways were like from the 1920s to the late-50s, and the older generation has the opportunity to re-live the experience. Crouch down to view each diorama about three-quarters of the way up from the bottom of the window. You may just get the feeling that you are actually there, experiencing the railway as it was 100 years ago. Find a spot and wait for the train to come so you can count cars, just as we did when the trains ran here.

For the very young, the kid’s train at the Bruce Museum is a toy train from the 1940s. Pull up on a lever and watch the train race through town. It’s hard to resist even for adults! An on-board video camera places you on the train at the lead end of a passenger car. The view is projected on a TV monitor, creating a vision of what it was like to ride the rails over 100 years ago.

The memories of the rail service that brought prosperity to our communities is alive and well in Grey/Bruce! ■

*Randy Schnarr, a volunteer conductor with the Bruce County Museum Railway, is a graduate of The Ontario College of Art, Industrial Design. He retired in 2004 from a career in sales and marketing. He and his wife Jessie moved to Southampton from Waterloo in 2005 after 45 years as cottagers. Randy was fascinated with model trains at a young age, however only engaged in the hobby after his retirement. The Bruce County Museum Railway is a project that Randy conceived and directed, and was built with the help of over 30 skilled and passionate volunteers. The exhibit strives to keep the memories and the lure of the trains alive in our communities. Learn more at [www.brucemuseum.ca](http://www.brucemuseum.ca).*

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