

## CHAPTER FIVE:

# The Canada Eastern Railway and Fredericton Railway Bridge

*It will be quite an easy matter, when the Fredericton Railway Bridge is constructed, to make the journey from St. John to Chatham, via Fredericton, in about five hours, so that a passenger can leave St. John in the morning and take his dinner in Chatham. From this it will be very clear that when once this bridge is constructed the Northern and Western Railway will prove, in conjunction with the New Brunswick Railway, a formidable rival for the Intercolonial Railway for the trade between St. John and the North Shore.*

- Miramichi Advance, July 14, 1887.

**W**HILE THE COTTON factory was building, Gibson was forging ahead with yet another railway, this one to Chatham. There were good reasons for such a connection. It would provide timber access for lumbermen at both ends of the line, especially for cedar, though the stands of spruce, hemlock and even pine were also substantial. With a railway bridge in place Chatham and mills along the Bartholomew River at Boiestown, Doaktown and Blackville would have direct connection with Saint John on the one hand and the Maine Central on the other, and with the Intercolonial Railway soon to connect at Chatham, Gibson could hope that the line would be a lucrative feeder for both Saint John, Fredericton and, of course, Marysville or perhaps even prove a direct competitor.

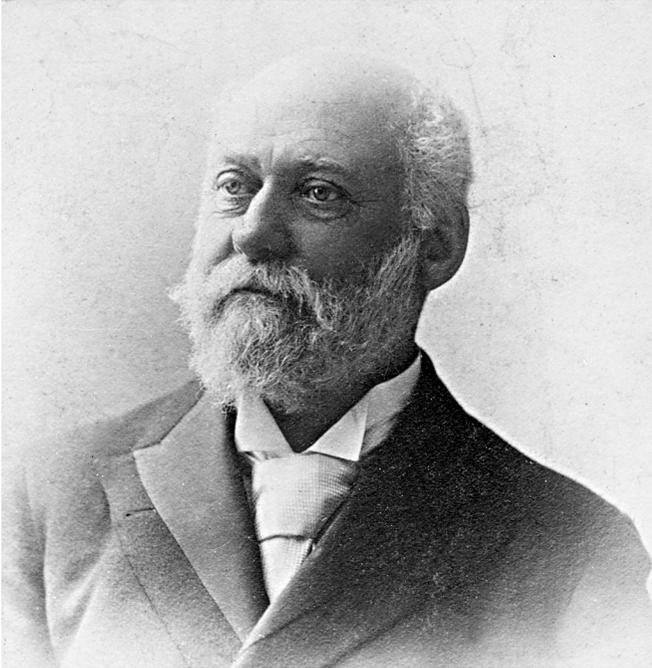
It was the fulfillment of a scheme which dated as far back as 1872, when Gibson and Thomas Temple, along with prominent lumbermen such as William Muirhead and John McLaggan of Miramichi, steamship magnate Sir Hugh Allen, Peter Mitchell, later Premier of New Brunswick, and Andrew Gault had incorporated the Northern and Western Railway Company for the purpose of constructing a line of railway “from the town of Chatham, passing through the counties of Northumberland and York to Fredericton, with the necessary branches.”

Factional infighting with a Newcastle group headed up by Major Randolph Call, who had interests in the steamship and newspaper busi-

ness (he published the *Chatham World*), effectively killed all progress on this project, during which time Gibson explored other possibilities in the railroad business. In 1876 he became President of the Central Railroad, which projected a line from the New Brunswick terminus at Gibson to some point on the Intercolonial Railway through the coal fields at Grand Lake, a scheme which had many stops and starts and never really went anywhere, at least in Gibson's day. After the sale of the New Brunswick Railway, as aforementioned, there were two other schemes which never came to fruition: his invitation to join Sir William Howland in a bid to build the trans-Canada railway to British Columbia and an offer by Gibson himself to purchase half a million of CPR stock.

In 1883 the Northern and Western Railway Company, or the "Miramichi Valley Railway," as it was colloquially known, was reorganized with Gibson as President, Jabez Snowball, owner of the largest lumber mill in the Miramichi area, as Vice-President, and other lumbermen such as William Muirhead of Chatham and John Pickard, M. P. for York. as directors. The Newcastle group which had opposed Gibson's original proposal for a Chatham - Fredericton railway, arose again in protest by forming a rival company, and there was actually a legal battle over which company had advertised prior notice to build the line. When the smoke cleared the Dominion and Provincial governments backed Gibson, perhaps because with the construction of the New Brunswick Railway to his credit, he had, as it were, the better track record.

There was yet another battle to be fought, this one for subsidies. In 1884 D. E. Maxwell's survey recommended a route from Gibson through Marysville, crossing the Nashwaak river just above the town and following it on its eastern side to Boiestown, where it would connect with the South-West Miramichi and proceed through Doaktown and Blackville to the Intercolonial at Chatham Junction. The Province provided a cash subsidy of \$3,000 per mile for this route with no land grants attached. When the Dominion subsidies were announced, there was a bit of a surprise. The Newcastle group, it seems, had made its influence felt in Ottawa, for while there would be a cash amount of \$3,200 per mile from Gibson to Blackville there would be no subsidy for the section from Blackville to Chatham Junction. Instead, there would be a grant of the same amount per mile to build a branch line from Blackville to Indiantown near Newcastle, bridging the South-West Miramichi to its North Shore; and there would also be a subsidy for a contractor to build a branch of the Intercolonial Railway from Indiantown to Newcastle - like Chatham Junction a connecting point of the government line. Fredericton interests, properly in the Gibson camp, were furious at this sort of meddling by the Call



faction, and very unhappy with the performance of Thomas Temple, newly elected Conservative member for York, who was not felt to have done his job in Ottawa.

But the decision had been made to build to Chatham Junction, and with Gibson's famous determination steering the work, none of these setbacks would materially alter the course or pace of construction.

His formidable partner in this venture was Vice-President Jabez Bunting Snowball. A worthy successor to the great Miramichi timber barons of the previous generation, Alexander Rankine and Joseph Cunard, whose rivalry was fought out on opposite sides of the river and the Provincial Legislature, Snowball was the biggest lumberman in the area, owning the largest steam sawmill in New Brunswick, cutting 170,000 feet a day, with other mills in Tracadie and Bay du Vin, along with a grist mill at Red Bank. In addition to holding vast timber leases from the Crown, he was also a co-founder of the Miramichi Steam Navigation Company, building steamers and shipping lumber and lobsters to the British Isles from wharves at

Jabez Bunting Snowball, a long-time partner and rival of Alexander Gibson. In the latter part of the century Snowball operated the largest lumber operation in the Miramichi, founded the Miramichi Steam Navigation Company, and the Chatham Branch Railway. After He was Liberal member for Northumberland from 1878 to 1882, and afterwards Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick. He died February, 1907.

**PANB Slides of the Fathers of Confederation: P106-40.**

which ships lined up ten deep. In short, he was the Alexander Gibson of the North Shore, albeit a slightly smaller version, both in stature and in wealth, and both he and Gibson stood to gain nicely from a railroad connecting their two business empires.

Such was the haste to build this line that things got going in the summer of 1884, even before the federal grants were announced. Snowball and Gibson would work from opposite ends towards Doaktown, where a bridge would join the two sections. Gibson's end was a notable hive of activity. The first sod was turned in July, and less than four weeks later a locomotive was able to be run slowly up the first section of the railway from Gibson to Marysville with machinery for the great cotton mill, then rising. Steamers with steel rails from England were unloading at the mouth of the Nashwaak. The sawmills were churning out lumber for the mill and sleepers for the railway. The bridge across the Nashwaak, just above town, was already partially built. In all, about five hundred men were laboring along the line. Meanwhile, reported the *Gleaner*, "from a certain cozy library, looking out upon a well-kept lawn adorned with handsome hedges and trees," went out messages which affected the lumber business of not only the province but even Great Britain.

There seem not to have been any major difficulties in construction, with the exception of a large cutting, called the "Big Fill," at Nelson's Hollow, eighty feet wide and deep. A lot of bridges were required. These were wooden bridges, mostly of the Howe truss design. They were less than half the cost of a steel bridge and, though less permanent, could be replaced later when revenues began to flow. Such was the strategy employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway in its race to the finish. The rails came from the Barrow Hematite Steel Company in Barrow-on-Furness, England, and weighed 60 pounds per yard - not the heaviest possible but the same weight as the Intercolonial Railway was using at this time.

Construction showcased the Gibson - Snowball rivalry quite nicely, as both men personally supervised their sections and each team worked with a will to reach Doaktown first. It took approximately two years, from August 1884 to September 1886 to complete the main line. If one story is true, Gibson's men threw down their tools about three hours before Snowball's, and by the latter part of September it was announced that through trains were now running from Chatham Junction to Gibson. This was a bit of misinformation. Trains were running from both Chatham Junction and Gibson to Doaktown, but the bridge there hadn't yet been completed, and wouldn't be for another few weeks, as some miscreant - and the *Miramichi Advance* laid the blame firmly on the disgruntled Newcastle faction - had exploded a charge of dynamite on each end of

the centre span, almost destroying it. By late September, 1886, travelers could indeed travel the full length of the line, so long as they didn't mind a forty-minute dinner break at Doaktown and crossing the river on a rope-drawn timber scow. (The passenger bridge had been washed out the previous spring by a catastrophic freshet.)

These were but temporary setbacks. By late October the last spike had been driven on the completed bridge and on January 1, 1887 the railway was officially opened. Also opened was a telegraph line connecting the two cities, the poles for which had been strung at the same time track was laid. The Northern and Western Railway included not just the line from Gibson to Chatham, but also the Blackville - Indiantown section, which was built in 1886. In a kind of counter-coup to the Newcastle faction, the man who secured the contract to build the link from Indiantown to Newcastle was none other than Snowball himself, an event which, reported the *Gleaner*, must have come "like a thunderclap" upon the ears of the opponents of the railway, who now must have "wanted to get somewhere into the woods and lick themselves." As a final touch, a deal was made with Snowball to upgrade the Chatham Branch Railway, an eight-mile section connecting Chatham with Chatham Junction which Snowball had become owner of in 1876, but which had been built with inferior quality, second-hand rails on loan from the Dominion government. It now got new rails and its three stations were to be included in the main line of the Northern and Western.

There were twenty-six stations on this railway, with locations at Chatham and Ivory's on the Chatham Branch railway; and Chatham Junction, Upper Nelson, Chelmsford, Gray Rapids, Blackville, Upper Blackville, Blissford, Doaktown, Stewart's, Ludlow, Boiestown, Astle's Crossing, Clearwater, Portage Road, Upper Cross Creek, Cross Creek, Covered Bridge, Zionville, Durham, Nashwaak, Manzer's Siding, Peniac, Marysville, and Gibson on the main line. The hardware included 11,000 tons of railroad ties and about 285,000 sleepers. The rolling stock, reported F. H. Risteen of the *St. John Sun*, the first correspondent to travel the road, consisted of eight locomotives, three first-class passenger cars, one second-class car, two combination cars for passengers and baggage, eighty-five flat cars, thirteen box cars, two snow-ploughs and one flanging car. The passenger cars were purchased from the Laconia Car Company in New Hampshire, and were finished in local hardwood. Some of the freight cars were built in Chatham, the rest in Saint John. Three of the locomotives came from the New York Locomotive Works, four from the Intercolonial Railway, and one from Toronto. The heaviest, No. 11,