

INTERMODAL LANES SHIFT TO THE EAST p. 28

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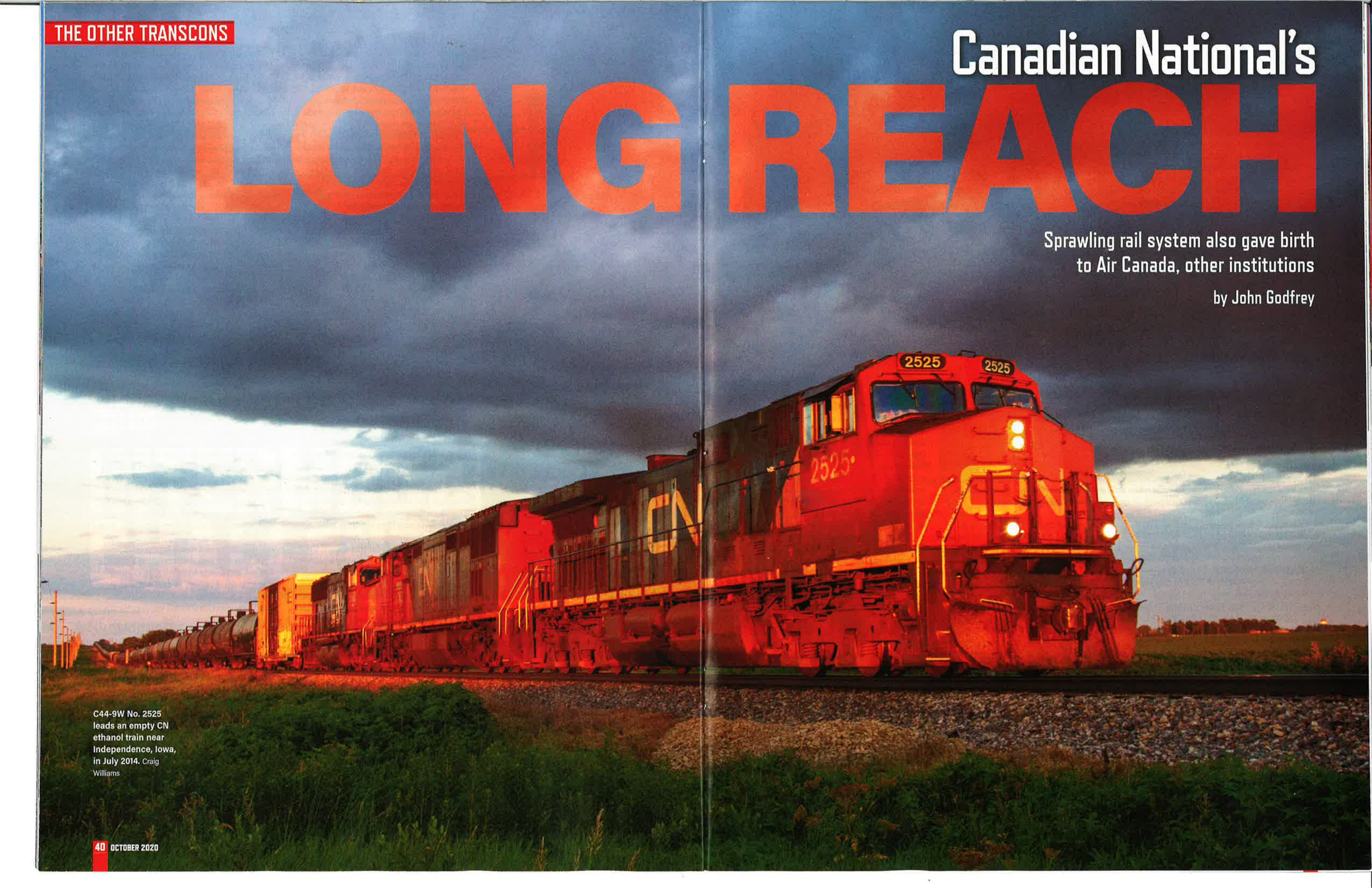
THE OTHER TRANSCONS

Canadian National's

LONG REACH

Sprawling rail system also gave birth
to Air Canada, other institutions

by John Godfrey



C44-9W No. 2525
leads an empty CN
ethanol train near
Independence, Iowa,
in July 2014. Craig
Williams



THE CN SYSTEM TODAY



CN's 19th-century heritage is represented by three locomotives leading the railroad's museum train in 1956. On the point is a 2-6-0 built in 1899 at CN's Point St. Charles Shops in Montreal, followed by a 4-4-0 built in Portland, Maine, for the Grand Trunk in 1872, and an 0-6-0 saddle-tank switcher built at Point St. Charles in 1894. Canadian National



While CN reaches three coasts and encounters dramatic mountain scenery, grain traffic on the prairies, as at Kamsack, Saskatchewan, in 1959, remains a staple. TRAINS collection

Concluding a series on North America's transcons, part of the 150th anniversary of the first Transcontinental Railroad.

LA COMPAGNIE DES CHEMINS DE FER NATIONAUX DU CANADA

The Canadian National Railways. Whichever name one uses, one would be hard pressed to find photos of any "last spike" ceremony marking its completion. No one tapped out "Done!" in Morse Code. No one listened on a wind-swept mountain grade while someone intoned, "All I can say is the work was well done in every way." But the younger of Canada's two transcontinental railways, which turned 100 in 2019, offers a rich and varied history.

What would evolve into Canada's largest railway system first saw the light of day with an order-in-council by the Canadian Privy Council in December 1918, granting floundering and bankrupt constituent railways the right to identify themselves as "Canadian National Railways." Eventually, the system linked Vancouver Island

off the coast of British Columbia to the eastern edge of Newfoundland, reaching far into the north to Hay River in the then Northwest Territories, to Churchill on the shore of Hudson Bay, with tentacles into New England and the upper reaches of the U.S. Midwest.

Over the course of its life, Canadian National has relinquished or abandoned its island and far northern trackage, and expanded through the central United States as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. It often notes in promotional materials that it is the only North American railway to reach three coasts.

But well before that came to pass ...

In June 1919, an act of the Canadian Parliament brought validity to the CNR, consolidating cash-strapped Canadian Government Railways (itself an amalgamation of among others, the Hudson Bay, Intercolonial, and Prince Edward Island railways) and Canadian Northern Railways. Over the next four years, Grand Trunk Pacific and finally Grand Trunk itself joined the fold. By 1923, only the Trans-Siberian

Railway was larger in a ranking of railways across the globe.

But Canadian National can trace its ancestry considerably further, back to the earliest days of rail travel in the former Lower Canada. Entrepreneur John Molson (yes, that John Molson, who also did fairly well mixing hops, barley, water, yeast, and such) saw a need for faster, more reliable transportation between the St. Lawrence and Richelieu rivers, and built the Champlain & St. Lawrence Rail Road, which opened in July 1836.

Robert Stephenson constructed the initial motive power, 0-4-0 *Dorchester*, in the United Kingdom. Unlike pioneer sibling 0-4-2 *The Rocket*, built by Stephenson's father, *Dorchester's* debut was not successful. It suffered the ignominy of having its inaugural train reduced by half following a stall. Paradoxically, the engine ran its last miles on what would be the oldest component of competitor Canadian Pacific, the Lanoraie & Industrie Railway, in 1864. Its career ended with a boiler explosion near St. Thomas, Quebec.

A comparatively 'teenage' Canadian National saw fit to commemorate the centennial of the advent of the railway in Canada by operating a special train from Montreal to La Prairie, Que., then to St. Johns (St. Jean today). The consist included a scale replica of the *Dorchester* riding atop a standard railway flatcar. Today this replica resides at Exporail, the Canadian Railway Museum in St. Constant, Que., 8 miles from downtown Montreal and a short distance from the northern end of the former C&SL.

he had the onerous task of bringing the far-flung, fledgling empire to order. It was an empire that lost \$33 million in 1920 — some \$402 million in today's money — which compared rather unfavorably to the \$33 million profit declared by Canadian Pacific. [Note: All figures are in Canadian dollars.]

Not all of these losses stemmed from the overabundance of steel rail upon which to run steel wheels. Some lay at the hands of the "assignment" of the Canadian Government Merchant Marine, a wartime creation that launched its first ship shortly after the end of World War I. More money was lost on extensive passenger service countrywide, and on a chain of railway hotels from coast to coast.

Though not in favor of anything out of the boundaries of what would in today's vernacular be termed its "core business," over his five-year tenure, Hanna managed to stop the flow of red ink. His government-appointed successor — Logansport, Ind., native Sir Henry Thornton, knighted for having righted the mess that was the Great Eastern Railway in the United Kingdom, and for his handling of troop trains in France and England during The Great War

(Twenty-first century rail travelers can travel over a portion of the C&SL aboard Amtrak's *Adirondack*, between Rouses Point, N.Y., and Montreal.)

THE ERA OF CONSOLIDATION

On the heels of amalgamation came consolidation. While many branch lines were retained despite being uneconomical, especially in the country's agricultural regions, main lines needed pruning to create a more unified, cohesive system.

At the helm initially was one David Hanna. A former Canadian Northern man,

Canadian National has an obscure though direct line to the standardization of time. During his tenure as chief engineer of the predecessor Intercolonial Railway, (later Sir) Sandford Fleming missed a train while traveling in Ireland over a misunderstanding regarding the departure time. He subsequently proposed the adoption of a 24-hour clock and was a party to the creation of longitudes to adjust standard time to the world's rotation. Nonetheless, it took 53 years for the world's time to be completely standardized.



A 67-hour cross-country trip in 1925 by one of these self-propelled cars, built by Canadian National, helped convince the railroad of the value of internal-combustion power. John Godfrey

— took the throttle in 1922. By then, Canadian National was finally spending less than a dollar to make a dollar. But only just. Under Thornton, Canadian National became innovative and began to thrive. (By 1936, incidentally, the Canadian Government Merchant Marine would cease to exist.)

Within a year of taking charge, Thornton created a Radio Department with an eye toward providing train passengers with on-board entertainment. CNR flagships like the *Ocean Limited*, linking Montreal with Halifax, Nova Scotia, soon touted this extravagance in their observation cars. Ra-

dio stations sprung up in larger on-line towns and cities. Reception was facilitated after CN telegraph wires were used in 1927. While programming was geared toward those onboard, anyone with a receiver tuned to the proper frequency could listen in. Rival Canadian Pacific, never pleased with having the federal government and its perceived bottomless sources of funding as a competitor, was far from amused.

What became of this innovation? In 1933, with former Canadian Pacific lawyer R.B. Bennett now in the prime minister's office, Canadian National was forced to sell

its money-losing radio department for \$50,000 to the federal government. It became the nucleus of today's Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

Canadian National wasted no time in dabbling in internal combustion. On the heels of a European junket by company motive-power officials came a fleet of self-propelled cars, assembled from parts provided by various suppliers. Late in 1925, the second of these cars, No. 15820, proved its mettle, setting out from Montreal's Bonaventure station for the west coast. One can imagine the bedraggled appearance of those accompanying the baggage-coach combination car throughout its entire journey when it arrived at CN's Vancouver station a mere 67 hours later.

Impressed with the performance of this "new" technology, Canadian National developed more internal-combustion locomotives, with varying degrees of success. In the 1930s, 2,660-hp, twin-unit No. 9000 was used in Quebec and Ontario before being split into two locomotives. Single unit No. 9000 was later modified for use on an armored train in northern British Columbia during World War II. It returned to regular service in Eastern Canada and was scrapped with its sibling a few years later without ever having worked in its new vocation.

Two other diesel pioneers were more fortunate. "Visibility cab" switcher No. 77, a long-time resident of Exporail, was built in 1929 and mostly saw service in Montreal and Toronto for CN before spending a

number of years leased to a customer in Eastern Ontario. Diminutive No. 500, a gas center-cab converted from an electric locomotive in 1930, resides on an isolated portion of Ontario's former Thousand Islands Railway, where it spent its working life.

This is not to imply that Canadian National left its steam fleet to wither and die. The railway also began to assemble a fleet of 54 4-8-2 Mountains from both Canadian Locomotive Works and Montreal Locomotive Works. Twenty additional semi-streamlined 4-8-2s from MLW were added in the 1940s, featuring such distinct UK touches as flared stacks and conical noses.

While the diesel fleet slowly grew with the purchase of yard and switching engines, Canadian National developed a large and refined fleet of 4-8-4s for dual passenger and freight service. Originally named "Confederations" when the 6100 was outshopped in 1927 before heading south to attend the Baltimore & Ohio's Fair of the Iron Horse, Canadian National in time adopted "Northern" as the class name, not unlike many other North American railways. Whereas competitor Canadian Pacific only rostered two 4-8-4s, Canadian National and wholly owned subsidiary Grand Trunk Western assembled a fleet of 203 from four builders.

In 1930, five 4-6-4 Hudsons were ordered from Montreal Locomotive Works for high-speed passenger service between Montreal and Toronto. While they were reported to routinely achieve triple-digit speeds with their 80-inch drivers hauling a maximum of eight heavyweight cars, time-keeping became a problem when train lengths reached nine cars and above.

Today, eight Northern, six Mountain, and two Hudsons live on in preservation, mostly in Canada.

Until this point, Canadian National can be said to have been second behind rival Canadian Pacific in terms of passenger comfort and accommodation. Trains and hotels were considered more functional than luxurious.

That said, Canadian National had an extensive passenger network and went head to head with its rival in many markets. With the worsening of the Great Depression, however, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific cooperated beginning in spring 1933 to jointly operate four passenger trains on each others' trackage between Montreal and Toronto. What began almost out of necessity grew over time to include more through passenger services between Montreal and Toronto; Toronto and Ottawa; and Montreal and Quebec City by the time this pool agreement ended over three decades later.

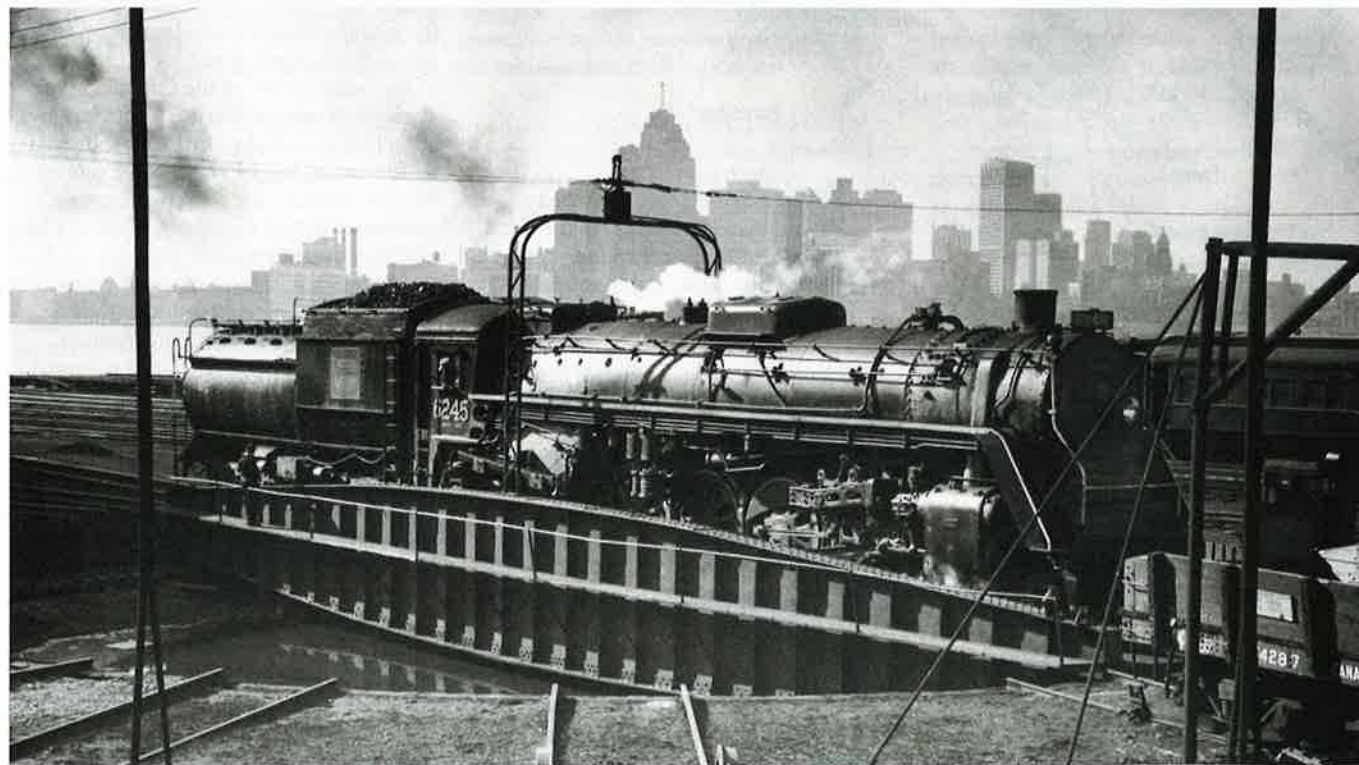
Unlike many North American railways in the 1960s, Canadian National under the leadership of Donald Gordon and later



Flawlessly restored FPA-4 No. 6765 gleams at Montreal's Exporail in 2018. The locomotive was part of CN's effort to maintain high-level passenger service into the 1960s. John Godfrey



After steam power was retired from revenue service, CN honored its heritage by employing a series of 4-8-4s and 4-8-2s on special trains. On March 21, 1971, 4-8-4 No. 6218 passes through a cut near Guelph, Ont., during its final year of excursion service. Ken Kraemer



With Detroit's skyline in the background, CN U-2-b 4-8-4 No. 6245 is turned at Windsor, Ontario, prior to a run on the *Intercity Limited* to Toronto on March 30, 1955. CN and its subsidiaries rostered more than 200 4-8-4s. Robert E. Wannier



CN's diverse branches included hotels. The Hotel Chateau Laurier, completed in 1912, was a CN property until sold to Canadian Pacific in 1988. It's now a Fairmont hotel. Canadian National

Norman MacMillan decided to make one last go in the passenger arena. Many existing cars were overhauled or rebuilt. Second-hand cars were acquired from numerous American companies happy to be rid of unused equipment. Train frequencies were increased on many routes. New equipment was acquired in the form of United Aircraft TurboTrains and light-weight cars from Hawker Siddeley dubbed "Tempo Trains."

As forward-looking as Canadian National was, it had not laid its past to rest completely. Long after 4-8-2 No. 6043 made CN's last regularly scheduled run of the steam era into Winnipeg, Manitoba, the railway continued to operate steam on special occasions, using engines that remained

serviceable. Subsequently, a succession of 4-8-4s and later a 4-8-2 were rebuilt for excursion service — largely in Ontario and Quebec. Two of the engines did make it to the company's U.S. lines in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut.

For a time in the mid-1970s, CN even used 4-8-2 No. 6060 and a consist of conventional coaches to replace a Wednesday RDC schedule between Toronto and Niagara Falls, Ontario, and return, with a mid-day side trip on a freight-only line to Port Robinson, Ont. There was also a more traditional extra on Saturdays during the summer months. Not only did this bring steam back into regularly scheduled service, albeit on a small scale, it also ignited a life-long

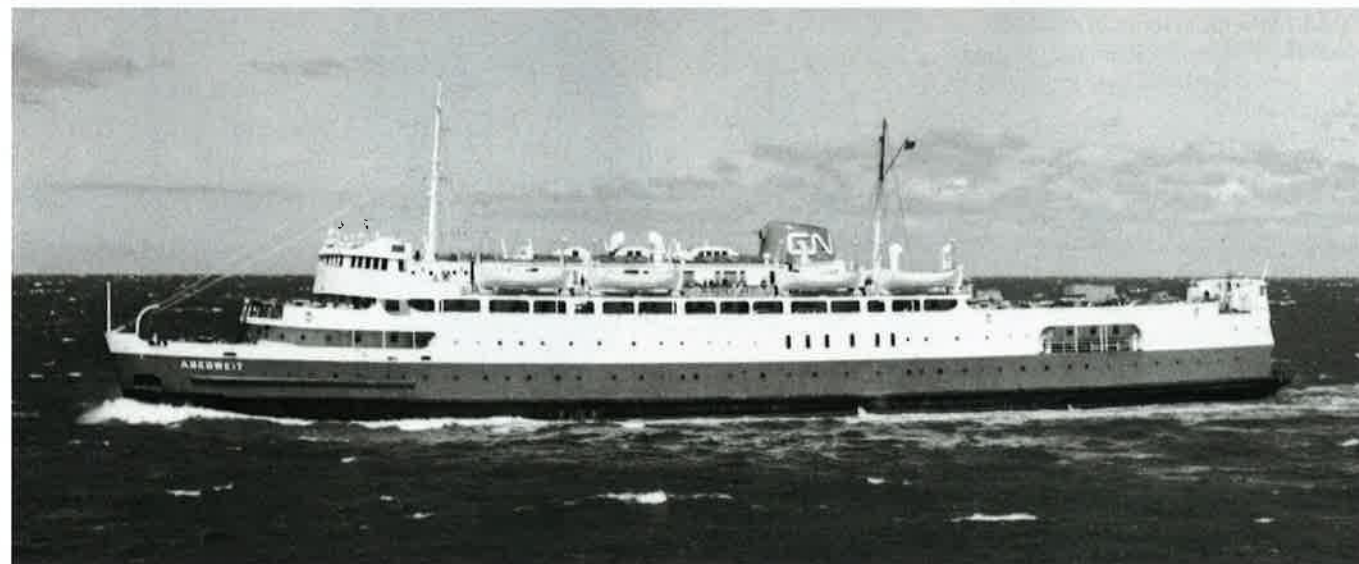
love affair with the steam locomotive in many who were too young to have experienced its heyday, including this writer.

Unfortunately, by this time, it had become painfully evident that the inroads made by aircraft and private automobile on the psyche of the travelling public could not be reversed. "VIA CN" was created in 1976 to oversee operation of the company's remaining passenger services, with locomotives and rolling stock given a new paint scheme. Within two years, the passenger operating division had become VIA Rail Canada, a crown corporation that oversaw and later operated the passenger services of both Canadian National and Canadian Pacific. The exception was in the province of Newfoundland, where a handful of mixed trains and bus routes ran on CN subsidiary Terra Transport until rail service ended on the island in 1988. The bus division was sold a few years later.

MULTIMODAL BEFORE THE TERM EXISTED

During the 1930s, Canadian National branched into a field that would eventually siphon off a great number of passengers from its long-distance trains. It created Trans-Canada Airlines, which took to the skies in 1937, some five years before Canadian Pacific Airlines. It was not until 1978 that Canadian National exited the air travel business. The airline, by then long renamed Air Canada, was made into its own crown corporation; it was privatized in 1989.

Having inherited a number of hotels from constituent railways, CN began occasional renovation and slow expansion in the 1920s. It added hotels in select cities countrywide, the last being L'Hotel in Toronto in 1984. Changing corporate ideals and markets saw the company divest its remaining properties in 1988.



CN served customers by land, air (with what became Air Canada), and sea. In an undated photo, CN's steamship *Abegweit* crosses the Northumberland Strait between Port Borden, Prince Edward Island, and Cape Tormentine, New Brunswick. Jim Shaughnessy



Similarly, constituent Canadian National Steamship Co. upgraded scheduled maritime passenger and ferry service in the country's Atlantic provinces and off the coast of British Columbia. Improvements in the former instance were ostensibly to provide connection to the rest of the country for Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, while the latter were to compete with Canadian Pacific's Princess steamships. A foray into the Caribbean ended in the 1950s due to dwindling traffic and rising costs on the heels of wartime losses in the Atlantic.

While Canadian National berthed its last British Columbia coast ship, *Prince*

George, in 1975, it rebranded its Atlantic services as CN Marine in 1977. A new company, Marine Atlantic, took over the operation in 1986, immediately before rail service ended to and from the Maritime island provinces of Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland.

CHANGES IN MONTREAL

A significant pre-Canadian National relic, Montreal's 3.3-mile-long Mount Royal Tunnel, is about to undergo a vast transformation. Conceived by the Canadian Northern in 1912 and completed to virtually no fanfare due to World War I in 1917,

Ancient CN commuter electrics prepare for one of their final trips through the Mount Royal Tunnel on June 2, 1995. The tunnel is being rebuilt for a light rail line. John Godfrey

it brought trains from a planned community called the Town of Mount Royal and beyond to a downtown Montreal station, which was eventually expanded into what is today's Central Station under the corporate headquarters.

Electricity — initially 2,400 volts D.C., then 25,000 volts A.C. following a mid-1990s upgrade — powered all northbound and most southbound trains throughout the tunnel's existence. At one time the tunnel was part of electrified trackage in greater Montreal that extended from Bridge Street in the city's Point St. Charles District, Turcot Yard, through Central Station and the tunnel to Ste. Gertrude and Deux Montagnes, with a short branch to Cartierville and a loop at Val Royal.

By 2014, electrification extended only from Wellington Tower, just south of Central Station, to Deux Montagnes. Renamed the Deux-Montagnes Sub, the electrified route was sold to Agence Métropolitain de Transport, the regional agency overseeing public transit at the time. That same year, the AMT inaugurated commuter rail service to suburban Mascouche, Que., using Bombardier dual-mode ALP-45DP loco-

In 1960, Canadian National spent a considerable sum on the research and development of a new corporate logo, which reflected not only a progressive, 'avant-garde' way of thinking but also worked well in both of Canada's official languages. Allan R. Fleming (at left in photo), the designer of the resulting "wet noodle," said at the time that he thought its simplicity meant the logo would "last for 50 years at least;" 60 years later, it's clear he knew what he was talking about. Subsidiaries Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific; Central Vermont; and Grand Trunk had their own versions for a time.





A southbound intermodal train on the former Wisconsin Central rolls through the junction with Metra's Milwaukee North line at Prairie Crossing in Libertyville, Ill. TRAINS: David Lassen

took advantage of changing Canadian rail regulations and shed itself of marginal and money-losing subdivisions. Large companies such as RailTex, Québec Railway Corp., Cando, and Trillium, as well as small independent corporations, took over former Canadian National lines in provinces from Nova Scotia to British Columbia. Some have since reverted to Canadian National ownership and operation. Others have been sold on. Still others have seen their rails lifted.

In 1998, a year before a failed attempted merger with BNSF Railway, Canadian National expanded its presence in the United States to the entire central portion of the country, as far south as the Gulf of Mexico, with the acquisition of the storied Illinois Central Railroad. With the acquisition came then IC president E. Hunter Harrison and his management team.

Further expansion in the U.S. came in 2001 with the purchase of Wisconsin Central. This not only provided CN with its own route to link its trackage of Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific lineage in Superior, Wis., to Chicago, but also brought WC subsidiary Algoma Central Railway into the fold. This, in turn, put Canadian National back into the passenger business between Sault Ste. Marie and Hearst, Ont. (Passenger operations are now confined to the seasonal tourist train

liking Sault Ste. Marie to Agawa Canyon, 114 miles north, an operation suspended in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic).

With the retirement of president and CEO Paul Tellier in 2003, Canadian National was in the hands of Harrison and his team. Harrison and company brought their brand of railroading north of the border, much to the delight of shareholders, but to the chagrin of rank-and-file workers. Train lengths were extended, locomotives parked or sold off, and employees furloughed as Harrison used CN to hone what is known today as Precision Scheduled Railroading.

In 2004, Canadian National acquired the right to operate trains on the provincially owned British Columbia Railway, providing a direct link between CN operations into Vancouver and Prince George, B.C. (CN has shut down that route, running its last through freight between Prince George and Squamish on April 7.) Another move added Great Lakes Transportation, largely to bring Duluth, Missabe & Iron Range Railway under Canadian National control.

Canadian National "closed the gap" in Chicagoland with its purchase of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railway in 2011, giving CN a bypass of Chicago's longstanding bottleneck and an in-house route around both sides of the Great Lakes.

After 101 years of amalgamation, innovation, and evolution, the Canadian National Railways of today is a far cry from the one that came into being in the halls of Parliament a century ago. Hopefully the enterprise once known as "The People's Railway" will continue to have a prominent place on the North American rail scene for decades to come. **I**

By acquiring Illinois Central, CN reached some distinctly un-Canadian locations. An SD60 leads a train through Savage, Miss., in February 2019. Jaxon Talbert

motives, and a short portion of trackage through present-day Junction de l'Est and onto the St. Laurent Subdivision to a new Ahuntsic Station on the old route to Ste. Gertrude was re-electrified.

The famous tunnel was sold to the province of Quebec's pension manager Caisse de Dépôt et Placement in 2016. In May 2020, it was closed for a scheduled three-year project to undergo a massive transformation for inclusion into a privately funded \$6.5 billion, 40-mile light rail network, the REM (Réseau express métropolitain).

EXPANSION AND 'PRECISION'

As with most things in life, railways evolve. They are created. They expand. They contract. They merge. So, too, with Canadian National Railways.

CN set out on the road to privatization in 1992. With the passage of the CN Commercialization Act three years later, it was complete. A profitable Canadian National

E. Hunter Harrison, who ran the company from 2002 to 2010, is one of just two Americans to serve as president or CEO of CN since the company's formation in 1919, the other being Indiana-born Sir Henry Thornton (1922-32). The other 12 have been Canadian, with Donald Gordon (1950-66) the longest serving. Notable among the presidents of the numerous CN predecessors is another American, Grand Trunk president Charles Melville Hays, who died in the April 1912 sinking of the *Titanic*.



SD38-2 No. 665 of Elgin, Joliet & Eastern — acquired by CN in 2011 — works the yard in Joliet, Ill., in October 2016 as repainted sister locomotive No. 664 awaits action next to a Grand Trunk GP9R. The EJ&E was the most recent CN acquisition in the U.S. Steve Smedley