

BULLETIN
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Chateau De Ramezay
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RAILROADS OF THE GENERAL MINING ASSOCIATION, PART I

by
Robert R. Brown

This autumn marks the 100th anniversary of the introduction of steam locomotion into the Maritime Provinces; the locomotive "Samson" was put to work on the South Pictou Railway of Nova Scotia in December, 1838. It is appropriate then that this and the following issue of the Bulletin should be devoted to a history of the South Pictou Railway written by a member of the Association, Mr. Robert R. Brown.

Between the people of Nova Scotia and the rest of Canada there is an irreconcilable difference of opinion as to which was the first railway in British North America. If we define a railway as "a road or way laid with two parallel rails over which vehicles, with flanged wheels are drawn", then naturally the tramways at Albion Mines and Bridgeport, both in Nova Scotia, and a mysterious wooden railway somewhere in the present province of Quebec, take first, second and third places. The exact location of the latter line is unknown and the only reference to it is in the Acadian Recorder of February 13th, 1830, "It is suggested that, independent of iron ways, a very useful kind of wooden rail might be employed. An experiment of this description has been tried with success in the woods 120 miles from Quebec".

However, if we further define a railway as "a line built for the public conveyance of passengers and goods" as opposed to a short, industrial tramway, then the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad was the first. In any case it was the first to use steam locomotives, although some writers have claimed that the "Samson" of the South Pictou Railroad, was the first locomotive in what is now the Dominion of Canada. Actually, the "Samson", which first ran in December 1838, was preceded by three engines of the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad: the

"Dorchester" in June 1836, the "Laprairie" in May 1837 and the "Jason C. Pierce" in the summer of 1838. A railway which does not exactly fall into either of these categories was the enclined plane built at the citadel of Quebec about 1823. It was used by military engineers to transport building materials to the top of Cap Diamond.

However, let us give honor where honor is due. The General Mining Association built and operated 6 tramways or railways in the province of Nova Scotia; the South Pictou Railroad, from Albion Mines to the Loading Ground of Pictou harbour; the Bridgeport Tramway, from the Bridgeport pits to the bar of Indian Bay; the Sydney Mines Railway, from Sydney Mines to North Sydney; the Lingan Colliery Railway, from Lingan to the bar of Indian Bay; a short incline plane at Joggins; and the Victoria Mines Railway, from Victoria Mines to the South Bar of Sydney River.

Coal mining in Nova Scotia commenced at a very early date, especially on Cape Breton Island where the French government opened pits about 1672 and worked them more or less continuously until about 1753. From 1758 until 1788 the mines were worked by the British military authorities but subsequently the mining rights were leased to various private operators:

1788-1791 Thomas Moxley
 1792-1800 Tremain and Stout
 1801-1804 William Campbell
 1804-1813 state operated
 1813-1818 Lever and Ritchie
 1818-1820 G. W. Bown and J. Lever
 1820-1825 G. W. Bown

In Pictou county, coal was discovered in 1798 and Dr. McGregor exhibited a fire of it to the candidates at the election of 1799 but it was not until 1807, when John McKay, son of the squire and usually known as the Collier, obtained a license to dig for the inhabitants and, at a later date, to export, that a serious effort was made to mine the coal commercially. McKay first worked a small seam, 3 feet thick, which he found on his father's farm but it soon became exhausted. He searched further and then found an outcrop of what has since been known as the Main Seam. These early pits were nothing more than shallow holes in the ground and were located on the west side of the East River of Pictou, a short distance above the present Canadian National Railways' bridge. The coal was sold at the pit mouth, carted to the river and sent away in small lighters. During the period of the War of 1812, a demand sprang up to supply the garrison, the navy and inhabitants of Halifax, but after the peace the price fell to half its former rate and, perhaps because of this, McKay became bankrupt in 1816. From that year until 1827 the pits were worked by various operators and the annual production varied from 4000 to 5000 tons.

In 1824 and 1825 the monied men in London began to turn their attention to mining; thriving companies were formed and the most extraordinary rage arose for the purchase of shares in those companies, comparable to the days of the South Sea Bubble. At that time, the granting of mining rights in the province of Nova Scotia was controlled by the British government and, in 1825, King George IV gave to his brother, the Duke of Kent, and without consulting the Provincial Legislature, the exclusive

right of mining in Nova Scotia for a period of 60 years, excepting only a few small grants already made to others. This transaction caused a great deal of dissatisfaction in the province at the time but, on the other hand, it was the means of introducing into Nova Scotia a wealthy company when the capital, needed to develop the province's resources, could not have been obtained easily otherwise. The Duke's rights were transferred immediately to Rundell, Bridge and Rundell, the celebrated London Jewellers, in payment of his debts, and from them to the General Mining Association, in which they were large shareholders. This Association worked the following mining areas:

Albion Mines	1827-1872
Sydney Mines	1827-1900
Bridgeport Mine	1829-1849
Joegins Mine	1846-1858
Lingan Mine	1854-1886
Victoria Mine	1867-1879
New Victoria Mine	1883-1898

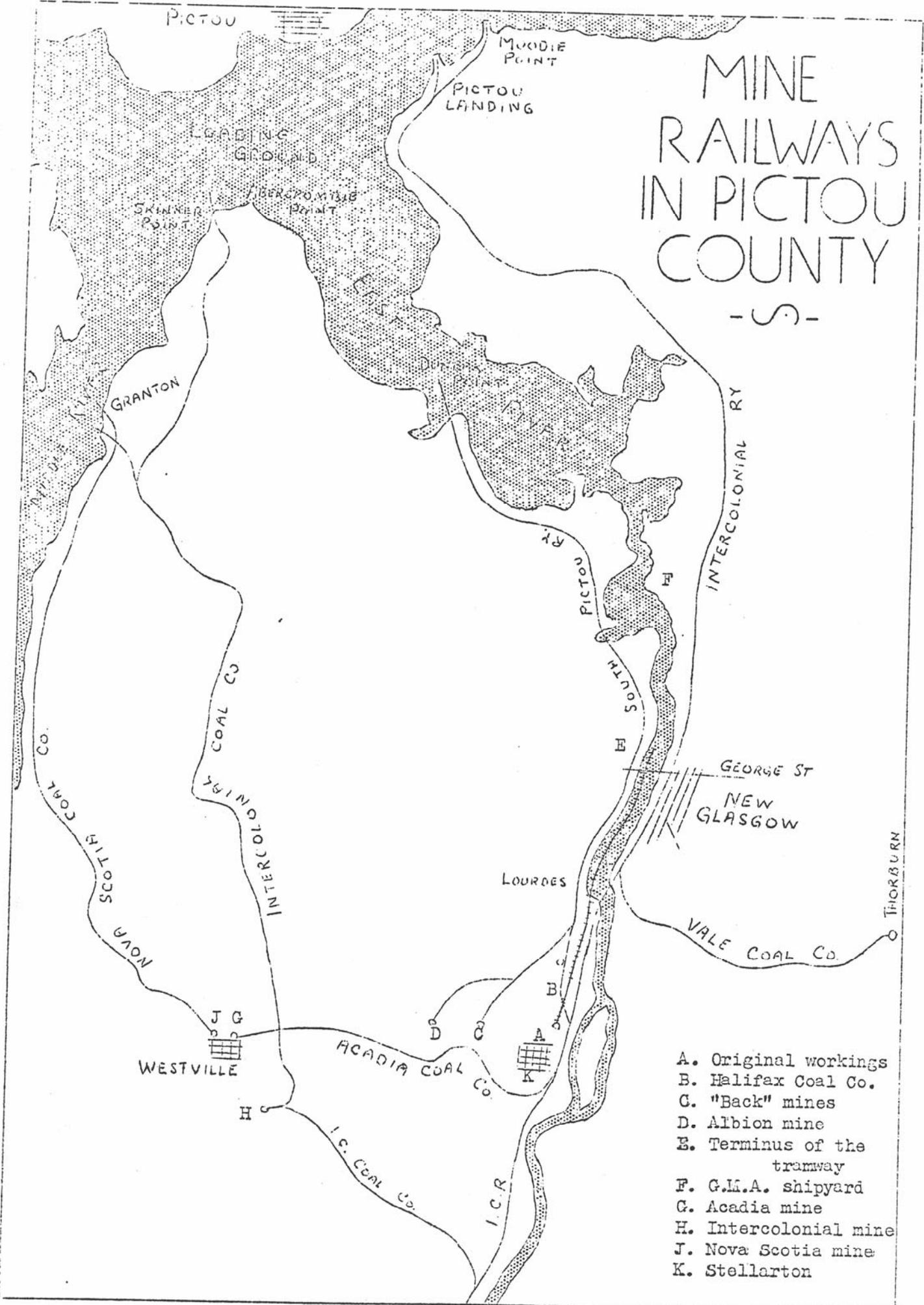
On January 1st, 1858, after much agitation, the control of mining was given to the Provincial Legislature and the General Mining Associations exclusive monopoly was abolished. However, it was permitted to retain, until the expiration of the original lease on August 25th, 1886, certain properties which it might select and after that date all arrangements would have to be made with the Provincial government. The properties then selected included the Albion, Sydney, and Lingan mines and undeveloped areas at Victoria and Springhill.

South Pictou Railroad

On June 4th, 1827, Richard Smith, the Association's agent, arrived at Pictou in the brig "Margaret Pelkington" with the necessary machinery and implements and a staff of engineers, miners and mechanics. The neighbourhood was carefully surveyed and it was found that the most suitable place to commence operations was on the west side of the East River of Pictou about 800 yds. north of the present C.N.R. station at Stellarton. Three large farms, owned by Dr. McGregor William McKay and Colin McKay, and the mining

MINE RAILWAYS IN PICTOU COUNTY

- S -



- A. Original workings
- B. Halifax Coal Co.
- C. "Back" mines
- D. Albion mine
- E. Terminus of the tramway
- F. G.M.A. shipyard
- G. Acadia mine
- H. Intercolonial mine
- J. Nova Scotia mine
- K. Stellarton

rights, originally granted to John McKay but then held by Adam Carr, were bought by the Association and several pits were sunk at the south end of the property on what had been the McGregor farm. These early workings, originally called the Store Pits, were destroyed by fire in 1839 and since then have been known as the Burnt Mines. Owing to the subsequent dumping of fine coal and debris from later mines and the building of the Nova Scotia Railway (I.C.R.) traces of the original pits have long since disappeared and their exact location is not known except that they were a short distance east of the car barn of the now abandoned Pictou County Electric Railway. In 1839, the Bye Pit was opened, a short distance north of the Store Pits but fire broke out in 1861 and it had to be flooded. Two years later when it was pumped out it was found that the pit props had rotted away and the workings had settled, so since then it has been known as the Crushed Mine.

Later, a number of pits were sunk about 1000 yards west of the river near the present Albion Mine; the Dalhousie Pit in 1850, the Cage Pit in 1852, and the Foster Pit in 1866, but these were all destroyed by fire. They were replaced in 1869 by the Foord Pit, which then was considered to be the most modern mine in North America. It was near the river, immediately north of the Bye Pit.

The East River was navigable up to about the site of the present C.N.R. bridge for vessels drawing not more than 6 feet of water, but numerous shoals made navigation difficult, especially in the late summer and autumn. For a time the coal was carted to the river bank but this proved to be unsatisfactory so during the summer of 1829 a tramway was laid down from the Store Pits to a wharf directly back of the Lourdes cemetery. The rails were cast iron, fish belly type, 3 feet long, setting in cast iron chairs which were spiked to the sleepers and it is interesting to note that these rails were made at

Albion Mines, being the first made in British North America and perhaps the first in all America.

When the General Mining Association commenced operations in Pictou County it was intended to work the iron deposits known to exist on the banks of the East River. A blast furnace was erected at the mines and the ore was quarried from an extensive bed near Springvale, about 12 miles up the river. Actual smelting was started in January 1829 but the demand for cast iron was small and the cost of carting the ore from Springvale was too great, so the work was given up gradually. Chain cables of excellent quality were made and, after 1835, several complete steam engines were built, and the castings produced, in combined hardness and toughness, excelled anything then known.

Large vessels could not ascend the river but were forced to anchor at the Loading Ground, below Dunbar Point, and the coal was brought downstream in lighters. In 1830 the Association introduced steam navigation into Nova Scotia; a small tow-boat named the "Richard Smith" was the first and was used to tow the lighters up and down the river, and two larger boats, the "Albion" and the "Pocahontas" ran from Pictou to Prince Edward Island and to the Mirimichi.

The original wharf at Lourdes was unsatisfactory because of shallow water and, shortly after the introduction of the steam tow boat, the line was extended downstream about 800 yards to a point about midway between the present C.N.R. bridge and the George Street bridge in New Glasgow. Another move was made, about 1834, to a point about 400 yards below the George Street bridge and there a large wharf with coal chutes was erected. Below Lourdes the tramway was built on crib work and piling along the shore and consequently all traces of it have long since disappeared.

It was standard gauge, or perhaps 4'8" originally; sidings were placed about half a mile apart, and each horse went its half mile with

loaded wagons downward and, leaving them on the main line for the next horse to take on, returned with empty wagons from the siding.

In addition to the 2 miles of tramway along the river there were about 2 miles of tracks down in the mines. About 50 horses were regularly employed on the tramway above ground and between 50 and 60 underground.

This method of transporting the coal being slow and expensive, the Association decided in 1834 to build a locomotive railroad from the pits to a wharf, near the Loading Ground, where the coal could be dumped directly into the holds of the largest vessels. The surveys and plans for the railway were made by Peter Crerar, who is worthy of recognition as one of Canada's pioneer railway builders. He was born in 1785 at Breadalbane, Scotland, and came to Nova Scotia in 1817 and died there in 1857. Apparently he was a man of unusual intelligence; at first he taught school and then he became a government land surveyor and Commissioner of Crown Lands, in which latter capacity he laid out several of what are now the main roads of Pictou County. Crerar had never seen a railway and, when his plans and profiles were sent to the Board of Directors in England, they were accompanied by a request that an experienced engineer be sent out to supervise the construction of the railway. The plans were submitted to one of the foremost engineers of the day and on his recommendation the directors wrote to their Agent in Nova Scotia, "What need is there of our sending you an engineer when you have Mr. Crerar in the country? Let him supervise the construction."

The building of the railway started in the spring of 1836 and as it was on a higher level and further away from the river bank than the old tramway, the latter continued in use until the completion of the new locomotive railway. The old case iron rails were not strong enough to support the weight of locomotives so the new line was laid with bull head rails of malle-

able iron, which set in cast iron chairs and were secured in place by iron wedges. The country was very uneven and there were some heavy fills and cuttings, amounting to 400,000 cubic yards. The cuttings and embankments were made with a slope of 1-1/2 to 1; the former being 18 feet wide at the bottom and the latter of the same width at the top. Many of the original cut stone culverts are still in perfect condition and still in use. In the matter of curves great caution was shown as, even where it entailed extra cutting of considerable amount, nowhere was there a curve of over 4 degrees radius or, in other words, the least radius of any of its curves was 1300 feet. Another remarkable feature was the unusual uniformity of the grade for a road passing through such an uneven country; the greater part of the line was perfectly level and the few slight gradients were with the loaded trains. It started from the pits with a falling grade of 1 in 437 for a distance of 1167 yards then practically level for 6257 yds then a slight incline of 1 in 578 for 833 yards, succeeded by a level piece for 1937 yards and then a down grade of 1 in 360 for 500 yds. which terminated at the wharf at Dunbar Point. During the existence of this terminal at Dunbar Point it was known as South Pictou and gave the railway its name. In modern times it has been called the Albion Mines Railway but the correct name was South Pictou Railroad. The total length of the line was 10,694 yards or 6.1 miles. It was intended to extend the road about 2 miles to Abercrombie Point but the proposed extension was never built. The wharf at South Pictou was 1600 feet long, 24 feet wide and commanded a fall of 17 feet above high water at the chutes.

There were employed on the construction of the railway 262 laborers and drivers, 20 masons, 3 blacksmiths, 11 carpenters and 102 horses and the total cost up to March 1st 1839 was \$31,300. The total cost on completion was about \$40,000.

A part of the line, near the mines

was completed in the autumn of 1838 and shortly afterwards three locomotives were received from England. One of them, the "Samson", was set up and tried out in December of that year but they were not in regular use until the following summer. George Davidson, who came out from England to set them up, was the first engine driver and later became Mechanical Superintendent; David Floyd was the first fireman and Patrick Kerwin was the first brakeman. The brakemen had a very difficult and dangerous job as the brakes consisted only of short lengths of chain, attached to the frames of the wagons, with hooks at the ends of the chains which were hooked on to the spokes of the wheels. As this operation usually had to be done while the cars were in motion, many a finger was clipped off. The first passenger was Kerwin's little daughter Margaret; just before the start of the trial trip, the brakeman snatched up his little girl, saying "Maggie shall have the first ride to make her remembered in the land".

The official opening of the railway, which took place on September 19th 1839, was an event that was long remembered. The steamboats Albion and Pocahontas, with lighters in tow brought about 2000 people from Pictou to New Glasgow, whence they were taken by train to the mines in coal wagons which were temporarily fitted up to carry passengers. This was followed by a parade to New Glasgow and on returning to the mines, a great feast awaited the guests and employees of the

association. A large brick oven had been erected, large enough to hold the carcass of an ox, which was stuffed like a turkey and roasted whole. Men kept turning it constantly and barrels of melted butter were used for basting. In addition, 1100 pounds of beef and mutton and corresponding quantities of other food were used.

A small passenger coach was built to handle the small passenger traffic and, because one of the first passengers carried in it was the

bride of the governor of the province, it became known as the "Bride's Coach". From that event apparently arose the local tradition that if a young girl would sit in the coach perfectly still and without speaking for twenty minutes she would be married within a year but of course a girl who could do that would be such a rare jewel that she would have no difficulty in finding a husband anyway. The coach itself was but a square box mounted on four wheels and had one compartment of the contemporary English type; it is reported to have been "elegantly" decorated inside and out but nevertheless it obviously was nothing more than a crude makeshift. It was purchased by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad about 1892 and is still in the possession of that company.

In 1850 the first of the "back mines" was opened and a branch line was built from the junction at Lourdes back to the Dalhousie Pit, a distance of about one mile. Later on in 1880 this branch was extended to the Albion Mine.

The monopoly of the General Mining Association was abolished in 1856 but it was permitted to retain two square miles in Pictou County, on which the existing workings were located. However, these including the South Pictou Railroad were sold in 1872 to the Halifax Coal Co., of which Sir George Elliott was president. This company opened the Albion Mines in 1880, after the destruction of the Foord Pit, and the branch of the railway to the "back mines" was extended about half a mile to this new mine.

In 1885 the Acadia Coal Co., which had been operating a mine at Westville since 1864, acquired the properties of the Halifax Coal Co. and also the Vale Coal Co., which operated a mine at Thorburn about 6 miles east of Stellarton. The Acadia Co. had built a railway from Westville to Stellarton, 3 miles, in 1867 and another from the terminus of the Intercolonial Railway at Pictou Landing to the Acadia Company's loading pier at Moodie Point, about 1 mile beyond,

and the Vale Company had built a railway in 1872 from Thorburn to New Glasgow.

The loading pier at Moodie Point was more modern than the one at South Pictou so, after about 1885, the coal from all of the mines operated by the Acadia Company was shipped from Moodie Point or was turned over to the Intercolonial Railway at Stellarton or New Glasgow.

The lower part of the South Pictou Railroad, from George street to Dunbar Point was dismantled soon afterwards and since then only about 3 miles have been used; from the junction with the Intercolonial Railway, near Stellarton, to Lourdes; from Lourdes to the "back mines," and from Lourdes down to George St. where there is a large coal pocket from which local deliveries are made.

Lines on Cape Breton Island

The Cape Breton coal field was worked in a small way as early as 1672 and in 1687 several experimental shipments were sent to France. The French government opened up several pits in 1720 at Port Morien and a little later at Glace Bay, Sydney Mines and Little Bras d'Or, and because of the unsettled times they were fortified with blockhouses, palisades and trenches. One of these early French mines, the Blockhouse pit at Port Morien, was worked from 1720 until 1888. In these early workings the coal was taken from small holes in the ground or quarried from outcrops in the cliffs; most of the coal so mined was used at Louisburg, where firewood was scarce and expensive; but considerable shipments were sent to France and to the New England colonies.

The General Mining Association purchased about 1827 the mining rights held by G. W. Bown and commenced operations first at Sydney Mines about 1827 and at Bridgeport in 1829.

The Bridgeport Tramway

The mine at Old Bridgeport on the south side of Indian Bay was opened in 1829 and a horse-operated tramway about 2 miles long was built

from the mine, down a fairly steep hill to the shore of the bay and then across the sand bar to the gap at Lingan on the north side where a small harbour was made. The mine and the tramway were abandoned in 1849 and, except perhaps for some ancient piling at the harbour, it is doubtful if any traces of the tramway remain.

Sydney Mines Railway

This line is considerably older than is generally supposed and its completion was advertised in the Nova Scotian on September 17th 1836: "The line of Railway at the Sydney Mines, having been completed from the Pits direct to the North Bar, vessels can now load in all kinds of weather, without any risk of being detained as heretofore - the wharf being situated within the bar, is effectively protected from sea swell and the depth of water alongside is sufficient for vessels of the largest class - mooring buoys are placed at suitable distances from the wharf for the convenience of vessels, and there are berths for three vessels to load at one time. The coal is brought direct from the pit to the wharf, a distance of 2-3/4 miles by railway and is discharged from the wagons directly into the hatchways of the vessels. 500 tons can be shipped in one day, and the coal being passed over screens into the wagons is delivered to the vessels free of slack. Vessels can land their ballast and take in their cargoes at the same wharf.

S. Cunard."

Samuel Cunard, the founder of the Cunard Line of steamships was then Agent of the General Mining Association and S. Cunard and Company, retail coal merchants in Halifax, which he founded at that time, is still in business.

The railway was in the nature of a hump with the summit about half-way; the horses were trained to haul the loaded wagons from the mine to the summit, then jump into a "dandy" car and the train was "dillied" or coasted down to the pier.

To Be Concluded

NEWS OF THE ASSOCIATION

Resumé of the Minutes

N.B.: Unless otherwise stated, it is to be understood that the meetings were held in the Chateau de Ramezay with the President acting as chairman.

Meeting of May 18th: The special guest of the evening was Mr. E.S.M. Macnab, Passenger Car Lighting Engineer, Canadian Pacific Railway, who spoke on "The Railways of Ireland". His talk, which consisted largely of reminiscences of his youth, was illustrated with numerous locomotive photographs and maps from his private collection. The members discussed summer excursion plans and decided to visit the Central Vermont shops in St. Albans, Vt., on Sunday, June 5th and on, or about, Sunday, June 26th, to go to Cantic, Que. to inspect the S.S. "Vermont". Mr. Terroux, a Director, acted as chairman of meeting.

Meeting of June 8th: After some discussion, the members decided upon certain changes in the Association's policy in regard to motor-car excursions, first, that henceforth such excursions would be for members or persons accompanied by members only; second, that expenses would be shared equally by driver and passengers. Plans for a motor-car excursion to inspect the hull of the S.S. "Vermont" on the first Sunday in July and for a railway excursion to inspect the shops of the Quebec Central Railway at Sherbrooke one Sunday in August were discussed.

Reports of Excursions

St. Albans Excursion of June 5th: Eleven members of the Association and two guests in four automobiles took part in a 150-mile trip to St. Albans, Vt., to inspect the shops of the Central Vermont Railway.

The party travelled via Marieville, St. Anzele, Farnham, Bedford, Frelighsburg, Que. and Enosburg Falls, Vt. From 2.30 to 4.00 and under the guidance of General Manager Carson and Mechanical Engineer Hamm, the members thoroughly inspected the roundhouse, locomotive repair shop, foundry and car erecting shop. On the return journey stops were made at Swanton to examine the terminus of the St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain Railway and on the King Edward Highway near Laprairie to see the Association's commemorative plaque to the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad.

S.S. "Vermont" Excursion of July 3: A party of nine members and three guests in a caravan of four cars drove to the western shore of the Richelieu River near Cantic, Que., in order to examine the hull of the S.S. "Vermont". The party, accompanied by two amateur divers, chose a campsite near the Willis Homestead. There they were joined by Mr. D.A. Loomis, General Manager, Lake George Steamboat Co. and by Mr. Beauchemin and another dredging engineer of the Department of Public Works. With the help of the engineers the wreck was soon located and with the help of the divers three ribs or pieces of ribs were dislodged and brought to the surface. One was donated to Mr. Loomis and is now in the Fleming Museum of the University of Vermont, one to Mr. Beauchemin and one remains in the possession of the Association.

"The Montreal Gazette" of July 4 carried a full account of this excursion. In the correspondence columns of the same paper during the following weeks Dr. W.A.L. Styles of Montreal took violent exception to certain of the Association's statements.