

The Railway System of Prince Edward Island

Official Stationary, RPO hammers and auxiliary markings of the PEIR

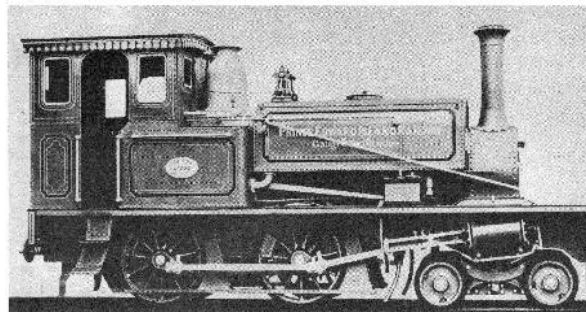
PURPOSE: This exhibit offers a study of the stationary, RPO's and auxiliary markings of the former PEI railway system from 1877 thru 1968. I will be showing the routes involved, including waterway and iceboat transport which would allow a train-ferry-train system to function. Many of the cancellations shown in this exhibit are quite scarce, being either unique or known in very limited quantities.

The establishment of the Prince Edward Island Railway (PEIR) was not only involved in the trade, commerce and transportation of the colony, but was indirectly associated with the confederation of the island and Canada. The Charlottetown conference of 1864 initially proposed this union, but it was rejected by P.E.I. in 1867, as the colony preferred to remain part of Great Britain. There was even talk of its own dominion, or annexation with the United States.

On the 17th of April, 1871 a coalition government passed legislation that would allow for the construction of a colonial railway system between Georgetown and Cascumpeque (Alberton). This act would nearly bankrupt the government in a short period of time.

The construction contract specified a cost per mile, but did not include a maximum mileage, and as a result the railway became a meandering route as it was often easier to go around an obstacle than through it. Additionally, politics would often ensure that the railway would find its path through towns that were not necessarily part of an efficient route.

By March of 1872, the spiralling cost brought down the government, but the new Liberal one, feeling the public pressure, not only continued on with construction, but expanded the lines to include Souris and Tignish. The choice of the Islanders was now to either increase taxation or consider union with Canada.



PEIR's first locomotive, a Hunslett 4-4-0

Sir John A Macdonald, who was weary of American expansionism offered to take over the debt the Island, finish the railway construction, and provide a year-round steamer service between the island and the mainland. P.E.I. agreed to the terms, and officially became a Canadian province on July 1, 1873.

The PEIR was officially opened in May 1875, utilizing a narrow gauge rail width (42"). It eventually switched over to standard width between 1918 and 1930 to accommodate rail cars from the mainland, by adding a third rail. This allowed narrow and standard gauge cars to operate simultaneously.

The railway officially ended on Dec. 31, 1989 and the route was converted into a recreational trail way.

EXHIBIT PLAN:

Pages 2-3 Official P.E.I.R. stationary
Pages 4-37 RPO's of PEI
Pages 38-45 Boat and Northumberland Straight Crossing
Pages 46-47 Agent and Accountancy Markings
Page 48 Emergency Marking

TREATMENT: When a given page has a route that the covers would have been transported on, there will be a map on the upper left to guide the reader as to its location. Information on rare, or earliest or latest known examples will be described in red.