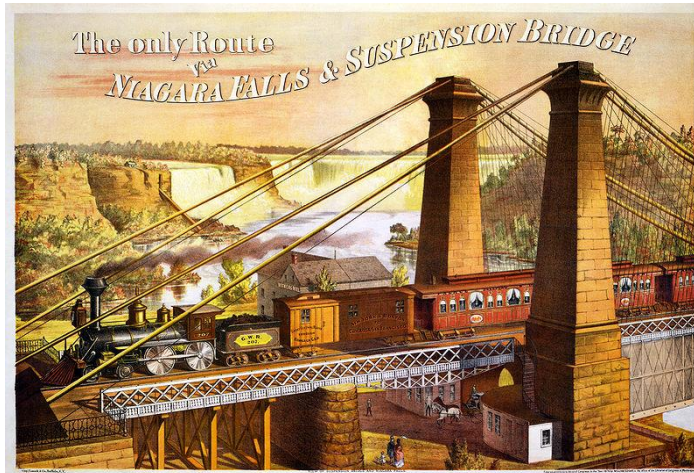


History of the
Great Western Railway



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1826: The village of London is founded. Six years later, the people of the village begin campaigning for a railway from London to the head of Lake Ontario, a distance of 80 miles.

6 March 1834: The London & Gore Railroad Company is incorporated. The plans also include possible connections to Goderich (60 miles) and to the Michigan border (110 miles). Politician Allan MacNab supports the project and takes charge of it.

1837: An economic depression and the Upper Canada rebellions of that year put the railway on hold. The government of Upper Canada finds it impossible to honour the promise of a loan.

Mid-1840s: U.S. traffic between the Atlantic seaboard and the Midwest outgrow the existing services and Americans become interested in the shorter route across southwestern Ontario. During these years, new settlers arrive, adding to the communities and easing the depression.

1845: Allan MacNab lays out new plans for the railroad, focusing on acquiring American support. During the spring of 1845, the London & Gore project re-emerges as the Great Western Railway Company (GWR), with authority to build from Hamilton in both directions to the Niagara and Detroit rivers. MacNab is helped by people such as Isaac Buchanan, politician and railway promoter, and Samuel Zimmerman, contractor of the majority of the railroad.

April 1849: Politician Francis Hincks introduces his *Guarantee Act*, in which any railway longer than 75 miles will receive government financial assistance as soon as half the line is completed. This is a major contributor to the railway boom in Canada.

23 October 1849: Sod-turning commences in London for the GWR. It becomes the largest system in southwestern Ontario at the time. Thomas Talbot is the guest of honour at the ceremony in one of his final public appearances.

30 August 1851: Hincks' *Main Trunk of Railway Act* declares: "The Great Western Railroad which has been commenced and partly constructed on the faith of said guarantee... forms part of the Main Trunk Line." The Great Western is to be Ontario's main line of transportation.

1851: Labour issues commence. Railways are given a bad name because of the influence of rough, undisciplined labour gangs in small communities. The winter of 1851-1852 is severe and the ground freezes to a depth of three feet, halting construction. Despite the efforts of the municipality leaders, troubles continue.

31 July 1852: MacNab's request for the matching railway gauge to the Americans, the 4'8 ½", is refused. To stay under the status of a main line in Canada, they are forced to use the previously accepted standard Canadian gauge, the 5'6".



The gauge is the distance between the rails on a railroad. The U.S. Standard Gauge is 4'8½".

December 1852: The anticipated day of opening arrives for the Great Western. The railroad is extremely far behind schedule and settlers are becoming angry with the delays.

12 April 1853: The prospect of the Grand Trunk Railway changes the *Main Trunk Line of Railway Act*. The Great Western is no longer regarded as the southwestern Ontario main line and the statutory route of the main line is altered. In response, the GWR increases its capital by five hundred thousand pounds and changes its name to the Great Western Railway.



Summer 1853: Twenty-six year old Charles Brydges arrives from England as the Managing Director of the Great Western. In response to the pressure from settlers, he decides to rush the line to completion before the end of 1853, despite opposition from Chief Engineer, Roswell G. Benedict.

1 November 1853: An engine and three cars travel carefully between Hamilton and Niagara Falls without a problem. Ten days later, regular service is opened in this section.

December 1853: The first train reaches Niagara Falls from London. The citizens of St. Thomas are disappointed that the GWR decides to build through London from Windsor to Niagara Falls rather than St. Thomas.

17 January 1854: The first through train from Niagara Falls reaches Windsor, carrying eight hundred passengers. According to a Toronto newspaper, contractors worked all through the previous night by lantern-light to lay the last rails. Almost the entire railway is unballasted (lacking the material usually packed around the rails to hold them in place when the train goes by). Huge celebrations follow.

1854: The railway cars are packed. Canadians respond joyfully to the new, faster way to travel, although the condition of the railroad and cars make it a rough ride.

30 September 1854: London becomes a city. The population area has increased by three thousand in a little more than a year.

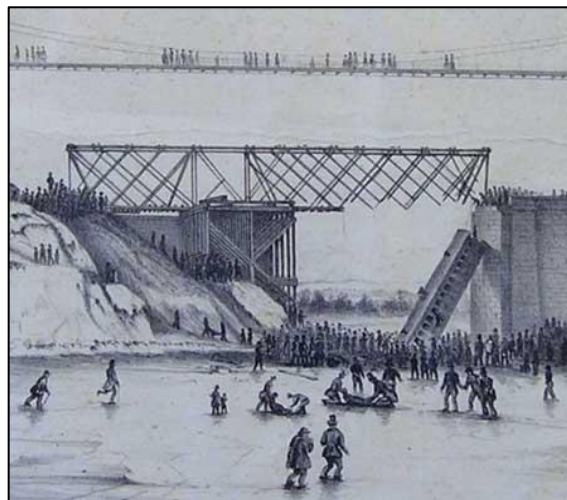
27 October 1854: A major collision at Baptiste Creek kills fifty-two people and injures forty-eight. In 1854, nineteen serious accidents occurred on the Great Western, mostly as a result of carelessness by the operators or passengers. The number killed is six times the amount killed on all of Great Britain's railways this year, which carry three hundred times the passengers.

1855: The revenue for the first full year of operation is scrutinized. Despite the criticism regarding the railway, the Great Western does extremely well, and brings prosperity to every town it passes through.

May 1855: The railway suspension bridge in Niagara Falls is opened.

3 December 1855: The Hamilton-Toronto section of the GWR is opened.

12 March 1857: The Desjardins Canal disaster: sixty passengers are drowned or burned to death due to a mechanical defect on a Great Western train while going over the Desjardins Canal. Samuel Zimmerman dies tragically at the age of 41.



A close-up of the Desjardins Canal disaster, painted by John Herbert Caddy.

1857: The Panic of 1857 occurs. One hundred and fifty banks in the United States close within eight weeks in a brief, but severe depression. The Great Western is affected but manages to cut back expenditures proportionately.

November 1857: Managing Director Charles Brydges makes the mistake of lending the Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad £150,000.00 in return for almost total control over the company.

1858: The GWR decides to pay back a Canadian Government loan early, giving the impression of stability: the second mistake following the end of the Panic.

1858: Competition arises in the form of small railways, such as the London & Port Stanley Railway and Buffalo & Lake Huron Railway. This reduces Great Western business.

1860: The Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad is sold for about one fifth of its indebtedness.

1861-1865: The Chief Engineer of the GWR calls for repair expenditure of two million dollars during this period. After only 6 years of operation, the improperly completed railway desperately needs restoration.

Spring 1861: The American Civil War breaks out. Railway construction in Upper Canada pauses for nearly ten years, as there is a risk of Great Britain becoming involved in the war.



The Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge provided direct access to the state of New York and featured two decks. an impressive feat at the

1861: Great Western earnings mount steadily and the company settles its outstanding loans from the province of Canada West.

Autumn 1862: Charles Brydges resigns to become manager of the Grand Trunk Railway.

January 1867: An overnight excursion from Chicago to Niagara is made to celebrate the introduction of the common 4'8 ½" gauge. This expensive change makes the Great Western much more competitive, as American partners are tired of delays caused by the different gauges. It also provides the opportunity for the luxury sleeping car to be introduced.

1872: Afraid of losing traffic to the new Canada Southern Railway that runs through St. Thomas to connect Detroit and Buffalo, the GWR constructs the Great Western “Air Line” or “Loop Line” in order to compete. It is an extremely expensive venture that gives St. Thomas two major railways in the same year.

1874: The Great Western leases the London & Port Stanley tracks for 20 years. The GWR then leases multiple other small railways that never earn as much as their operating costs.

October 1875: The GWR comes under the management of Hugh Childers and Frederick Broughton. Between the two of them, the railway becomes one of the most efficient railways in North America. Unfortunately, the pressure of the big names of the railway scene, such as the Vanderbilts and the Goulds, are too much for the Great Western. An alliance with the Grand Trunk is sought.

1879: Childers resigns, believing amalgamation with the Grand Trunk is inevitable. His successor, Colonel Francis D. Grey, decides to hold on to Great Western independence for as long as possible.

Spring 1882: Many, including the Grand Trunk president Sir Henry Tyler, believe that unless the Canadian railway companies pool their strengths, they will be taken over by American competition.

29 June 1882: The final meeting of Great Western shareholders reveals that the *Main Line of Railway Act* of 1852 makes a lease legally inadmissible. The GWR’s only choice is amalgamation and absorption into the Grand Trunk Railway.

12 August 1882: The official amalgamation of the Great Western with the Grand Trunk occurs.



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