



St. Thomas Railway History Chronology

1834 - The plan for the Great Western Railway (GWR) is conceived. An economic depression delays implementation for several years.

23 October 1847 - Sod-turning commences for the GWR. It becomes the largest system in Southwestern Ontario.

1850s - Surveying for railway lines is conducted in the St. Thomas area by different railroad companies. Among those reported in the *St. Thomas Weekly Dispatch* are routes to Simcoe and Amherstburg.

1854 - Citizens of St. Thomas are disappointed that the GWR decided to build through London from Windsor to Niagara Falls instead of St. Thomas. St. Thomas's leading citizens had been campaigning for years for a railway.

1856 - The London and Port Stanley Railway (L&PS) is inaugurated. Though it was initially supported by St. Thomas, it turned out to be a financial disaster, as St. Thomas merchants lost customers to London. The city purchased shares in the company for \$125,000.00 a piece and later sold them to the City of London, who owned the line, for \$25,000.00 per share.

1868 - The Erie and Niagara Extension Railway is chartered and the following year it is renamed the Canada Southern Railway (CASO).

Late 1860's - William A. Thomson rallies support for the CASO run between Amherstburg and Fort Erie to connect to St. Thomas. He is successful.

1871 - The CASO Station is built in anticipation of the railroad's arrival the following year. It still stands today.

1872- The GWR, afraid of losing traffic to the CASO, constructed a rival St. Thomas to Glencoe line, thereby affording St. Thomas two railroads. GWR opens operations in February of 1872 and the CASO begins running 19 December 1872.

March 1874 – The GWR leases the L&PS tracks for twenty years.

1880 - The population of St. Thomas has more than tripled since 1872 as a result of the railways.

Railway Legend

L&PS- London and Port Stanley

LE&DRR- Lake Erie and Detroit River

SWTCo- South Western Traction Company

N&W- Norfolk and Western

TRRY- St. Thomas and Eastern

C&O- Chesapeake and Ohio

PM- Pere Marquette

WAB- Wabash

CVR- Credit Valley

MC- Michigan Central

OSR- Ontario Southland

L&LE- London and

Lake Erie Railway

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1881 - The Credit Valley Railway (CVR) begins operations from Woodstock to St. Thomas; the Wabash Railway (WAB) leases tracks operated by the GWR.

August 1882 – The GWR is purchased by the Grand Trunk Railway (GT).

1 May 1883 – The CASO leases its facilities to the Michigan Central (MC) for 21 years. The CASO Station becomes known as the Michigan Central Station.

30 November 1883 - The Canada Pacific Railway (CPR) takes over the CVR facilities.

15 September 1885 - Jumbo the elephant is killed by a GT freight train. A circus employee was loading the animals into their cars at 8:18 p.m., disregarding specific instructions not to do so until after 9:55 p.m. As the train approached the tracks, Jumbo sensed danger and reared on his hind legs. He charged at the train, destroying its smokestack but driving a cylinder head into his own head.

15 July 1887- A Grand Trunk excursion train operating on the L&PS lines collides with a MC freight train hauling oil. It causes a massive fire and explosions which are visible for miles around. Fourteen are killed including a family of four and five other children. Sixty-five are injured by the explosion and three by the collision. Known as the Great Wreck of 1887, it is the worst disaster in the city's history.

1892 – The MC temporarily operates the L&PS.

December 1893 - The Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway (LE&DRR) lease the L&PS lines for 20 years.

1894 - The Pere Marquette Railway (PM) and the MC lease the rights to haul coal through St. Thomas.

1897 - The WAB leases the eastern lines of the GT from Windsor to Fort Erie.

30 June 1901 - The LE&DRR extend their service from Ridgetown to St. Thomas.

1903 – The PM assumes ownership of the LE&DRR.

1904 – The PM uses MC tracks from St. Thomas to Niagara Falls and from St. Thomas to Victoria and Black Rock, two suburbs of Buffalo; the MC extends its lease on the CASO tracks to 99 years.

1906 –The PM leases the L&PS tracks.

1 July 1906 - The South Western Traction Company (SWTCo) opens an inter-urban line to St. Thomas from London.

30 October 1907 - The SWTCo line runs to Port Stanley from London via St. Thomas.

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1909 - SWTCo is sold to the London and Lake Erie Railway and Transportation Company (L&LE).

1 April 1910 - Work begins on the MC Roundhouse in St. Thomas.

1 April 1911 - A lawsuit is launched against the London and Lake Erie Railway for operating cars on a Sunday. This is still an era in which businesses are legally forced to respect the Sabbath.

31 May 1911 - Two St. Thomas men are killed in the wreck of an MC train near Ridgetown. The tracks had been tampered with, causing the train to go off the rails.

1914 - The City of London takes over the L&PS, creating the London Railway Commission.

1915 - The L&PS is electrified and provides passengers with smoke free transportation.

15 June 1918 - The *St. Thomas Daily Times* reports a plot by two men hired by Frank Bopp, German Consul-General in San Francisco, on behalf of Kaiser Wilhelm II to blow up the MC stockyard in St. Thomas, targeting horse trains specifically. One of the men carried a suitcase full of dynamite to St. Thomas. He had a "yellow streak" as the newspaper reported it, and substituted bricks for the dynamite at the last minute to fool his partner. He later turned state's evidence and revealed the plot to the US State Department.

15 October 1918 - The L&LE interurban service is discontinued after years of financial failure.

1929 - The facilities which the MC has been leasing are subleased to the New York Central Railroad (NYC) for 999 years.

1936 - The Public Utilities Commission of London takes over the operation of the L&PS.

1947 - The PM is purchased by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway (C&O).

1955 - The first diesel locomotive is purchased for the L&PS.

18 February 1957 - Passenger services are discontinued on the L&PS.

1960 - The NYC line from St. Thomas to Courtright is abandoned.

1964 - The WAB is leased to the Norfolk and Western Railway (N&W) and ends operations under the Wabash name.

31 December 1965 - The L&PS ends freight services and its entire operations wind down. It was the oldest railway in Canada still operating under its original charter.

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1 January, 1966 – The Canadian National Railway buys the L & PS and uses the line for freight services.

1 February 1968 - The NYC is merged with the Pennsylvania Railroad to form the Penn Central (PC) Railroad. The Penn Central now operates the former NYC tracks through St. Thomas.

1 April 1976 – The PC and several other bankrupt railways are amalgamated to form the Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) which begins operations in St. Thomas.

31 December 1978 - Amtrak, a passenger line which is operating the Niagara Rainbow line through St. Thomas on the Conrail tracks, discontinues its service to St. Thomas.

9 November 1998 - The St. Thomas and Eastern Railway (TRRY), a division of Trillium Rail, assumes operation of the former GWR tracks between St. Thomas and Delhi.

1 June 1999 - Conrail operations in St. Thomas are divided between the CSX Transportation Company and the Norfolk Southern Railway.

14 December 2009 - The Ontario Southland Railway (OSR) begins operation in St. Thomas. They take over the CPR tracks between St. Thomas and Woodstock.



Prepared by [Cameron Bryant](#), Local History Summer Student,
for the St. Thomas Public Library, 2010.

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