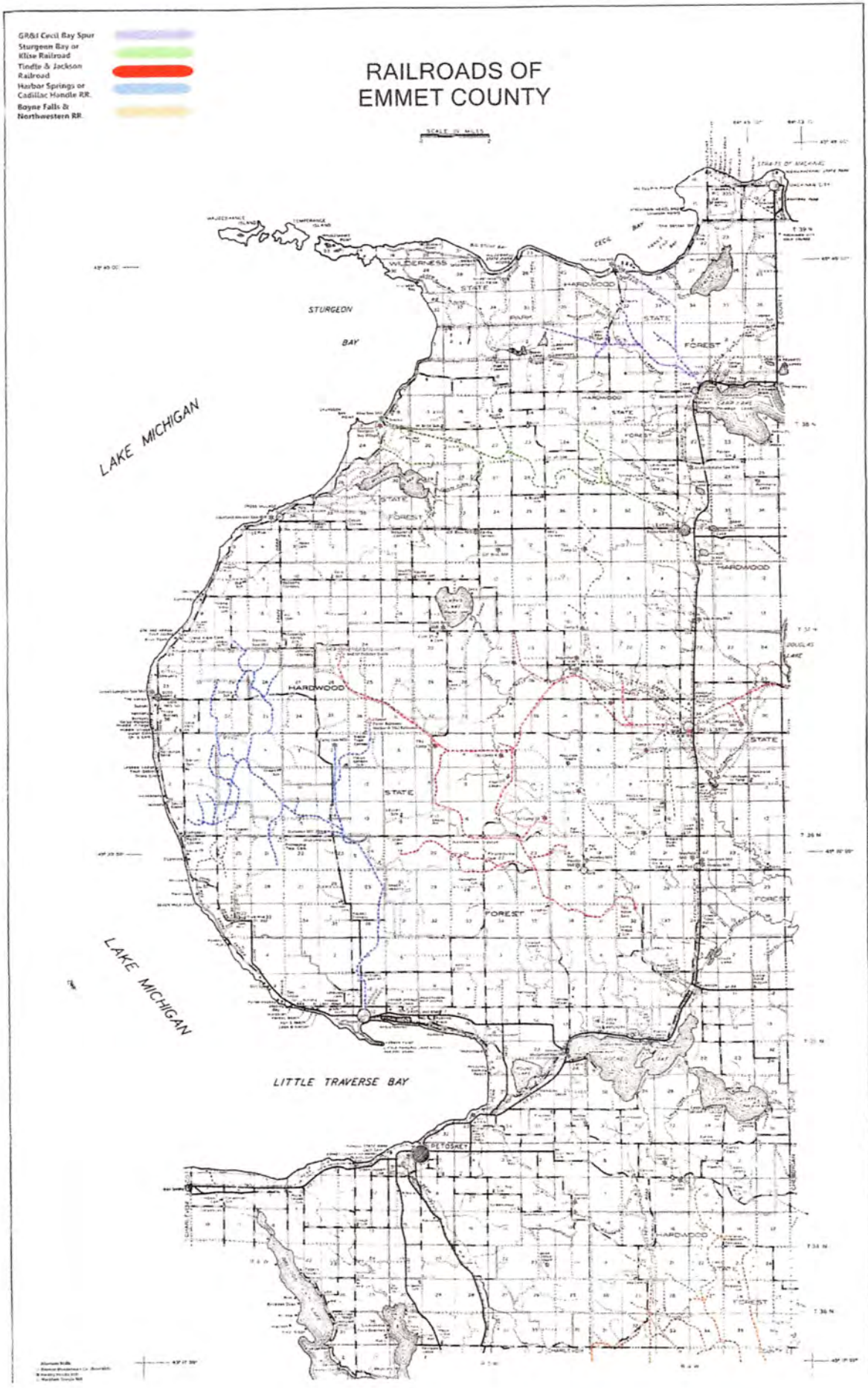


# RAILROADS OF EMMET COUNTY

- GR&I Cecil Bay Spur
- Sturgeon Bay or Klix Railroad
- Tindie & Jackson Railroad
- Harbor Springs or Cadillac Handle RR.
- Boyer Falls & Northwestern RR.



SCALE IN MILES



Michigan State  
 Bureau of Railroads  
 Railroad Commission  
 Railroad Statistics  
 Railroad Statistics

## WHEN THE RAILROAD CAME TO TOWN

It is too bad that O'Henry or Mark Twain could not have seen and described Petoskey railroading sometime during the seventy-five years from the first train arrival in the autumn of 1874 until the great days of the Pennsy "Northern Arrow" and the C&O "Resort Special." {Actually, Mark Twain did put in a Petoskey appearance, in 1895, but it was a hurried twenty-four hour visit, and its focus was a speech at the Old Opera House, without benefit of local railroad lore, which was perhaps and unfortunate oversight!}

Either author would have delighted in describing such an exciting and action-packed period in this small town, and the hullabaloo caused by presence of the Iron Horse.

First came the GR&I, predecessor to the Pennsylvania with its big engines chugging their way smack across the present busy intersection at Mitchell and Howard Streets, stopping street traffic to show who was boss, pulling slowly to a stop at tiny Bay Street station across from the old Elk's Club building.

Unfortunately, unless there is a dusty personal chronicle in existence, no one recorded the excitement of the first arrival, because it occurred before a newspaper was published in Petoskey.

From fragmentary accounts there were no schedules at the outset, and the train stopped running altogether in the winter. Petoskey, in 1874, was a community of 200 people, boating of five stores, three hotels {The Cushman, Rose and Clifton Houses}, two sawmills, a grist-mill and a single saloon.

Things picked up quickly, though. In 1875 a twice-a-week summer schedule was adopted, both north and south, and there was a single train each day even in winter.

The first suburban trains started operating in 1878, from Petoskey through Bay View to Crooked Lake. These used wooden rails topped with strips of steel for tracks. The cars were small, open at the sides and had wooden canopy type tops.

For the first three summers these were horse-drawn, but in 1880 a small engine was regularly used on the Harbor Springs route. By 1880, the GR&I had extended service all the way to Mackinaw City.

The original depot on Bay Street burned that year, and a new station was built in what is now Pennsylvania Plaza. The railroad began advertising itself in Chicago and Detroit as "The Fishing Line," a great appeal.

The first passenger agent in Petoskey for the GR&I was M.F. Quaintance, whose official position automatically bestowed an aura of importance, since the railroad soon became one of the largest employers in town. 125 employees reported to him. Big business for a little town.

Completion of the GR&I segment from Reed City to Petoskey stimulated the business climate all the way north, and all over the north. Soon a "State Road" was built from Cheboygan to Petoskey to accommodate a "feeder" stage route. Service was soon available from Little Traverse {Harbor Springs} via Petoskey to Cheboygan, accommodating passengers and mail.

By 1905 the GR&I found it necessary, because there were 66 trains a day through Bay View, to "double track" all the way to Harbor Springs, and six sets of tracks were needed at Bay Street to handle all the traffic.

One could take the "dummy train to or from Harbor or Bay Street on the hour and half-hour anytime between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. Passengers rode in one or two or three vestibule-type cars {with hard wooden seats} that carried sixty persons each. The bright red cars took only 30 minutes to make that trip; fare was \$.25. Stations from Petoskey were Rosedale, Bay View, Reed Avenue, Edgewater, Menonequa Beach, Ramona Park, East Wequetonsing, Wequetonsing, West Wequetonsing and, of course, Harbor Springs at the end of the line.

People are curious about the term "Dummy," which everyone called the commuter facility and others like it throughout the Midwest. One writer explains that the name derives from the practice in dairy regions of disguising the engine in a box-like wooden covering in order to avoid frightening cows grazing along the right-of-way.

In 1905 a summer commuter line was established that ran four times per day each way to Conway, Oden and Alanson, then back to Petoskey and south to Clarion and Bear {Walloon} Lake. Starting that year, also, you could go to Kegomic at 15 and 45 minutes after the hour.

One reason for all the stepped up service on the GR&I in Petoskey was the 1893 arrival in town of the Chicago & West Michigan, which occurred in 1893. Its advent had been heralded in a news-paper story a couple years earlier in the Petoskey Record.

“Capitalists interested in the Chicago and West Michigan Railroad...have definitely decided to extend the road to the Straits...the road will be built this season, at least to Petoskey.”

As was often the case, there were delays in execution, but a month later the Record ran a story headlined, “Railroad This Time Sure.”

“While it has been known for some time past that the building of the C&WM RR northward from Traverse City was a certainty, it was not known just when...but last Friday night at a meeting with the businessmen of Petoskey, officials stated that within 48 hours after they were granted a right of way from the West line of Emmet County to the corporate limits of Bay View, together with grounds for a depot within the village, a force of men would set to work...”

The clincher was that Captain H.O. Rose, prominent businessman of Petoskey at that very meeting, donated the right of way along the whole of his waterfront property from Bay View to Bear Creek, together with ample room for a station.

No time was wasted, as the railroad men had promised. On June 1<sup>st</sup> the Record carried a story headlined “The New Depot.”

“Work began this week upon the new depot of the C&WM railroad on the waterfront. It will be 154x48 feet in size and when done will present a handsome specimen of Romanesque architecture. The central portion will contain a general waiting room 25x40 feet, and a ladies waiting room, 16x28 feet, besides a baggage room, ticket and telegraph office, and toilet rooms. From the center wall will rise a large tower commanding a fine view of the Bay. On the second floor of this tower will be a large room twenty-five feet in diameter with balconies on the waterfront side. The depot is to cost \$6,000 and to be completed in 60 days.” {this is the present Petoskey Historical Society Museum, which features a fine railroad exhibit.}

An editorial in the same issue was prophetic:

“Our citizens do not even quite yet understand all this means to Petoskey, the material advantages are very great...it means growth...and advance in values of real estate...no material increase in summer business could be expected until facilities for transportation were increased...within the next three years volume of summer travel will double.”

Morning and afternoon “The great daylight scenic runs,” with through parlor cars to Detroit and Chicago, plus an overnight train, were for many years a part of Petoskey action. A large poster-size time-table for the C&WM for 1910 is on exhibit as testimony to the busy life of Petoskey’s second rail line.

As a postscript to the long-lines aspect of the C&WM, General Passenger Agent George DeHaven commented quaintly: “in addition...there will be established... the following local schedule...every day...seven times per day, where never was train before.

Executives of the GR&I quite naturally were slightly jealous of all the attention showered on this new competitor and in the year 1902 pulled out all the stops to again take the lead in the never ending game of one-upmanship; they planned a new station-house for the GR&I in Petoskey. No holds were barred. They commissioned the world-famous Chicago architect, Daniel Burnham, to design the structure which still stands, across from the Perry Hotel.

Burnham, it may be recalled, was the designer of the long-range plan for Chicago’s waterfront which has been closely followed since the turn of the century. {While nothing much was made of this coup at the time in Petoskey, it is just possible that architectural fans haven’t really discovered this gem in the wilderness, and that its time may yet come.}

Local newspapers enjoyed playing big-brother to the railroad people and early on prodded their management into safety measures. For example;

“What has become of the gates at the railroad crossing at Howard and Mitchell Streets the councilmen were demanding last winter? Agent Quaintance said at the time that the GR&I was going to put in electric alarm bells right away quick, but poor as that device is, it hasn’t turned up. Is the thing going to run along this way until somebody is killed?”

Beyond minor squabbles and incidents, however, the two railroads more than lived up to the dreamers – and investors – hopes. They also became a warm part of Petoskey community life, as born out by friendly squibs in the papers from time to time.

“The track of the C&WM between here and Charlevoix is said to be the best piece of new track ever laid in the state. It is as smooth as any old piece of road ever laid, and the sixteen miles have been covered in 17 minutes.

“The C&WM carried 1400 people to Charlevoix on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.”

“Trains began running to the foot of Bear {Walloon}Lake on Sunday. People can now go down in the afternoon, spend several hours on the lake and return in time for tea.

“Eddie Labadie, who has been telegraph messenger at the GR&I depot for nearly two years, meanwhile learning how to thump the key, has been promoted and made operator at the Harbor Point office. Eddie is a steady and gentlemanly fellow, and will get on in life.

“The facilities afforded by the GR&I this season for quick trips to Bear Lake are admirable, and there will be thousands who will spend a day on that beautiful stretch of water this season. Added to the local trains to Crooked Lake, Harbor Springs and Bay View, the railroad now has furnished us unequalled service.”

“The annual excursion of the GR&I from all stations between Richmond, Indiana, and Vicksburg, Michigan and Traverse City will be given September 8. Fare only \$5. Tickets good to return on all regular trains for ten days after that.” {1200 people were aboard this particular special.}

“This morning excursion on the GR&I to Machinac and the Soo took our 385 people.”

“The excursion brought in by the C&WM and the GR&I Wednesday and Thursday nights were large ones. The two together brought about 1200 people into Petoskey.”

The Petoskey Independent in 1892 reported that a total of almost 13,000 trains made trips to or from Kegonic from June 25 to September 30.

It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the two carriers to the development of the city and area as a summer haven. There are hundreds of senior citizens who recall with affection the scene of happy confusion that always occurred at the arrival of trains at both stations all summer long.

You'd hear them first, announcing their coming from far down the track and then they would come chugging into the station, the engine blowing off steam as the engineer rang the bell next to the stack.

First off each car were the porters, one to a car, swinging down to the platform with the iron step in their free hand, dusting off the hand-rail, at the ready to take the arm of each dismounting passenger.

There were mothers, dressed to the nines with white gloves and floppy hats, and, in the really olden days, bustles and pleated skirts that barely cleared the ground. Often, a hat box was in hand.

There were fathers in double-breasted, pin-striped Palm Beach suits, canes, two-toned sporty shoes and skimmer straw hats.

And there were little girls in braids and white dresses with colorful sashes tied in a big bow at the back and patent-leather black shoes, and their brothers in long-sleeved white shirts, string ties and straw hats, some with a fishing rod clutched in hand.

Quite often, trailing the family and running around the brick train-platform to see to trunks and suitcases would be the domestics and nannies, along for the summer season.

Adding to the confusion would be noisy hotel porters shouting the name of their hotel, baggage-handlers, big iron-shod baggage wagons, draymen and spectators. Later on in the summer the arrival scene was repeated in reverse, a little quieter and sometimes with parting tears.

As most people know, Bay View was established as the result of negotiation between the GR&I, which originally owned the property, Methodist interests seeking a retreat, and city of Petoskey, which led to the agreeable, more-than-century old relationship between the resort and Petoskey.

The railroads were almost equally influential in successful establishment of many other summer havens around the north – Harbor Point, Roaring Brook, Wequetonsing and the shores of Pine and Walloon Lakes, at the very least they made them more accessible to all who sought relief from city heat beating down on the Midwest.

No one had any thought that his happy state of affairs would ever change. There is a delightful little book, printed in Petoskey in 1898, *The Northern Michigan Handbook for Travelers*, by J.F. Inglis, that describes the natural beauties of this region. It is full of tips on how to enhance a vacation in the area by taking little side-trips by carriage, horseback, bicycle and on foot, which were the approved ways of getting around once you arrived in the area. The book is available in local bookstores and original copies turn up at house sales from time to time. It is worth reading as a guide to innocent pleasures in the days before the concrete highway!

The railroad bubble finally burst as the automobile moved into the scene in the teens and twenties and thirties.

The C&WM which had been acquired by the Pere Marquette and later by the C&O made a valiant effort to compete. Mr. Young, president of the latter road established the "Resort Special" as a sleeper service during the summer. Sections left Detroit and Chicago Friday nights, arriving at northern stations in this vicinity early Saturday morning. Return service left Petoskey at 7 p.m. Sunday nights, delivering its load of commuting family heads in time for work Monday morning in the big cities. This was a great success but could not, alone, support the railroad.

Its competitor, the Pennsylvania, successor to the GR&I, said, in a story in the Petoskey News-Review, April 20, 1950:

"Improved passenger equipment, including a wide range of Pullman accommodations, will feature this years' Northern Arrow"...it will serve north Michigan for more than four months during the coming summer season...diesel powered, as it was last year, the Arrow will present for the first time a dining car especially for the north Michigan service, decorated with photo murals of that resort area..."

Alas, in September, a little over four months later, the Northern Arrow pulled out of Petoskey for the last time...a sort of last gasp for passenger railroading.

The old spirit of enterprise and innovation, which had included such elaborate ventures as the annual staging of a Hiawatha Pageant on little Round Lake, north of Petoskey, and combination rail/boat round trips from Chicago and Detroit to Petoskey and Charlevoix could no longer be profitable. The railroads simply quit trying.

Extracted from People, Places, Happenings in Northern Michigan By William H. Ohle. Pages 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, & 67.

This is a collection of articles that have appeared over the past two decades in "THE GRAPHIC," A tabloid published by the Petoskey News-Review for the enjoyment of vacationers.