

# THE KLONDIKE CONNECTION:

## A History of the Jasper Place Railway

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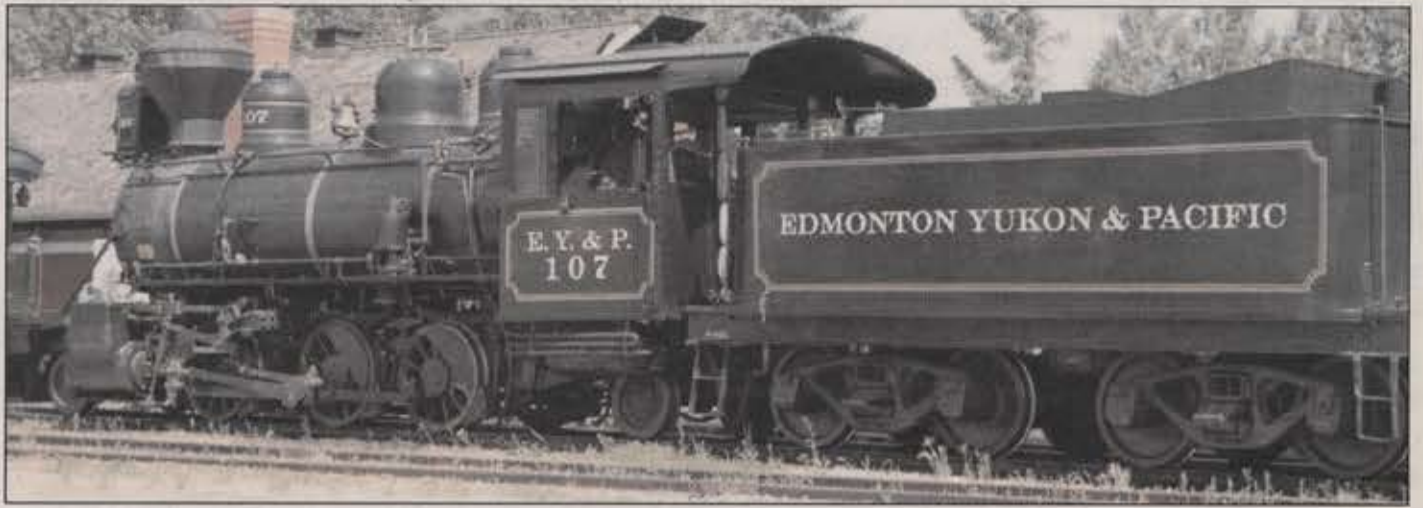
The first residents of Jasper Place expected that the tracks north of Stony Plain Road would someday extend all the way to Vancouver.

The name was certainly ambitious enough: the Edmonton, Yukon and Pacific Railway, chartered to snake through the Yellowhead Pass into B.C. Perhaps, in the event of another outbreak of gold fever, it would head north to the Klondike as well.

In 1907, as settlers started building houses along the MacKinnon Ravine, the first 30 kilometres or so of the EY&P were already operating: Strathcona to Edmonton to Stony Plains (the extra "s" eventually disappeared).

When the EY&P first train had crossed the Low Level Bridge on Oct. 20, 1902, it was an event of such magnitude that Mayor William Short declared a civic holiday.

Finally Edmonton was connected to the rest of the world by a more reliable form of transportation than steamships and stage-coaches. More importantly, it had secured a place on 20th century maps. In 1891, when the Calgary and Edmonton Railway dead-ended in Strathcona, it seemed like a matter of time before the new settlement swallowed up the town that had grown up on the north side of the river, around the old Hudson's Bay Company Fort. Instead, 10 years after the first EY&P train, Edmonton annexed (or "amalgamated with," to use the politically-correct term) Strathcona.



The route that first train took now makes for a lovely walk, especially on a fall afternoon. Start at the east side of the CPR rail yard. Between 68th and 69th Avenues, there's a long grassy knoll that stretches all the way to the Mill Creek Ravine. (It's an off-leash area for dogs now, so tread carefully.) The alignment through the ravine is preserved as a paved trail, and walking toward the river valley a hiker crosses four trestle bridges, reminders of the EY&P. The longest and most impressive is parallel to 76th Avenue.

Initially, the rails did not reach as far as Jasper Place. Just getting across the river was good enough to start, so the EY&P put up a temporary station in Rosedale, northwest of the Low Level Bridge, and declared itself open for business. It was a frugal operation. When there was no money to buy coal, the engineer and fireman dug into a seam near the station hoping to find fuel for the tender. Construction standards had been exceedingly poor, which caused frequent derailments. For safety's sake, trains crawled along at a maximum speed of 16 km/h.

At the end of November 1905, a second line reached Edmonton:

the Canadian Northern Railway, from Winnipeg through Saskatoon, North Battleford and Fort Saskatchewan. As the CNoR and the EY&P shared the same ownership, under the direction of William Mackenzie and Donald Mann, linking the railways made sense. Malcolm MacCrimmon was given a contract to extend the EY&P up the north bank on the North Saskatchewan River. The line climbed over Victoria Park, wrapped along the east fork of the Groat Ravine and continued diagonally toward the CNoR yards, connecting near the Molson brewery.

In 1906, MacCrimmon started building westward, extending the EY&P on an alignment just a little bit north of today's 106th Avenue, through areas now called Glenora, Grovenor, Canora, Britannia, Youngstown, Mayfield – and on to Stony Plains.

Alas, Stony Plains would turn out to be the end of the line for the EY&P. Out of money, Mackenzie and Mann lost the initiative to the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, which reached Edmonton from Wainwright in 1909 and kept building west to Jasper and eventually Prince Rupert. That year, on Apr. 23, the EY&P lost its independent corporate existence, becoming part of the CNoR.

When their finances improved, Mackenzie and Mann faced a choice: build from Stony Plains alongside the GTP line or take a more northerly route, through St. Albert, Onoway and Alberta Beach. This decision to explore virgin territory relegated the former EY&P to a spur, with three trains per week picking up grain from the Stony Plains elevator.

By 1923, both the CNoR and GTP were bankrupt and under direct federal government control. A

new crown corporation, Canadian National Railways, consolidated duplicate lines: between Glenora and (now called) Stony Plain, the old EY&P right of way was abandoned, the rails removed.

During the Second World War, the line would be rebuilt as far as Grovenor, where it served warehouses north of 106th Avenue that were being used by the U.S. Army's Quartermaster Corps. This small industrial area became a staging point for the construction of the Alaska Highway.

If you live in a 1940s house in Grovenor or Jasper Place, there are very good odds that the original residents were an American family that had temporarily resettled in Edmonton while Daddy worked on the Alaska Highway project.

Perhaps, in a fanciful sense, the EY&P fulfilled its destiny by serving the builders of the Alaska Highway. The little railway with big ambitions eventually found a way to help people get to the Klondike – and beyond.

After the war, the railhead became, for a short time, a commercial zone. However, because of the baby boom and migration fuelled by the oil discovery at Leduc, Edmonton needed people houses more than warehouses. The shops were recycled and so were the rails. Once and for all, trains disappeared from the west end.

But they've left a legacy. Remember – the parent company of the Edmonton, Yukon and Pacific Railway was the Canadian Northern Railway. The CANADIAN NORthern RAILWAY. CA-NO-RA. Canora.

Neat, huh?

