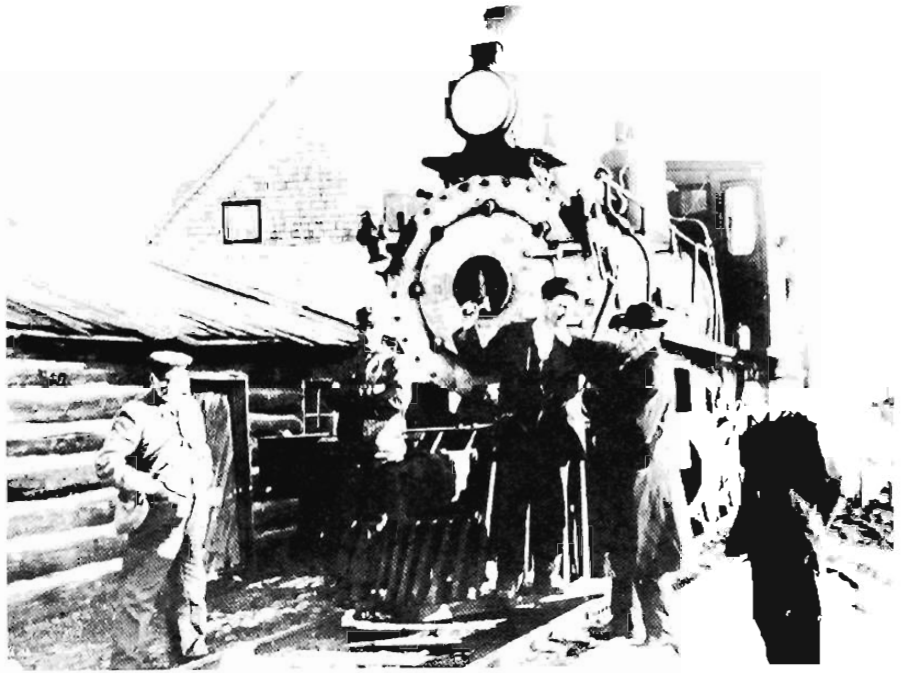


# LOGGING LINE:



## A History of the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba

Harold T. Hagg

DURING THE 1890s a spreading network of logging railroads opened a new logging frontier in Minnesota. After depletion of the state's pineries in the St. Croix delta, loggers pushed northward into the deep forests of Itasca, St. Louis, Beltrami, and Lake counties. But in those regions few waterways existed for driving the logs to the sawmills. Logs thus had to be moved by railroads, either exclusively or as part of a combined land and water route. The railroads made it possible to harvest previously inaccessible pinelands. Rail transportation of logs was also faster and more dependable than river driving (always subject to the uncertainties

of weather) and permitted year-round operation of sawmills. Gradually the logging railroad supplanted the river as a carrier of logs. In 1901 approximately 100,000,000 feet of logs were shipped by rail to Minneapolis. After 1903 more logs reached Duluth by rail than by water. "By 1910 it was the railroad rather than the river that carried most of the logs," wrote one historian. "the main stay of log transportation was the railroad."<sup>1</sup>

Some logging railroads were incorporated as common carriers; others were private roads built by logging companies. The large common carriers of northern Minnesota also ran numerous logging trains. However, because the tributary timber was rapidly exhausted, some railroads operated for only a few years, although in some cases an entire road would be pulled up and rebuilt elsewhere. A few logging lines, notably the Brainerd and Northern Minnesota Railroad Company, were absorbed by regular common carriers, but the fate of most was abandonment. Nevertheless, during the half century of railroad logging after 1890, "northern Minnesota had an all-time total of more than 2500 miles of logging railroads."<sup>2</sup>

In 1892 construction of the Brainerd and Northern Minnesota began from Brainerd into the pine areas to the north. As the pine receded, the line was extended, reaching Walker in 1895. By 1898 the line was completed to Bemidji. At the turn of the century the Brainerd

<sup>1</sup> Agnes M. Larson, *History of the White Pine Industry in Minnesota*, 361, 363 (Minneapolis, 1949); William Gerald Rector, *Log Transportation in the Lake States Lumber Industry, 1840-1918*, 226, 292 (quote) (Glendale, California, 1953).

<sup>2</sup> Franklin A. King, "Logging Railroads of Northern Minnesota," in the *Railway and Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin* no. 93, p. 94-115 (p. 95 quote) (October, 1955); Rector, *Log Transportation*, 230, 233, 289, 296; J. C. Ryan, "Minnesota Logging Railroads," in *Minnesota History*, 27:300 (December, 1946).

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erd and Northern Minnesota was the most important logging railroad in the state. From Bemidji the Minnesota and International Railway, which became a major log carrier, was extended gradually to the northeast, reaching International Falls in 1907. Bemidji was also on the Great Northern line between Duluth and Grand Forks, North Dakota. By 1905 a railroad incorporated as a common carrier between the strategic rail center of Bemidji and the south shore of Lower Red Lake had enlarged the new pineland frontier to include a sizable area in southern Beltrami County. This thirty-three-mile road became an integral link in the chain of log transportation to Minneapolis, International Falls, and other major milling centers. In operation until 1938, it bore the proud name of the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba Railway Company.<sup>3</sup>

The growing network of logging railroads both indicated and speeded the trend toward concentration of ownership and large-scale production in lumbering. The Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba, like other logging lines, was controlled by big lumber interests. It was an artery of trade and travel for woodsmen, settlers, and Indians, as was often the case with logging railroads. Along its route boom towns sprang up, as they did on similar lines. And, finally, the hope that the Red Lake line might be extended and survive the lumbering era as a common carrier or as part of a larger system was shattered—an outcome shared by all but a handful of these railroads. Thus, the story of the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba illuminates the role of logging railroads in the lumber industry and in a developing region.<sup>4</sup>

THE FIRST SEGMENT of this railroad was built by the Red Lake Transportation Company in 1898 from Nebish northward to the south shore of Lower Red Lake. Nebish, located about eight miles south of Red Lake, was in the portion of the Red Lake Indian Reservation ceded by the Red Lake Chippewa Indians under the terms of the Nelson Act of 1889. This measure was in response to pressure to open Indian lands to lumbermen, whose acquisitive interest had been aroused during the 1880s by the rich pine resources of the Red Lake and other Indian reservations.<sup>5</sup>

The Nelson Act provided that all the Minnesota Chippewa except the Red Lake bands were to move to the White Earth Reservation where land allotments were to be made to them, according to provisions of the Dawes Act of 1887. The Red Lake Indians were to receive allotments on their own reserve. After the allotments were made, the remaining lands on the reservations were to be classified as agricultural or pineland and sold. After all expenses were paid, the remainder of the money was to go into the United

States treasury. The principal was to remain untouched for fifty years, and only the 3 per cent annual interest, part of which was designated for schools, was to be paid to the Chippewa Indians.<sup>6</sup>

In 1889 the commission appointed to negotiate with the Indians obtained the Red Lake band's consent to a "diminished reservation." "Diminished" it was, indeed, for the Indians ceded approximately four-fifths of their lands, including a substantial portion of southern Beltrami County. Presumably the retained lands were reserved to fill allotments as stipulated in the Nelson Act, but the Indians were determined to hold their lands in common and the allotment plan was not carried out.<sup>7</sup>

The logging line from Nebish to Red Lake was built to tap pinelands in the ceded area. The diminished reservation included a belt of land approximately five miles wide extending along the south shore of Lower Red Lake. On June 25, 1897, the St. Hilaire Lumber Company of Minneapolis received permission from the United States Department of the Interior to construct a temporary logging railroad across this portion of the retained reservation. The railroad was to be used only for transporting logs and camp supplies and was to be removed when it was no longer needed. The lumber company was to avoid unnecessary waste and to compensate the Indians for any damage the road might cause them.<sup>8</sup>

St. Hilaire's president was Thomas H. Shevlin, a prominent figure in the lumber industry of Minnesota. When the first public sales of ceded pinelands were held at Crookston and Duluth in July, 1896, another Shevlin-connected firm in Minneapolis—Shevlin, Car-

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<sup>3</sup> Harold T. Hagg, "The Beltrami County Logging Frontier," in *Minnesota History*, 29:138, 139, 147 (June, 1948); King, in *Bulletin* no. 93, p. 100; Larson, *White Pine Industry*, 362; Rector, *Log Transportation*, 294.

<sup>4</sup> Larson, *White Pine Industry*, 362; Ryan, in *Minnesota History*, 27:300; Hagg, in *Minnesota History*, 29:138, 141-144, 147.

<sup>5</sup> Hagg, in *Minnesota History*, 29:147; Larson, *White Pine Industry*, 310-312.

<sup>6</sup> William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 4:220 (St. Paul, revised edition, 1969). Under the Dawes Act the president was given power (among other provisions) to end the tribal arrangement and the communal ownership of land and to divide the land among the Indians by allotting 160 acres to each head of a family and making smaller allotments to others (this was amended in 1891 to only eighty acres per head of family). The Indians could neither mortgage nor sell their property for a period of twenty-five years. Surplus lands, after allotments were made, could be purchased by the government and opened for settlement. See Larson, *White Pine Industry*, 310-312.

<sup>7</sup> Folwell, *Minnesota*, 4:297-299.

<sup>8</sup> King, in *Bulletin* no. 93, p. 104.

penter and Company — bought large tracts. The railroad from Nebish was built to haul timber from these lands to Red Lake for towing across the water and driving down the Red Lake River to Shevlin-Carpenter mills along that stream. Before the logging railroad was built, drives on tributary streams had taken logs to Red Lake en route to the Red Lake River. The logging railroad therefore complemented rather than altered the natural outlet of logs cut in the Red River drainage basin.<sup>9</sup>

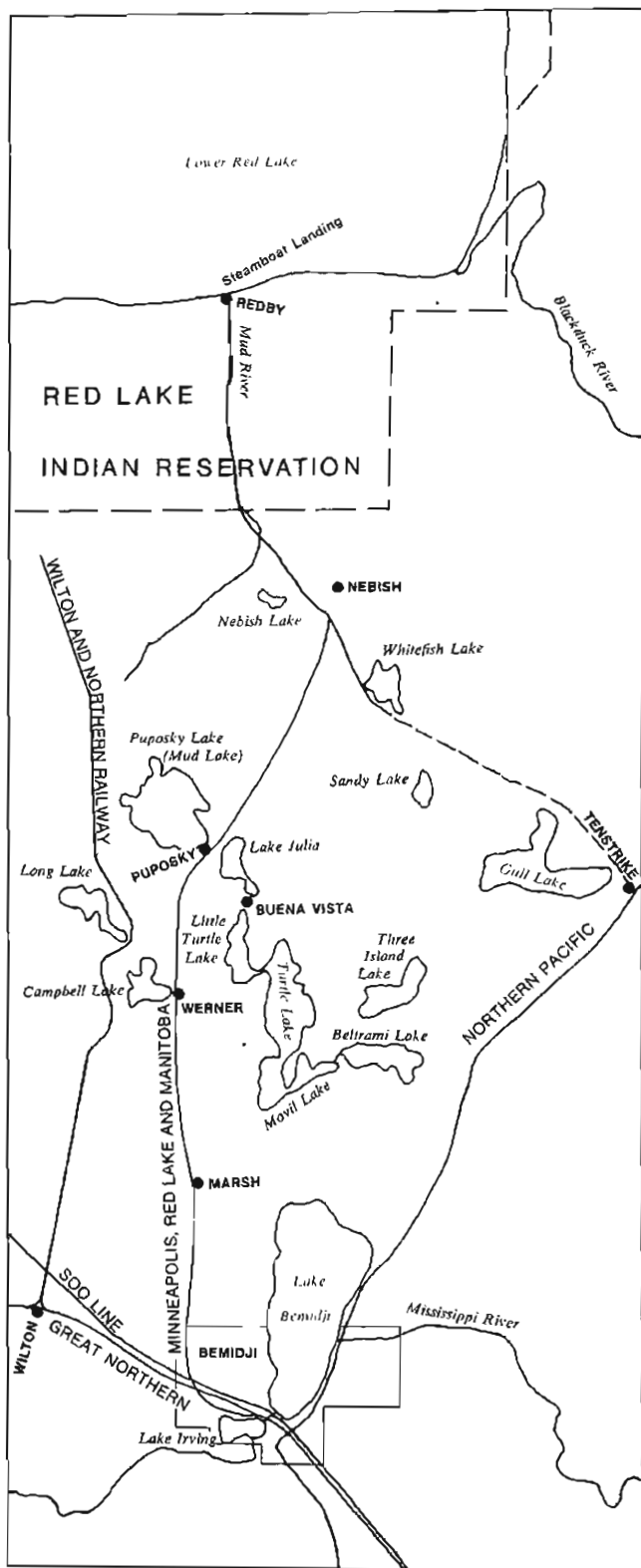
Apparently a firm under contract to the St. Hilaire Lumber Company had done some logging at Nebish during the winter of 1895–96, although the land had not yet been sold. This logging contract was acquired by the Halvorson-Richards Company, a railroad construction firm which proceeded to organize the Red Lake Transportation Company. The latter was incorporated on December 9, 1897, with a capital stock of \$100,000. Its business was to be the construction, maintenance, and operation of railroads and the operation of steam- and towboats for the transportation of passengers, freight, and logs. Charles H. Richards was president and Halvor K. Halvorson vice-president of the company which undertook to build the railroad authorized by the permission granted to the St. Hilaire Lumber Company.<sup>10</sup>

At Nebish the Halvorson-Richards Company erected a large building of hewn logs to house an office and a general store. The existing camp facilities were enlarged, and car shops and a roundhouse were built. Of the more than 100 workmen employed in construction and logging, many were from Chicago. The Halvorson-Richards Company had worked on the recently completed Chicago River drainage canal project, which reversed the flow of the river for sewage purposes. Not only men but some of the equipment used in that project in Illinois were transported to help build the Red Lake line.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Larson, *White Pine Industry*, 156, 243, 313; *St. Hilaire Spectator*, June 7, 1899; Hagg, in *Minnesota History*, 29:137.

<sup>10</sup> King, in *Bulletin* no. 93, p. 105; Minnesota Railroad and Warehouse Commission, *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 625 (1899) (these reports are hereafter cited only by number and year or years covered); Euclid J. Bourgeois, "Two Years in the Nebish Country," 19. The latter is an account of the construction of the railroad by an employee of the Halvorson-Richards Company. Bourgeois was an assistant on the surveying crew and had a long career as a surveyor in northern Minnesota. In his later years he participated in an oral history project sponsored by Charles W. Vandersluis, M.D., a former resident of Bemidji. Bourgeois' recollections were transcribed and mimeographed under the direction of Dr. Vandersluis. A copy is in the possession of the author.

<sup>11</sup> Bourgeois, "Two Years in the Nebish Country," 20.



FROM BEMIDJI TO REDBY at Lower Red Lake, the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba chugged back and forth until 1938. This map shows the route and surrounding area in Beltrami County as it existed in that era.

The camp was still being constructed and enlarged even as the railroad was being surveyed and graded. Locating a route that could be graded at a reasonable cost proved difficult. Also, it was necessary to cross the Mud River in three places because of its crooked course. Shovels, wheelbarrows, and scoops were used in grading, but much of the work was done with small dump cars running over tracks from the cuts to the fills. The cars were loaded by hand, then allowed to run by gravitation to the fills below. A horse-drawn pulley arrangement dragged the empty cars back up. Logs and trees were also utilized extensively as fill.<sup>12</sup>

Although Indians did a small part of the grading, they were unhappy because they had not wanted the railroad constructed across their reservation. Never having consented to the encroachment, they claimed it was causing serious damage. As the grading work approached Red Lake and went farther north on the diminished Red Lake Reservation toward the future site of Redby, the railroad builders tried to placate the Indians by giving them work. They were paid by the cubic yard of earth moved, receiving slips which could be traded for groceries.<sup>13</sup>

Transporting steel and equipment for the railroad presented formidable logistical difficulties. The most accessible railhead was Walker, about sixty miles south of Nebish. From Walker materials could be moved by barge to Steamboat Landing, located midway between Walker and Cass Lake. During the autumn of 1897 a warehouse, docks, and camps were built at Steamboat Landing in preparation for hauling of railroad equipment.<sup>14</sup>

The route from Nebish to Steamboat Landing was overland. The greater portion of it was the Leech Lake-Red Lake trail—a historic Indian route that followed ridges through the forests and crossed as few streams as possible. Now the trail was widened and cleared so that the railroad equipment could be moved. Since neither Steamboat Landing nor Nebish was located on the trail, connecting roads were opened.<sup>15</sup>

During the winter of 1897–98, ten four-horse teams hauled sleds loaded with railroad equipment from Steamboat Landing. At three camps along the road, teams were changed and drivers were provided meals and accommodations. Wagons replaced sleds when the snow was gone, but, as an old woodsman recalled later, the heavy freight “broke all the wagons they had in this country. You know that steel is awful stuff.”<sup>16</sup>

Another contemporary observer recalled: “The loads coming into Nebish the winter of 1897–98 were a sight to see. The locomotive, later called the ‘Irish Molly,’ was one of the last items to come in and looked like a mass of mud with no resemblance to anything.

It was just before the spring breakup and [the engine] looked like a big circus wagon being pulled out of the mud. The main boiler was mounted on a grader or scooter with logs laid across to hold it up out of the mud. It was just snaked—or dragged—up on skids by twenty-four teams of horses.”<sup>17</sup>

The trucks for the logging cars were shipped by rail to Thief River Falls, then moved by steamboat on the Red Lake River to Red Lake, and finally transported overland to Nebish. In shops there the logging cars were built, as was a caboose. Constructed over Nebish Lake was a trestle with hoisting works to load the logs from the water to the trains.<sup>18</sup>

All of this—the railroad construction, logging operations, and transportation of supplies—made Nebish a scene of bustling activity. Railroad workers and woodsmen stayed at a large camp which could accommodate about 300 men. Women and children soon arrived, and a shanty town arose with company offices, a company general store, and the inevitable saloons. Provisions were brought in at first from Fosston and Red Lake Falls and later from Bemidji.<sup>19</sup>

In December, 1898, the logging railroad was completed from Nebish to Red Lake Landing, now Redby, on the south shore of Lower Red Lake. Laid with thirty-five-pound steel rails, the standard-gauge line was ten miles long. The cost of construction, as reported to the Minnesota Railroad and Warehouse

<sup>12</sup> Bourgeois, “Two Years in the Nebish Country,” 19–21.

<sup>13</sup> Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs, *Reports*, 1899, part I, p. 212; Bourgeois, “Two Years in the Nebish Country,” 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Beltrami Eagle*, October 1, 1897; *Bemidji Pioneer*, June 3, 1904. The files of these newspapers consulted by the author are in the A. C. Clark Library at Bemidji State College. Unless otherwise noted, references are usually to be found on the back pages of the *Pioneer*.

<sup>15</sup> Bourgeois, “Two Years in the Nebish Country,” 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Beltrami Eagle*, October 1, 1897, [p. 1]; Harold T. Hagg interview with Archie Logan, March 3, 1952, transcript in possession of author. Logan was employed by the Halvorson-Richards Company during the period of the construction of the railroad.

<sup>17</sup> Bourgeois, “Two Years in the Nebish Country,” 21. When questioned about this by other members of the oral history group, Bourgeois replied: “I won’t say there were twenty-four teams of horses hooked to the locomotive, but there were twenty-four horses anyway.” See page 39 of Bourgeois’ recollections. For another account see “Remarks of Ralph H. Dickinson,” in *Beltrami County Historical Collections*, 1:15. Dickinson was a pioneer resident of Beltrami County.

<sup>18</sup> *Crookston Times*, quoted in *Bemidji Pioneer*, June 23, 1898; Bourgeois, “Two Years in the Nebish Country,” 21–22.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Logan; Bourgeois, “Two Years in the Nebish Country,” 20, 22.

Commission, was \$45,222.88. The equipment included two wood-burning locomotives and thirty-two cars acquired at a cost of \$10,074.37.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, logs had been brought up to the right of way for shipment to Red Lake. There they were formed into immense rafts containing 1,000,000 feet of logs each. These were towed across the lake to the Red Lake River by the 150-foot-long "Michael Kelly," a steamboat built in 1899 by the Red Lake Transportation Company at a cost of \$15,000. At the river the rafts were broken up and the logs floated downstream to sawmills at Crookston and St. Hilaire to be made into lumber for Red River Valley farms and cities.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 628, 632 (1899); "Report and Certificate of the Red Lake Transportation Company to the Railroad and Warehouse Commission of Minnesota." This was apparently submitted in 1899 and is preserved in the State Archives. A copy is in the possession of the author. The name "Red Lake Southern Railroad Company" appears on this certificate. The author has not found this name used elsewhere.

<sup>21</sup> *Minneapolis Journal*, May 2, 1899, p. 6; *Bemidji Pioneer*, July 11, 1901.

<sup>22</sup> *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 631 (1899); *Bemidji Pioneer*, March 21, 1901.

<sup>23</sup> *Sixteenth Annual Report*, 658, 662 (1900); *Seventeenth Annual Report*, 544-549 (1901); *Eighteenth Annual Report*, 590-592 (1902); *Nineteenth Annual Report*, section 2, p. 25 (1903).

<sup>24</sup> *Seventeenth Annual Report*, 544 (1901); *Eighteenth Annual Report*, 590 (1902); *Nineteenth Annual Report*, section 2, p. 25 (1903); *Twentieth Annual Report*, section 2, p. 38 (1904); *Farley Telegram*, February 14, 1902; *Blackduck Times*, February 14, 1902; *Blackduck American*, February 12, 1902. Newspaper files are in the A. C. Clark Library.

<sup>25</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, March 10, June 3, 1904; *Twentieth Annual Report*, section 2, p. 38 (1904).

During the initial period of operation ending June 30, 1899, the Red Lake Transportation Company moved nearly 55,000 tons of logs to Red Lake for the Shevlin-Carpenter and Thomas B. Walker lumber interests. The company carried 340 passengers, too, in that period. Gross revenues were \$7,009.62; operating expenses, \$6,780.95; and net income, \$228.67.<sup>22</sup>

During the next four years the log tonnage fluctuated between a low of 50,821 in 1901 to a high of 105,412 in 1903. The large increase in tonnage hauled in 1903 no doubt was due to an extension of the line in that year to Whitefish Lake, two-and-one-half miles southeast of Nebish, at a cost of \$16,518.<sup>23</sup>

The railroad, however, was not operating profitably. Recurring deficits began in 1901, and there was an additional loss of \$15,000 in February, 1902, when fire destroyed the roundhouse and car shops at Nebish. Unable to meet its obligations to its creditors, the company became insolvent. On December 16, 1903, Walter G. Marson, as trustee, became responsible for administering the bankrupt company.<sup>24</sup>

Log hauling was resumed in the spring of 1904 under the management of the trusteeship. Logs banked on the Mud, Sandy, and Blackduck rivers were transported to the landing at Red Lake. Although shipping tonnage dropped to 23,163, the revenues exceeded operating expenses by \$1,636.82.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, action to foreclose was brought against the Red Lake Transportation Company in Beltrami County District Court. Judgment was entered decreeing that the sheriff should sell the property of the company for the benefit of the creditors. At the Bel-

*CONSTRUCTION WORKERS pause during the laying of the Halvorson-Richards line from Nebish to Redby in 1897.*



trami County Courthouse on June 28, 1904, the railroad was sold to the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba Railway Company for \$42,000. The only other bid was \$10,000 offered on behalf of the Crookston Lumber Company.<sup>26</sup>

The financial collapse of the Red Lake Transportation Company is less noteworthy than its record of achievement. It had built, under adverse conditions, twelve miles of railroad in a remote and almost untouched wilderness. It was a pioneer in the opening of a new era in the logging industry in which the river gave place to the railroad as a carrier of logs. And its roadbed continued to be used as part of a new transportation enterprise—the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba Railway Company.

INCORPORATED on June 14, 1904, the new company had been organized by the bondholders of the Red Lake Transportation Company. They apparently hoped to recoup their losses by acquiring the old logging line and connecting it to a trunk railroad, thereby enhancing the potential for a profitable enterprise. The president and principal stockholder of the company, Charles A. Smith, had long been a partner of the Pillsburys in lumber and was one of the largest lumber producers in Minneapolis. Former Minnesota Governor John Lind and his law partner, Andreas Ueland, were also financially interested in the company. In later years the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba seemed a pretentious name for a thirty-three-mile railroad between Redby and Bemidji, and it was usually referred to as the Red Lake line. But in 1904 the name was not altogether inappropriate; the company was based in Minneapolis, and the possibility seemed to exist that the railroad might eventually reach the northern border of Minnesota.<sup>27</sup>

The most feasible immediate project, however, was a connection with the Minnesota and International Railway which was being built from Bemidji to the northeast. In June, 1904, officials of the Red Lake logging road were reported to be planning an extension from Whitefish Lake to the Minnesota and International at Tenstrike, a distance of seven miles. The proposed extension aroused keen interest in Bemidji, located only fifteen miles southwest of Tenstrike and considered the center of the Beltrami County logging frontier. According to the *Bemidji Pioneer*, the extension would make the entire area tributary to Bemidji.<sup>28</sup>

Soon, however, Bemidji business and civic leaders saw greater advantages in a direct extension of the line to their city. Why share with Tenstrike the business of supplying Buena Vista, Nebish, and the Red Lake community? Accordingly, members of the Bemidji Business Men's Club launched a campaign to attract

the railroad to their city. The railroad promoters may well have anticipated this. For them, too, Bemidji was the more advantageous terminus; it was a larger town than Tenstrike and was on both the east-west and north-south railroad routes. But the option of building the shorter and less costly connection with Tenstrike gave the railroad officials leverage. Bemidji community leaders were well aware of this situation and were prepared to offer every possible inducement to obtain the direct route. During the summer and early fall of 1904, local committees conferred with railroad officials, mass meetings were held, and the support of the settlements to the north was enlisted. In return for assurances that the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba would be a common carrier and not merely a logging railroad, the Bemidji business community committed itself to donate land for the right of way in the city as well as for terminal facilities.<sup>29</sup>

Late in October, 1904, the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba Railway Company announced that it would build a connecting line between Nebish and Bemidji under terms of this agreement. First-mortgage, 5-per-cent bonds totaling \$700,000 were floated to finance the project. The construction contract was awarded to the firm of H. K. Halvorson and Charles Carlson, both of whom had been original stockholders of the Red Lake Transportation Company. Construction proceeded slowly during the winter, but by the spring of 1905 some 400 men were employed on the project. A site on the north shore of Lake Irving was selected for the Bemidji depot, and a trestle was built over the Mississippi River to provide a connection with the Minnesota and International tracks.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Beltrami County "Book 21 of Deeds," 171, in Beltrami County Archives, Bemidji; *Bemidji Pioneer*, June 28, 1904.

<sup>27</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, June 16, 28, August 3, 1904, February 4, 1942; George M. Stephenson, *John Lind of Minnesota*, 191, 352 (Minneapolis, 1935); Larson, *White Pine Industry*, 242, 353. John S. and Charles S. Pillsbury, sons of Charles A. Pillsbury (1842–1899), and Alfred F. Pillsbury, son of John S. Pillsbury (1828–1901), served on the railway company board of directors at various times from 1909 to 1932. See "Minutes Book of the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba Railway Company," 21–49. It is owned by Mrs. Irene Erickson of Bemidji who permitted the author to use it. The book contains minutes of the meetings of stockholders and of the board of directors from 1909 through May 5, 1950.

<sup>28</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, June 9, 28, 1904; Hagg, in *Minnesota History*, 29:139–148.

<sup>29</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, August 3, 20, September 7, 29, October 4, 10, 26, November 1, 1904.

<sup>30</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, October 28, November 1, 2, 1904, April 14, 20, 23, 1905, January 2, 4, 13, 1906; "Book 13 of Mortgages," in Beltrami County Archives, Bemidji; *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 626 (1906).



During the summer the labor crews made steady progress. Work trains hauled gravel and steel, and by August sixteen miles of track had been laid. In early October the sixty-pound steel rails reached Nebish. Regular train service between Bemidji and Nebish began in November, 1905. Scheduled trains from Nebish to Redby awaited the laying of new rails. The cost of the road and equipment was reported as \$417,587. Capital stock outstanding amounted to \$93,300.<sup>31</sup>

Bemidji boosters viewed with exuberant optimism the line's potential for contributing to the growth and prosperity of their city. Adding to their hopes was the completion of another railroad built northward from Wilton, six miles west of Bemidji. "Several new towns have been started on each line," reported the *Pioneer* in December, 1905. "Contrary to the general belief that this section of the state is all jack pine soil, the soil in western Beltrami County through which these roads run is a heavy clay and is rapidly settling up." Already envisioned was the transition of Bemidji from a lumber town to a busy mart for a productive agricultural region as farms replaced the forests.<sup>32</sup>

In the meantime the C. A. Smith Lumber Company was preparing its camps along the railroad line for the winter cut. In September, 1906, the Smith logs were hoisted from Lake Julia, about halfway to Red Lake, and shipped southward to Bemidji en route to Minneapolis. Logs that formerly would have gone to the sawmill centers of the Red River Valley now had a man-made outlet to Bemidji and other lumbering centers to the south. Earlier, in May, there had been hoisting operations at Mud Lake (now Puposky) and Lake Julia. For the year ending in June, 1906, the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba reported freight earnings of \$43,210.99 and passenger revenues of \$3,841.40. There was a deficit of about \$14,000, however, from the first year's operation.<sup>33</sup>

From November 1, 1905, when regular passenger

service began, to June 30, 1906, the line carried 6,720 passengers. The number of passengers rose to nearly 15,000 during the next twelve months and increased to 22,500 in the year ending June 30, 1908. The schedule was set up for one round trip daily except Sundays, with departure times of 7:00 A.M. from Bemidji and 5:00 P.M. from Redby and arrival times of 9:30 A.M. at Redby and 7:30 P.M. at Bemidji. During the two years from July, 1906, through June, 1908, passenger revenues accounted for about 25 per cent of the operating receipts of the railroad.<sup>34</sup>

Railroad-sponsored pleasure trips to Red Lake added to passenger traffic. During August and September, 1906, the railroad ran special excursions each Sunday between Bemidji and Redby at a round-trip fare of one dollar. The large double-decked steamer, "Michael Kelly," also offered trips on Red Lake for a fare of thirty-five cents. To reassure the less venturesome, the railway company promised "the best of order at all times." The first outing on August 5 attracted 200 persons who picnicked, rode the boat to the west end of the lake, and inspected the new townsite of Redby. Succeeding excursions were nearly as popular. On August 19, when a baseball game was an added feature, 150 persons made the trip.<sup>35</sup>

Similar outings in 1907 were also well patronized. During the next dozen years the railroad ran special trains or offered reduced fares for such events as the Beltrami County Fair and the Independence Day celebration at Bemidji and the Red Lake Indian Fair. In an era before the automobile came into its own, the Red Lake line played a significant role in enlarging opportunities for popular diversion.<sup>36</sup>

The railroad also brought Indian customers to Bemidji to trade, particularly after distribution of a per capita payment from tribal funds. Early in November, 1906, the *Pioneer* reported that Bemidji merchants were reaping the benefits of a recent payment to the Indians. More than 100 members of the Red Lake and Leech Lake bands had arrived in town by train and were crowding Bemidji stores to buy provisions and clothes. The Leech Lake Indians were returning from Red Lake after conclusion of the payment and the usual social activities accompanying that event.<sup>37</sup>

Another, more substantial, source of revenue after 1907 was the federal government, which awarded a mail contract to the Red Lake line, thereby improving not only the railroad's finances but also the mail service to residents along the way. For a year after the completion of the rail line the mails between Bemidji, Buena Vista, Puposky, Nebish, and Redby were still carried by stage. The roads, however, were in such wretched condition that "expeditious trips could not be made," as a local newspaper put it. After an

<sup>31</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, July 20, August 8, September 12, October 6, 27, November 2, 1905; *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 153, 157 (1906).

<sup>32</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, December 13, 1905.

<sup>33</sup> *Mississippi Valley Lumberman*, October 13, 1905, p. 31; Rector, *Log Transportation*, 231; *Bemidji Pioneer*, May 12, September 6, 1906; *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 161, 173-175 (1906).

<sup>34</sup> *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 188 (1906); *Twenty-third Annual Report*, 164, 197 (1907); *Twenty-fourth Annual Report*, 297 (1908); *Bemidji Pioneer*, October 27, 1905.

<sup>35</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, August 3, 6, 13, 20, 1906.

<sup>36</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, July 6, 20, 1907, September 12, 1912, June 29, September 21, 1916; *Bemidji Weekly Pioneer*, August 28, 1919.

<sup>37</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, November 9, 1906.

inspection trip by an official of the Post Office Department, the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba received a contract to carry the mail between Bemidji and Redby and intermediate points beginning December 31, 1906. Mail revenue of \$1,406 was reported for the year ending June 30, 1908, and during the next decade the annual mail revenue was between \$1,400 and \$1,500.<sup>38</sup>

A new line usually kindled the acquisitive hopes of townsites promoters, frequently including railroad officials themselves, and the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba was no exception. New towns were laid out at Puposky on Mud Lake and Werner on Campbell Lake in 1905 when the railroad was still under construction. Puposky was platted by C. A. Smith, president of the railroad company, and was reported to be booming in June, 1905. A large number of lots had been sold, and a store, two saloons, and a bank were under construction. Other buildings were soon to be erected. The townsites at Campbell Lake, where a "large two story hotel" was being built, was also expected to thrive when the railroad was completed. And at its Red Lake terminus the railroad company platted the townsites of Redby in November, 1905.<sup>39</sup>

During the summer of 1904 the proposed railroad extension from Nebish to Bemidji had aroused excitement in Buena Vista, located between Little Turtle Lake and Lake Julia, about twelve miles north of Bemidji. If the extension should run through Buena Vista, the settlement, of course, would have its hoped-for rail connection. But Buena Vista was to be by-passed and therefore disappointed. It was probably not coincidental that the line ran along Campbell Lake, in which the C. A. Smith Lumber Company had several million feet of logs.<sup>40</sup>

Many lumber camps became less isolated because of the railroad. "Newspapers, trade journals, mail and provisions could be more easily transported to the camps, owners could supervise logging operations more closely, labor became more mobile," wrote one historian. Accident victims—and accidents were all too common in lumber camps—could receive medical treatment more quickly. But closer contact with the outside world was not an unmixed blessing. Frank Higgins, the lumberjacks' well-known "sky pilot," or chaplain, pointed out bitterly that the old-time woodsmen usually remained all winter in camps away from civilization and its temptations. With the advent of logging railroads and towns along their routes, however, the jacks had easy access to saloons and brothels with a resultant increase in drunkenness and debauchery. ". . . today you can in many cases stand at the camp door and see the saloon," Higgins remarked.<sup>41</sup>

Saw timber was the economic base of the region

served by the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba. During the boom years of lumbering in north central Minnesota after the turn of the century, the business places of Bemidji and other towns along the Red Lake line drew much of their patronage from woodsmen, teamsters, sawmill laborers, railroad employees, and local farmers whose livelihood came in part from winter work in the logging camps. Likewise, the Red Lake line was essentially dependent on the logging industry. Saw logs made up well over 90 per cent of the freight tonnage hauled by the railroad, especially during the early years of its operation. In 1909, for example, forest products amounted to 95 per cent of the total freight transported that year; in 1912, 97 per cent of the total freight was timber. These were typical years. A substantial portion of the logs hauled on the Red Lake line to Bemidji during the early years belonged to C. A. Smith and were shipped on to his sawmill in Minneapolis.<sup>42</sup>

Most of the logs were hauled during the summer. Two locomotives were often used to pull as many as fifty log cars, each with two tiers of sixteen-foot logs. The railroad owned three steam locomotives for a while but later had only two. Other equipment included three passenger cars and sixty or seventy freight cars, the number varying from time to time.<sup>43</sup>

ON JANUARY 1, 1908, Alfred L. Molander, an employee of C. A. Smith and Company, succeeded Walter G. Marson as general manager of the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba. Molander previously had been a railroad station agent at Graceville, Minnesota. His competence, integrity, and industry quickly won him the confidence of the directors. In 1909 he was elected treasurer as well as general manager of the

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<sup>38</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, November 3, December 15, 31, 1906; *Twenty-fourth Annual Report*, 297 (1908).

<sup>39</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, January 24, April 23, June 20 (quote), November 23, 1905, October 29, 1906.

<sup>40</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, October 1, 24, November 28, 1904; "Remarks of Dickinson," in *Collections*, 1:17.

<sup>41</sup> "Rector, *Log Transportation*, 280 (quote); *Bemidji Pioneer*, April 6, 1911, p. 1 (Higgins quote). On Higgins see Harold T. Hagg, "The Lumberjacks' Sky Pilot," in *Minnesota History*, 31:65-78 (June, 1950).

<sup>42</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, April 29, 1908; *Twenty-fifth Annual Report*, 276, 288 (1909); *Twenty-eighth Annual Report*, 347 (1912).

<sup>43</sup> Harold T. Hagg interview with Andrew Bergquist, July 2, 1970, and with Leonard Dickinson, February 26, 1972. Bergquist, now living in Van Nuys, California, was employed by the Red Lake line from 1911 to 1938. Dickinson was section foreman for the railroad for a time. A former member of the Minnesota legislature, he has long been engaged in the timber business. *Thirtieth Annual Report*, 385 (1914); *Thirty-third Annual Report*, 384 (1917).



railway company and in 1921 became a stockholder and a director. Molander made his residence in Bemidji and soon attained a respected position in the community, from time to time serving in various civic posts.<sup>44</sup>

Rather austere in his ways, neatly attired in business suit and starched collar, Molander comported himself in a manner he felt befitting an executive and a business associate of such well-known figures as C. A. Smith, the Pillsburys, and John Lind. Nevertheless, he could be genial enough on occasion and was not without a sense of humor. Once while attending a convention of railroad executives he suggested to the president of an eastern line that they exchange passes. "But," the easterner asserted, "your road is less than fifty miles long while mine extends for thousands of miles." "True," Molander responded, "but mine is just as wide." Molander supervised the affairs of the railroad very closely, making frequent trips over the line in his private car—a reconstructed Model T Ford automobile fitted with handcar wheels.<sup>45</sup>

A few miles to the west, another railroad—the Wilton and Northern—paralleled the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba. The Wilton and Northern was built in 1905 by the Crookston Lumber Company to haul logs to its large sawmill in Bemidji. For several years the Crookston firm refused to ship any of its logs on the Smith-controlled Red Lake line. This refusal extended even to areas in which it would have been more economical to use the rival road than other means. By 1912, however, the saw timber tributary to the Wilton and Northern was virtually exhausted, and two years later the line was dismantled. Also in 1912

<sup>44</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, December 16, 1907, January 2, 1908, February 3, 4, 1942; "Minutes Book," 22, 34; *Collections*, 1:58.

<sup>45</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, February 4, 1942; Hagg interviews with Bergquist; with Dickinson, February 14, 1972; with Charles Hook, February 24, 1972; with Albin Dahl, February 21, 1972. Hook was employed in Bemidji, where he still resides, but made frequent trips over the line. Dahl, now home-school co-ordinator at Bemidji High School, lived near the line two miles north of Werner as a youth.

"Minutes Book," 25–26; Larson, *White Pine Industry*, 399; *Bemidji Pioneer*, January 12, March 26, 1920; Hagg, in *Minnesota History*, 29:147–148; Charles L. Wight, "Reminiscences of a Cruiser," in *Beltrami County Historical Collections*, 1:157. Wight, now deceased, had a long career as a cruiser (timber estimator) in northern Minnesota. His story is part of the materials collected by Dr. Vandersluis (see footnote 10).

<sup>46</sup> Larson, *White Pine Industry*, 320; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 4:308–310; Wight, "Reminiscences," 158. See also Erwin F. Mittelholtz and Rose Graves, *Historical Review of the Red Lake Indian Reservation*, 45 (Bemidji, 1957). On Backus see Grace Lee Nute, *Rainy River Country*, 88 (St. Paul, 1950).



SEATED in a gasoline-engined motor car fitted with handcar wheels for tours of the line are (from left) Carlos Avery, state game and fish commissioner, Sherman C. Bailey, attorney at law and game warden, and A. L. Molander, manager of the railroad.

the huge C. A. Smith sawmill in Minneapolis closed, and the Smith interests shifted to the Pacific Coast region. As a result of these developments the Crookston Lumber Company contracted in 1914 to ship its logs over the Red Lake line. During the ensuing years, until the Crookston mill in Bemidji closed in 1926, logs were shipped by rail to Bemidji from Crookston Lumber Company camps adjacent to the Red Lake line or on one of its numerous spurs.<sup>46</sup>

In 1916 some 100,000 acres of fine white pine in the southeastern part of the Red Lake Indian Reservation were set aside in the newly established Red Lake Indian Forest and opened up to logging by whites. Theoretically this area served by the Red Lake line was to be logged under the direction of the secretary of the interior and by applying rules of scientific forestry. In November, 1917, the International Lumber Company, owned by one of Minnesota's leading lumbermen, Edward W. Backus, signed a contract with the superintendent of the Red Lake Indian School, who was under orders from Washington, D. C. The company had offered the most satisfactory of the sealed bids for the sale of merchantable dead timber and all other timber marked for cutting by a member of the Indian Service on about 50,000 acres. Apparently, however, no action was taken to enforce scientific logging rules, and more than 80 per cent of the timber on the designated acres was cut. The yield was more than 105,000,000 feet, for which the company paid some \$1,395,500.<sup>47</sup>

The logs were transported on the Red Lake line

to Bemidji and then sent by rail to International Falls for sawing. Freight volume on the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba reached record levels during this period of heavy tonnage. After rising sharply in 1916 and 1917, tonnage reached a peak in 1918 when 245,020 tons were transported. Shipments continued at high rates in 1919 and 1920. Nearly 1,000,000 tons of freight were shipped during the five-year span from January 1, 1916, to December 31, 1920, making this the busiest era in the entire history of the railroad. In the economic mobilization for World War I the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba did its part by transporting vital raw materials on an expanded scale. Like other railroads, the Red Lake line was controlled by the government during the war. Railroad employees subscribed to bond drives, and the company itself bought \$10,000 worth of Victory Bonds in 1919. General manager Molander was elected president of the Beltrami County Safety Association in 1918.<sup>48</sup>

In 1917 the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, of which John Lind was a member, authorized commercial fishing in the Red Lakes as a wartime food conservation measure. According to the former governor's biographer, Lind was instrumental in having the commission take this step. He believed that the fishery would not only benefit the Red Lake line of which he was a director but would also offer the Indians work which would be familiar and appealing to them. Lind had long had a benevolent concern for the Indians' welfare, according to his biographer.<sup>49</sup>

About 500,000 pounds of fish were shipped on the Red Lake line in 1918 from the fishery at Redby to Bemidji and sent on to various parts of Minnesota. After the war the fishery continued under state direction until 1929 when the Red Lake Fisheries Association was organized. Each year during the 1920s several hundred thousand pounds of tasty Red Lake walleyes went in refrigerator cars over the Red Lake line en route to the Chicago market.<sup>50</sup>

Another Red Lake Reservation enterprise which provided employment for the Indians and freight business for the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba was a new sawmill completed and put into operation in 1925. Lind also was interested in this project which would give the Indians congenial work as well as furnish traffic to the railroad. Older sawmills had been located elsewhere on the reservation, but the new, larger one was built at Redby because it had a railroad connection with Bemidji. A spur from the Red Lake line was laid to the sawmill. Lumber shipments from Redby during the years 1924 to 1930 fluctuated between 9,554 and 1,423 tons. In 1931 the volume dropped sharply to 865 tons. In some years of the late 1920s, lumber constituted a significant proportion of

the total volume of forest products freight. During the last two years the railroad operated, when its imminent abandonment appeared likely, lumber shipments rose sharply because large stocks on hand were transferred while railroad service was still available.<sup>51</sup>

DURING THE 1920s forest products continued to account for the lion's share of the freight business of the Red Lake line. Timber comprised more than 90 per cent of the freight tonnage every year until 1924 when the percentage of forest products dropped to approximately 75 per cent of the total tonnage. In 1925 they amounted to 82 per cent of the freight hauled. But 1924 and 1925 were years of low freight volume; the lower ratios were more the result of relatively small timber shipments than of any significant increases in the amounts of other items hauled, which included agricultural products (chiefly potatoes and milk) and some manufactured goods and merchandise.<sup>52</sup>

The last period of heavy freight traffic was in 1926 and 1927, with forest products again making up more than 90 per cent of the tonnage. These were years of large-scale logging in the Red Lake Indian Forest. In 1928 the freight volume was about one-fifth of that of the preceding year, and there was an almost uninter-

<sup>48</sup> *Thirty-third Annual Report*, 383 (1917); *Thirty-fourth Annual Report*, 415 (1918); *Thirty-fifth Annual Report*, 417 (1919); *Thirty-sixth Annual Report*, 281 (1920); *Thirty-seventh Report*, 554 (1920-1922); "Minutes Book," 30, 32; Robert Dreschich, "The Home Front in Bemidji in World War I," (unpublished master's thesis, Bemidji State College, 1971), 74, 120.

<sup>49</sup> Stephenson, *John Lind*, 351; Merle Sherman, "A Geographic Study of the Red Lake Chippewa Band of Minnesota," in *Proceedings of the Minnesota Academy of Science*, vol. 30, no. 1, p. 64 (1962). For an early view of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, see Folwell, *Minnesota*, 3:317-319, 556-575. For more recent and more critical comments on that body, see Carol Jenson, "Loyalty as a Political Weapon: The 1918 Campaign in Minnesota," in *Minnesota History*, 43:42-57 (Summer, 1972), as well as numerous references in Carl H. Chrislock, *The Progressive Era in Minnesota: 1899-1918* (St. Paul, 1971) and in Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (Minneapolis, 1955).

<sup>50</sup> *Bemidji Pioneer*, August 30, 1918; *Bemidji Sentinel*, February 20, 27, 1925; Bergquist interview; Mittelholtz and Graves, *Red Lake Reservation*, 88; Sherman, in *Proceedings*, 65.

<sup>51</sup> *Bemidji Sentinel*, February 27, 1925, cited in Folwell, *Minnesota*, 4:311; Stephenson, *John Lind*, 351-352; Sherman, in *Proceedings*, 63; Mittelholtz and Graves, *Red Lake Reservation*, 49; *Thirty-ninth Report*, 647, 763 (1924-1926); *Fortieth Report*, 376, 504 (1926-1928); *Forty-first Report*, 386, 531 (1928-1930); *Forty-second Report*, 520, 668 (1930-1932).

<sup>52</sup> *Thirty-ninth Report*, 620, 630, 635, 734, 758, 763 (1924-1926).

rupted decline every year thereafter until the railroad ceased operating.<sup>53</sup>

From 1909 through 1917, when passenger totals varied little from one year to the next, the annual average number of passengers carried was approximately 20,000. During the next three years, however, there were marked increases. The record year for passenger traffic was 1920 when the total was 30,571. This was also the time of heaviest log shipments which suggests that there was some correlation between large volume of freight shipments and increased passenger traffic. Passenger numbers declined after 1920, except in 1926 and 1927 when log shipments rose sharply. It seems evident that a significant proportion of the railroad passengers consisted of woodsmen and others engaged in logging operations. An expansion of the industry, therefore, increased the number of its employees riding the trains.<sup>54</sup>

Although passenger trains ran slowly and made numerous stops, the scheduled running time for the thirty-three-mile, one-way trip between Bemidji and Redby had been cut by 1929 to one hour and forty minutes from the earlier two and one-half hours. Passenger trains carried mail and express and local mixed freight as well. Sometimes fish cars also were hauled along with the passenger coaches. Depots were located at the terminal points and at Puposky and Nebish. At various smaller places were shelter sheds for passengers and freight awaiting trains. Frequent stops were made to take on and drop off passengers, to throw off or pick up mail sacks, to deliver light supplies to log-

ging camps, and to shunt freight cars to and from sidings. Milk cans were picked up almost everywhere along the line for delivery to Bemidji creameries.<sup>55</sup>

Woodsmen en route to logging camps, Indians traveling to and from the Red Lake Reservation, men on business errands, drummers with sample cases, settlers on shopping trips, and sportsmen with hunting or fishing gear all rubbed elbows in the dingy coaches. The number of Indian passengers jumped when a per capita payment was made. One of the cars was a smoker; all were heated with coal stoves. Sometimes jacks fortified themselves against the rigors of the journey by visiting a saloon beforehand. If they became unduly loud and boisterous, the conductor would escort women passengers to the baggage compartment out of earshot of the coarse language. At terminal points the conductor casually held up the train's departure for any stragglers known to be making a round trip. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Bemidji High School pupils from places along the line rode the train on week-end visits home. They said the initials of the railroad really stood for "Molander's Rotten Line of Misery." Less critical were their elders who traveled over the old rough wagon roads before the railroad was built.<sup>56</sup>

Until 1930 the Red Lake line's operating revenues usually exceeded operating expenses, but only by relatively modest margins. The record year was 1927 when net revenues totaled \$52,298; 1920 was the only other year in the company's history when the net revenues were over \$50,000. Between 1909 and 1929 net operating revenues averaged approximately \$21,000 annually, yet interest alone on the bonded indebtedness of \$700,000 was \$35,000 a year. Hence the company was able to pay the interest on the bonds only irregularly and at reduced rates. In September, 1909, for example, payment of the semiannual interest coupons due was authorized on condition that they be surrendered on payment of 1½ per cent interest instead of 2½ per cent. Again, in 1913, a payment of 1 per cent on the outstanding bonds was authorized, if all unpaid interest coupons were surrendered for cancellation.<sup>57</sup>

The bondholders, a relatively small group, also were the stockholders of the company and hence controlled it. Not surprisingly, they elected to accept reduced interest payments and continue operating the railroad rather than liquidate it. For one thing, there was the prospect that the tributary timber on the Red Lake Indian Reservation might be opened to market, and this did occur in 1916 when the Red Lake Indian Forest was set aside. Then, too, there was the agreement with the Crookston Lumber Company for the shipment of its logs on the Red Lake line. There was also the potential of the railroad as a common carrier

<sup>53</sup> *Fortieth Report*, 335, 364, 463, 492 (1926-1928); *Forty-first Report*, 386, 388 (1928-1930); *Bemidji Pioneer*, October 19, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> In the 1909-1917 period the highest annual passenger total was 21,959 in the year ending December 31, 1916; the lowest was 18,478 in the year ending June 30, 1915. See *Thirty-second Annual Report*, 307 (1916); *Thirty-third Annual Report*, 377 (1917); *Thirty-seventh Report*, 548 (1920-1922); *Fortieth Report*, 350, 464 (1926-1928).

<sup>55</sup> Interviews with Bergquist, Dickinson (February 20, 1972), and Dahl; *The Official Guide of the Railways and Steam Navigation Lines of the United States, Porto Rico, Canada, Mexico and Cuba*, 1328 (New York, January, 1929).

<sup>56</sup> Interviews with Bergquist, Dickinson (February 19, 1972), Dahl, Hook, and Mrs. Bert Wernberg (a daughter of Andrew Bergquist, she rode the train frequently in the 1930s while attending school in Bemidji, where she now resides); *Bemidji Pioneer*, November 18, 1909.

<sup>57</sup> *Thirty-seventh Report*, 472 (1920-1922); *Fortieth Report*, 435 (1926-1928). Before 1917, the largest amount of total net revenue was \$21,986.03 in the year ending June 30, 1912. *Twenty-eighth Annual Report*, 215 (1912); *Thirty-third Annual Report*, 326 (1917); "Minutes Book," 22, 24, 25.

as the forests gave way to farms and the region served by the railroad developed.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, income continued to be insufficient even to pay the interest on the bonds, to say nothing of accumulating funds with which to pay the principal on the bonds due to mature on June 30, 1925. At the stockholders' meeting of May 6, 1925, the directors were authorized to seek a ten-year extension of the time for the payment of the bonds and of the unpaid interest thereon. Because the stockholders of the company were also its bondholders, the stockholders' approval of the proposal implied the willingness of the bondholders to accept this extension. This acceptance was reinforced when the bondholders present at the meeting expressly consented to the extension and to the surrender of the unpaid interest coupons.<sup>59</sup>

The transaction, however, only postponed the financial problems of the railroad. In 1928 revenues dropped precipitately, and by 1930 income had fallen below operating expenses and taxes. In May, 1931, after the failure of a proposed merger of the Great Northern and Northern Pacific railroads had ended hopes that the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba might become part of the contemplated unified system, the company directors were authorized to take action to abandon the line.<sup>60</sup>

While applications to abandon the railroad were pending, Molander had secured financial backing from the Great Northern, whose officials considered him "the only person qualified to run the road." In January, 1932, Molander offered to purchase all the outstanding stocks and bonds of the company for \$50,000. This proposition was accepted, and at the stockholders' meeting on May 4, 1932, Molander, Henry A. Krebs, and Earle A. Barker were elected directors and the transfer of the main office of the company from Minneapolis to Bemidji was approved. Krebs, a timber and fuel dealer, and Barker, a merchant, were both Bemidji residents. Molander, who owned 994 of the 1,000 shares of the stock outstanding, was elected president.<sup>61</sup>

Despite efforts of the new board of directors to stem the tide, the economic situation of the railway company continued to deteriorate, mirroring the sluggish economy of the 1930s. Each year income fell below operating expenses. By 1935 operating revenues had dwindled to only \$19,175. In the same year the average daily passenger traffic shrank to about six and freight shipments to 6,058 tons. During the 1930s pulpwood, fuel wood, and lumber made up the bulk of forest products shipments. In 1932 no saw logs whatever were hauled.<sup>62</sup>

The recurring deficits and the necessity of expending \$18,000 in the near future for maintenance prompted the directors on May 24, 1937, to decide to

file application with the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and the Minnesota Railroad and Warehouse Commission for permission to abandon the railway line. Local civic organizations and public bodies tried in vain to save the railroad. On February 15, 1938, an ICC examiner recommended that the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba be permitted to abandon its entire line of 32.35 miles and 2.94 miles of yard and other tracks, as well as operation over 3.37 miles of trackage rights on the Great Northern line. On May 6, 1938, the ICC granted permission for the Red Lake railroad to abandon its line and trackage rights as to interstate and foreign commerce, effective June 15, 1938. Similar authorization with respect to intrastate commerce was granted by the Railroad and Warehouse Commission on June 20, 1938, the order to take effect on or before September 1, 1938. On September 2 the railroad ceased operating.<sup>63</sup>

On September 29, 1938, the stockholders accepted an offer by the Washington and Great Northern Townsite Company to purchase the removable property of the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba for \$49,073.46. Of this sum, \$16,775.18 was used to pay in full the principal and interest on Molander-held promissory notes. In addition, \$2,298.28 was paid on the interest and \$30,000 on the principal of the railway company bonds. In 1939 the rails were taken up.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> C. A. Smith and Charles M. Amsden were the largest holders of stocks and bonds. The Pillsburys owned about 20 per cent of the stock and some 15 per cent of the bonds. See *Twenty-fourth Annual Report*, 490 (1908); "Minutes Book," 40-42.

<sup>59</sup> "Minutes Book," 41-42. C. A. Smith was president of the company until 1920, and John Lind served as president from 1921 until 1930. See "Minutes Book," 31, 33, 35.

<sup>60</sup> "Minutes Book," 49-51.

<sup>61</sup> "Minutes Book," 51-55; *Bemidji Pioneer*, May 6, 1932, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Forty-third Report*, 495 (1932-1934); *Forty-fourth Report*, 564, 609, 652 (1934-1936).

<sup>63</sup> "Minutes Book," 72-75; *Bemidji Pioneer*, October 5, 1937; *New York Times*, February 16, 1938, p. 33; Certificate and Order, Finance Docket No. 11691, Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba Railway Company Abandonment, May 6, 1938. A copy of this certificate, obtained from the Minnesota Department of Public Service, is owned by the author. The copy also refers to the Minnesota Railroad and Warehouse Commission Order A-4622, authorizing abandonment.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes of the special meeting of the stockholders on September 29, 1938, attached to p. 77 of the "Minutes Book." An inventory of the buildings, equipment, and shop machinery is included. The company continued in existence, operating the telegraph and telephone line between Bemidji and Redby. In 1960 the corporation was dissolved, according to information furnished February 28, 1972, by Martin R. Sathre, Beltrami County register of deeds. For a story about the dismantlement of the railroad, see *Bemidji Pioneer*, May 24, 1939, p. 1, 6.

Although the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba succumbed during the hard times of the 1930s, the great depression was less the cause than the occasion of the demise of the road. The primary cause of the doom of the railroad was the exhaustion of tributary saw timber. Agricultural production in the cut-over region was much too small even to begin to replace the log traffic. With the spread of hard-surfaced roads and the concomitant growth of automobile and motor-truck traffic — more flexible and convenient

than railroad service — the wonder is not that the Red Lake line was abandoned but that it survived as long as it did.<sup>45</sup>

The story of the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba is part of the colorful history of Minnesota lumbering. The railroad hauled millions of tons of logs all or part of the way to the sawmills. Viewed as a separate enterprise the Red Lake line was a financial failure, but in reality it was a unit in the huge lumber empire of C. A. Smith and the Pillsburys. In this context the deficits of the railroad were negligible and readily absorbed. Although essentially a logging line, the Red Lake railroad also provided vastly improved freight, mail, and passenger service to the Red Lake Indians and residents of the region before the automobile and motor truck became commonplace. The railroad lessened rural isolation and helped brighten the social life of the scattered settlers. Today's motorists travel over roads built on portions of the old grade, and snowmobile riders jolt along trails where once long log trains hauled by two puffing locomotives snaked their way to the sawmill centers of the North Star State.



*EMPTY LOGGING CARS ready to be loaded are visible (just beyond the pole in the foreground) at far right as one of the Minnesota, Red Lake and Manitoba trains stops at the Redby depot. A portion of what appears to be Lower Red Lake can be seen in the background.*

<sup>45</sup> In 1928, 1,509 tons of potatoes were shipped, and milk revenue was \$1,277 — absurdly inadequate substitutes for the former log traffic. See *Forty-first Report*, 317, 384 (1928–1930). Both the number of farms and the number of acres in farms of Beltrami County decreased from 1925 to 1930. See Oscar B. Jesness and Reynolds I. Nowell, *A Program for Land Use in Northern Minnesota: A Type Study in Land Utilization*, 101–105 (Minneapolis, 1935).

PHOTOGRAPHS courtesy of the Beltrami County Historical Society. Alan Ominsky drew the map. In the photograph on page 123, railroad employees clown on the cowcatcher of the Red Lake line's locomotive No. 1.



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