

INSIDE AURORA: The Big Day

By Scott Johnston

'It's a big day today.'

'I'll say. May 16, 1853. The day the first steam train rolled into our little hamlet. People will talk about this for years to come.'

The two men stood at the edge of a small crowd gathered just south of Wellington Street east of Yonge. The assembly continued to grow as more people arrived both on horseback and on foot. There was a definite sense of expectation and excitement in the air.

'I never thought it would happen,' Sam observed. 'But I guess now that our community's so large - there must be 200 people living here - it was inevitable that the railroad would come.'

'There'll be more than 200 soon with a train coming through once a week. Why, in no time, we could even formally be declared a village!'

'You know,' Charles pointed out, 'they say it's only supposed to take two hours to get here from Toronto.'

'Two hours!?' Sam exclaimed. 'It takes a whole day by stage!'

'Mind you, the train it does cost a dollar, so it's not inexpensive.'

Looking around the forested area surrounding the station, Charles continued, 'I guess soon this whole area will be settled. I hear old Robert Machell has already started subdividing this part of his land to sell off lots around here.'

'Makes sense,' Sam replied. 'People and goods coming and going. Who wouldn't want to be right next to it all? Living way over west of Yonge, the way I do, I may even consider pullin' up stakes and settling down here myself.'

Pulling the brim of his hat down to further shade his eyes, and turning to look south along the newly-laid track, Charles asked with anticipation, 'When's it supposed to arrive?'

'Well, of course, it's the first time it's made this journey, but I think it's expected around noon,' his friend replied. Taking out and consulting his pocket watch, he continued, 'It's about that time now.'

Sure enough, in the distance a puff of smoke could be seen above the trees. Over the next few minutes, it steadily grew in size, until the train itself became visible.

The pride of the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railroad Company, it carried both passengers and freight, and was five cars long, including the engine. With its obvious power, and the sun gleaming off of the polished metal, it was an impressive sight.

With a reassuring hiss of steam the big train neared the station. A cheer went up from the crowd, and everyone pushed for a better view.

Suddenly, just before the train came to a stop as it reached Wellington, a loud screech emitted from it. A few horses reared, and many of those gathered covered their ears.

'Tarnation, what was that?!' Sam exclaimed, with a wince.

'Train whistle,' his friend replied, wiggling a finger in his ear. 'Knew it was comin', but never thought it would be so loud.'

'Well, that better not be a regular thing,' Sam replied. Looking around, he continued, 'You know, I may rethink moving here. Can you imagine having to listen to that racket?'

'I'll say,' Charles agreed. 'And once a week, at that. Folks would complain.'

Feel free to e-mail Scott at: machellscorners@gmail.com