

Chapter Two

CITIZEN VAN HORNE

If Mr. Van Horne, in his capacity as a tax-payer and resident of St. Andrews, would use his powerful influence with President Van Horne, of the Canadian Pacific Railway, we think he might be able to accomplish a good deal in the way of an improvement of our port facilities.—St. Andrews Beacon, August 31, 1893

MUCH INK has been spent on the extraordinary nature of Sir William Van Horne and, to a lesser extent, of his summer estate on Minister's Island. Certainly, his appearance in St. Andrews was a welcome surprise and the improvements he made a yearly wonder. But as a citizen of the town Van Horne came to be seen in a more ordinary light as well. He was a taxpayer, a neighbour, a person with political opinions and personal foibles, and sometimes he rubbed people the wrong way. From the local perspective he was human—some thought a little too much so.



PREVIOUS SPREAD

Sir William Van Horne, in an unusual pose. He was seldom photographed wearing his eyeglasses.

LAC E007914037



During his stay in St. Andrews, Van Horne was first General Manager, then President, then Chairman of the Board of one of the most powerful transportation companies in Canada, and St. Andrews was a little town that had almost from its beginning aspired to be a seaport of importance on the Atlantic. Put simply, St. Andrews expected things from Sir William. As with the CPR generally, there was a feeling that while there was no financial obligation on his part to help the local economy, there was certainly a moral one. This feeling existed before Van Horne arrived on his first tour of inspection in 1889, persisted through his residency, and was passed on to his successor Thomas Shaughnessy. There can be no doubt that the town did benefit very materially from the presence of Van Horne and his CPR associates, in terms of both tourism and the shipping business out of its port. It is also true that there was a gap between what it expected and what it actually got, especially in port development. There were times, in fact, when it was quite disappointed with the great man and his company.

In its early days, St. Andrews was an ambitious little town. It had citizens of wealth and standing in the provincial government, and it had schemes of future greatness. Or rather, it had one. As early as 1835, it planned to build a railway to reach Quebec City, solidly ice-bound in the winter, and thereby become the winter port on the Atlantic for Upper and Lower Canada. It would have been a tremendous coup, had it come to pass. It would have changed the whole character of the town. Fortunately or unfortunately, it never happened. St. Andrews was in a race with Portland, Maine, but funding problems and a border dispute with Maine, across which it hoped to lay tracks, effectively put it out of the running. It made no real start on the project until 1847, by which time Maine, which had poured large sums of money into the venture, called the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railway, was almost there. It connected with Quebec in 1853, and the Grand Trunk Railway, which controlled the few railways in existence in the Canadas at that time, leased it for 99 years in 1854. The St. Andrews and Quebec Railway, as

it was called, later the New Brunswick and Canada Railway, didn't reach Woodstock, even, until 1862. By that time Portland had become the great emporium of the northern states, and both Montreal and Quebec had numerous railway connections with Portland, Boston, and New York. When in 1876 the Intercolonial Railway connected Saint John and Halifax with the line from Rivière du Loup to Quebec City, the dream of St. Andrews as even an auxiliary winter port was defunct.

Perhaps "dormant" would be a more accurate term. In the later history of the town the old dream and the old hopes came to life again on a number of occasions. One was on the proposed creation of a short line of track connecting the Maritimes and Montreal. To get to the Maritimes in those days required a voyage down to Portland by train and up the coast by steamer, or an equally roundabout trip along the Intercolonial across northern New Brunswick and down its eastern shore, returning west to reach Saint John, for example. In various election campaigns Sir John A. MacDonald and Sir Charles Tupper—the latter a summer resident of St. Andrews since 1871—promised riches for the Maritimes over this line, whenever it was completed. Over succeeding decades every time a new section was added, the local newspapers could be depended upon to trot out well-worn arguments as to why St. Andrews, and not Saint John or Halifax, would be the most fitting eastern terminus for this line. The argument, as vented in the *St. Andrews Bay Pilot* for 1884, for example, was basically that over the proposed Short Line St. Andrews was 42 miles closer to the Atlantic than Saint John—and of course far closer than Halifax. When Sir John visited St. Andrews in the summer of 1887, however, he dashed these hopes. If the Short Line were to prove especially useful to St. Andrews, he stated in a speech at the Court House, it would be as a conduit for summer visitors from Ontario and Quebec, not for CPR grain from the great North-West.

When in 1889 the CPR did in fact lay the last section of this line, connecting with New Brunswick at McAdam Junction, and also expressed an interest in adding the New Brunswick Railway to its system, once again the old hopes and the old arguments were raised, except that this time they focused on the person of William Van Horne himself, who in the summer of 1889 was rumoured to be coming to town on a tour of inspection. "We hear," wrote Robert E. Armstrong, Editor of the newly formed *St. Andrews Beacon*,

that someone in the County has been notified that Mr. Van Horne, General Manager of the CPR, is shortly to visit St. Andrews. If such is the case, the people of St. Andrews should know of it, and they

MINISTER'S ISLAND

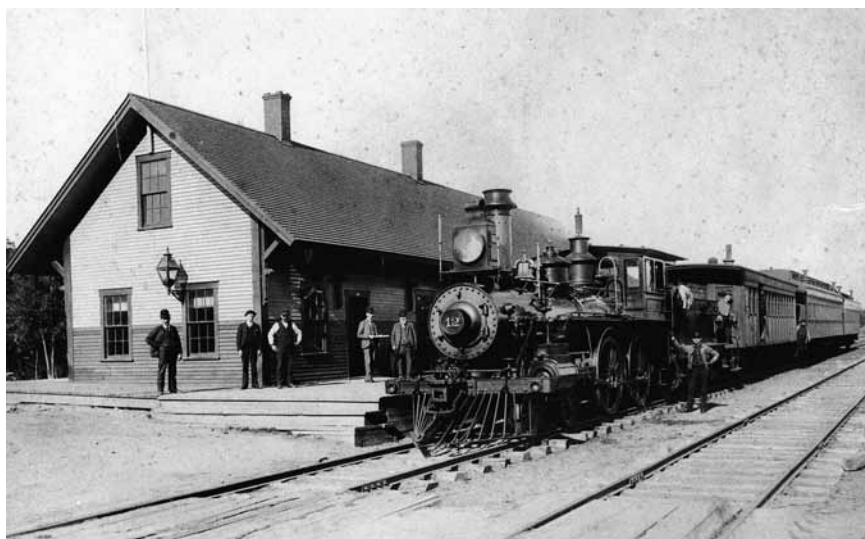
should be prepared to extend him a hearty greeting. And not only this, they should be in a position to show him the great advantages our port has to offer as a terminal point; they should be in a position to point out to him that our port is easy of access, that its approaches are deep and wide and easily accessible by the largest steamer. This is not a matter which should be done in secret either. St. Andrews has nothing to hide. We are not ashamed of our port, and we have nothing to gain and everything to lose by suppressing the truth. Whatever is done should be done at once and should be given the widest publicity possible.

The following summer, when Van Horne was back for his second visit, Armstrong interviewed him and, concerned citizen that he was, asked bluntly whether the CPR would use a deep-water wharf, should one be built here. Van Horne equally bluntly queried: "Do you know what amount of money it would cost to put a place like this in shape for a steamship business? It would cost at least half a million dollars to build docks, warehouses, yards, etc. And where is this to come from unless the business of the road is taxed for it? This business will not stand a tax, and we will have to go to the cheapest port." That seemed to indicate pretty plainly that if there were to be any additional shipping out of St. Andrews' wharves via the CPR, it would be the responsibility of the town and province to provide facilities for it.

In 1890 the town banded together to investigate the possibility of constructing a deep-water wharf and petitioned the CPR on the matter, pointing out its advantages as a shipping port. The Secretary's reply was prompt but unambiguous. The CPR, wrote Mr. Drinkwater, always maintains a neutral position with regards to the various seaports reached by its lines. It would "undertake to provide in the way of wharves, warehouses, etc., for taking care of all business that may be offered at or for St. Andrews, but it cannot undertake to create the business." The catch, unfortunately, was that the business could not be created without first putting into place the necessary infrastructure.

This document awakened a great deal of interest in the town and was the principal topic of conversation for the next week. It was received with some disappointment, of course, but also the determination to look around to see just who might be interested in doing port business out of St. Andrews. Van Horne did not cheer many up with a letter to Mr. Armstrong and the town shortly after, adding a few personal suggestions that might help the town. Like Sir John and the St. Andrews Land Company, he emphasized the development of the town as a tourist

Citizen Van Horne



TOP TO BOTTOM
McAdam Station,
Bar Road Station,
and St. Andrews Station
COURTESY BOB WRIGHT AND
BARRY MURRAY



~

Sir William Likes Men Who Do Their Duty

Sir William Van Horne has gone to England. It is rumoured that the object of his visit is to finance the Grand Falls pulp scheme. The *St. John Times*, in speaking of his departure from that port, says of Sir William:—

“An incident that gives an insight into the character of the man, occurred as he was walking from the train to the steamer, smoking a cigar. A policeman stepped up to him and politely informed him that smoking was not allowed on the docks. Sir William promptly threw away his cigar. When a reporter who was with him remarked that the policeman evidently did not recognize him, he replied curtly: “He was perfectly right. That’s what we pay him for.”—*St. Andrews Beacon*, March 16, 1911

~

destination. He thought particularly that Katy’s Cove would be a good place for a bathing beach, and that general town improvement was in order—the removal of all suggestion that the town had “gone to seed.” “This company,” he wrote, “will do all that is necessary towards putting its own premises in proper order and will make every effort by advertising and otherwise to bring people there. I trust that these suggestions will be received in the spirit in which they are given and that I will not be thought officious in having made them. If I had not come to feel a good deal of interest in the matter I should not have taken the trouble to say anything.” Once again, the thing that the town really wanted—port development—was being brushed aside; and the thing that would provide it with only seasonal work—summer tourism—was being substituted.

This was December of 1890, the year that Van Horne’s wife, daughter and sister had vacationed at the Algonquin. When they left in September, the *Beacon* noted that “Mrs. Van Horne, of Montreal, has been greatly pleased with St. Andrews during her stay here.” That was only partly the truth. She had left feeling the air and scenery especially fine, but confided in a letter to her husband that “The town is asleep—I wonder there was even enterprise enough to establish it.” A more unfair remark could hardly have been penned. The town was striving its utmost to create employment but, in its struggles with Van Horne and the CPR, not meeting with stellar success.

The following summer it was learned that Van Horne planned to build his summer home in St. Andrews. Between 1891 and 1893, while Covenhoven was being constructed, the town and private enterprise attempted gamely to forge ahead with port development. Figuring that about \$40,000 would be required for a deep water wharf, the town successfully petitioned the provincial government for permission to assess the ratepayers \$1,000 a year for 20 years. It then unsuccessfully petitioned the Dominion government for a grant of an additional \$20,000 to make up the balance. The fact that this refusal came from the same Conservative government that had helped create and subsidize the CPR, and which around the same time began to subsidize the Allan Steamship Line to operate out of Portland, instead of a Canadian port, did not win a lot of hearts in St. Andrews. Private enterprise was not much more successful than the town. In 1894 a local businessman, B. F. DeWolfe, constructed a large wharf near the lighthouse and asked Van Horne to consider reducing rates somewhat to help attract business to it. Van Horne promised to consider the matter, but in 1896 it was learned that, although DeWolfe was doing a decent shipping business, no concessions from the CPR would be forthcoming. This earned a scathing editorial

from the *Beacon*, which accused Van Horne of renegeing on his promise to take care of all trade that might be created here. “We are fully persuaded,” he concluded, “that there is no ‘sentiment’ in the composition of the CPR, that it is pure, cold, hard, ‘business’ the whole way through; therefore, we are the more surprised that the company should so long neglect to avail themselves of the splendid advantages that this port possesses.”

St. Andrews was also peeved—rather unjustly—at the preference that Saint John received over its own port. With a larger population base on which to draw funds, and port facilities that were already far larger than those of tiny St. Andrews, Saint John was much more successful in winning CPR contracts. It had spent quite a large amount of money in the last decade of the nineteenth century to build wharves and grain elevators, and this gamble had paid off. Laurier’s Liberal government, elected in 1896, put pressure on the CPR to find a Canadian equivalent on the Atlantic to Portland, and by 1897 St. Andrews recognized that Saint John was now pretty much officially the CPR’s winter port on the Atlantic. In fact, in succeeding years there was so much shipping business for Saint John that the CPR threatened to go back to Portland and Boston, or even to Halifax, if the city could not find the money to expand facilities. This galled St. Andrews because it felt entitled to at least overflow business from its rival neighbour, and it recalled with some bitterness a remark made by Van Horne in 1892, when he stated that if the experiment in shipping out of Saint John was successful he saw no reason why it couldn’t be repeated at St. Andrews. In fact, the Beaver Steamship Line, then operating out of Saint John, had at the same time of this remark expressed a decided interest in locating at St. Andrews, but was unsuccessful in persuading the CPR to make any move towards expanding existing facilities.

The Wisp of Hay

Then Sir William passed on to talk of his Island at St. Andrews in the Province of New Brunswick, which he says is to him the wisp of hay in the donkey’s bridle—always leading him on. He is constantly looking forward to spending long leisure weeks at St. Andrews, but rarely gets there at all. The wisp of hay at St Andrews is a picturesque country home with a beautiful flower garden, every flower of which he knows. There he plants trees, and grows strawberries that have no equal in the world. It is an idyllic life that Sir William goes in for there, albeit more in imagination than in reality, a life indeed remote from the bear garden of the Stock Exchange in which so many have their only recreation. So remote, in fact, that as he painted his joys, I began to think he was a true Arcadian.

“But, Sir William,” said I, “do you never at St. Andrews divert some little time away from the planting of your trees and strawberries and spend it cutting coupons?” The twinkle that so often lightens those marvellous eyes of his, and which for a time seemed to be dreaming itself away, returned and flashed upon me. “When on my island,” he answered, “I do no business; and as to cutting coupons, the man who cuts coupons in this life is not the man who does useful things. The man who is valuable and wise is the man who buys common stock and makes it pay dividends.”—*St. Andrews Beacon*, June 10, 1909. Excerpted from the *Canadian Mail of London* ✂

MR. VAN HORNE'S

HE FIGURES AS A SPECULATOR IN INDIAN OPIUM

There is no man connected with the CPR who has had more experiences to the square inch than Jim French, the "cullud gemman" who does the honors so gracefully in President Van Horne's private car, and there is none who can relate his experiences more quaintly or more forcibly, or who can interlard them with more swear-words, than the aforesaid James. In fact, from the rugged cliffs of Cape Breton to the ocean-laved shores of British Columbia James French stands out alone and unique, the *ne plus ultra*, as it were, of all that is scientific and quaint in latter day profanity.

Yet Jim is not bad, or vicious. On the contrary, he is as meek as a mouse, as generous as a lord, as sharp as a steel trap, and his heart is as big as the car in which he drives. Surrounded by wealth and luxury, Jim has had his dreams of greatness, but alas, many of them have not panned out as he had anticipated.

One of these, he related to the *Beacon*, while the President's car was waiting on the track at the Bar Road, the other day. It was while he was in Victoria, B. C., some years ago, that Jim experienced one of these ecstatic dreams. Somebody had whispered in his ear that if he invested his spare cash—he had about \$225 in his inside pocket just then—in opium that he could treble his money back east. The vision of the wealth that was to roll in upon him as a result of this speculation nearly turned his head, and after a feverish night he pocketed his wealth next day and invested the whole of it in opium at \$7.50 a point. He got back to Montreal with his investment, and lost no time in seeking out the leading druggist. "I told him that I had about \$300 worth of the stuff, and asked him what he would give me for it. He looked at a little book, and then told me that it was worth \$4.50 a pound.

"Gee Whillakers! How my heart beat! only \$4.50 a pound and I had paid \$7.50 for it! I thought he was mistaken, but he showed me it in black and white. You see, the market for opium's something like wheat—it—it—what in — — — do you call it—oh, yes—it fluctuates. One day it's up and the next day it's down. I struck it on the down grade. And how my heart beat!"

"I tried every dealer in Montreal, but not one of them would give me a cent more than \$4.50. Then I took it home and stowed it under the bed, and told the old woman not to let any of the children tech it. She wanted to know what it was. 'Dynamite! Dynamite!' says I. 'Don't you let them children tech it!' Then she screamed, and told me to take it out, or we'd all be blowed up. At last, I told her all about it. She looked daggers at me, but none of them children teched it."

"Some time after this I was in Chicago. I took the stuff with me. Only \$5 a pound there! How my heart beat! I tried in other Yankee towns, but it was no go. And all this time I might have been getting 4 percent for my money if it hadn't been for that — — — villain in Victoria! A shame, wan't it?"

"Next year, I was going to British Columbia, and I took it along with me. Tried to sell it to all the Chinese camps we passed, but couldn't do it. None of them would give me what I had paid for it. At that time, the track stopped at Port Moody. Of course, you know where Port Moody is. Well, there was a big Chinaman there and I hooked onto him."

"How muchee givee me?" I asked.

"Givee you seven dollee hop!" said John."

AIDE-DE-CAMP

AND STRAW HATS

“Seven dollars and a half! Gee Whillakers, how my heart beat! Just to think I was going to get my money back! Then I thought I’d strike for more, just for interest, you know!”

“Worth more than that,’ said I.”


“Seven dollee hop, all I givee. Gettee it in Victoria for seven dollee hop.”

“But I have nearly three hundred dollars worth.”

“Allee sammee thousand dollee; me take it seven dollee hop.”

“And you ought to have seen me ‘hop’ for that car. Gee Whillakers! How my heart beat! I took every blessed ounce of it and sold it to John. And it’ll be a cold day again before you see me buying opium.”

“Got salted on hats, too! yes, I did. You know those straw hats, those cheap hats, those ornery hats, those — — — — things that farmers wear in the fields! Of course, you do. Well, a friend told me in British Columbia that there was a bonanza for me in it, if I took a lot of them out. I could get fifty cents apiece for them. Went to a Montreal dealer, and asked him the price of them wholesale. ‘Four cents,’ said he. ‘I’ll take all you have,’ said I. His eyes got big as saucers, and I guess he thought I was crazy. He sold me about three hundred of the — — — — things on a string. They filled my room near about. When I got to Donald the man that was to give me fifty cents for them had busted up, skipped out, vamoosed. And there I was with a half a car load of the — — — — things to sell, and only an hour or two or sell them in! How my heart beat! I hustled around, and at last found a chap that offered to take them off my hands for five cents apiece! A cent profit after lugging them for nearly three thousand miles! Whew! I’ve had quite enough of opium and hats. No more of them for me, please. But here’s the old man.”

And Jim scurried off to the kitchen to arrange a tempting repast for the President.—*St. Andrews Beacon*, April 13, 1893 

MINISTER'S ISLAND

~

Mary Van Horne. She shared Sir William's interest in botany, in particular fungi, as well as his talent for painting. She died in the winter of 1904, after having been ill for several years.

LAC E007914040

~



To be fair to Van Horne, the port of St. Andrews did benefit from the CPR's presence, as it admitted, grudgingly, on a few occasions. Railway traffic increased, there were several modest, though intermittent, contracts for shipping coal up the CPR line from Joggins and Parrsboro, and Mr. DeWolfe profited enough to build a second wharf. When all is said and done, however, it cannot be said that Sir William did very much to develop the local port business. His successor, Thomas Shaughnessy, did considerably more. Under his leadership the CPR purchased the holdings of the St. Andrews Land Company in 1903, bought DeWolfe's two wharves in 1903 and built a new one at the lighthouse location in 1909. That isn't to say that Van Horne wouldn't have done the same thing, had he been President when opportunity arose, or that he didn't have some influence on Shaughnessy's decision to go this route. And this isn't to say that Shaughnessy couldn't pinch pennies as hard as Van Horne. In the construction of this third wharf there was a celebrated incident in which the contractor hired to do the job found it cheaper to float his logs down the Saint John river than pay CPR freight rates. The ensuing scandal effected a decrease for the poor builder, but reminded the town once again that when it came to business, the CPR under any President—even Van Horne and Shaughnessy, summer residents—put business first.

THE ONLY POSSIBLE exception to this rule was the episode of the ill-fated Chamcook sardine plant.

In December of 1911 the *Beacon* confirmed a rumour that had been current for about a year—that a large sardine canning plant would be erected at Chamcook, just across the channel from Minister's Island. The *Montreal Star* filled in the details. The Canadian Sardine Company had been incorporated in Montreal with George F. Johnson, of the Montreal firm of McConnell, Johnson and Allison, as President, and with Sir William Van Horne, his

son Benny, and several CPR people as backers. It turned out later that the CPR itself had no stake in the venture, and that Johnson and Sir William had made personal guarantees of approximately \$50,000 each.

Why a sardine plant? The reason given was that while 85 percent of sardines were caught in Canadian waters, almost none were packed there. This was certainly true of Passamaquoddy Bay. There had been a tiny and short-lived sardine canning operation in St. Andrews a few years previously, and Connors Brothers of Blacks Harbour had been doing a modest business since 1889, but there was nothing on the Canadian side that compared with the large seasonal operations just across the line in Eastport, visible from Sir William's back porch. Sardines were the second largest seafood product in the Bay, topped only by herring. Lobsters came in a distant third, and everything else, such as cod, haddock, pollock, smelts and clams were hardly on the radar screen. The Canadian Sardine Company would produce a high quality sardine. Packed in olive oil, it would equal the Norwegian product in quality and fetch twice the current market price. The cannery would operate with top-of-the-line equipment and employ up to 600 workers in operations that would run year round. It would pack larger fish as well as sardines, and not only fish but clams, lobsters, scallops, string beans, peas and berries, squash, baked beans and brown bread (in separate sections), and the "humble but savory fish ball," the canned equivalent of the fish cake.

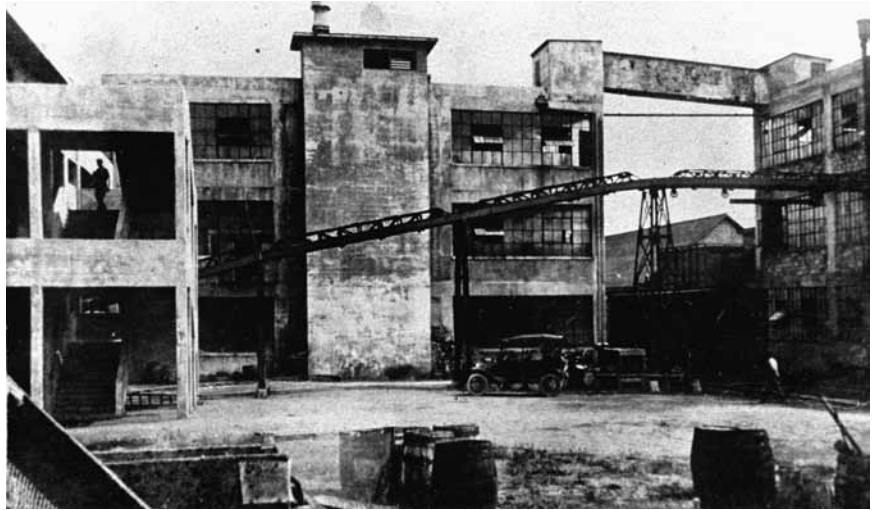
A professional architect was put in charge of layout and design, but it was no surprise to the locals to learn that Sir William himself, amateur architect that he was, would have entire control of the layout and design of the townsite and cottages. For like Minister's Island, it was to be a miniature village, and rather self-contained. Sir William had shown an interest in town planning while building the CPR, drawing up plans for a circular arrangement



~
Lucy Adaline Van Horne, Sir William's wife. Along with Mary and Addie Junior, she was a regular summer tenant at Minister's Island. She died in 1929.

COURTESY HENRY CLARKE

MINISTER'S ISLAND



~

TOP AND MIDDLE

The Canadian Sardine Company, Sir William's still-born canning business in St. Andrews. These photographs show the factory and residences still under construction.

CHARLOTTE COUNTY ARCHIVES

P 127-9, P 127-10

BOTTOM

The Cannery from Minister's Island, circa 1928.

COURTESY LENA MILLER



~

