

The Algoma Central Railway runs northerly and westerly from Sault Ste. Marie to joining the Michipicoten branch of the railway at Hawk Junction, a distance of 170 miles, then northerly 30 miles to Franz, on the C.P.R., 50 miles to Oba on the C.N.R. and 50 miles to Hearst on the Northern C.N.R. line. The Michipicoten Branch runs from Michipicoten Harbour to Hawk Junction nearly 35 miles. The construction of this railway between 1902 and 1914 illustrates an important theme in Canadian development.

Unlike the American West the settlement of the Northern Superior shore was not spearheaded by hardy farmers carving a home in the forest. The developmental force came from the metropolitan centre of Sault Ste Marie and the drive and capital of the entrepreneur Francis Clergue. Over a period of twenty years this man plotted, directed and organized the development of a massive transportation system into the interior forest. He well knew the necessity of a railway to turn the Sault into a central entrepot, a thriving supply depot which would operate flourishing businesses selling the multitude of paraphernalia needed for lumbering, mining and agricultural camps and receiving raw resources to feed the mouths of vast processing factories.

In 1900 no railways had been constructed in Northern Ontario running North and South. The immense and valuable tract of land stretching 500 miles between Port Arthur and Sudbury was serviced only ~~by~~ by the C.P.R. This road, by following the barren rocky height of land between the ~~xxxx~~ Great Lakes and the Arctic watershed, carried its trade east, to service the market centres and industries of Montreal and Quebec City. No benefit accrued to Sault Ste. Marie. The valuable timber and immense deposits of gold, copper, and iron extending from Sudbury westerly to Michipicoten and further to the North and West could not be developed by the C.P.R.

For the Sault to develop as a modern industrial centre, and to benefit from these resources, Clergue saw that it was essential that a railway be constructed to the west and north, furnishing cheap transportation for large quantities of manufactured supplies for mining camps, and a ready industrial market for interior staples. The route of the Algoma Central Railway was initially directed from the prosperous Helen Iron Ore Mine to the Michipicoten Harbour in 1900 to provide the cheapest water transportation of some 1,000 tons of ore a day to Sault blast furnaces. Since the harbour froze in winter, the railway was built from the Sault to Hawk Junction, crossing many rivers which were used for timber drives to the Railway, for transportation to the Sault. From Hawk Junction the railway was constructed Northward to intersect with the C.N.R. deep within the agriculturally prosperous Great Clay Belt. Here Sault Ste. Marie businessmen hoped to sell millions of dollars of household goods, farm machinery, roceries, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ hardware goods and other manufactured products to the new farms of the pioneer fringe. In addition the sale of their agricultural produce to the Sault would pay for their manufactured goods and provide a ready and cheap source of farm produce. By intersecting the C.N.R. vast amounts of trade along the ~~the~~ Great Clay Belt would be diverted from Montreal to the Sault. Pulpwood as well could be floated down Northern Rivers to the C.N.R. then shipped Southward to the Sault. The A.C.R. by opening new territory and transportation quickly and cheaply large quantities of iron ore and pulpwood to the Sault, was responsible for rapid industrial development. The Lake Superior Power Co., Algoma Commercial Co., Sault Ste. Marie Pulp and Paper Co., Algoma Steel Co., and the Tagona Water

Light Co., all came into being. ~~By~~ Settlement followed industry.

In 1894 Sault Ste. Marie had only 2,130 people. By 1901 the city

had grown to 6,000 and by 1914 12,291 people were found within

municipal boundaries. Today the Sault stands as one of Northern

Ontario's major metropolitan centres servicing an immense mining,

timber and agricultural hinterland.