

THE ESPLANADE OF TORONTO

A FORECAST MADE IN 1853.

Report of Col. Fred. Cumberland to the Directors of the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway.

Reprinted from THE EMPIRE.

Mr. Barlow Cumberland has transmitted to Mr. D. R. Wilkie, chairman of the Esplanade Committee of the Board of Trade, a letter containing his views on the Esplanade question, and enclosing a copy of a report made by his father, the late Col. Fred. Cumberland, on the subject. Both documents will be read with a great deal of interest at this juncture of the discussion on this question.

The Letter.

Mr. Cumberland's letter reads :

TORONTO, July 22, 1889.

D. R. Wilkie, Esq., Chairman of the Esplanade Committee of the Board of Trade, Toronto.

DEAR SIR,—As a matter of interest in connection with the subjects that are at present occupying the attention of your committee, I beg to transmit to you herewith a copy of a report made in July, 1853, by Mr. Fred. Cumberland, then chief engineer of the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron railway, proposing a plan for the arrangement of the water front of the city of Toronto. This report was made 35 years ago, when the city of Toronto had but 30,763 inhabitants and when there were no railways whatever along the water front.

The present arrangement of Esplanade street was at that time under consideration under the then proposed Esplanade Act of 1853. The alternative proposition made by the report was that the natural position of the level of Front street as being above that of the lower, or wharf level, should be taken advantage of. That a retaining wall should be constructed along the south side of Front street so that the railway tracks passing from east to west through the city should run at the foot of this wall similarly to the way in which (as afterwards constructed under his directions) they now run at the foot of the bank between Bathurst and Brock streets. Communication with the water front was to be made from the streets running north and south by means of bridges over the railway tracks in similar manner as is done at Bathurst and Brock streets. It is to be remembered, however, that the levels of Front street, east of Simcoe, while sufficient to pass over the railway tracks are less than at these points, so, that the slopes communicating

with the water front would be much easier than those at the present bridges at Brock and Bathurst streets.

The Light of Experience.

In the light of the experience of past years there is no doubt that such a plan would, as was predicted, have "preserved direct and safe communication from the city to the wharves and water frontage."

The present scheme of the Esplanade was, however, adopted in preference to the above proposition, and I think it will be admitted that the prophecies of the proposer have been most completely fulfilled.

The Esplanade has become "neither more nor less than a street, although dignified by a higher name." The use of it for railway traffic was submitted to be "unwise in the last degree, and justified by neither common sense nor professional opinion," and the forecast has been fulfilled that if it were so used "the Esplanade, either as an esplanade or a street, would be ruined, and the railway service obstructed; while further the city would be cut off from its water frontage on the bay except under the permanent hazard and embarrassment of crossing, say, five lines of railway on the level!"

The Crisis Again Arises.

Again a crisis has arisen in the history of the water front of the city, and you are now endeavoring to relieve the community from the embarrassment which it was foreseen 35 years ago would be certain to result from the adoption of the scheme of placing the tracks upon Esplanade street.

As the position stands an end must be put to level crossings, and either the railways must be carried over the roadways or the roadways carried over the railways.

The first of these is what is termed "The Viaduct Scheme." Its adoption involves very considerable difficulties, particularly in the way of retaining the convenience of local car deliveries along the front of the city to the advantage of our merchants and manufacturers, and also in the connecting of the "through tracks" with the railway passenger and freight depots and with the existing or proposed shunting yards. These may be overcome, but they present a variety of technical problems which will need the closest investigation.

...and is out an adaptation of the proposal made by Mr. Cumberland in 1853.

The Windmill line has been moved out into the bay and between Esplanade street and a new east and west communication, "Lake street" has been formed, which is approximately as far from Esplanade street as Esplanade is from Front. The streets running north and south can, therefore, be continued upon bridges leading from, and at or about the level of Front street, until such time as they have passed over the railway tracks, and then by a gradual descent reach the new east and west line of communication to the docks and water frontage along Lake street. There should be no more difficulty in getting from the Front street level to Lake street than there is in getting from the present Front street level to Esplanade street. Communication with the water can be thus maintained free of danger from railway tracks by all streets along the city waterfront, while the present facilities for delivery along Esplanade street and the communication with the railway shunting yards would remain undisturbed, and the citizens have freest and safest access to the water front.

A Further Suggestion.

Might I make a further suggestion? The city water front divides itself naturally into four sections.

From the Don to Scott street is "business frontage," mainly used for manufacturing, storage and freight forwarding purposes.

From Scott to Bay may be considered the "steamboat passenger centre," and here, perhaps, might be placed the "city dock," to which reference has been frequently made.

From Bay to Simcoe is the "railway passenger centre," and events seem to point in the direction of its being entirely handed over to the railways for that purpose.

From Simcoe to Brock street is the "railway shunting centre," including both the Grand Trunk yard and local freight sheds and the water lots which were granted by the city to the Credit Valley, and now belong to the Canadian Pacific, for the self-same purposes. Through the middle of this section exists Esplanade street, impossible of use to the citizens, and not fully availed of by the railways, while the right of communication north and south from John and Peter streets is a constantly vexed question between the city and railways.

Might it not be possible, in connection with the new Windmill line extension, to place along the water front a real "Esplanade" or "street facing on the water," with boat-houses, ferry landings, wide grass plots and broad promenades from Simcoe to Brock, forming a water side resort, which would be a proper companion to the Island Park, which the city is now creating on the other side of the bay?

Bridges from Simcoe, John and Peter, passing over the shunting yards, could give direct communication, and in consideration of the

construction of these and of the new water front, or of whatever may be a fair value of Esplanade street, the latter may be transferred to the railway companies.

The nucleus of this "Esplanade" already exists in the gardens of the city Water Works, to which access is now attained only at the hazard of life by climbing through railway trains, but which under this proposition would be the centre of an unique water side promenade.

Importance of the Question.

Pardon this communication, but as the city's future depends so greatly upon the subjects which you have under consideration, I conceive it to be the duty of every member of the board to offer whatever information he may have for your committee's consideration, and I trust that whatever conclusions you may arrive at they will be come to in this light—that whatever the increase may have been to the city during the past 35 years it will be immeasurably extended during the years that are to come, and provision must be made not simply for the present requirements, but as was submitted, but not accepted, in 1853 for the future growth of our population.

Your obedient servant,

BARLOW CUMBERLAND.

COL. CUMBERLAND'S REPORT.

An Accurate Forecast of the Difficulties Since Encountered.

The report of Col. Cumberland, above referred to, is as follows:

ENGINEER'S OFFICE, O., S. and H.R.R.,
July 23, 1853.

To the Directors of the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron R. R. Co.

GENTLEMEN,—In pursuance of your order of the 25th ult., that I should consider and report a general scheme for the railway service of the frontage of this city, I beg to submit the accompanying plan prepared on the basis of the company's works now under construction at the Queen's wharf amplified and extended to general purposes.

The plan comprises the full extent of the city water frontage from the Garrison Common to the River Don.

Front street from Bathurst street on the west to the Custom House on the east, has been set out on a line parallel to King street. From the Custom House it bears north-easterly to Palace street at George street, and thence is continued again on a line parallel to King street.

This broken course in the original location of the street was doubtless induced by a similar break in the water line of the bay shore, and it is observable that from the angle thus formed to the Don river all that part of the bay lying between the present shore and the line of Front street truly projected easterly is comparatively shoal water and therefore, in its present condition, of

commercial value, but more readily available for improvement.

What was Proposed.

I propose then to extend the line of Front street easterly to George street in the rear of the City Hall and fish market, to be continued thence to the eastern limits of the city by a very open curve (say half a mile radius) crossing the Don at right angles, and following the course apparently necessary in connection with railway gradients in that vicinity.

The width of this street would be maintained throughout at 66 feet, and immediately to the south of this and parallel with it through its entire length I propose to set out an esplanade (colored green upon the plan) also 66 feet wide, enclosed and planked as a continuous avenue stretching from the Queen's wharf to the Don. This avenue would be devoted to pedestrians and interrupted only at intervals and at right angles by the streets from the north projected to the wharves. A southern sidewalk to Front street would therefore be unnecessary and the roadway might accordingly be widened out.

The general level of Front street is from 13 to 14 feet above the level of the wharf lines, or in other words, from 23 to 19 feet above the mean water line, but the gradients of Front street might be very materially improved so as to give a more uniform level and in places an increased height above the wharf and water lines. It will be remembered, too, that this bank is broken not only in regard to height but projection from the line of Front street, and my suggestions contemplate true alignment as well as improved levels.

A Retaining Wall.

Assuming, then, the southern boundary of the Esplanade to be true in alignment throughout the frontage of the city and at a regular height (of say 16 ft. 6 in.) above the railway and wharf grades, I propose to build on that boundary a retaining wall, having its coping fenced by an iron railing (as at the Montreal wharves), with a general railway track at its base of width sufficient for the number of lines considered necessary, which, for the present purpose, I assume at five.

This general railway track being thus 16 ft. 6 in. below the level of Front street, and the Esplanade would be bridged over in one span opposite each of the intersecting streets from the north, whereby direct and safe communication would be preserved from the city to the wharves and water frontage.

The southern limit of the railway track on the lower level would be fenced throughout its length and to the south of this again, and parallel with it a common road would be constructed to facilitate communication on the wharf level.

Beyond this line I submit no propositions. The arrangement of the wharves in breast-works or inlets must be dependent on the in-

tentions of the respective individuals or companies in possession of the water frontage. I have, however, set out pier and dock work on the plan, not as dictating them in detail, but simply to illustrate my views as to the best manner of their railway service and connections.

Considerations Submitted.

Having thus described my propositions in outline, for a full understanding of which, however, I rely upon your examination of the plan, I will now submit some considerations as to the practical and comparative value of such an arrangement.

It is, I believe, well understood that "the Esplanade," as originally designed and indeed as contemplated even under the Act of last session, was intended to be built on the wharf or lower level on a line nearly parallel to Front street and equi-distant, or nearly so, from it and the frontage of the wharves, or what is commonly known as the Windmill line, thus severing the water lots at about the centre of their projecting length by what would be neither more nor less than a street, although dignified by a higher name. Such a proposition could not have been made in view of railway service, and yet I believe it has been seriously proposed to make it subservient to railway traffic. Such a use of an esplanade and such a location of the railways would, I submit, be unwise in the last degree. The Esplanade (either as an esplanade or a street) would be ruined and the railway service obstructed, while further, the city would be cut off from its water frontage on the bay, except under the permanent hazard and embarrassment of crossing say five lines of railway on a level. When we remember that these lines will be worked under different managements and at all hours, we may appreciate the danger, difficulty and obstruction to the lake trade of the city resulting from such an arrangement. Nor can it be intended to devote the Esplanade solely to railway tracks. A common road must be provided upon it or in its immediate vicinity, whereby the further disadvantage of parallel and abutting lines of railway and common road on the same level will ensue, increasing the danger and inconvenience.

I accordingly conclude that such an arrangement will, on reflection, be abandoned, for I am convinced that common sense, as well as professional opinion, will condemn it as a system to be justified only by positive necessity, in this case by no means apparent. On the contrary, the natural levels (fortunate and valuable to a degree if availed of) point directly to the construction of a retaining wall and a perfect system of bridging over the railway for the city streets, by which appliances, whilst all the common road communications with the water may be kept up free and unobstructed, the railway tracks may be safely and conveniently omitted from both extremities into the very centre of the

city, to be diverted (at intervals and wherever the trade may demand) by curves and sidings on to the edge or frontage of every wharf.

The Public Walk.

These, doubtless, are the main considerations, and I submit that the proposal now made effectually secures them, but there is another, and one which I am instructed is thought of high importance by a large number of the citizens of Toronto, viz.: The retention in any new scheme of those provisions agreeably made by the grant of "public walks and gardens" on the frontage. This grant I understand is to comprise a strip of land immediately to the south of Front street, averaging in width 100 feet 6 inches, and extending from the Queen's wharf to Bay street. This, as already explained, I propose to retain (and if possible extend) in an amended form; for whereas by the original proposition the Esplanade would be on the lower level and consist of a street with frontages north and south, it is now recommended to be reserved on the upper level in the form of an avenue, at an altitude which will command a view of the lake enclosed, and entirely unobstructed by the railway, which will be at the base of this retaining wall, sixteen feet below it.

The promoters, therefore, of the public walks will find their purposes better secured under this than under the original proposition: for under this they will in truth secure an esplanade (which may be rendered "an open space or public walk facing the water") which the work as contemplated under the recent Act of Parliament can never give them.

Effect of the Scheme.

Thus we see that (apart from the question of cost or property) the purposes of the railway companies, the forwarders and the city will be conveniently secured: of the railway companies because their lines will be free from obstruction by level crossings, whilst their tracks may connect with every wharf in the city; of the forwarders and citizens generally, for the same reason, viz., ample and safe connection between the common highway, the railways and the water; and of the citizens especially because beyond all this an enclosed avenue may be provided 66 feet wide throughout the entire frontage of the city, overlooking the bay and Lake Ontario, and connecting with the proposed park on the Garrison Commons.

That such works properly executed in detail would result in a water frontage uniting great beauty with very ample commercial facilities can scarcely be doubted, and in no locality with which I am acquainted do the provisions of nature, as well as original plan of location, so clearly denote a system. The magnitude of the work may possibly startle those not prepared to appreciate the prospective value of the water frontage covered, but not obstructed, by railway connection. On consideration, however, I think its cost may not be an insuperable obstacle.

The present opportunity is such as rarely occurs in any city, and certainly will never again occur in this.

Those Interested.

We have the following public bodies all interested in the question, but none, as I am informed, as yet committed to any particular scheme:

1. The corporation, in regard to the Esplanade, its property in water frontage, the city railway service, the preservation of its street communications and the provision of public walks and gardens.

2. The Harbor Commissioners, who contemplate a public or city wharf. The railway companies, viz., the Grand Trunk (including the Guelph and Sarnia), the Northern, the Hamilton and Toronto, none as yet committed to any particular location of depots, all of whom must procure adequate right of way, and, lastly, the owners of water lots, who, standing pledged to some expenditure on the Esplanade, would find their interests promoted by this system.

If then it can be shown that by one general and harmonious scheme all the provisions contemplated by these bodies can be secured we have at once our expenditure predicted on the different purposes as a fund applicable to the united one now proposed. The amount involved, its equitable distribution, and the settlement with owners and lessees on the frontage in regard to their rights and privileges (which, however, in most cases would be improved in value) are all matters of detail which cannot be safely estimated if fairly stated without due enquiry and very mature consideration. It is apart from my present purpose to do more than submit to you the outline of a scheme intended to provide permanently for these important public services, and I apprehend that proposition as may most conveniently unite all in one comprehensive work will recommend itself as strongly to public favor as to overcome any financial obstacle not altogether insurmountable.

The trade of the city will hereafter, to a great degree, depend for its success upon its facilities afforded it by the railway and harbor services. If an error be now made in these, permanent embarrassment will result, and these considerations are the more important because the harbor frontage of this city is comprised within a fixed limit incapable of extension, while the difficulties of railway introduction will increase daily with the growth and population and the value of real estate.

Should you take any action based upon the report and plan now submitted, I desire that their preparation may be understood as an official duty undertaken by your instruction. This is desirable, lest it might appear that I was gratuitously intruding upon matters already engaging the consideration of other public bodies.

I have the honor to be, gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

FRED. CUMBERLAND, Chief Engineer.