Surveying the Last Spike

By Ray Argyle

Day after day, the thunder of explosions echoed off the cliffs hanging over Eagle Pass. Canada's greatest feat of surveying – laying out the route of the Canadian Pacific Railway from Ontario to the west coast – had come to an end. Now, gangs of workmen were blasting out a roadbed for the final section of the line through the Monashee mountain range in British Columbia.

This year marks the 125th anniversary of the completion of the CPR with the driving of the Last Spike at Craigellachie, B.C., on November 7, 1885. It was a pivotal year in Canada's history.

In that long-ago time, two characters who may never have met, but who shared destinies closely linked with the surveying profession, sweated out the greatest challenges of their lives.

Arthur Stanhope Farwell, British Columbia's Surveyor General, was sent to the province's interior in 1883 to survey a wagon road that could carry supplies for the railway builders. By 1885, he had also pre-empted 1,175 acres on the Columbia River for the townsite of Farwell, anticipating that the CPR would have no choice but to deal with him for land for a station and rail yards.

Farwell's decision to challenge the railway led to a decade-long court battle. The CPR, meanwhile, built its own town a half mile east of Farwell, naming it Revelstoke in tribute to Lord Revelstoke, the British businessman whose Baring Brothers Bank came to the rescue of the financially-strapped line.

Edward Mallandaine, a callow youth of eighteen, found himself at loose ends in Farwell, frustrated in his dream of "fighting the Indians" in the uprising that became known as

One of the most famous Canadian photos reveals Edward Mallandaine peering out from behind the bearded Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona) who drove the Last Spike. Sir Sandford Fleming is standing directly behind Smith and to his right is William Van Horne. Courtesy McCord Museum of Canadian History.

the Northwest Rebellion. He'd set out from home in Victoria, B.C., but by the time he reached Farwell's settlement on the Columbia River – having beaten his way by riverboat, horseback and on foot – the Rebellion had been crushed and its leader, Louis Riel, was in jail. He would be hanged a week after the Last Spike was driven.

Young Edward, whose father had surveyed part of the CPR route through the Fraser River canyon, got lucky in Farwell. He was given a post office contract to carry mail and supplies by horseback west from Farwell through the Eagle Pass to Eagle Landing (today's Sicamous). That put him in line to be in the famous photograph of the driving of the Last Spike when railway "navvies," working in gangs from east and west, joined up at Craigellachie. "Thus, was the Dominion of Canada bound and nailed together by bands of steel," Edward would later write.

(I tell the story of Edward Mallandaine's youthful adventures in my book, *The Boy in the Picture*, Dundurn Press.)

Whether Edward and Farwell ever met is not known, but it is clear the young man learned a lesson from Farwell's tribulations. Years later, when Edward had himself become a surveyor, he partnered with another man to stake a townsite on the route of the CPR's southern line in British Columbia. In order to lure the railway into building a station in their new town of Creston, he cleverly handed over half their pre-emption to the CPR.

As well as gaining a station, Edward became the
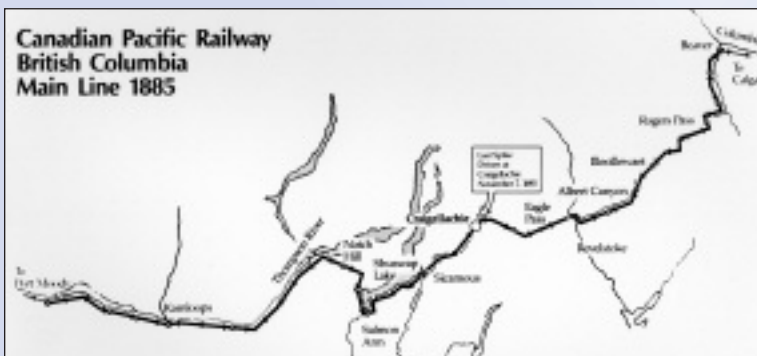
Map shows route of CPR through the Selkirk and Monashee mountains. Courtesy Revelstoke Railway Museum.

A.S. Farwell, surveyor who fought the CPR. Courtesy McCord Museum of Canadian History.

CPR's land agent for the Kootenay district with responsibility for several million acres. In 1911, he successfully scoured Europe for immigrants to take up the empty land.

Arthur Stanhope Farwell was born in Derbyshire, England, in 1843, the son of a Methodist clergyman. Trained as a civil engineer and a surveyor, he followed thousands of his countrymen to British Columbia. He arrived in Victoria in 1864 and quickly caught on with the colonial government in his chosen profession.

Farwell's arrival in British Columbia coincided with the union of Britain's two west coast colonies, Vancouver Island and British Columbia. In 1871 the united colony became a province of Canada, on condition that it be linked by railway. The B.C. delegation had demanded only a "tote" road but in Ottawa, Sir John A. Macdonald, anxious to push the scheme for a national railway, seized on B.C.'s request as a reason to commit to a line to the west coast.

Delays caused by scandals and construction difficulties held up completion until 1885. That summer, with the line finished across the prairies, the CPR was able to transport three thousand troops under General Middleton, a formidable force that soon put down Louis Riel's uprising.

Farwell, meanwhile, had been working feverishly to survey possible transportation routes into the Kootenay district of eastern British Columbia.

Working with Gilbert Sprout, he mapped out a low level route through Eagle Pass that ran from Lake Shuswap to the confluence of the Columbia and the Illecillewaet rivers. The Illecillewaet ran down from the Selkirk Mountains to the east, where Captain Albert Rogers had found Rogers Pass.

With Rogers Pass lying directly to the east and Eagle Pass the key to getting through the Monashee Mountains to the west, Farwell knew he had found the perfect location for a townsite. Farwell figured the CPR would have to come through this narrow cleft in the mountains as it made its way to the Pacific coast.

Following close behind Farwell and Sproat was Gustavus Blin Wright, charged with the responsibility of building the wagon road. Wright had earlier built sections of the Cariboo road that was punched through to central B.C., following the discovery of gold around Barkerville.

Surveyors had to endure bitter conditions in plotting route of the CPR. Courtesy Revelstoke Railway Museum.

It was not long before hundreds of men hired by the CPR's contractor, Andrew Ondordonk, were blasting out the right of way and laying track from Eagle Landing, on Lake Shuswap, east through Eagle Pass.

Meanwhile, another gang of navvies was pushing west through Rogers Pass. Their joint objective was to link up somewhere in Eagle Pass.

On January 13, 1885, Farwell received approval from Victoria giving him a pre-emption grant on 175 acres, plus an additional 1,000 acres for a townsite. He began laying out a town which he named for himself, confident that the CPR would have a buy a right of way from him to erect its station and assemble railway yards. He expected to become very rich.

The CPR didn't see it this way. The reason was that the British Columbia government had agreed to convey "in trust to the Dominion (federal) government" a belt of land twenty miles on each side of the railway route. Ottawa was to pay B.C. $100,000 per year, and the CPR, on completion of the railway, would select its grant lands from within this belt.

With the two governments squabbling over the same land, no one was sure who had title to what. Victoria still claimed the right to give land grants within the belt, hence the award to Farwell. Ottawa also insisted on its right to award grants within the Railway Belt. One Dominion grant, for land B.C. had already awarded to Farwell, went to the Columbia and Kootenay Steam Navigation Company. Victoria refused to register it. B.C. also withheld registration for a 320-acre grant that Ottawa had given to the Kootenay Smelting and Trading Company.

In the resulting turmoil, an angry William Van Horne, builder of the CPR, was forced to give in and pay Farwell for land on which to erect a temporary station in Farwell.

That wasn't the end of it. Van Horne next got a Dominion grant on a large tract of flat land a half mile east of Farwell, where the CPR emerged from the Illecillewat Canyon. There the CPR laid out its own town site with yards, station, streets, and commercial buildings. Lots were offered for sale, and the CPR property in Farwell was no longer needed. The future Revelstoke had come into being.

The confusion was not ended, however. Rival provincial and Dominion police forces – the North-West Royal Mounted – vied to control liquor sales within the Railway Belt. B.C. was willing to sell liquor licences to all comers, while the Dominion government had banned sale of booze within twenty miles of the railway. On occasion, the rival forces even arrested the other's members.

In desperation, Arthur Farwell sued the Dominion government for his rights. The case dragged out until 1894, when the Supreme Court of Canada arrived at a compromise: Farwell was to surrender his provincial title and in its place receive title to all his 1,175 acres except those lands the Dominion government had granted to others.

The squabbling severely handicapped the development of Revelstoke. Miners had to register their claims with both governments. Banks and other companies refused to set up on land where title deeds were in dispute. Many businesses, along with Arthur Farwell, moved south to the rival city of Nelson which promptly became the premier centre of the Kootenays.

Farwell turned to politics in 1890, but failed in a bid to win election as the government candidate in Kootenay riding. He lost by five votes, 45 to 40. People blamed him for the confusion over land titles.

Edward Mallandaine, meanwhile, went on to become one of British Columbia's most successful pioneers. He served for many years as the magistrate and reeve (mayor) in Creston. He also had a hand in schemes to reclaim flooded land for agriculture, started up the water company serving Creston, and became a Colonel in the Canadian Reserves serving overseas in the First World War. He never repeated the mistakes of that other, earlier surveyor, Arthur Farwell.

Ray Argyle is a Toronto-based writer whose book *The Boy in the Picture* will be launched at the Railway Museum in Revelstoke, B.C. on August 15, 2010 as part of the 125th anniversary celebrations of the driving of the Last Spike. His book can be found in the Book Reviews on page 46.