

Rusty Rails

The vanishing heritage of our rural railways

As a boy, John Hardy and his brother played in empty boxcars stored on a siding at the edge of the farm, walked the tracks with their father, and loved to listen for the whistle and rumble of a big locomotive. In 1969, he was given a camera as a Grade 8 graduation present, which started him on the road to photographing his favourite subject.

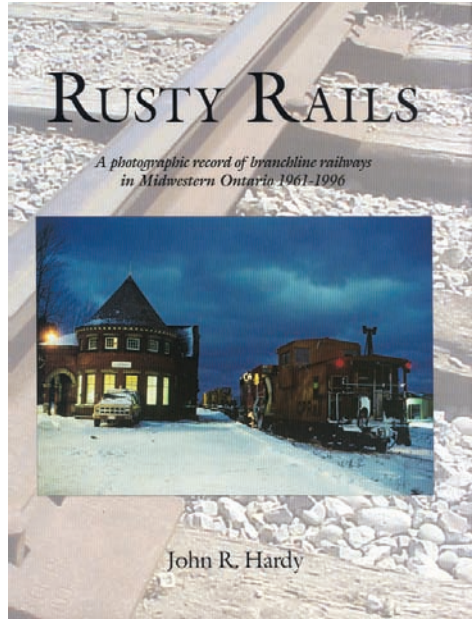
Even then, the lure of the line was only just beginning. Hardy's first experience on a Canadian National Railway line in the winter of 1962 occurred when he and his brother Gordon were allowed to ride the passenger train – alone – from Goderich to Clinton. The entire adventure took only 18 minutes through a blustery winter landscape. When they disembarked at Clinton to wait for their parents to pick them up, the adventure served to make John Hardy especially eager for more rail travel.

As Hardy relates, although the CPR removed the switch which served the railway siding of Shapit located near the back of his family's home farm in Huron County. "it was not until [it] was taken out that I realized an aspect of our local history was disappearing."

Over the next 35 years he used a variety of cameras to photograph the railway lines from Goderich to Guelph, or Owen Sound to Streetsville. Trains became less and less frequent, but he drove further afield to shoot the remaining branch line operations.

It's not difficult to tell that the writer is truly enamoured with his subject. Through his years of study while photographing and documenting them, Hardy has now provided readers with a record of branch line railways in Midwestern Ontario from 1961 to 1996.

Inside, the author includes a detailed map of the railways as they were in 1971, denoting which were CP (Canadian Pacific) and CN (Canadian National), and the tracks that were abandoned before 1971. Seven chapters are devoted to the individual lines. Throughout the book there is a wealth of detailed information regarding trains, engines, routes, rail yards, and their workers. In the accompanying Appendix is a compilation of engine data as it pertains to Hardy's photographs.



His writing style is sensitive and often softly poetic – and imminently readable. Railway fans, especially locals, will enjoy this text and Hardy's dedication to the subject.

"I spent many an afternoon waiting beside rusty rails for the local freight to pass on its way to Goderich, Kincardine, Teeswater, Southampton, or Owen Sound. Today as most of the lines lie abandoned, I feel those waits were worthwhile for I have been able to save a pictorial record of branch line railroading in Midwestern Ontario for the period of 1961 to 1996

Hardy also portrays his sense of loss for the "way of life" – the fascinating dimension that the railroad added to Canadian annals. "I hurt inside," he started, "to think that something once so important to our community and my own way of life would end..."

Classic railway stations, turntables, elevators and sidings are chronologically detailed as Hardy traverses one end of the line to the other, punctuating his stories with historical information. Thanks to his passion for trains and the fact that John Hardy recorded many magical moments on film, the unique heritage of branch line railways in Midwestern Ontario has been carefully preserved.

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