

THE ERIE AND ONTARIO RAILWAY

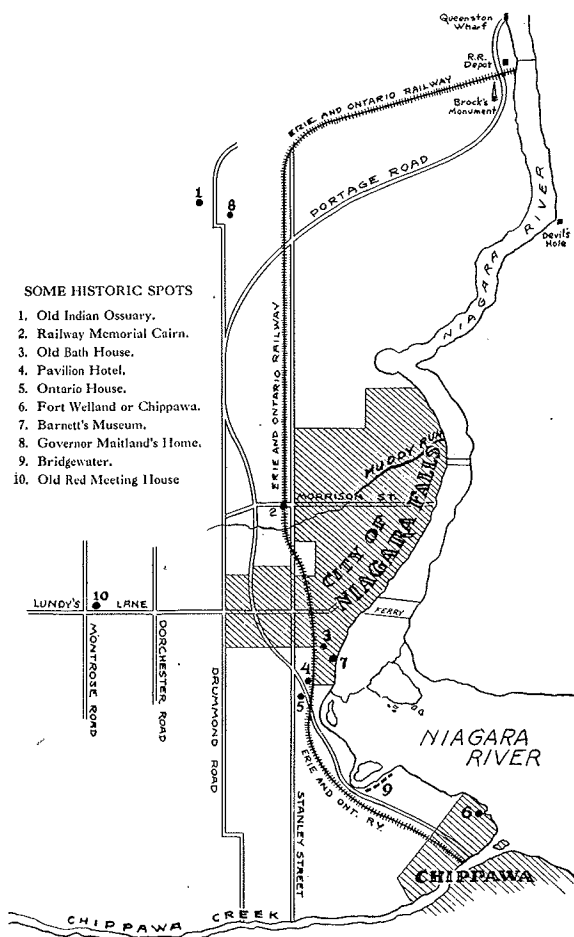
Until 1829 and the construction of the Welland Canal, all traffic heading to the Upper Lakes had to portage between Queenston and Chippawa. In 1831, to offset the loss of business caused by the Welland Canal, a group of businessmen from communities along the Niagara River applied for a charter to build a railway from Queenston to Chippawa. Although the proposal was initially rejected, primarily due to the opposition of W. H. Merritt, founder of the Welland Canal Company, the charter was issued in the early 1830s, along with options to expand the railroad to Niagara and Fort Erie.

Construction of the Erie and Ontario Railway, commonly known as the Chippawa-Queenston Railway, began in 1835. The line began operating in 1838-1839 and was fully completed in 1841. The railway cars were drawn by a team of four horses, on tracks which were made of wooden rails topped with iron strips. Each car could accommodate twenty passengers and baggage was carried on the roof. The Erie and Ontario Railway operated only in the summer season, when passenger traffic was highest, and followed a path which ran nearly parallel to present day Stanley Street in Niagara Falls.

In 1854, the railway line was taken over by Samuel Zimmerman. The horse drawn cars were replaced by steam engines and the route of the Erie and Ontario Railway was relocated closer to the Villages of Clifton and Elgin. The track was also extended to Niagara (present day Niagara-on-the-Lake), bypassing Queenston. In 1857, Zimmerman died in a railway accident, and in that same year, the Fort Erie Railway Company began construction of a railway from Chippawa to Fort Erie, which was completed in 1860. In 1863, the Fort Erie Railway Company purchased the Erie and Ontario Railway and changed its name to the Erie and Niagara Railway.

It was later purchased by Canada Southern in 1878. The Michigan Central Railroad assumed operations of the Canada Southern in 1894, and the New York Central Railroad obtained a 99-year lease of Michigan Central in 1929. With the advent of the automobile, however, the number of passengers using the trains plummeted, with the brief exception of the war years (1939-1945), and in the face of such decline, the New York Central eventually discontinued the line.

Although little remains of the original horse-drawn railway, the Erie and Ontario Railway is commemorated by a stone cairn which was erected jointly by Stamford Township and the Lundy's Lane Historical Society in 1931, on the hundredth anniversary of the organization of the railroad company. This memorial is located at the corner of Stanley and Morrison Streets, within the boundaries of Oakes Park, along the route of the original line.



Map showing the route of the Erie and Ontario Railroad and several historic sites.