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## God Bless The Bridge Builder

**April 7th, 1914**

Publish Date: Wednesday, 7th of April 2010  
 by *Ronald Wolf*

This article dates back to a time when railway or railway construction accidents were rarely investigated. Constructing the Canadian Railway system was truly a dangerous job where there were no guarantees that a worker would leave for the day with all his limbs or even his life.

Bartholomew Brosnan Kelliher (1862-1929) was born in County [Kerry](#), Ireland. At the age of 24, Kelliher left his native country and travelled to the United States to join the Union Pacific Railway (UPR), where from 1887 to 1890 he worked as a topographer and an assistant engineer.



In January, Kelliher joined the ranks of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTPR) of [Canada](#) and was quickly promoted from assistant engineer to district engineer to division engineer. In 1904 Kelliher married his first wife, Anna Souter. She died in 1908.

In 1905 Kelliher was appointed Chief Engineer of the GTPR of Canada. The GTPRL was completed under his direction.

On April 7, 1914 Kelliher, chief engineer of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, drove in the last spike of the western division of the line at Nechako River Crossing west of Prince George. The first train arrived in [Prince Rupert](#) in April. The Winnipeg to Prince Rupert line will officially open Sept. 9; later part of the CNR.

Due to ill health, Kelliher resigned as Chief Engineer from the GTP. He returned to Ireland for three years.

Kelliher went back to the United States to supervise the construction of the Spruce [Railroad](#) on the Olympic Peninsula for the United States government.

From 1921-1923 Kelliher served as assistant to the President of the Denver and Rio Grande [Western Railway](#).

In 1923 Kelliher retired from railway service and returned to live in Ireland. By this time it seemed he had married his second wife, Miss Creusie O'Connor from Wexford.

On Nov. 7, Kelliher (aged 68) died in a [London](#) nursing home. He is buried in Crosstown Cemetery, Crosstown, Wexford, Ireland. Carved on his headstone are the words: "God Bless the Bridge Builder."

It should be remembered that B.B. Kelliher was hailed as the greatest railroad engineer of his time mainly for his work on the GTPR and his greatest engineering skill in the mountains.

Through merit & ability alone he worked his way to the top of a very tough and demanding profession. He achieved worldwide recognition, yet his life and work remained for many years, somewhat a mystery.

The fact that he left no family and his work took him half way across the world is perhaps the reason why his life story has remained unfinished. Perhaps, someday we will fully know and appreciate, - "The Master of Mountains" – B.B. Kelliher.

Those who change the face of Canada may not always be born here but they will always be remembered in It's Our History, Our Country.