

# *The* LEADER *AND* RECORDER

*"Truth before favor—Principles, not men."*

Spring 1993

Toronto Junction, Ont., Canada

## West Toronto Junction Historical Society Newsletter

### CPR's Lambton Roundhouse – A West Toronto Landmark

by John D. Thompson

For 48 years, from 1912 until 1960, the Canadian Pacific Railway's Lambton Roundhouse dominated the southwest corner of Runnymede and St. Clair. At this facility, located beside the railway's Lambton freight yard and Toronto-Windsor main line, routine maintenance (called "running repairs") was performed on locomotives assigned to pulling freight trains in and out of Toronto, as well as engines that switched freight cars in the yard and at West Toronto industries.

Physically, Lambton Roundhouse was an imposing structure. As its name implies, the building was circular, with 30 tracks—called stalls—each with space for a single "iron horse". It was built of concrete, with a wooden roof, surmounted by high wooden smokestacks to better disperse smoke from engines being fired up. Each stack had a number on the top, representing the number of the stall beneath; thus, when an engine arrived after dropping off its train, an employee—called a "hostler"—would be instructed to put it into stall 10, for example, which could be readily identified by the number.

In the centre of the roundhouse, in the open air, was a circular pit containing an 80-foot long turntable. The turntable was a bridge-like structure with a single track; it could be rotated by means of an air-operated engine to line up with the tracks leading into any of the stalls, and the tracks heading westward, away from the roundhouse. When an



CPR Pacific-type locomotive 2203 is about to have its fire dumped at Lambton Roundhouse, 3 September 1959. Note spout of water column, left, conveyor belt from ash pit, right, and roundhouse with open door and smokestacks. View looks northeast.

(Photo courtesy of John D. Thompson)

engine arrived at the roundhouse, it would turn onto the turntable. An operator would then rotate the table to the appropriate stall, line up the tracks, and the engine would be run, front first, into the roundhouse. The procedure was reversed when a locomotive was being taken out of the roundhouse.

A tall brick smokestack at the west side of the roundhouse indicated the location of the steam heating building, where steam was generated for heating the roundhouse and other nearby buildings, such as the offices on the north

side of the property, beside St. Clair Avenue. A 50' x 90' addition housed a machine shop. Each roundhouse stall contained a 65'-long inspection pit for performing maintenance beneath the locomotives.

About a thousand feet west of the roundhouse stood the coaling tower. The massive structure, as its name implies, provided coal for the locomotives. The coal fed by gravity, via metal chutes, into the locomotive tenders. Originally a wooden structure, this tower

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## CPR's Lambton Roundhouse

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was replaced by a more durable concrete and brick structure. Coal, often from Pennsylvania, would be loaded into the tower from hopper cars spotted beside it; the coal would be taken up into the top of the tower by a conveyor belt bucket arrangement.

Sand for the locomotives was also provided at this location. Piped into a dome atop the boiler, the engineer would release it onto the rails when starting a train to provide better traction for the drive wheels.

A black water tower stood over near St. Clair, close to the coaling tower. The engines were watered from standpipes in the yard—unique devices that were swung over openings in the locomotive tenders, which held as much as 12,000 gallons.

After a locomotive arrived at Lambton, it would be stopped over an outside pit. The firebox was opened and the blazing coals dumped into the pit. Later, the ashes would go up a conveyor belt into a dump car, and be recycled for use as ballast beneath the tracks on branch lines and sidings.

Before being put away in the roundhouse—even without a fire, the boiler would retain enough pressure to move the engine—the locomotive would be inspected and greased. If any defects had shown up in the locomotive's operation, the engineer would advise the roundhouse staff of these so that they could be corrected before the next trip.

Lambton Roadhouse employed maintenance workers having a variety of skills, such as machinists, boiler-makers, pipefitters, electricians, steam-fitters, and mechanics—to name a few. They were capable of making repairs to boiler tubes, gauges, the running gear, fireboxes, dynamos, headlights, etc., and repairing minor collision damage, as well as washing out the boiler at prescribed intervals. For major overhauls, engines were sent to the nearby West Toronto Shops, west of Keele Street, or to the company's Angus Shops in Montréal.

When a locomotive was ordered for a train, it would take several hours to

raise steam—generally, about 200 pounds per square inch was operating pressure. A layer of coal would be spread evenly throughout the bottom of the firebox, on the grates. Kindling wood or creosote-soaked wooden blocks would be used as a base; then, kerosene-soaked cotton waste would be thrown in and lit to get the fire burning.

In a few moments the coal would catch, and the firebox interior became a raging inferno.

As the boiler pressure needle climbed, the engine would come alive, being transformed from a cold, dead piece of machinery into a panting, thumping, sighing creature—the most marvellous of man's creations. A whine atop the boiler, and the turbo generator kicked in, and the cab glowed with warm, yellow light. A cough, a wheeze, and then the locomotive's air pumps on the side of the engine started their rhythmic cycle, pumping up the air system.

Finally, the steam pressure gauge showed enough steam to move the engine out. The hostler climbed into the cab and took his place on the right-hand seatbox, at the controls. A lazy sigh of air sounded as he put the engine's valve gear in reverse. Outside, the turntable was lined up for the stall. Then, his gloved hand went for the brass engine brake handle, releasing the brakes. The melodic bell sounded a warning for any workers around to stand clear. The hostler pulled back on the throttle and live steam roared into the cylinders. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the giant of the rails began moving, easing onto the turntable with a massive thump as over 200 tons of dead weight passed over the gap between the table and solid ground. Coming off the table and heading for the departure track, the hostler opened the cylinder cocks, letting condensate spew out from the cylinders in



**CPR Mikado locomotive 5135 and Ten Wheeler 882 await departure on Lambton Roadhouse ready track, October 1959. View looks west. Note standpipe, foreground, and coaling tower, background.**

(Photo courtesy of John D. Thompson)

great white clouds. After coaling and a final inspection, the engineer and fireman would board the locomotive. It would then be coupled onto its freight train, and start earning revenue for the CPR, heading for Windsor or Sudbury or Montréal, or a multitude of other destinations.

In 1912 Lambton Roadhouse was at the edge of development, being mostly surrounded by open fields. Gradually, these were filled in with houses and stores, except for the vacant lot at the northeast corner of Runnymede and St. Clair, which remained empty until about 1960, long after the others were built on. There is an interesting story behind this odd situation. The property had been purchased by the Toronto Transportation Commission in the mid-1920s, for the erection of a carhouse to replace the antiquated Dundas Carhouse at the intersection of Dundas and Howard Park, several miles to the southeast. The TTC even laid track up Runnymede beyond the existing loop at Dundas and through the underpass that was built beneath the CPR tracks at that time. However, with the onset of the Depression, the Runnymede Carhouse project was postponed, then cancelled. The Commission retained the property for many years, though, perhaps with the intention of building a bus garage there after the streetcar system began contracting. This never happened either. And, of course, the tracks beneath the CPR overpass never felt a streetcar wheel.



**CPR Lambton Roundhouse from Runnymede Rd. looking northwest.  
Fall 1960, wrecking in progress.**

(Photo courtesy of E. Emery)

Lambton Roundhouse had been constructed to replace West Toronto Roundhouse, over on West Toronto Street, although the latter was likely still used for servicing yard engines. Ironically, part of West Toronto survives to this day (it was built in 1890), while Lambton fell to the wreckers in the fall of 1960. Expensive repairs were required, and, with diesels having taken over on the CPR, it could be dispensed with.

I became familiar with Lambton in the Indian Summer of its life—Labour Day weekend, 1959, was my first visit. As a budding railfan, age 13, I visited the office of the genial foreman, the late Don Cochrane, and signed a release of liability form. I was thus free to wander at will throughout the engine terminal and roundhouse.

For an impressionable teenager who had been fascinated by steam locomotives and railways from earliest recollections, it was like entering the inner sanctum. Many times previously, I had gone past the roundhouse in cars, looking through the windows at the fronts of locomotives, the yellowish headlight reflectors catching my eye.

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon, the brightness outside contrasting with the cool gloom of the roundhouse. I walked through the structure, gazing upon perhaps a dozen steam locomotives but, alas, none of them had steam up, nor, I was told, were any to be fired up that afternoon. I was wondering if it was a wild goose chase—by that time steam operation was a rarity—and walked over to the west end of the ter-

minal, past the coaling tower. Looking down the track, I almost jumped for joy as I saw a steam locomotive moving slowly toward the tower, a lazy wisp of smoke drifting skyward. It halted beside the coal tower, and I immediately went into action with my brand-new Kodak Pony IV camera. As luck would have it, the very first picture I ever shot with it was of an operating steam locomotive.

Then, the hostler invited me up into the cab to ride into the roundhouse—what a thrill! I didn't realize it then, of course, but that fateful lucky Saturday marked the beginning of an absorbing, lifelong hobby.

There would be more visits to Lambton, and each time Lady Luck smiled on me, providing one or more of CPR's dwindling reserve of steam locomotives for me to watch and photograph. On a rainy Remembrance Day visit that fall I encountered a fellow rail enthusiast, Ted Wickson, who became a lifelong friend and even, for several years, a co-worker at the TTC.

Then, on sunny December 31, 1959, the ground thick with recent snow, the phone rang in my house on Melrose Avenue in North Toronto. It was Don Cochrane, telling me that the last scheduled steam locomotive was about to depart on a freight for Montréal. I hustled out to Lambton, dreading that I would be too late. The Runnymede bus at the corner of Keele and St. Clair seemed to take forever to arrive. As we neared the familiar bulk of the roundhouse I saw a column of grayish smoke.

I leaped off the bus and raced up the stairs to the yard as Mikado-type

locomotive Number 5411, a sleek, massive machine just 19 years old, glided past and coupled onto its train. The roundhouse crew had done themselves proud, polishing and shining the boiler until it gleamed in the cold winter sun. Newspaper photographers and yours truly recorded the event. I climbed up into the cab, enjoying the cosy warmth. Then, shortly after three o'clock, it was time to step down, and take up position for my farewell photos. There was the familiar lazy sigh of air as the brakes were released, then I saw the engineer's gauntleted hand pulling back on the throttle. The 5411 came to life, the drivers revolving ever so slowly, then gaining momentum. Smoke shot skyward as the engine passed me, the thunder of the exhaust shattering the sky. I shot pictures feverishly, for I knew this would be one of the most exhilarating—and saddest—experiences I would ever have.

On June 5, 1960, Lambton Roundhouse echoed to the sounds of a steam locomotive for the last time. One of the magnificent Royal Hudson passenger locomotives, 2857, beautifully repainted and polished, was sent down to Union Station to pull a farewell to steam excursion to Port McNicoll. It was the end of an era.

Two months later, a diesel yard switcher removed what was likely the last steam locomotive, 1057. This veteran, ironically constructed the same year as the roundhouse, was destined, not for scrap, but display at Regal Stationery on Eglinton Avenue East, Leaside. Today, Lambton's last engine is part of the South Simcoe Railway fleet at Tottenham, Ontario and, one day soon, will again be operating.

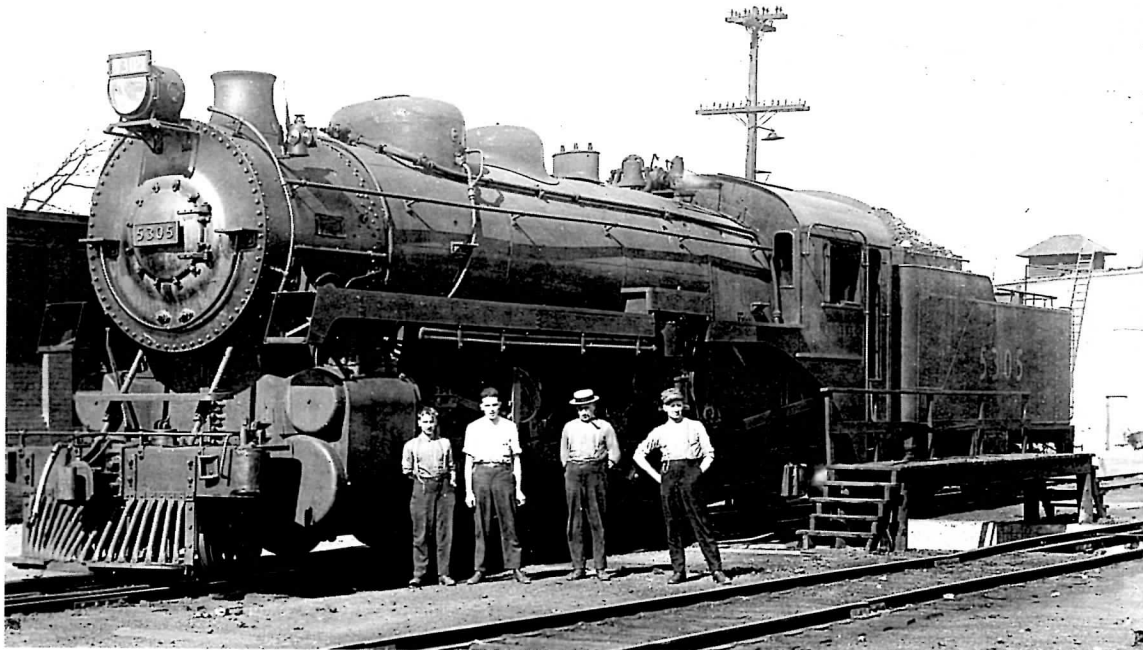
In 1993, the Lambton Roundhouse site is occupied by a trucking concern; virtually all traces of its former use have vanished. However, for myself and countless other railfans who were lucky enough to be there, the roundhouse will remain forever bright in our memories.

The writer acknowledges the assistance of Newton Rossiter, Canadian Pacific Ry. (retired) in preparing this article.

Editor's note: Would anyone with pictures of Lambton Roundhouse please contact us so we can make copies for our files.

## May — June 1993 Schedule of Events

- May 6      7:30 P.M.      WTJHS Annual meeting, Annette Library.  
              8:30 P.M.      "Old Car Memories & Memorabilia". Gordon Hazlett, writer for *Old Auto Magazine*, will bring artifacts & posters to illustrate his talk.
- May 1-July 15      "The First 100 Years: Town of York-City of Toronto 1793-1893". Exhibit at the Baldwin Room, Metro Toronto Reference Library.
- May 15      10 A.M.-2P.M. Police Week Display & Activities, Mavety Street in front of Eleven Division (between Dundas & Annette); refer to the notice on p. 5.
- May 27-30      Ontario Genealogical Society, *Seminar '93*. University of Toronto. Includes a day-long workshop on genealogy & publishing by Peter Mérey; refer to the notice on p. 3.
- May 27-October 4      "Ordering the Land: Surveying in Toronto, 1793-1855". Exhibit at Colborne Lodge, High Park.
- June 3      7:30 P.M.      WTJHS Annual meeting, Annette Library.  
              8:30 P.M.      "Fort York & the Founding of Toronto". Fort York curator, Carl Benn, will present a slide talk show in honour of the 200th Anniversary of the founding of Toronto.
- June 12      Arts & Craft Show at Colborne Lodge, with a walking tour of High Park.
- June 12-September 26      "Engineering Toronto: City Maps, 1834-1900". Exhibit at The Market Gallery, 2nd floor, St. Lawrence Market.
- June 19      Open House at the new Toronto Historical Board Headquarters, 205 Yonge Street, featuring tours, music, dance, children's activities & more.
- Preview of WTJHS Fall Speakers
- September 9      "The Burford Clan". Illustrated talk by Gwen Morgan Couture about her family, the subject of her article in the Sept/Oct 1992 issue of *The Leader and Recorder*.
- October 7      "The Way We Drove in Toronto, 1893-1953". Slide talk show by Bill Sherk taken from his new book to be published that month. Copies of the book will be available.
- November 4      Joel Rice will speak on railway development in our area; final topic TBA.  
 (This will conclude our 1993 season; meetings to resume January 6, 1994)



Postcard print from the collection of Herb Stitt; probably taken in Lambton Yard where he worked for many years. Stamp on the back: "Photo by S. F. Piggott, 68 Humberside Ave., Toronto."  
 (If you can supply information about this photo, please write to us!) [Photo courtesy of Frances Bain]



## Stray thoughts about matters of WTJHS concern

Ontario's Minister of the Environment, Ruth Grier, is looking for the location of Sir Wylie Grier's house "Beneden" which was designed by architect Eden Smith and built around 1902. Smith is on record as attending an executive committee meeting in Toronto Junction which was discussing the cost of water pipes. The six-bedroom house, complete with stables and chicken coop, was inhabited by the Grier family until 1910. Sir Wylie was a portrait painter who was knighted in the 1930s.

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The society mounted a display at Sherway Gardens February 18-20 as part of Heritage Showcase. Special thanks to Dorie Atkins, Frances Bain, Margaret Laycock, Joan Miles, Marilyn Shortt, Herb & Helen Rous who provided staffing for the three days.

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To celebrate Toronto's 200th birthday, the city is issuing a turn-of-the-century tabloid newspaper, *The Penny Express*, containing interesting articles and photos of Toronto's history. It is to be published four times during 1993 and distributed throughout the city. Look for the first issue in May, featuring a John Greaves Simcoe contest and lead article by Mike Filey. Call 928-2909 for more information.

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At the upcoming Ontario Genealogical Society's *Seminar '93*, May 27-30, University of Toronto, Peter Mérey, (who does the typesetting and layout of our newsletter) will be giving a day-long workshop on *Publishing your Family History*. Topics include "Presenting a genealogy in text and charts" and "Manuscript preparation".

If you are thinking about publishing your own research then perhaps this workshop will prove useful. Call O.G.S. at (416) 489-0734 for more information or to register; workshop is on May 27th.

## West Toronto Junction Historical Society Statement of revenue and expense, and changes in members' equity Year ended 31 December 1992

	1992	1991
<b>Revenue</b>		
Membership fees	\$871	\$852
Government grants [note 3]	1,810	496
Donations [note 4]	4,127	2,921
Book sales	1,982	—
House tour and other revenues	168	603
Interest	176	432
	<u>\$9,134</u>	<u>\$5,304</u>
<b>Expense</b>		
Archival and library additions	\$433	\$598
Archival housings, equipment and supplies	192	1,052
Fund raising	7	8
Newsletter	2,775	2,323
Postage	929	621
Book purchases	4,679	—
Insurance	265	265
Professional services	169	227
Administration	416	331
Memberships and meetings	438	385
Goods and services tax [note 2]	243	[ 142]
	<u>\$10,546</u>	<u>\$5,668</u>
Excess of revenue over expense/ [excess of expense over revenue]	[1,412]	[ 364]
Members' equity at beginning of year	9,131	9,495
Member's equity at end of year	<u>\$7,719</u>	<u>\$9,131</u>

Philip Creighton, Chartered Accountant

## Is CN Station Doomed?

by Diana Fancher

Federal MP Jesse Flis was notified in mid-March that the application by the Toronto Historical Board (THB) to have West Toronto CN Station designated as an historic station by the Canadian Sites & Monuments Board has been rejected. Neither the THB nor WTJHS have been notified of this decision, although the letter received by Flis was dated February 23.

Any official decision, of course, must wait for the signature of Environment Minister Jean Charest to whom the board reports and is undoubtedly more interested in his campaign to become prime minister at present.

However, the reasons, as best we can determine third-hand, are that the station is in bad condition and is in an out-of-the-way spot likely to be vandalized. In real terms, this means that CN will be rewarded for refusing to do any maintenance on the building and allowing the roof to cave in without any minimal protection of any sort and that the

aesthetics of location are more important to the board than any historical context.

Ironically, the station has become more prominent in recent years, since the traffic that used to cross the tracks from the Old Weston Road bridge now comes off Keele Street onto Junction Road and slowly rounds the corner onto Old Weston Road directly in front of the station.

Currently Jesse Flis (who was responsible for the federal legislation which protects historic stations), the THB and ourselves are working on an appeal to this poorly thought out decision.

A committee was formed at the Annual Meeting to work toward the preservation of the station, chaired by John Huzil of the Metro Toronto Archives. For more information or to help out, contact John at 767-0740 or 397-0738.

Editor's note: The excellent historical report to the board on this station was prepared by architectural historian Anne De Fort-Menares, a former Junction resident and WTJHS member. Excerpts will be printed in the next issue.