

WHITBY STN

newsletter

Upper Canada Railway Society

1941



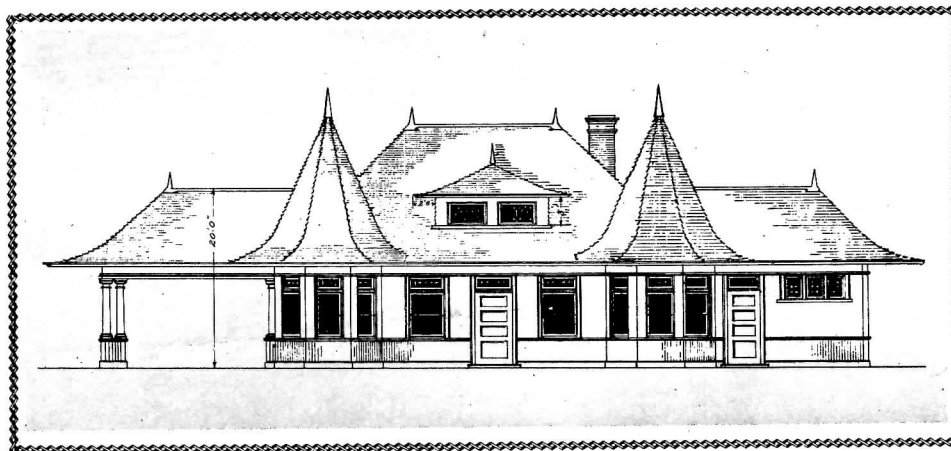
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A NEW LEASE ON LIFE...



...FOR AN OLD STATION

What happens to old railway stations once they have outlived their usefulness to the communities they have served? Where do old stations go when the passenger trains that once stopped at their platforms are discontinued? Most often, old stations just fade away into the background like old soldiers; to be sold and demolished, or converted to other purposes not intended when they were built.

However, for a few railroad stations in this country and in the United States, something better in life awaits them. A fortunate few stations are preserved and restored to their original function in the communities they have served; others are saved and become an asset to the community by serving as a home for a public-spirited organization in the community. Other stations are saved and become museums to a bygone era.

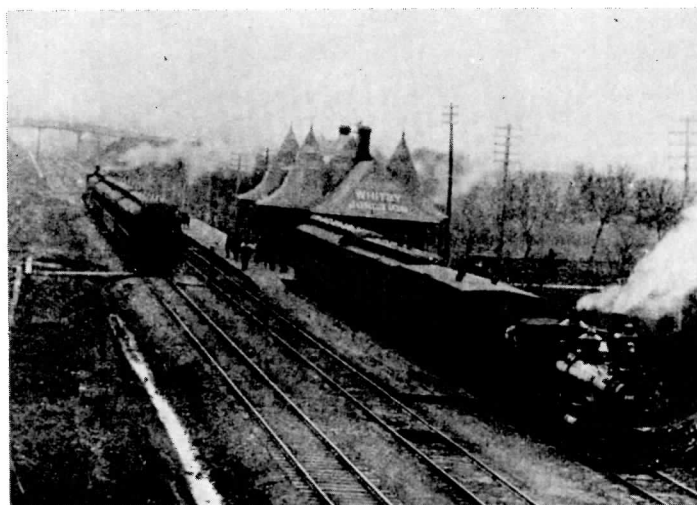
Whitby Station is one station that has been saved to become a definite asset to the town it once served in a rail capacity. The new home of Whitby Arts Incorporated, the station stands in a new location in the town of Whitby, Ontario, refurbished and restored to serve as the premises of Whitby Arts and their objectives of the promotion and encouragement of the visual and creative arts of every kind within the community. The station was acquired from Canadian National by Whitby Arts in the summer and fall of 1969, largely through the efforts of two dedicated women members of the organization and their "save the station" campaign.

The Whitby station had become redundant to CN's needs, as a new passenger station had been constructed between Whitby and Oshawa to serve both communities. Upon learning of the impending demolition of the building, the two women began their campaign to save the station as the result of conversations at a cocktail party. If the station was to be saved, it had to be moved away from its location on the CN Kingston Sub. Investigations were made as to a new location and whether the station could be moved. Whitby town council was approached on the project, and the council gave its approval to the plan. It was decided that the Town of Whitby would own the building and lease it to Whitby Arts Incorporated who would then operate and maintain it.

A location was found on land owned by the Ontario Government, and a small plot of land was purchased in one corner of the property to be the site of the new home for the station. Some delay was encountered in the moving date for the station, as permission to close the station was slow in coming from the CTC. Finally in the fall of 1969, permission was granted and the station was closed. In January, 1970, work began on digging under the station in preparation for the move. On February 16, 1970, a crowd of 300 huddled in the cold to watch the station bounce across the CN main line to Montreal, and across a field to its new site at the corner of Henry and Victoria Streets, just south and west of Highway 401.

All through the spring, summer and early fall of last year, a dedicated group of volunteers worked hard to restore, refurbish and fix up the station both inside and out, even to the extent of putting a basement under the structure. Finally, the station was opened to an admiring public on Saturday, September 26th. Response has been so good that the station has been open on Saturdays and Sundays since then.

Let us look back in time and take a look at the history of the Whitby station and its predecessor buildings.



RIGHT: Whitby Junction station as it appeared around 1903. To the left is a GTR local train for Toronto. To the right is a local train bound to Lindsay.

The story begins in 1856, when on August 25th of that year the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada opened its Toronto-Montreal main line as far as Oshawa. A station was constructed by the GTR at Whitby, on the north side of the tracks, east of the base line crossing. A complex of freight sheds and other buildings surrounded the station, including a railway hotel on the south side of the track. The station served Port Whitby, a more active community than the Four Corners during the 1850's. At this station distinguished visitors such as the Prince of Wales, Prince Arthur and Baron Lisgar, the Governor-General, were greeted when they stopped at Whitby on their way to Toronto.

In 1872, the Port Whitby and Port Perry railway was built from Port Whitby to Port Perry, forming a junction with the Grand Trunk near the station. A passenger station was built on Dundas Street east to handle traffic from the north.

By the 1890's, a legal dispute developed between the Grand Trunk and the Town of Whitby over maintenance of railway property. Many residents felt the station was too far removed from the business centre of town which had shifted from the harbour to the Four Corners in the 40 years since the first station was built.

In 1902, the town and the railway reached an agreement. GTR constructed a new double track through Whitby, closed level crossings at Byron and Centre Streets, erected new bridges at Brock and Henry Streets, and demolished the old station.

The new station at Byron Street, known as 'Whitby Junction', was built in the autumn of 1903, serving as a passenger stop and telegraph office. The name 'Whitby Junction' was spelled out in coloured shingles on the roof at each end of the building.

The first stationmaster at the new building was Fred Allin, who formerly tended the GTR Pickering station. William Vanvalkenburg was baggageman and later stationmaster.

A horse-drawn omnibus service was operated by William Newport to the junction station from the Ontario Hotel at Brock and Elm Streets. His bus met all passenger trains arriving at the station to take railway travellers up to the Four Corners. In 1910, the business was taken over by Joseph Heard.

In 1917, the Ontario Hospital for the Insane at Whitby was taken over by the Federal Government for use as a military hospital. In March, 1918, the Dominion Military Hospitals Commission built a railway line from the hospital to the Grand Trunk line at the station in Whitby. An agreement was made between the Military Hospitals Commission and the GTR, whereby the commission operated a donkey locomotive and a tramcar over 0.75 miles of track from the GTR freight siding at Whitby Jct. station into the hospital grounds. The donkey engine operated for a short while, but a Grand Trunk way freight with a coach made trips to and from the hospital as required.

Canadian National MLW C630 2022 is on the point of a westbound freight as it passes Whitby Station in the spring of 1969.
(David M. More)



Whitby Junction Station as it appeared about 1906.

The Port Whitby and Port Perry Railway was extended to Lindsay in 1877 and later taken over by the Midland and the Grand Trunk systems. Although the trackage to Lindsay was abandoned about 1941, the uptown station remained in use as a freight office until 1963. In December 1969, the building was demolished.

In 1922 the Grand Trunk system was nationalized by the Federal Government and incorporated into the Canadian National system. Canadian National operated Whitby Junction station until late 1969, when it was closed.

An art gallery now occupies the space formerly utilized by the baggage shed. A modern kitchen occupies the former dispatcher's office (the office, completely restored, sits in another part of the building). A potbellied station stove completes the restoration, serving now only as a receptacle for cash donations.

Whitby station continues to serve the town of Whitby as the home of Whitby Arts Incorporated, after many years of use as the CN passenger depot. The members of Whitby Arts are to be congratulated for their tremendous efforts in the preservation of the station, its moving, and restoration and refurbishing. It is hoped that other groups may undertake similar projects to save and preserve railroad depots in their local communities in the future.

[Material for this article kindly supplied by Mrs. W. G. Irwin of Whitby Arts Incorporated, and Mr. George Horner.]

