



Canada's train stations: destination oblivion or protection?

by Gavin Murphy

Many were built as great cathedrals to commerce at the turn of the century. Just about every community across Canada had one. They played a pivotal role in settling Canada's West. Some served as meeting halls, often rivalling the local general store. Smaller ones had the obligatory pot-bellied stove to keep visitors warm in winter. They were often the oldest building in town and were once the hub of community activity. They provided immigrants with their first view of future homes. All were the scene of great happiness and sorrow. Some were large, others were small. Some have new leases on life and continue to serve the community. Others have died a painful and humiliating death. Still others languish on death row, their fate unknown. All have plenty of friends, but no genuine protection. They are an endangered species. They are Canada's train stations.

Only Canadian Northern Railway freight men use this 1912 ornate brick and stone station located in Dauphin, Manitoba. On a working mainline, the station may be renovated to accommodate commercial offices.

designation, demolitions permits, stop work orders, and other legal weapons are therefore ineffective.

Two recent demolitions well illustrate the problem and the acrimony that surrounds it. The first took place in the Ottawa Valley town of Arnprior, some 60 kilometres north-west of Ottawa. When CP demolished the town's station on September 25, 1981, it brought to an end more than two years of battling and petitioning on the part of the local heritage group and town council who wanted to convert the unused 82-year old station into a museum.

When CP applied to the Canadian Transport Commission — the railways' regulatory body — for permission to demolish the station, the community and The Heritage Canada Foundation countered with an application to the provincial government for heritage designation. The Arnprior station, an attractive building of local limestone, had been designed by Montreal architect Edward Maxwell. Maxwell is best known for Montreal's

Windsor Station, now part of CP corporate headquarters, and the McAdam (New Brunswick) station, an 85-year-old building that has been designated a national historic site. It was determined, however, that heritage designation could not be accorded to the building because it was situated along operating rail lines and was therefore under federal jurisdiction.

The Arnprior design had also been used for stations in the other Ottawa Valley towns of Pembroke, Renfrew, Almonte and Carleton Place. Only the Carleton Place station remains today amidst ominous rumours of its impending demolition. The Pembroke station had been demolished just 10 days before Arnprior's, without even a municipal demolition permit. Said Dick Burroughs, CP's Superintendent of the Smith Falls' Division: "We don't see any heritage in it. All we see is a big bill of expense maintaining things for nothing." Countered Pembroke Mayor Angus Campbell: "We thought it was pretty highhanded of them. They should have waited for the demolition permit. It's an indication that CP doesn't have much faith in Canadian citizens and democracy."

The jurisdiction issue is complex, but a case now being prepared against CP might clarify some aspects. At issue is CP's unauthorized destruction

Since 1969, 75 of Canada's train stations have been demolished. Some were torn down despite strong objections from municipal politicians and years of lobbying by local conservation groups, and despite attempts for municipal and provincial heritage designations. Canada's railway stations appear to have fallen between the tracks of current laws. And unless the federal government enacts protective legislation, many of the more than 1200 stations that still remain across the country — two dozen of them listed as national historic sites — could also fall prey to wrecking crews.

The problem is one of overlapping jurisdictions that effectively leaves the stations outside the law, and under the sole control of their owners, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific railways which are regulated under the federal Railway Act. Regardless of their location, in town or country, stations on operating rail lines fall under federal jurisdiction. Provincial and municipal laws governing heritage



Only freight passes through this CP station in Goderich, Ontario since passenger service ended in 1974. With the tourists in mind, an attractive witch's hat design was used. Other examples of this style, can be seen in Southern Ontario and South-Western Quebec. The round section was used as a waiting room.



The battle raged on for five years to save the West Toronto Station before it was finally demolished in 1982. The station was on CP's transcontinental mainline.

of West Toronto Station on November 25, 1982. The 71-year old building was razed in the early morning hours, again without a municipal demolition permit and, more important, without CTC approval. The company also ignored a stop work order issued under the Ontario Building Code.

Local conservation groups had been working for five years to convert the redundant station into a commercial enterprise. CP had offered to sell the station for \$1, but on condition that it be removed from company property. Sufficient funds were never raised for the expensive relocation.

In a tersely worded telegram sent to the home of CP president William Stinson, Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton promised to take legal action. The City subsequently charged CP with demolishing a building without a permit and failing to obey the stop work order. The CTC ordered a public enquiry into the demolition because the federal Railway Act states that a railway cannot "remove, close or abandon any station" without CTC approval.

During the hearings the next month, CP argued that transport commission approval was not needed because the station had been closed to passengers and freight since 1979 — that it had in fact ceased to be a sta-

tion. CP lawyer Gordon Miller summed up the company's position this way: "In the event a building is considered of historical value and is not required for operating purposes, CP Rail will sell the structure to interested outside parties for a nominal sum on the condition that it be removed from railway property. CP Rail will not permit outside parties to assume ownership of redundant railway buildings considered historic which remain on railway property... In the case of West Toronto, after more than five years of attempting to have the former station removed, the only response was to leave the former station where it was. In keeping with this policy, the station was demolished by CP Rail."

On April 28, 1983, the CTC recommended that the Attorney General of Canada institute proceedings against CP under the Railway Act. In the Federal Court of Appeal, CP challenged the CTC's right to make such a recommendation. On December 18, 1984, that court upheld the CTC's right. The railway then asked for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada which, on February 25, 1985, dismissed CP's claim, adding that legal action could proceed against the railway for its unauthorized razing of the West Toronto Station. Criminal pro-

ceedings are now being prepared. CP was meanwhile found not guilty in Provincial Court of breaching Ontario Building Code regulations because the land on which the station sits is under federal jurisdiction.

These and other demolitions are all the more regrettable because Canada's redundant train stations could have a new lease on life as politicians and local groups work to find alternatives to destruction. Examples of successfully converted stations can be found across the country. The former stations of Shawville (Quebec), Owen Sound and Ridgeway (Ontario), Oxbow (Saskatchewan), Claresholm (Alberta), and Summerland and Pouce Coupé (British Columbia) are now museums. The Kingston and Milton (Ontario) stations serve as tourist bureaus. In Rothesay (New Brunswick), the station has become an apartment and photographer's studio. Ottawa's old Union Station is a conference centre, while in Winnipegosis (Manitoba), the former station is a multi-purpose community centre. The Whitby (Ontario) station became an art gallery. Restaurants now operate out of the former Wakefield (Quebec) and Kimberley (British Columbia) stations.

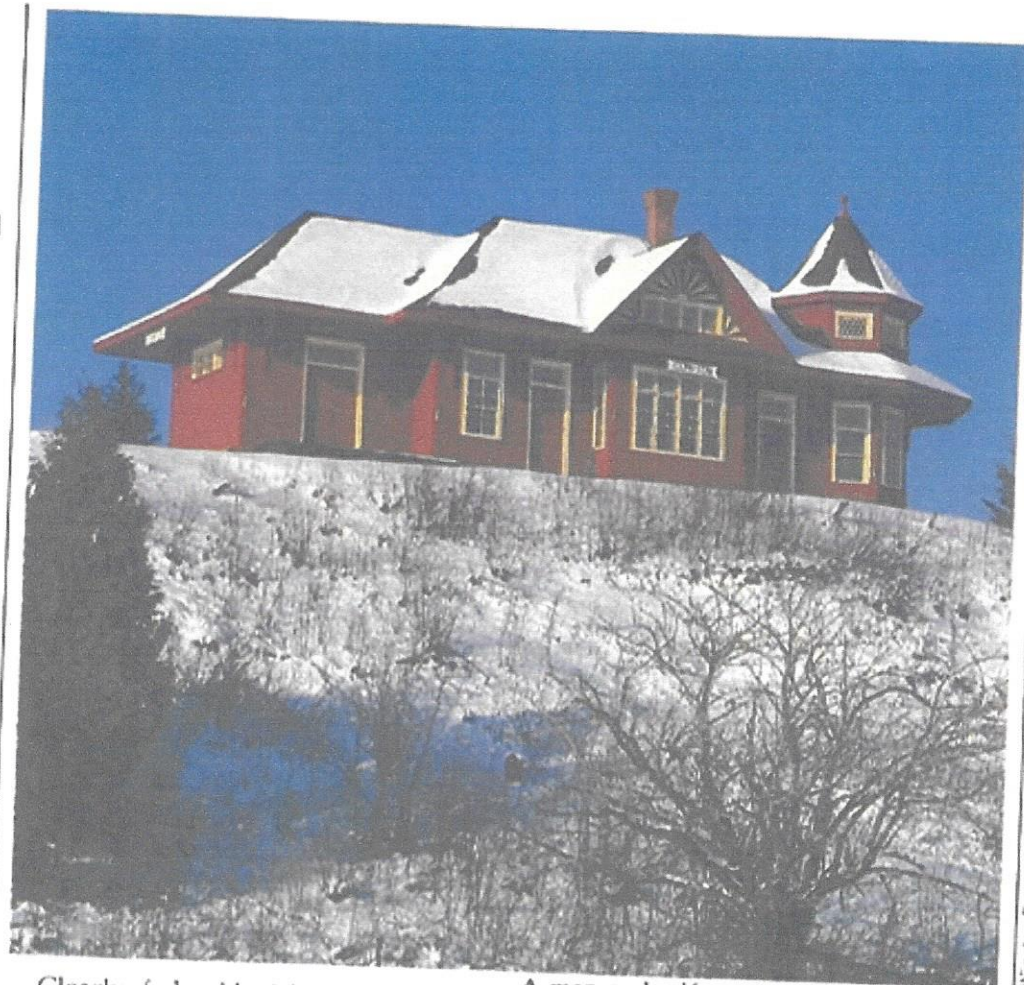
Provincial governments generally support railway heritage and Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship and Culture has provided funds to help

rehabilitate stations in the communities of Port Hope and Gravenhurst. The Canadian Railroad Historical Association (CRHA) has helped save Smith Falls' (Ontario) 81-year old CN station, now designated a national historic site. The CRHA also submitted a proposal to Toronto City Council in 1983 to establish a railway museum in CP's former John Street round-house in the heart of that city.

In 1983, Heritage Canada proposed that the Railway Act be amended to protect stations on the basis of their cultural value and to ensure enforcement of provincial and municipal heritage designations. To encourage preservation and help eliminate jurisdictional disputes, the Foundation also recommended that a holding company be created to acquire and administer stations the railways considered redundant so that the companies would not suffer financially. While VIA Rail and CN appear interested in supporting the recommendation, privately-owned CP does not. On April 2, 1984, Russ Allison, then executive vice-president of CP Rail and now its president, called the proposal unacceptable: "We also object to the concept of establishing a holding company with a mandate to acquire property belonging to Canadian Pacific for anything less than the fair market value."

Clearly, federal legislation is urgently needed to protect heritage railway structures. Advocates of preservation urge that tax incentives be

A man and wife team purchased the Old Compton station in Quebec as a summer home and had it moved by truck to its present location high on a hill near Stanstead, some 50 kilometres away.



Winston Fraser



The Rothesay, New Brunswick station, once run by Canadian National, is now a photographer's studio. This waiting room was once the ticket office. Photographer Bill Hart and his wife reside in the apartment formerly used by the station master.

offered to assist in the rehabilitation of heritage stations. Such incentives available to investors and developers in the United States have helped save stations and provided viable commercial alternatives to demolition. In Canada, discussions on tax law amendments have been held between interested parties and the government for many years.

CP's response to preservationists has been to point to its policy of offering redundant stations to interested parties for a nominal sum provided they are removed from railway lands, a requirement that is too expensive and time consuming for most local heritage groups. Moving and rebuilding the Pembroke station, for example, was estimated at \$250,000. While this condition is not enforced when the lines are no longer used, both CN and CP are concerned about their liability should an accident occur on operating lines.

Sceptical-preservationists consider the right-of-way controversy to be a



The Kingston K and P Station was designed by architect William Newlands and is constructed of local limestone. Construction began on the building in the early 1870s and the first passenger train rolled out of the station in 1875. Today it houses the Kingston area Visitor and Convention Bureau.

smokescreen created by the railways to confuse the issue. They point to the exceptions to the rule: the St Stephen (New Brunswick) station built by CN in 1929 is now the St Croix Public Library, just four metres from an operating line. The Eganville (Ontario) CN station has housed a craft shop since 1981 although the line was operational until 1984. No accidents involving members of the public and rolling stock have been reported at abandoned stations and insurance policies could cover liability if arrangements were not made to transfer responsibility. Fencing between the building and tracks would also reduce the possibility of injury.

A new breath of life for some stations may also come as VIA Rail Canada Inc. expands its passenger services. The Crown corporation is currently negotiating with CN and CP to buy or lease operating stations. When VIA was created in 1977 it acquired rolling stock from the railways, but not the stations that it must now pay to use. In order to fully imple-

ment its ambitious program to upgrade baggage, handling and ticket services and enhance passenger rail travel, VIA stresses that it must have full control of stations. It eventually hopes to purchase or manage under lease all train stations in Canada's major cities.

A start has been made on the program. A year-long \$3.5 million renovation of Toronto's Union Station is due to be completed this summer (see p.36.). VIA has acquired the magnificent Gare du Palais in Quebec City and will spend some \$28 million to restore the 70-year old station to its former splendour. Gare du Palais is expected to serve as an "intermodal" passenger transportation centre integrating train, bus, taxi and private car service. Similar centres now exist in Yarmouth (Nova Scotia), Levis (Quebec) and Gravenhurst (Ontario). Passenger train service will return to downtown Quebec after close to 14 km of track are relaid into the city's Lower Town. VIA trains now use the suburban Ste Foy station.

The federal government is also boosting passenger rail services and, therefore, the role of train stations. In January 1985, it decided to revive six VIA Rail lines cut in 1981 by the previous government, including the Super Continental route through Edmonton and Jasper (Alberta) and the Montreal to Saint John (New Brunswick) overnight train. Boarded-up stations along these lines will return to active service. Already on the Halifax to Yarmouth line, increased passenger traffic and improved station facilities in communities like Digby have made it one of VIA's most financially successful.

The best protection for Canada's threatened stations could have come with the proclamation of a bill by Parliament. On November 26, 1984, the Honourable Gordon Taylor (P.C./ Bow River, Alberta) introduced Bill C-211 in the House of Commons. The bill was the same as that introduced on June 21, 1984, by the Honourable Jesse Flis (Lib./ Parkdale-High Park), one-time parliamentary secretary to former Transport Minister

Lloyd Axworthy. Mr Flis was defeated in the September 1984 federal elections. Originally called Bill C-253 and officially known as the Heritage Railway Station Protection Act, this private member's bill would have required Cabinet approval for the sale or demolition of any heritage railway station. Failure to comply with this law could have resulted in a fine of up to \$1 million. The bill would also have given interested parties the opportunity to present viable alternatives to demolition.

According to Mr Taylor, the bill was "intended to save stations across the country that have historic value. Many of these stations are well built and are relics of another era." He speaks from personal knowledge: the station in his home town of Drumheller (Alberta) was torn down with little, if any, community consultation. And yet, he says, other stations in his riding have been successfully adapted to other uses. The former Beiseker CN station was turned around 180 degrees to face the town's main street

and now houses a library, craft shop and town council chambers. The High River station is a museum and the Okotoks station is an arts centre and public meeting hall. Taylor notes that neither of these stations had to be moved because they are located on abandoned branch lines.

The strong optimism that the bill would pass the House was fuelled on April 29, 1985, when it came before Parliament. On that afternoon Mr Taylor moved that Bill C-211 be given second reading. According to legislative aide Joe Williams, Mr Taylor had the support of the majority of provincial governments and both federal Opposition parties. Unfortunately, the bill did not get the support of Parks Canada, the federal agency responsible for heritage preservation. In a prepared speech Dr G. M. Gurbin,

The Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan station, originally owned by CN and later taken over by CP, lies abandoned. The station, located on a working line, was declared a heritage site by the provincial government. Its future has yet to be decided.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, threw cold water on the bill. Referring to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board within Parks Canada, Gurbin stated that its "very limited resources would be quite incapable of responding to this very important work and this great need," in protecting heritage railway stations.

Gurbin amended Taylor's motion that the bill be withdrawn, "and the subject matter thereof referred to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry". With that, the Members chose to postpone immediate action on the urgent need for legislation.

For the Federal government the protection of heritage railway structures is still unfortunately a low priority. At this point, Canada's train stations are closer to oblivion than protection. *

Carin Murphy is an Ottawa freelance writer and photographer. This is his third article for Canadian Heritage magazine and his second on train stations for this publication.

