

Petition from townspeople brought station in 1905

A hub of town activities, a gathering place, a locale of farewells and reunions, a bustling business and a repository of memories—Acton station is no longer shuttered and silent for months now it is being taken down—for scrap.

Nothing will remain related to Acton's past dependence on the rails except the bleak little oblong of a building newly erected by the C.N.R. to shelter the few commuters left.

The C.N.R. had sold the station to the Lions club whose ambitious plans to move it as a centennial project foundered. They sold it instead.

Well built
Henry McCarthy, who bought the building, has commented on the fine quality of the workmanship. "They built this to last a thousand years!" he commented. Instead, it lasted just 68 years as changing ways overtook it.

Appeals from Acton to have the station remain open and service improved have been unheeded. Freight has shifted to Guelph and mail now arrives by truck. Passengers, discouraged, have shifted to bus and car.

First whistle
It was in 1856 that the first train whistled through Acton—then just a hamlet and part of Esquimes township. Acton was on the Grand Trunk line then being constructed between Toronto and Sarnia and no doubt the location on a main line helped Acton prosper and grow.

The only history of Acton ever written, Acton's Early Days, has unkind words for the first tiny station, now long gone. "In those early days," the book recorded in 1888, "the convenience of the railway, its sidings and switches were evidently carefully considered, but any consideration of the comfort or convenience of the public was manifestly never in the noddies of the projectors of the road."

Bad location
"The station was planted about midway between Mill and Queen Streets. At the east end were cattle yards and oil sheds and tool house and freight shed, with no passageway to the station except on the railway track itself. At the west end there was a big woodshed with a capacity for three or four thousand cord of wood, with woodracks beside the track and between them and the track lines the semaphore lines were stretched."

Many falls
"In winter time there was a glare of ice for ten feet around it, and in summer it meant constant drop of water to spoil the spring millinery and delicate costumes of passengers who inadvertently passed in or out to the station by that route. Later the tank was moved in to the end of the station platform. Many a tumble took place there, by unwary passengers who were unfamiliar with the slippery places, where poor sinners were supposed to stand."

Finally, when the present station supplanted the old shack which had done duty for half a century a fine new tank was constructed on a metal frame on property outside the railway limits and hydrants adopted for supplying the engines.

Dirty drab
"And that old station. What a place it was and what memories cluster about it! A little low frame building severely rectangular in its outlines, painted a dirty drab, but once in every score of years and smoke-colored and dirty inside and out between times. What a place it was!"

There were living quarters at the west end of the very limited quarters, for the agent and his family; a seven-by-nine waiting room for passengers, a baggage room about big enough for a couple of good sized Saratoga trunks and a pair of old-fashioned carpet bags, and access to it only through the passenger waiting room. The agent's office, ticket room and operators' quarters had a room about 10 by 12 and behind this was the lamp and oil room."

More history
In July 1903, ex-councillor W. H. Denny and H. P. Moore (Free Press publisher) waited on council and presented the petition of 117 business men and citizens praying the Grand Trunk Railway authorities to build a new station at Acton.

Council endorsed the petition speedily—H. Swackhamer, G.

Cooler weather

Cool temperatures and sprinkling rain this week have made a change from the heat of most of the summer.

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"ACTON WEST" proclaimed the sign on the trim station years ago; it was the official name of the post office as well. Many memories had their locale at the old station. Here soldiers left for war, harvesters and homesteaders for the west, teams for out-of-town games and gala daytrippers on low excursion rates. Doctors even made house calls via train. Passengers, mail and freight were carried into the centre of town by horse-drawn bus.

Hinds, R. Holmes and James Brown all agreeing to the inadequacies of the existing station "which has done duty for half a century."

The petition was forwarded to the G.T.R. authorities and complaints about conditions continued to appear. The new Board of Trade added their voice of appeal. Finally work began in May of 1905.

Start at last
The Free Press excitedly records the dimensions and details of the new structure—"to face Church St. from which street there is to be free access. It is to be located where the present tank stands and the entire yards will be transformed."

On July 27, 1905 the editor's eloquence records: "On Monday morning last without a hint of trumpets nor even a piper in attendance, agent Holmes and his



GRAND TRUNK RAILROAD lines were constructed through the hamlet of Acton in 1856. The first station was a dingy little building much complained about by travellers of the times. This station (above) was built in 1905 and wrecked in 1973—replaced by a commuters' kiosk even smaller than that first despised station of a century ago. Towering water tank on the right was a necessity for steam engines.

TOWN OF NORTH HALTON 1973 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

NOTICE TO ELECTORS CORRECTIONS TO THE PRELIMINARY LIST OF ELECTORS

The Preliminary List of Electors will be posted in the Municipal Offices for the Town of Acton, The Town of Georgetown, and the Township of Esquimes, on August 20th, 1973.

Copies of the List will be posted within each Polling Subdivision for which it is prepared.

Electors are requested to examine the List to ensure that their names and relevant information are correctly shown therein.

Complaints in the nature of requests for additions or corrections to or deletions from the List may be made by an elector completing and filing a form obtainable at the Municipal Offices noted above.

All such requests will be received by the Town Clerk at the Municipal Offices for The Town of Georgetown, 36 Main St. N. commencing on Tuesday, August 21st, through to Tuesday, August 28th, 1973, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., excluding Saturdays and Sundays.

All requests for revisions will be dealt with on August 29th, 1973, at the Municipal Offices for the Town of Georgetown between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. by the undersigned.

Dated August 13th, 1973

G. D. Pritchard,
Clerk and Revising Officer.

agent the longest over 60 years and it was during his tenure that the "new" station was built. Its well lighted office and buy window provided unimpeded view of the tracks for the staff, and he saw the adoption of the telephone system for reporting the movement of trains.

It was the Adams family that settled Acton originally, and they sold wood to the Grand Trunk Railway for fueling the locomotives. For the first 30 years the trains were hauled by wood burning engines and Acton provided the largest supply of beech and maple wood between Toronto and Bradford.

Paper work
At first mail was carried simply from the station to the post office on someone's back. A change became necessary when the Free Press was established in 1874 and the load suddenly became too heavy. Then a horse and wagon became a familiar sight. A horse-drawn bus also carried passengers.

Early in this century Acton was well served with passenger and freight trains. Accidents—near misses and tragedies—are also associated with the railroad through its years.

Derailments—fairly common—were really felt then. Students couldn't get to school, mail didn't arrive, travellers and freight had to wait. In one snowstorm, several hundred people were stranded here.

Injured persons used to be taken by train to Guelph and doctors made house calls via rail.

Sixty-eight years ago Free Press editor H. P. Moore sat



BUILT TO LAST A THOUSAND years, according to workmen this week, Acton's Canadian National Railways station lasted exactly 68 years. Townspeople petitioned the Grand Trunk Railway for better facilities and Actonians were delighted when this building was opened in August 1905.

enunciated in his brand new, tin-fronted, elaborately decorated new building on Mill St. (now Simpson Street). Here he wrote with satisfaction of the final erection of the much needed new station and turned his perceptive editorial attentions to the town's next need—a new post office.

And so today's citizens will change direction; give up the station we must, but we'll likely continue to press for GO train service extended from Georgetown up to Guelph to include this still-prospering community.

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Memories of 1905

None of the previous articles on Acton's C.N.R. station had stated what year it was built. Acton's Early Days, the only history of the town ever written, didn't give the year. None of the old pictures published gave us a clue. Searching aimlessly through all the files seemed too lengthy a task.

Finally the problem was solved, with the help of Cam Leishman. He has an excellent memory, and knew the station was built when he was a boy. He moved with his family to Acton from Crewsons Corners when he was two years old, and he went to work in the freight yards at the station when he was 16. Harry Holmes was agent then, Cam recalled.

It was his memories that produced the clue that resulted in the finding of the date in our files.

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