

# THE STATION GALLERY

*A transportation centre for*

*body and spirit*



By Steven Duff • Photography by Cody Storm Cooper

As the calendar flips over to 2008, the train station, now known as the Station Gallery, will be celebrating its centenary as a link connecting family and friends with their loved ones and travelers with their destinations.

The Canadian Pacific rail line on which it stands was completed in 1908 and filled a missing link between Toronto and Sudbury on the main trans-continental line. Prior to 1908, to travel west, one needed to go by train to Owen Sound and then by steamship to Port Arthur to connect with the Montreal-Vancouver train. And to take a train anywhere else from Parry Sound, the only way out was by the Ottawa, Arnprior, and Parry Sound Railway, which went nowhere near Toronto.

To have the new railway line up and running as quickly as possible, construction went ahead simultaneously on the line itself, bridges, and stations, and, as in past practice, a selection of utilitarian station designs, designated A, B, C, and D were used. A few variations existed, however, and the Parry Sound station was one of them. Some communities were thought to deserve something a bit more elegant, and their stations were treated to a circular waiting room.

Ultimately, probably owing to economic or time pressure, only four of this type of station building were ever constructed by the CPR in its entire system. In addition to Parry Sound, the stations at Orangeville, Lindsay, and Ste. Agathe, Quebec, were so treated. The Ste. Agathe and Lindsay stations no longer exist; the Orangeville station is now a restaurant whose interior bears little resemblance to a station, and so Parry Sound's own building is a real collector's item.

Service opened on the new line in 1908 and, almost overnight, Parry Sound had direct access to markets in southern Ontario. As far as passenger service was concerned, there were day and night trains between Toronto and Sudbury, as well as the Imperial Limited, a fore-runner of today's Canadian. It is worth mentioning that even the lordliest Canadian Pacific (and later VIA Rail) passenger trains have always had a station stop at Parry Sound.

Fifty years ago, the Parry Sound station was host to four daily trains: a Toronto-Sudbury local, the Dominion, the Canadian, and a night mail train with rudimentary accommodation. But air and road transportation took their toll on rail traffic and by 1986, only the Canadian, now under the management of VIA Rail, made the Parry Sound stop. Even the Canadian vanished in 1990 as it became re-routed over Canadian National trackage. Thereafter the station was largely boarded up and a limited amount of space used for offices and storage. The once-proud station soon became shabby and forlorn.

However, things were already happening. In 1981, Mayor Bill Hall and the Parry Sound council had created a LACAC, otherwise a Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee, to evaluate the possible preservation of the station building. In the same year, the station was listed by the Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings, an agency of the federal government. Matters moved forward the following year with correspondence between the LACAC and Canadian Pacific to determine what CP had in mind for the station's future, to state the town's interest in its preservation, and to point out the long and intimate relationship between the railway and the town.

The new mayor, Roy O'Halloran, and his council authorized the LACAC to represent the town's interests in negotiations with Canadian Pacific and invited quotes from architectural consultants regarding the re-use and restoration of the station, which was now suffering visibly from poor maintenance.

Quite a brew of agencies and ministries had become involved by this point, covering transportation, tourism, culture, communications, mines, and northern development. At the time, there loomed a major obstacle in that station buildings acquired for other uses had to be moved off railway property in the interest of safety. In our general region, this had either happened or would happen to the stations at French River, Britt, Alliston, Coldwater, and Brechin. Moving the Parry Sound station would have been appallingly difficult and the LACAC lobbied to keep it where it was.

In 1987, a formal study was undertaken by the firm of Allen and Ensslen, headed up by Bob Mitchell, whose survey found the station to be sound despite its ratty appearance. Council accepted the findings, but the project then went into limbo, to be revived by Mayor Nancy Cunningham and Council in 1992. Proceedings were set in motion to have the station declared historic and by 1995, the building was designated by both the Ontario Heritage Act and the federal Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act.

In the meantime, there was a major problem when Avenue Road, whose south end was the property of the railway, began to collapse into the properties just down the slope and the company closed its portion of the road. Avenue Road, of course, is a critical thoroughfare, and so the town took steps to acquire it, repair, and reopen it. In the process, the town once again proposed acquisition of the station without the condition that it must be moved. The station was, by this time, protected from demolition by federal law and Canadian Pacific, by now convinced that secure