

fencing would suffice, consented to selling it. In 1996, the station was purchased by the town for \$2,000.

Now the fun began! The station was leased to a group of artists and craftpersons, who oversaw the formation of a non-profit community corporation to do the restoration. Ralph Smith, a retired teacher, amateur builder, and railway enthusiast, took the helm as project manager, and with a grant of \$150,000 from the town, work went ahead.

The poor old station started to bloom. The interior layout was preserved, with the baggage room as the main gallery, the ticket office as a small gallery for special displays or functions, the now-famous round waiting room as a railway heritage display area that could also be used for meetings, art classes, or intimate concerts, and an ante-room in the middle of the building to serve as the gallery office.

Nearly all of us had known the station in its CPR paint scheme of brick-red with black trim and ivory window sashes. Now it emerged in its original livery of cream with green trim and proudly came back to life in 2001, making its debut as a gallery in May of that year.

The old station has seen much coming and going in its 99-year lifespan. There have been vacationers and cottagers arriving in the summer and departing at that time of year when portable billboards appeared at all the railway stations within a 100-mile radius of Toronto to advertise the Canadian National Exhibition. There have been youngsters heading off for service in two world wars and Korea, some to return on foot, a few in pine boxes, and some not at all. There have been ecstatic greetings and tearful farewells, grandparents arriving for a visit, guests for weddings and funerals.

And, as testament to the importance of the railway as a community lifeline, grimy sacks of Royal Mail, express packages, and canoes packed in straw and burlap made their way across the platform. And who could forget the crates of dairy products from the Georgian Bay Creamery going aboard the baggage car for transit to Pointe au Baril, Britt, and French River? On a hot day, half the milk would be cottage cheese by the time it reached its destination.

The waiting room was a virtual palace of enticement; posters of great steam locomotives assaulting the Rockies, a beautiful White Empress ocean liner sailing in



silent majesty to Great Britain, the Banff Springs Hotel, a Canadian Pacific Airliner winging its way across the Pacific. You could send a telegram or a money order from that station, book passage to Liverpool, get an air ticket to Hong Kong.

Parry Sound station was then, what would be called a one-stop travel centre today.

For the community, station activities are very much a part of our history. And thanks to some wheeling and dealing between Canadian Pacific and Canadian National, VIA Rail's flagship train The Canadian resumed calling in January, 2006, at what we now know as the Station Gallery on its northbound run. The wheel at last – and literally – has come full circle.

The building itself will cease to be a gallery, closing on December 31, 2007. At the time of writing, it is unclear what the building's future function is to be, but, whatever the situation, we are assured of its place in Parry Sound history.

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