# RAILWAY STATIONS OF THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

Texts and Photography (except where noted) by Matthew Farfan
(With special thanks to J. Derek Booth)

The 19th century saw a massive railway boom all across the Eastern Townships. Driven by the need to access raw materials, the desire for rapid transit, the growth of industry, and a mania to build more and more branch lines, literally dozens of companies vied for territory and markets. By 1900, a network of local and regional railway lines crisscrossed virtually every corner of the region. The Grand Trunk (later Canadian National), Quebec Central, and Canadian Pacific railways emerged as the dominant players.

The presence of a railway line was a major advantage to a small town. The stakes were high, and the good fortune of one town could mean the decline of another. Not surprisingly, local business leaders and politicians were enthusiastic railway boosters. Towns with an early advantage were those situated along the route of the Grand Trunk Railway. This line, completed in 1853, linked Montreal with the ice-free shipping facilities of Portland, Maine. Sherbrooke, Richmond, Acton Vale, and Coaticook were all situated along this route and enjoyed rapid growth as a result.

Yet, the heyday of the train was relatively short-lived. With the development of the road network, the mass production of the automobile, and the growth of the trucking industry, railways declined throughout the 20th century, and many branch lines and stations were closed. Passenger service to some towns began to be scaled back or eliminated altogether in the 1950s, with station closures continuing along various lines throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Via Rail service to Richmond and Sherbrooke finally ceased in 1994.

At the height of the railway network in the 1920s, there were over 250 stations in the Eastern Townships. That number plummeted to 45 by the 1970s and has declined even further since then. Recent years have seen the demolition of several former stations, the Magog and Beebe Junction ones being only two examples.

Aside from a handful of stations (such as Saint-Armand, Warwick, and Drummondville), which have been excluded from this tour only due to distance constraints, most of the better preserved stations in the Townships have been included. A few (Mansonville, for example) have been left out because they have been altered beyond recognition.

Kingsey Station, 1908. (Photo: Farfan Collection)
Near Magog, 1913. (Photo: Farfan Collection)
The former Mansonville Station of the Orford Mountain Railway, hardly recognizable, is now a private home.
Map, the Railway Network, 1916. (Source: J. Derek Booth, *Railways of Southern Quebec*)

1)
NAME: Highwater (formerly Mansonville Station)
LOCATION: 1 km N. of the Canada-U.S. border (North Troy, Vt.) on E. side of Rte. 243.
HISTORY:  The South Eastern Railway ran this line from 1873 to 1883, when it was acquired by Canadian Pacific. The current station replaced an earlier one and dates to the CP era. Passenger service to Highwater ceased in the mid-1960s. The name "Highwater," which replaced the original "Mansonville Station," was adopted in 1909 in honour of the annual springtime flooding that occurs here on the Missisquoi River.
DATE: c.1910
DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Shingle and clapboard. Painted in typical CP maroon.

ACCESS: Private.

1) From the road.
2) The first station, c.1900. (Photo: Farfan Collection)
3) A new trestle on the South Eastern Railway, near North Troy, Vermont. (Photo: Private Collection)
4) A railway accident on the line of the South Eastern at Sutton, 1874. The smoking car has been "telescoped" by the passenger car. (Photo: Farfan Collection)


2)
NAME: Foster Station
LOCATION: In Lac-Brome, at the corner of Bondville and Lakeside roads, near the golf course.
HISTORY: Originally part of the South Eastern Railway, the line through Foster was acquired by Canadian Pacific, which built the current station. This station was once part of CP's extensive Foster Yards, at the junction of the east-west Montreal main line and the north-south Drummondville Subdivision. Closed in the late 1970s, it is now the Lac-Brome Tourist Bureau.
DATE: 1887
DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Shingle and clapboard.
ACCESS: Public. Seasonal.

1) Foster station.
2) Now a tourist bureau.
3) Station, detail.
4) Foster, c.1910. (Photo: Farfan Collection)
5) Knowlton station, near Foster, c.1900. (Photo: Farfan Collection)


3)
NAME: Acton Vale Station
LOCATION: Downtown Acton Vale.
HISTORY: Built by the Grand Trunk Railway, the superb Acton Vale station is based on a standard plan for all stations built by the GTR along its Montreal-Portland route between 1895 and 1905. The Grand Trunk, which acquired this line from the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railway in 1853, was Quebec's first international railway and the first to cross the Eastern Townships. By 1919, the GTR was overextended and bankrupt, and four years later, it was absorbed by Canadian National Railway. When passenger traffic on the line declined in the second half of the 20th century, Acton Vale's station, like many stations in the Townships, was closed. Abandoned for years, new life was finally breathed into the old landmark in 1979 when the *Société de la gare* was formed. A federally and provincially designated historic site (1976 and 1980 respectively), the station was purchased by the town in 1983 and has since been restored to its former grandeur and converted to a tourist bureau and exhibition centre.
DATE: c.1903-1904
DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Clapboard. Built in the neo-Queen Anne style, according to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, the station includes a "high-pitched dormer window, a turret with multi-paned windows, and a bellcast roof, which together produce a striking picturesque effect."
ACCESS: Public. Info: (450) 546-7642.

1) Tower.
2) Plaque erected by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1986.
3) The view from the tracks.
4) Scale model.
5) Inside the tourist bureau.
6) Exhibition room.
7) "I visited Acton Vale station."
8) Downtown Acton Vale, c.1900. (Photo: Farfan Collection)

4)
NAME: South Durham Station (*moved to its present location)
LOCATION: 8 chemin Melbourne Vallée. Towards Acton Vale, 6.2 km along Rte. 116 from the Jct. of Rtes. 143 and 243 in Richmond.
HISTORY: Built in 1902, this station was originally located in South Durham, on the line of the Grand Trunk. When passenger service ceased, it was closed and fell into disrepair. Some years ago, it was purchased and moved to its present location by the current owners, who have restored it and converted it to an art gallery and showcase for their collection of railroad memorabilia. The "Melbourne Valley Railway Museum," as they call it, serves as an added attraction to the restaurant located next door in an 1862 farmhouse. Both the restaurant and the station are open year-round, but strictly to groups and by reservation only.
DATE: 1902
DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Clapboard. Projecting dormer.
ACCESS: Private. Groups by reservation only. Admission charge. Info: (819) 826-3822.

1) Restored interior. (Photo: Melbourne Valley Restaurant).
2) "Tickets." (Photo: Melbourne Valley Restaurant).
3) The station in its new location. (Photo: Melbourne Valley Restaurant).
4) Promotional item. (Photo: Melbourne Valley Restaurant).


5)
NAME: Richmond Station
LOCATION: 779 Main Street, Richmond.
HISTORY: Richmond has been a major railway hub since the completion of the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railway in 1853. That line, acquired upon completion by the Grand Trunk, and the Quebec and Richmond Railroad Company (also bought by the GTR), linked Richmond with Quebec City and Montreal. Canadian National acquired the GTR in 1923. The current station, the third at this location, dates to the Grand Trunk era. A station until 1994, it is now a hotel and restaurant.
DATE: 1912
DESCRIPTION: Two storeys. Brick. Large central bay.
ACCESS: Public.

1) From the street.
2) Motel de la gare.
3) Sign for the "Chemin de fer St-Laurent & Atlantique."
4) GTR Station, Richmond, c.1920. (Photo: Farfan Collection)
5) A railway accident at Richmond, 1915.  (Photo: Farfan Collection)
6) An accident on the Canadian National line at nearby Kingsey, 1927. (Photo: Farfan Collection)


6)
NAME: East Angus Station
LOCATION: 221 Saint-Jean Ouest, East Angus.
HISTORY: In 1875, the Sherbrooke, Eastern Townships, and Kennebec Railway became the Quebec Central. The QC, which was leased in perpetuity by the CP in 1912, and which was largely though not entirely a resource railway, served the southern Townships as well as the Lake Megantic and Beauce regions. The first Quebec Central station in East Angus was built in 1882 and is now a private home. The current station was built in 1914 and served CP passengers until 1965. Recently restored, it has been declared a historic site and is now an interpretation centre on the local paper industry and the history of the railroad. It is also the headquarters of the *Train du Haut-St-François*, a tourist train operating excursions along the rails of the Quebec Central. As such, it is the only functional train station on this tour. For information, call: (819) 832-2221.

DATE: 1914
DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Built entirely of blocks composed of cement and asbestos, an innovative technique at the time.
ACCESS: Public.

1) Restored East Angus Station
2) "*La Vieille Gare du Papier*."
3) The *Train du Haut-St-François.*
4) Schedule for the *Train du Haut-St-François,* featuring engineer and founder, Father Donald Thompson. (Photo: *Train du Haut-St-François).*
5) A stop in Bishopton, on the line of the *Train du Haut-St-François.*

7)
NAME: Union Station (Sherbrooke)
LOCATION: Dépôt Street, downtown Sherbrooke.
HISTORY: Beginning in the early 1850s, Sherbrooke became the main railroad hub in the Townships, with several major railways either passing through, or having terminals in, one of the city's two stations. The first station in Sherbrooke was built by the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railway (later Grand Trunk) in 1852 along the Montreal-Portland line. In 1870, the new Massawippi Valley Railway opened its Sherbrooke terminus at this same station. Four years later, the Quebec Central began service between Sherbrooke and Weedon, and by 1880, the line extended as far as Quebec City. In 1875, the International Railway commenced operations between Sherbrooke and Lake Megantic. The present station, the second at this location, was named Union Station because it served four different railways. The Grand Trunk became CN in 1923, and from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, passenger service to Sherbrooke was operated by Via Rail. Since then, the building has suffered at the hands of vandals, who have covered it with graffiti. As part of the city's redevelopment plans for downtown, the station will soon be completely restored and converted to the new Sherbrooke bus station.
DATE: 1890
DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Brick. Distinctive neo-Romanesque windows and large central gable with date and decorative brickwork.
ACCESS: Public

1) The target of vandals since its closure, the station is slated for restoration.
2) "1890."
3) Distinctive gable.
4) A St. Lawrence and Atlantic diesel freight train.
5) Grand Trunk Station, c.1910. (Photo: Farfan Collection)

8)
NAME: Canadian Pacific Station (Sherbrooke)
LOCATION: Near the Jct. of Belvédère Sud and Rand streets, Sherbrooke.
HISTORY: In 1885, a second train station was built in Sherbrooke, with the completion of a line from Magog by the Waterloo & Magog Railway. This company was short-lived, and in 1888, was taken over by CP as part of its strategy to build an east-west "short line" and to break the international rail monopoly held by the Grand Trunk. In 1910, CP rebuilt the station near its original location, and it is this station that we see today. Closed to passenger service since the 1970s, the station has suffered from neglect and vandalism. In 2003, it was the target of arson. Though still the property of CP, the station figures prominently in Sherbrooke's urban renewal plans. The city plans to purchase and restore the station and make it the focal point of a market, bicycle path, and possibly a tourist train.
DATE: 1910.
DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Brick. Central pavilion. Dormer windows. At 250 feet, this is the

longest station in the Townships.
ACCESS: Limited.

1) CP's Sherbrooke station, the target of vandals and arsonists.
2) A diesel engine.
3) Awaiting restoration.
4) Canadian Pacific Station, Sherbrooke, c.1905. (Photo: Farfan Collection)

9)
NAME: North Hatley Station
LOCATION: 210 Main Street, North Hatley.
HISTORY: This station is situated along the former line of the Massawippi Valley Railway, which was leased successively to the Connecticut & Passumpsic, the Boston & Maine, the Quebec Central, and finally Canadian Pacific. After its closure in 1951, it served for a time as the North Hatley Town Hall and laundromat. Picturesque downtown North Hatley and access to Lake Massawippi are just up the street.
DATE: 1892-1893.
DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Clapboard.
ACCESS: Private.

1) North Hatley station is now a private dwelling. This view is from the street.
2) Downtown North Hatley is just up the street.

10)
NAME: Coaticook Station
LOCATION: 131 Lovell Street, Coaticook.
HISTORY: This, the second station on this site, was built by the Grand Trunk in 1904. With the decrease in passenger service in the 1960s and 70s, the Coaticook station was closed, eventually losing its status as a station in 1980. In 1988, the City of Coaticook purchased it for a dollar. By that time, however, it was in a pitiful state, and restoration costs amounted to over $175,000. The exterior has been preserved largely intact, but the interior has been completely remodelled. In 1999, the station was cited a historic monument by the province of Quebec. It has served a variety of functions since its purchase by the town.
DATE: 1904
DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. The largest rounded station in Quebec. A number of interesting architectural details, including varying roof levels, gables, and picturesque ornamentation, make it especially attractive.
ACCESS: Public. Note: the Beaulne Museum is within a short walk of here.

1) Coaticook Station in winter.
2) From the tracks.
3) Second storey.
4) Exterior detail.
5) Coaticook Station, 1904. (Photo: Farfan Collection)
6) Waiting for the train, c.1920s. (Photo: Farfan Collection)

11)
NAME: Compton Station (*moved to its present location)
LOCATION: Stanstead East (formerly Compton). From Stanstead: 0.8 km E. on Fairfax Rd from the Intersection of Rtes. 55 and 143; then SE. on Stage Rd. for 2.5 km; from the bridge and Jct of Stage and Smith Rds., continue straight on Smith Rd. for 3 km.
HISTORY: Built in Compton by the Grand Trunk Railway at the turn of the last century, this station was moved to its present location in Stanstead East some years ago, after passenger

service to Compton was cut in the 1970s. It now serves as a private residence.
DATE: c.1900
DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Clapboard. Like the station in Acton Vale (see #3 on this tour), this station was built in the neo-Queen Anne style and features a corner tower and some picturesque decorative elements.
ACCESS: Private.

1) Tower.
2) Station, detail.
3) The station is now a private dwelling. This view is from the road.

12)
NAME: Beebe Plain Station
LOCATION: 38 Principale Street, Stanstead (Beebe Plain sector).
HISTORY: The Massawippi Valley Railway opened a line from Lennoxville to Lineboro on the U.S. border in 1870. This station is located on a spur that ran from Beebe Plain to Rock Island and Stanstead Plain. Upon completion, the MVR was leased successively to the Connecticut and Passumpsic Railway, the Boston & Maine, the Quebec Central, and finally Canadian Pacific. This station was closed in the 1920s and converted to a private home. Passenger service along the MVR ceased some years later, and when even cargo traffic was discontinued in the late 1980s, the rail bed was abandoned altogether. In the 1990s, the spur line was sold to the Town of Stanstead, which has since converted it to a bike trail. It now connects with the Tomifobia Nature Trail, which runs from Beebe to Ayer's Cliff. Panels near the station indicate area attractions, including the local trail network. The station is adjacent to the Bank of Commerce, which was once the Eastern Townships Bank.
DATE: c.1872.
DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Clapboard. Exterior has been modified.
ACCESS: Private

1) The former rail bed is now a bike path.
2) Rest area on Principale Street.
3) A popular route.
4) Beebe Station (Boston & Maine RR), c.1910. (Photo: Farfan Collection)
5) The famous Beebe Advent Christian Campground, just down the track, c.1880. Special charter trains brought thousands of people to this camp each summer for huge revival celebrations. The camp is still in operation today.
(Photo: Belden Atlas).