

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

RAILWAY STATION REPORT

Title: Canadian National Railways Station
Bedford, Nova Scotia

Source: Harry Jost and Barry Moody,
Delta Four Associates

RSR-45

INTRODUCTION

The wood-shingled railway station in Bedford, Nova Scotia, was built by Canadian National Railways (CNR) in 1939-40 (Figures 1 and 2). It was designed "in house" in the Moncton Regional Office. Still owned by CNR, it is now used for office and storage for the Signals Department. Its civic address is 1370 Main Street, Bedford, and its railway designation is Bedford Subdivision, Mile 10.61 (Figures 3 and 4).

The railway played a major part in the development of the community in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, that role seriously diminished in the years immediately after the construction of the present station which, considerably altered, is now no longer of any real consequence in the town.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Thematic

The small station at Bedford, Nova Scotia, is of fairly recent construction (1939-40), but the rail line which runs in front of it is the oldest section of line in the Maritime region, and dates back to the very beginning of rail service in the province. During 120 years of active service, the present station and its two predecessors saw the trains of six separate railway companies serve the community. The station was built near the end of the railway era for Bedford, and represents the decline of the railway as a significant factor in the life of the town. Now the few passenger trains that still use the tracks merely pass the station by, as they do so many communities in Canada.

Although a railway linking Halifax with key inland regions of the colony, such as the Annapolis Valley and Truro, had been advocated as early as the 1830s by such people as Thomas C.

Haliburton and Joseph Howe,¹ it was not until 1845 that prospecti for the "Halifax and Quebec Railway and Land Co." and the "Halifax and Windsor Railway Co." were issued.² After a number of setbacks and disappointments, on 4 March 1854, Howe introduced into the House of Assembly the legislation to establish a government owned, constructed and operated railway line - the Nova Scotia Railway Company.³ Three lines were to be built - Halifax to Pictou via Truro; Halifax to Windsor; Truro to the New Brunswick border.⁴ Because Halifax is situated on a peninsula, the first two lines would of necessity pass through what would become the community of Bedford. Howe himself became Commissioner-in-Chief of the new Nova Scotia Railway Board, and over the next two years vigorously pursued his dream.⁵ In September 1854, the Morning Chronicle confidently predicted that "The iron horse will soon be seen with his nostrils of fire coursing around the [Bedford] Basin; the steam whistle with its fiery blast will startle many from indolence to a life of active labour!"⁶

A station was erected at Bedford in 1857, at a cost of 244.18.3,⁷ and traffic proved very brisk. Work on the main line progressed rapidly, and was completed as far as Truro by 15 December 1858.⁸ Earlier in the year, the opening of a branch line from Windsor Junction to Windsor brought the Annapolis Valley into direct rail contact with Halifax.⁹ Bedford would thus find itself as a station on what would eventually be two separate rail lines - the Nova Scotia Railway Co. (NSR) main line to Truro (eventually CNR) and the Halifax to Windsor line (eventually the Dominion Atlantic Railway and then the Canadian Pacific Railway).¹⁰

The necessity of a rail line which would link the Maritime colonies with the colony of Canada was advanced in 1864 as one of the important reasons for union of the colonies, and a guarantee of its completion was part of the British North American Act.¹¹ On 1 July 1867, the ownership of the NSR was transferred to the new Dominion Government and on 9 November 1872 it was made part of the Intercolonial Railway (ICR).¹²

The ICR continued to be operated by the federal government for the rest of the century. A royal commission, appointed in 1916 to examine the whole issue of government involvement in railways, recommended nationalization and amalgamation of many of the smaller lines in Canada.¹³ The ICR too was incorporated into the CNR, and a new era in Canadian rail transportation began.¹⁴ The CNR would continue to provide passenger service to Bedford until the creation of VIA Rail nearly sixty years later.

Although the rail line which runs in front of the 1939-40 station represents the important themes of regional rail transportation and the links with central Canada that were part of the building of the new nation in the nineteenth century, the station itself, erected near the end of Bedford's active rail history, is only peripherally related to these themes.

Local Development

The predecessors of the present station at Bedford played a significant and visible role in the growth and creation of an identity for the community, but the present building, while serving the area well in the 1940s and 1950s, cannot be said to have played a major part in the life of Bedford.

The road signs proudly proclaim that Bedford has been "A Stopping Place Since 1503," but permanent settlement did not begin until after the founding of Halifax in 1749. Before the end of that century, this attractive stretch of the Bedford Basin had become the preferred location of summer residences for the Halifax elite. It was here that Edward, Duke of Kent (the father of Queen Victoria) built Prince's Lodge; other residences soon followed.¹⁵ First known as Sackville, the area took the name of Bedford when the NSR built a station there in 1857.¹⁶

The provision of easy and regular access to Halifax stimulated the growth of the area, resulting in the division of some of the large estates into smaller lots. The first subdivision took place in 1856, with the lots selling for 28 each.¹⁷ Although local historian Elsie Tolson has written that "The railway was considered the greatest thing that had ever happened to Bedford. People did not mind it slashing through their backyards, cutting off access to the Basin,"¹⁸ such was not always the case. Two brothers at least took the railway to court for damages done to their property by the building of the line through the community.¹⁹ The rail service did make Bedford even more attractive to vacationing Halagonians, and several hotels sprang up in the immediate vicinity of the station, complete with gardens and a bowling "saloon."²⁰

By 1878, the small station built in 1857 proved inadequate and a larger one was needed. The former station was then used as a freight shed. The new station served the community well, providing a crucial link with Halifax as the railway stimulated the growth of the village. One of the last pictures taken of the 1878 station appears in Tolson's book and shows an eager crowd assembled to welcome King George and Queen Elizabeth on 15 June 1939.²¹ Several weeks later, in a night of spectacular fires, the Bedford station and freight shed were burned by an arsonist.²² A passenger car was brought in immediately to serve as a temporary station and plans were made for the construction of a new building at Bedford.²³ By late November of the same year, drawings had been made and the necessary permission from the Board of Transport Commissioners had been received.²⁴

The 1939-40 station was slightly larger than its predecessor, reflecting the optimism concerning the future of rail passenger service still present at the time of its construction. However, by the late 1960s, demand for local passenger service had declined seriously. Expanded bus service and the prevalence of cars foreshadowed the demise of the Bedford station. In

addition, the construction of the Bicentennial Highway to provide a new access to Halifax without going through Bedford, and the opening of the Angus L. MacDonald Bridge, allowing easy access to Halifax from Dartmouth, both in the late 1950s, eased the pressures on the Bedford to Halifax road and encouraged the use of cars. In 1972, approval was given by the Canadian Transport Commission to replace the station agent at Bedford with an "on-hand representative" and to remove the station building. This was done with no formal opposition from the community.²⁵

The station was now advertised for sale and removal.²⁶ There were a number of expressions of interest,²⁷ and at one point approval of the sale was actually made. However, the purchaser changed her mind and the sale fell through.²⁸ By this time, the station had obviously fallen into serious disrepair, as the local fire chief wrote to the owners complaining that "the building is not locked and all of the windows are broken." The building was considered a serious fire hazard.²⁹ CNR decided to repair the building and use it for the Signals Department, for storage and office space.³⁰ It is still used for this purpose at time of writing.³¹

While passenger trains bound for central Canada still pass by the station, they no longer stop in this community. For Bedford, the age of passenger service by rail is largely at an end. The growth of the community during the 1960s and 1970s that led to the incorporation of Bedford as a town in 1980 came as the result of the proximity of Halifax and the prevalence of the automobile, not the presence of the railway.

ARCHITECTURE

Aesthetic/Visual Qualities

Order #58281 of the Board of Transport Commissioners of Canada dated 21 November 1939 ordered the construction of a new train station at Bedford, Nova Scotia in accordance with plans under file #28780.199.³² These plans (Figure 5), dated 12 October 1939, are credited to CNR, Atlantic Region, office of the Regional Engineer.³³

As designed and built, the Bedford station is a single storey building of wood construction, with a recessed track-side entry. In design, it is much more similar to simple contemporary domestic architecture than it is to distinctive railway station forms. There appears to have been a deliberate attempt to move away from traditional Nova Scotian station design. This station is built of wood, not brick; it does not have the usual wide overhang over the platform, and it is lacking all of the ornamental trim traditionally associated with railway stations. The only decorative feature is the round window/louvre in the two gable ends (Figures 6 and 7). The intention seems to have been to make the building appear smaller rather than larger,

hence the use of wings rather than a single, more substantial-appearing unit. Mr. B. Stewart, Assistant Superintendent for CNR in Halifax, believes there may have been at most one other station of this style built in Nova Scotia.³⁴

The plain, utilitarian nature of the station appears to signal a shift in the attitude of CNR toward small Nova Scotian communities such as Bedford. Stations built in a slightly earlier era were clear statements of the railway's presence in the town or village, and reflections of the pride of the railway companies in their buildings. The more economically-constructed Bedford station does not fit in such a category. The station at Havre Boucher, Nova Scotia, built in 1955, exhibits some of the same features as Bedford (Figure 8). Of course, World War II had begun only a few months before the construction of the latter station, and both materials and time may have been in short supply.

There have been a number of alterations to the building since it was constructed. On the track side, windows to the left of the door have been removed and the spaces shingled over (Figures 1 and 9). This has greatly altered the appearance of the station, upsetting the symmetry that was one of the building's few distinguishing features. In the west end the original door and window were removed, and a larger door installed to accommodate the storage requirements of the former post office wing (Figures 6 and 7). On the back or north side, several windows have been removed and a new and incompatible window has been added to accommodate the office recently created from part of the former waiting room (Figures 10 and 11). The overall effect of these changes is most unfortunate, destroying the sense of balance that the building possessed and giving it a somewhat ungainly appearance. However, most of these changes could be reversed relatively easily, and the building returned to its original appearance.

Architecturally, the Bedford station reflects the decline in significance of the railway station in rural Nova Scotia by the mid-twentieth century. The days of an impressive building as the focal point of the community were largely at an end. The CNR no longer seemed interested in making a public statement with its building; it only wished to serve the travelling public as cheaply and expeditiously as possible.

Functional/Technological Qualities

The Bedford station was built with a full basement under the centre portion only, with a crawl space under each of the wings. This basement, now used for storage, originally housed a coal-fired furnace with a chute on the track side and other service facilities. The main floor contained the waiting room with men's and women's washrooms and the agent's office in the centre section. The freight and express room was housed in the right

wing and the post office, consisting of a mail room and lobby space, was in the left wing (Figure 5). The inclusion of a village post office in the west end of the building sets this station apart from others built in Nova Scotia. At the time of writing no other stations in Nova Scotia which also housed local postal facilities have been identified. The layout of the station was compact and practical and, like the exterior, it shows no attempt to be either decorative or impressive.

The partitions in the post office wing have been removed, and a door has been cut through into the former waiting room. The waiting room has been subdivided to form a modern office with a suspended, acoustic tile ceiling and synthetic wood panelling on the walls. The agent's office retains most of its original features including the ticket window. The original finishes of the freight and express room remain intact including the matched v-joint lumber walls.

ENVIRONMENT

Setting

According to the location plan on the original drawings, the station is constructed on the site of the previous station and freight shed. It is located at the bottom of a stone retaining wall separating the station from what was formerly the main highway from Halifax to the Annapolis Valley and Truro. Travelling north along the highway, one passes by the station almost at roof level (Figure 12). The building is difficult to see until one is abreast of it. Travelling south, the north end of the building is visible as one comes around a curve and begins a rapid climb, with the access road at this end of the station.

The site is bounded on the south by a park which formerly contained the war memorial and has recently been renovated under downtown beautification programs with new lights, repaired stone walls and pathways (Figure 13). It appears that none of this parkland was ever maintained or controlled by CNR although the boundary line shown on the location plan indicates that this may, indeed, have been within the title area of the railway.³⁵ Looking east across the tracks from the station, one sees Bedford Basin, a view now partially blocked by houses constructed within the last ten to fifteen years. These houses crowd up close to the track, further diminishing the visual impact of the station (Figure 14). In fact, the station appears almost lost in the midst of the expanding community.

The station is located in the centre of neither the current nor the former commercial heart of Bedford. The former commercial area is to the south of the station. It is not visible from the station nor is the station visible from the commercial area of Bedford. The station was certainly a more important feature of the old commercial area than of the new, which begins

approximately a half mile to the north of the station.

Slightly to the north of the station, there is a viaduct of impressive dimensions and age (Figure 15). The station and viaduct, when viewed together, strongly reinforce the railway image of this area. Constructed in 1855, at a total cost of 3,220³⁶, this bridge carried the tracks beyond Bedford toward Windsor Junction. This structure is very visible from the highway, and the town has developed a small park in its environs. It is certainly a more important reminder of the presence of the railway in Bedford than is the station itself.

Community Status

Although Bedford has grown rapidly in the years since the 1950s (population 8010 in 1986)³⁷, and was incorporated as a town in 1980³⁸, there does not seem to be any movement within the community to preserve or restore the station. This may be the result of its fairly recent construction and perhaps even more due to its now-awkward location, very close to an extremely busy highway. Recently the Town of Bedford had to move the War Memorial from beside the station to another location because of the pressures of traffic and lack of parking.³⁹ The same problems apply to the train station.

While the successive stations at Bedford, Nova Scotia, once filled a vital role in the life of the community, such is no longer the case. In the nineteenth century the railway served as part of an essential link with Halifax, providing transportation for passengers and goods moving in both directions. In the early to mid twentieth century, development in the area made the station less and less a focal point of the community, crowding in on the building, and often dwarfing it. The station has virtually disappeared as a visually or economically significant factor in the town.

Endnotes

- 1 Thomas C. Haliburton, The Clockmaker (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1958), p. 26; J. Murray Beck, Joseph Howe: Conservative Reformer 1804-1848 (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1982), p. 148.
- 2 Marguerite Woodworth, History of the Dominion Atlantic Railway (Kentville, N.S.: Kentville Publishing Co., 1936), p. 27.
- 3 Ibid., p. 159.
- 4 Ibid., p. 34.

- 5 Ibid., p. 35; G.R. Stevens, Canadian National Railways: Sixty Years of Trial and Error (1836-1896) (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1960), p. 159.
- 6 Halifax Morning Chronicle, 18 September 1854.
- 7 Woodworth, History of the Dominion Atlantic Railway, p. 42; Elsie Churchill Tolson, The Captain, the Colonel and Me: Bedford, N.S., since 1503 (Sackville, N.B.: The Tribune Press Ltd., 1979), p. 135.
- 8 Stevens, Canadian National Railways: Sixty Years of Trial and Error, p. 162.
- 9 Woodworth, History of the Dominion Atlantic Railway, p. 43.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 58, 83.
- 11 A Statutory History of the Steam and Electric Railways of Canada 1836-1937 compiled by Robert Dorman (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938), p. 88.
- 12 Stevens, Canadian National Railways: Sixty Years of Trial and Error, p. 185.
- 13 Leslie T. Fournier, Railway Nationalization in Canada: The Problem of the Canadian National Railways (Toronto: MacMillan Co., 1935), p. 7.
- 14 G.R. Stevens, Canadian National Railways: Towards the Inevitable (Toronto: Clark, Irwin & Co., 1962), p. 282.
- 15 Brian Cuthbertson, The Loyalist Governor: Biography of Sir John Wentworth (Halifax: Petheric Press, 1983), p. 109.
- 16 The Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988), vol. I, p. 194.
- 17 George Mullane, Footprints Around and About Bedford Basin (np, nd), pp. 42-3; Tolson, The Captain, the Colonel and Me, p. 136.
- 18 Ibid., p. 136.
- 19 Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax, RG 28, vol. 18, no. 11, address to the Jury for the Appraisalment of Railway Damages, Temple and Lewis Piers, 2 July 1857.
- 20 Tolson, The Captain, the Colonel and Me, pp. 140-42.
- 21 Ibid., p. 186.
- 22 Halifax Herald, 3 July 1939, p. 1.

- 23 Halifax Herald, 4 July 1939, p. 1.
- 24 CNR, Moncton Office, Bedford File, Order No. 58281, The Board of Transport Commissioners for Canada, 21 November 1939.
- 25 Ibid., Railway Transport Committee, Order No. R-13471, 25 January 1972.
- 26 Ibid., CNR, Atlantic Region, Notice of Sale [nd, 1972].
- 27 See *ibid.* for several letters of interest either to develop the site or demolish the building.
- 28 Ibid., C.H. Sparks to Miss Susan Little, 6 June 1972; Sales Order, CNR to Susan Little, 15 June 1972.
- 29 Ibid., David Selig, Chief, Bedford Volunteer Fire Department, to A.I. Atkinson, 22 August 1972.
- 30 Ibid., C.E. Matheson to D.F. Mersedreau, 17 August 1972.
- 31 Mr. Ben Levesque, CNR, Atlantic Region, in conversation with the author, 20 February 1991.
- 32 CNR, Moncton Office, Bedford File, Order # 58281 of Board of Transport Commissioners, 21 November 1939.
- 33 Ibid., Bedford File, Plans for Bedford Station.
- 34 Mr. B. Stewart, Assistant Superintendent, CNR, Halifax, in conversation with the authors, 27 February 1991.
- 35 Mr. Dan English, Bedford Town Clerk, in conversation with the author, 28 February 1991.
- 36 Tolson, The Captain, The Colonel and Me, p. 136.
- 37 Canadian Encyclopedia, vol. I, p. 194.
- 38 Atlantic Advocate, vol. 70, no. 8, April, 1980, pp. 41-46.
- 39 English, in conversation with the author.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA

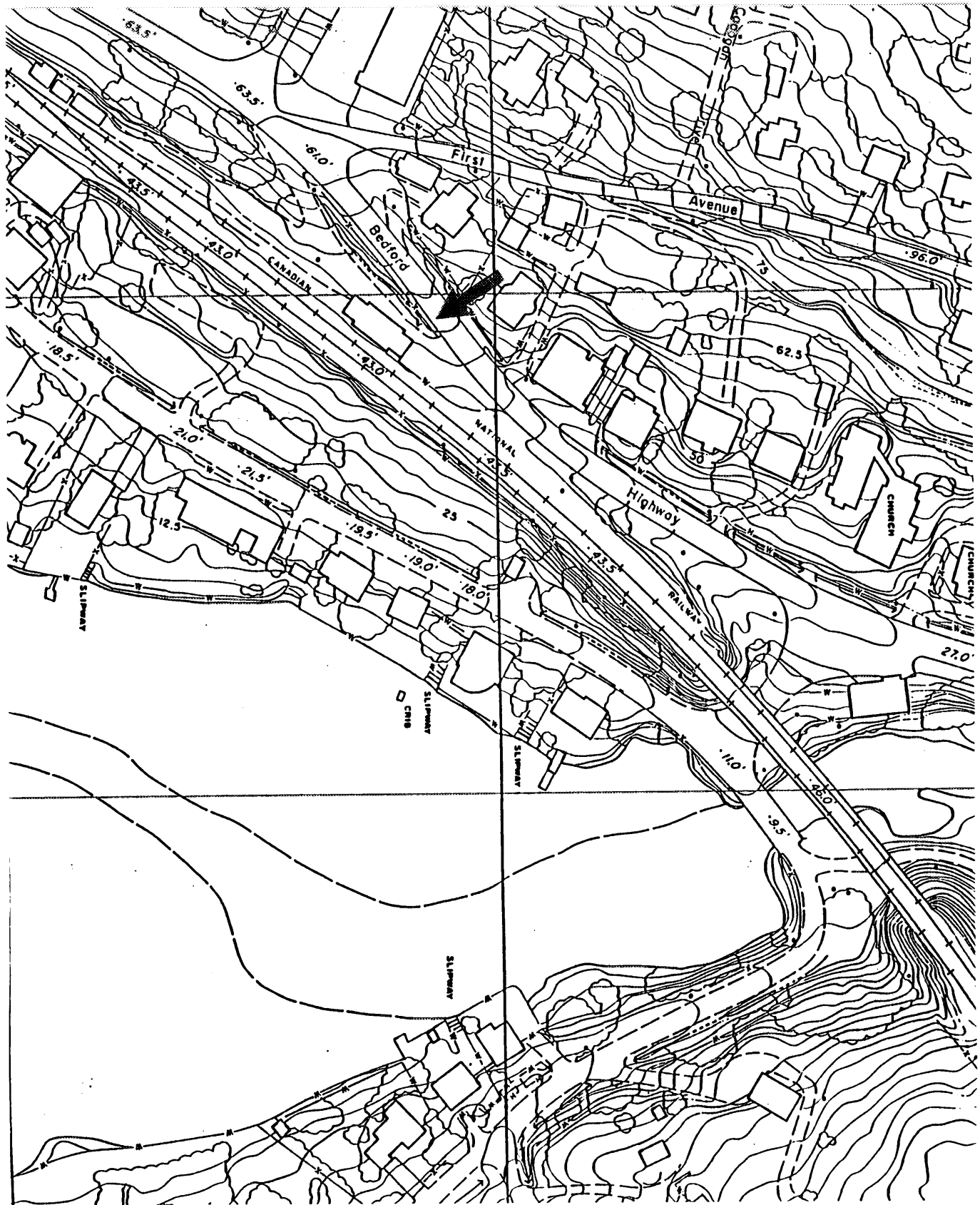


- 1 Canadian National Railways (hereafter, CNR) station, Bedford, Nova Scotia; constructed 1939-40, plans prepared by Moncton Regional Office; track-side elevation. (Barry Moody, Delta Four Associates - hereafter DFA - 1991.)



- 2 CNR station, angled view of track-side elevation. (Barry Moody, DFA, 1991.)

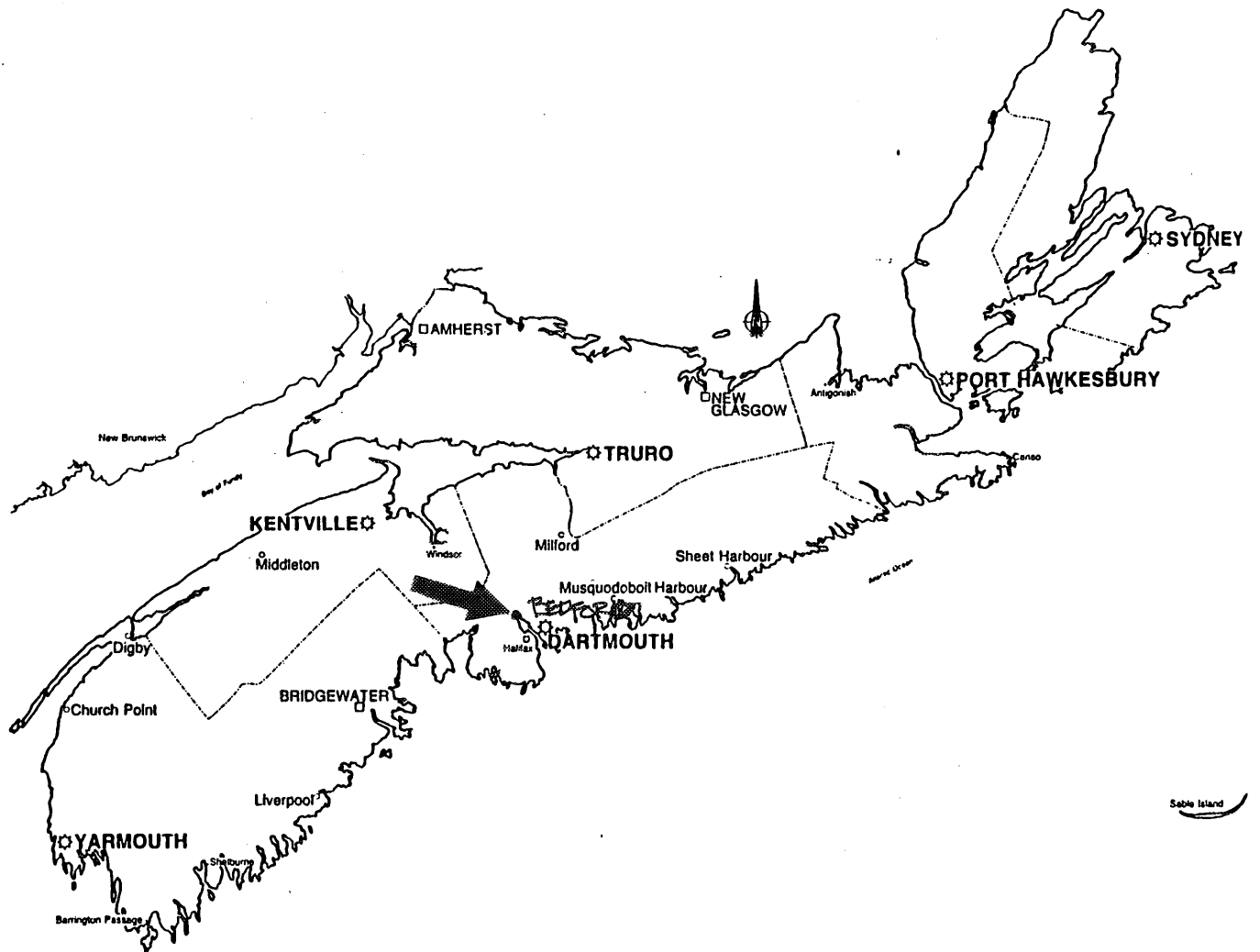
CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA



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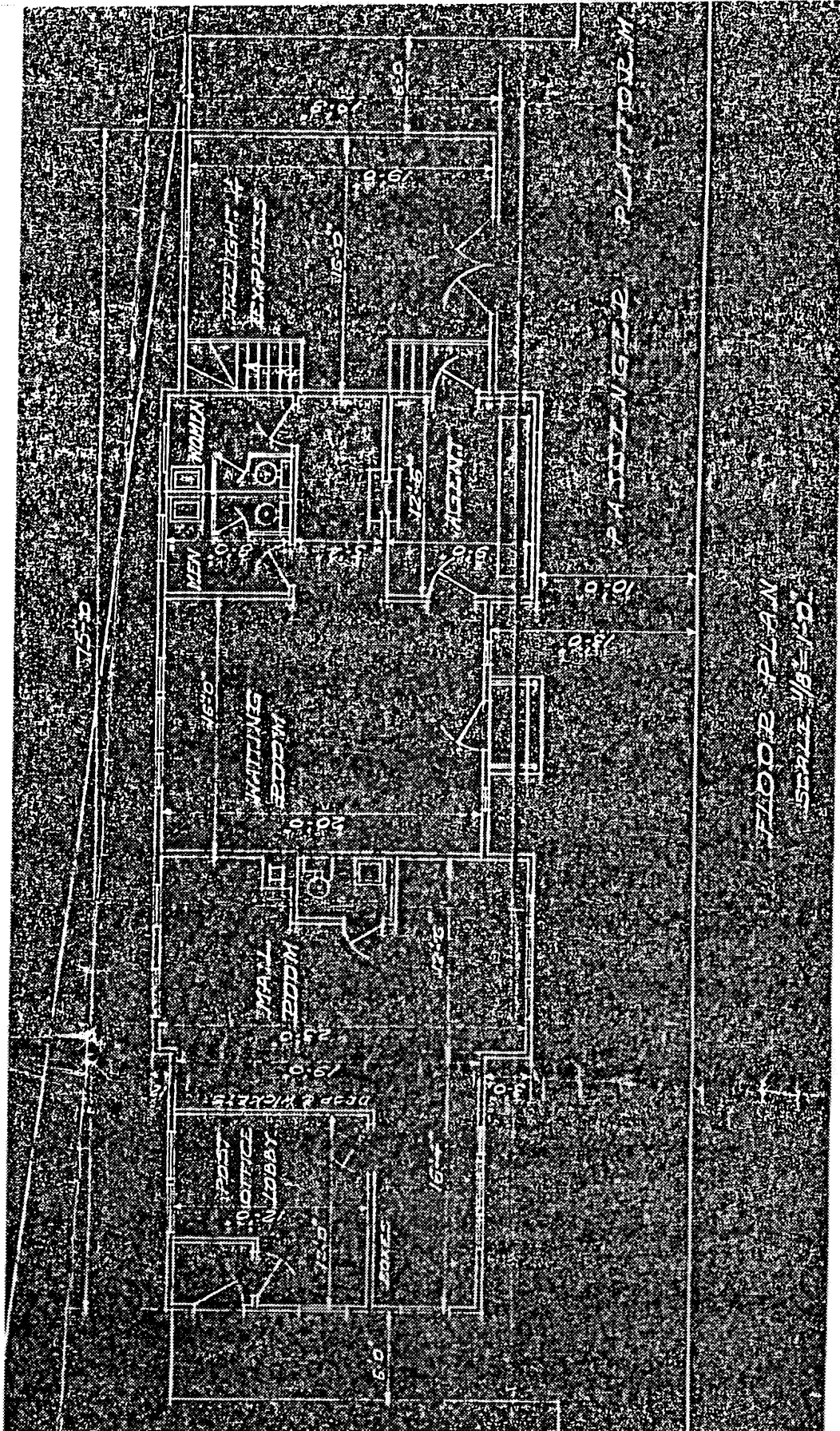
Map of Bedford, Nova Scotia, showing station location.
(Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA



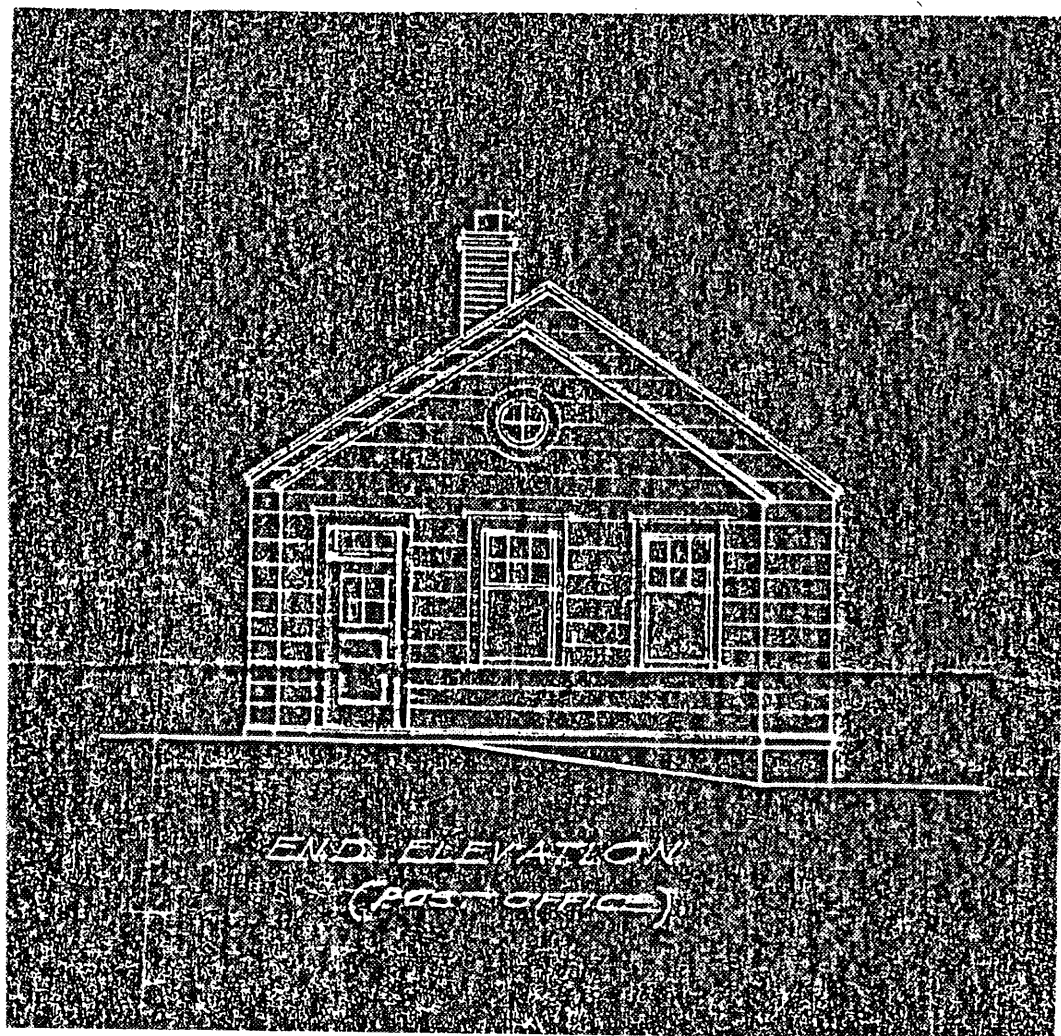
4 Map of Nova Scotia showing location of Bedford.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA



5 CNR station, floor plan, 1934. (Courtesy of CNR, Atlantic Region, Moncton, NB.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA



6 CNR station, "[west] End Elevation", 1939. (Drawing courtesy of CNR, Atlantic Region, Moncton, NB.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA

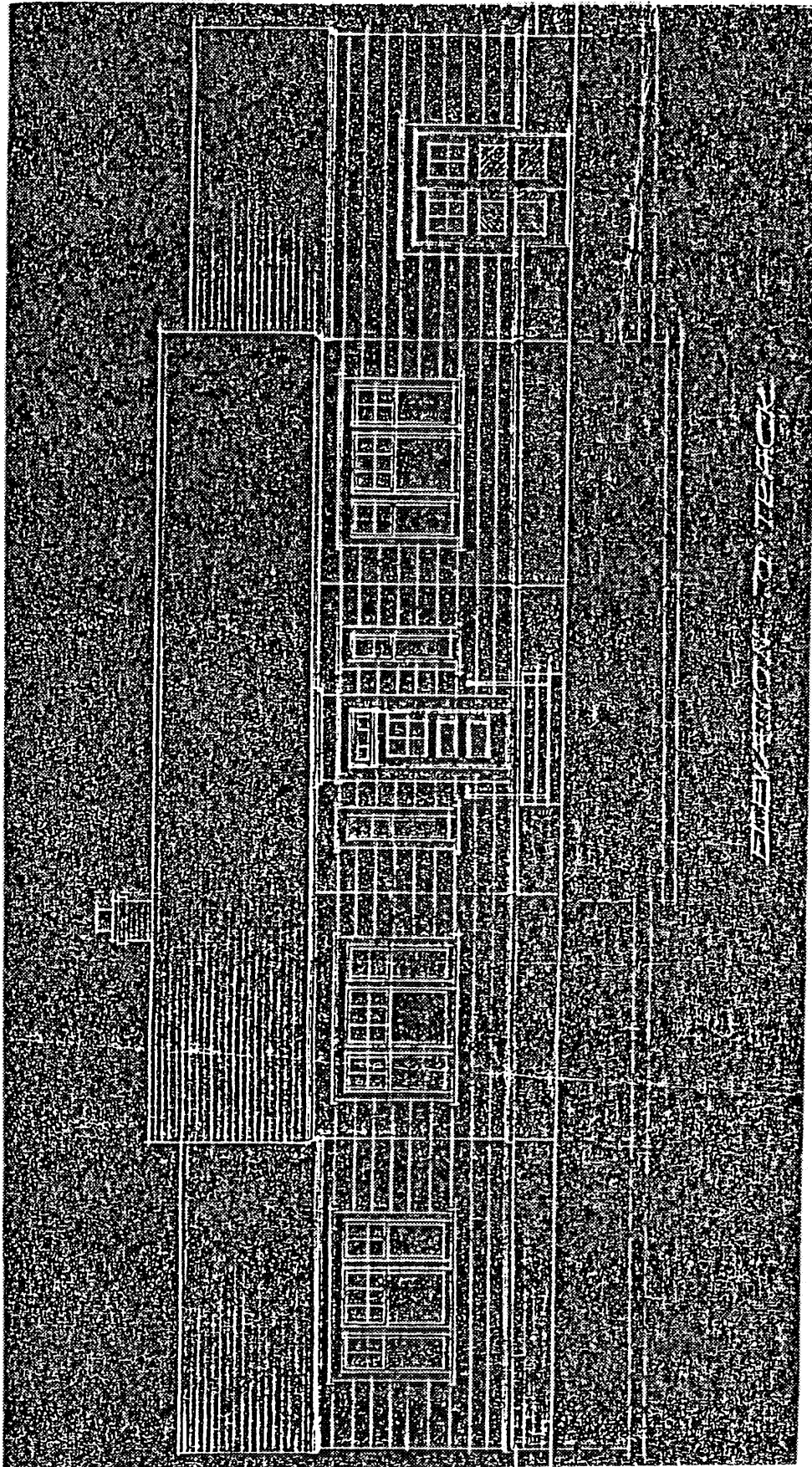


7 CNR station, showing west end modifications. (Barry Moody, DFA, 1991.)



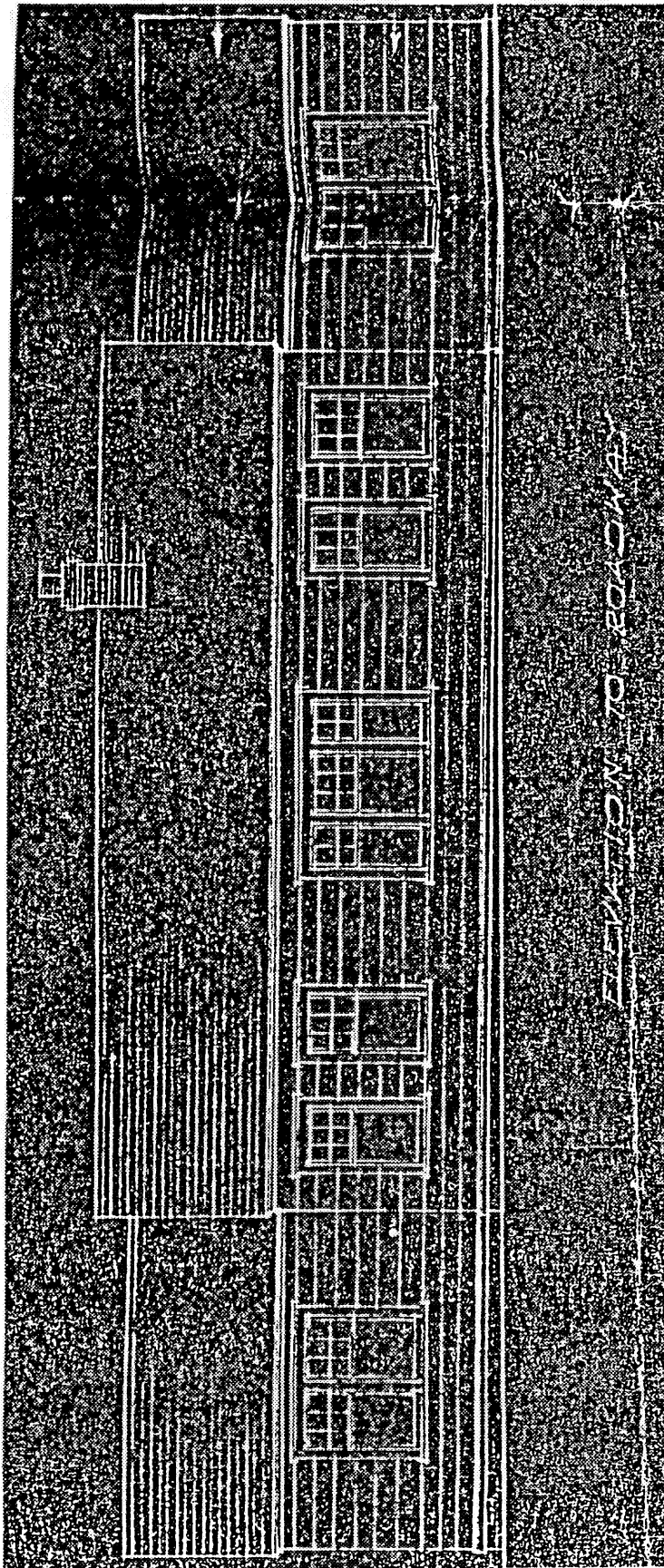
8 CNR station, Havre Boucher, NS. (J. Barrie Stewart, Waverley, NS, private collection.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA



9 CNR station, "Elevation to Track", 1939, showing window locations. (Drawing courtesy of CNR, Atlantic Region, Moncton, NB.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA



10 CNR station, "Elevation to Roadway", 1939, showing window placement. (Drawing courtesy of CNR, Atlantic Region, Moncton, NB.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA



11 CNR station, road side elevation, showing contemporary window pattern. (Barry Moody, DFA, 1991.)



12 CNR station, showing relationship of station to highway. (Barry Moody, DFA, 1991.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA

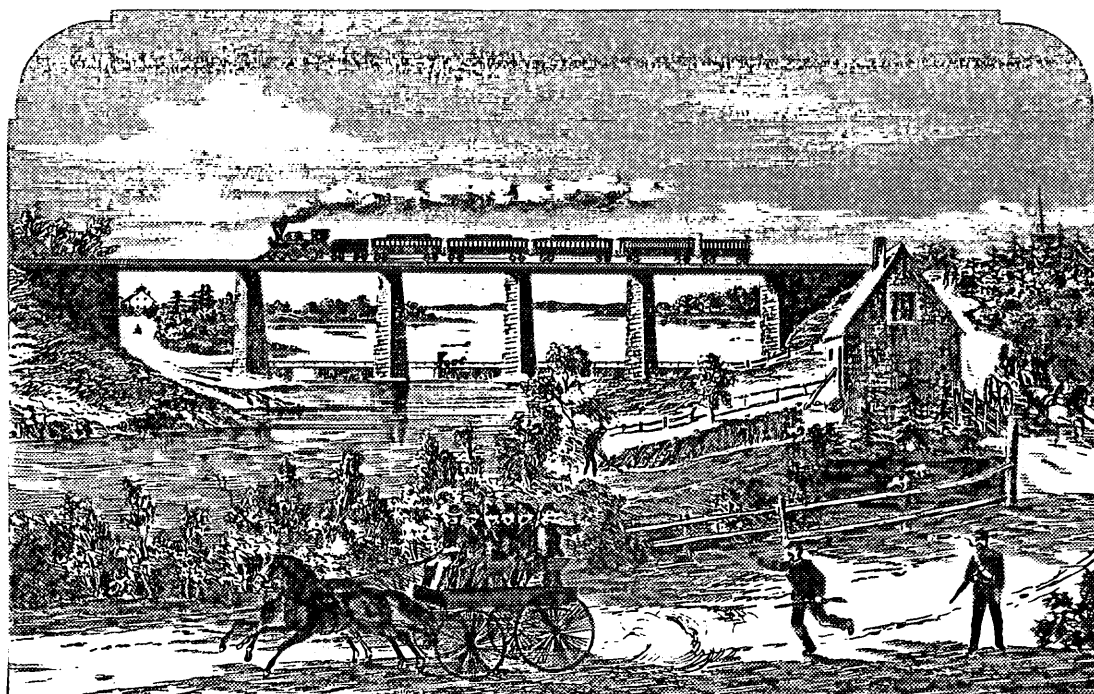


13 CNR station, showing adjacent park. (Barry Moody, DFA, 1991.)



14 CNR station, view across tracks in front of station. (Barry Moody, DFA, 1991.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BEDFORD, NOVA SCOTIA



15 Viaduct, Bedford, NS, from the sketch by E. J. Russell "On the Road to Bedford Range: A Consignment by the 8 a.m. Train". (Canadian Illustrated News, 7 October, 1871.)