

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

RAILWAY STATION REPORT

Title: Canadian National Railways Station
Brookfield, Nova Scotia

Source: Harry Jost and Barry Moody,
Delta Four Associates Inc.

RSR-136

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian National Railways (CNR) station located at Brookfield, Nova Scotia (Figure 1), was built by the CNR in 1938-39. It was designed "in house" in the office of the regional engineer, Moncton. Its official designation is Bedford Subdivision, Mile 55.97 (Figures 2 and 3).¹

The small wooden station at Brookfield reflects the importance of the railway to the countryside as well as to the developing towns and cities of the Maritime region. The station is in moderately good repair and it is currently used as section headquarters by the CNR.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Thematic

The rail line which passes through the community of Brookfield has been owned by three different railway companies, and is now leased to a fourth. The line from Halifax to Truro, completed on 15 December 1858, was the second one to be built in the colony.² Joseph Howe, the guiding light behind the project, saw the enterprise very much as a government-owned railway, to be built and run in the public interest.³ Howe saw the line to Truro, on which was located the small community of Brookfield, as merely the first step in the much larger venture, an intercolonial railway which would link the Maritime colonies to Canada.⁴ Others saw the importance of the line in more local or regional terms, as the address of the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly to the Lieutenant-Governor in 1851 made clear:

The construction of Trunk Lines of Railway through these Provinces must advance their material prosperity - multiply their commercial and social advantages, in tranquil times, and greatly strengthen

them should the peace of this Continent be broken.⁵

The rail link with the other colonies became an integral part of the Confederation debate between 1864 and 1867. After the accomplishment of Confederation, the Nova Scotia Railway Co. line was incorporated into the larger interprovincial line, becoming part of the Intercolonial Railway Co. (ICR) in 1872. By 1876 Nova Scotia was linked by rail with the other mainland colonies.⁶

For the small rural communities along the ICR route, the connection with central Canada was of considerably less significance than the easy access provided to major regional centres such as Halifax or Truro. Local rather than national traffic provided the stimulus for economic growth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was assisted by flexible freight rates designed specifically to aid the industrial development of the Maritime region. Even centres such as Brookfield which failed to develop into towns during this period still clearly show the impact of what one historian has called a "regionally oriented transportation policy."⁷ The development of regional trade encouraged the growth of local industries and the increase in population which characterized most places where a station had been built.

The absorption of the ICR by the Canadian Northern Railway in 1918 and the subsequent creation of the CNR spelled the end of a regionally controlled railway policy.⁸ The resulting industrial and economic decline was obvious in small communities such as Brookfield, or major industrial centres on the scale of Amherst, as industries either closed or moved to larger centres, especially in central Canada. In many communities the station, serving fewer and fewer passengers, and a nearly empty freight shed remained to indicate the once-crucial role played by the railway in the area's growth.

For nearly 100 years after the building of the railway, small centres such as Brookfield would benefit considerably from the presence of rail service, and for each of these communities, the station served both as the practical focal point of railway activity and the visible symbol of the presence of the railway, and behind it the government, in its midst. The closure of the station, and the cessation of passenger and rail service, has conversely come to stand for the abandonment of rural Nova Scotia by the CNR.

Local Development

With the completion of the railway from Halifax to Truro in 1858, communities along the line took on new significance. In the decades prior to the age of the railway, most of the significant development in Nova Scotia had taken place along the sea coast, or along the small rivers. The railway freed parts of the colony

from such reliance on water transportation and opened up new areas for rapid development. New industries developed, and with them, new communities. Some settlements along the ICR line, such as Stewiacke, developed into towns by the end of the 19th century.⁹ Others, including Brookfield, evolved into substantial villages.¹⁰ In both cases, the development of the communities depended largely on the presence of the railway, and the pattern of economic and social life of the area came to depend very much on the daily schedule of arrivals and departures of passenger and freight trains.

The local historians of Brookfield, writing in the 20th century, all credit the real beginnings of the community to the coming of the railway in 1858. In 1984, the community bicentennial committee noted that "The railroad helped turn Brookfield from a scattered settlement of a few small clearings to a small railway terminal--serving the Stewiacke and Musquodoboit Valley areas."¹¹ Before long the crossroads had evolved into a bustling community boasting two hotels, three stores, a saloon, a tannery and two blacksmith shops.¹² The railway allowed for the successful tapping of the agricultural, lumbering and mining resources of the area.¹³

Writing in 1967, local historian Mrs. John Lindsay noted the significance of the railway in yet another, although less tangible, way:

In the year of Confederation, the little community of Brookfield was still feeling the effects of the growth-stimulant provided in 1858 by the completion of the long-anticipated railroad. This added, not only more and new types of opportunity and employment, but also to the importance of the place in the minds of its residents.¹⁴

That self-confidence of area residents is reflected in the establishment in 1894 of the Brookfield Creamery, a joint stock company formed by the local farmers to make butter from the area's cream, rather than shipping it to Halifax. By 1920 it was producing ice cream as well, and today it is the oldest such company in the province.¹⁵ In 1901 Thomas Higgins established a saw mill, shingle mill and grist mill, the beginning of major milling operations in the community.¹⁶ Both of these industries relied heavily on the rail line to carry their products to market, primarily in Halifax and nearby Truro.

A small wooden station was built in 1858 to serve the needs of the travelling public of the Brookfield area.¹⁷ Although the population of the area grew significantly, the officials of the ICR saw no reason to replace the station in later years. Perhaps the proximity of the booming town of Truro, only 13 km away, worked against Brookfield in this regard. After 1920, the importance of the community declined, both as the result of the Brookfield Dairy relocating to Truro and as part of the general

economic slump in Nova Scotia, to which the policies of the newly-created CNR clearly contributed.¹⁸

In spite of the low volume of passenger traffic through Brookfield, by 1937 the CNR was forced to consider the building of a new station, as the 1858 one was by then too "dilapidated"¹⁹ for further use. The small station erected in 1939 reflected the status of the community in the eyes of the CNR, and the low expectations for future passenger traffic.

As with so many other communities, large and small, in Nova Scotia, the increasing prevalence of more convenient cars and buses spelled the end of extensive rail passenger traffic. By the 1950s it was no longer practical to maintain a station and agent in Brookfield. In 1953, for example, ticket sales per month ranged from \$4.45 to \$49.65, most of the revenue coming from 30 cent tickets to Truro. In July, 1958, the Brookfield agent sold a single \$2.00 ticket.²⁰ This decline in local travel by train took place in spite of the fact that Brookfield was increasingly a bedroom community of Truro and to a lesser extent Halifax. By 1960 approximately one-third of the households in the Brookfield area contained at least one member who travelled daily to those centres to work.²¹ The handling of local freight was clearly all that kept the station going during this period, and even then it must have been at best a marginal operation.²²

Passenger service was terminated much earlier at Brookfield than at stations in most larger Nova Scotia communities. On 23 August 1974 the terse orders went out from CNR regional offices in Moncton:

Effective Friday, August 30th, 1974 at 1700 hours, the position of Agent-Operator, Brookfield, N.S. is abolished and this agency closed. Please arrange for closure of this Station.²³

On that date, the last passenger train stopped at Brookfield.

The Brookfield station has survived because it became the section headquarters for that area of track, and it has remained so to the present day.

ARCHITECTURE

Aesthetic/Visual Qualities

The plans for the Brookfield station were drawn up in the office of the regional chief engineer at Moncton, New Brunswick, and they are dated 24 March 1938 (Figures 4, 5 and 6). This small (35'10" x 16'8") wooden station reflects the minimal passenger/express requirements of this rural Nova Scotian

community.

The wood frame building has a hip roof with a bell cast. It was sided with painted cedar shingles, with a 3' high strip of clapboard drop siding at ground level (Figures 5 and 7). Both the siding and the red asphalt roof shingles appear to be original. The well-proportioned corbelled top on the chimney (rather than the plain one shown on the drawings) adds one of the few decorative features to the building.

The track side (east) elevation (Figure 1) has a rectangular bay nearly centrally positioned, to accommodate the agent's office. To the left is the door which led to the passenger's waiting room and to the right is a pair of doors for the former baggage/express room. A 4'6" wide canopy extends along the track side, with hip returns supported on a bracket positioned 3' from each end (Figure 8).

The rear (west) elevation has three pairs of windows (Figure 9). The baggage room windows are shortened to a single sash.

The north (Figure 10) and south (Figure 11) elevations are similar to each other, except that the waiting room window is double hung. Both windows are centred on their respective walls.

Minor alterations have been made to the exterior of the building to accommodate its changed use. The waiting room door and all of the windows now have white aluminum storm doors and windows, which detract somewhat from the original appearance (Figures 12 and 7). The attractive wooden doors leading to the baggage/express room shown on the original drawings (Figure 4) have been removed, the opening enlarged and less attractive slab doors installed (Figure 1). This was done to provide for the storage of the signalman's jitney. A similar alteration was made to the station at Stewiacke, Nova Scotia, for the same reason.²⁴

On the interior, the walls of the waiting room and the agent's office were of plaster, with a burlap wainscoting (Figure 13). The walls of the baggage/express room were of tongue and groove boarding (Figure 14). The floors of the waiting room and agent's office were of hardwood. Much of this original finish has survived, although some of it has been covered over as the interior was adapted to other uses.

In both size and design, the Brookfield station was similar to a number of stations built in the early 20th century to serve rural Nova Scotia. By that time, the rapid growth of communities along the rail lines was largely at an end, and villages like Brookfield and Lawrencetown, Annapolis County, required only the most basic of buildings, accommodating minimal services and displaying few if any decorative features.

As originally built, the Brookfield station was a modest but well-proportioned building, plain and unadorned, suitable for the

size and needs of the community it served. Its appearance has not been improved by the changes made in recent years. The original proportions have been altered by the change in door size, and the substitution of the slab doors for the more ornate originals removed one of the station's few decorative features.

Functional/Technological Qualities

The Brookfield station was constructed at a time when local passenger travel by rail was already being seriously challenged by the automobile. This small rural station provided minimal services for the travelling public, and minimal comfort for the local agent.

The station has a concrete foundation, with a crawl space but no basement. The single chimney allowed for the installation of stoves in the waiting room and the agent's office.²⁵ No inside washroom facilities were provided for either the passengers or the agent, perhaps because there was no municipal source of water.

The interior layout of the building has a simple, linear arrangement of waiting room, agent's office, and baggage/express room (Figure 15). The agent's office is in the middle, flanked by the waiting room on the right and the baggage/express room to the left. This building of only three rooms is the smallest type of station built in the province. Shelters built by CNR in the late 1970s and VIA in the early 1980s are much smaller but house no services.

The interior layout of the building has been changed somewhat since it became the signalmen's headquarters in the 1970s. A washroom was added to the corner of the former agent's office. A furnace has been installed in the corner of the waiting room (Figure 16).

The original layout of the building was simple but serviceable, and probably more than met the needs of the small numbers of passengers who used the station.

ENVIRONMENT

Setting

The present building was erected on the site of the 1858 station (Figure 17), and adjacent to the freight shed (since demolished). A 300' wooden platform originally stretched along the track in front of the two buildings.

The station is located on the edge of Brookfield's residential area (Figure 18), and adjacent to extensive lumber yards which form much of the basis of its economy (Figures 19 and 20). The

building sits about 200' from the road, with no screening by other buildings or trees (Figure 21). It is thus highly visible as one approaches the community from the main highway through the area.

The overall impression is one of isolation and desolation. The feeling of neglect is enhanced by the poorly maintained yard, littered with the debris (Figure 22).

The community has recently established a small memorial picnic park near the western entrance to the station area. The ornamental plantings are still in their early stages of growth, and so have little visual impact on their surroundings (Figure 23).

Community Status

There appears to be little concern in the community for the future or status of the Brookfield station. Brookfield is neither a town nor an incorporated village, so it has none of the administrative structure that has often provided the leadership in other, larger communities. There is no local historical society to champion the cause, and even if there were, the comparatively recent construction of the building would probably work against such a society's active concern. The fact that the building is not located in the middle of the community, but on its very edge may also account for the apparent lack of community interest.

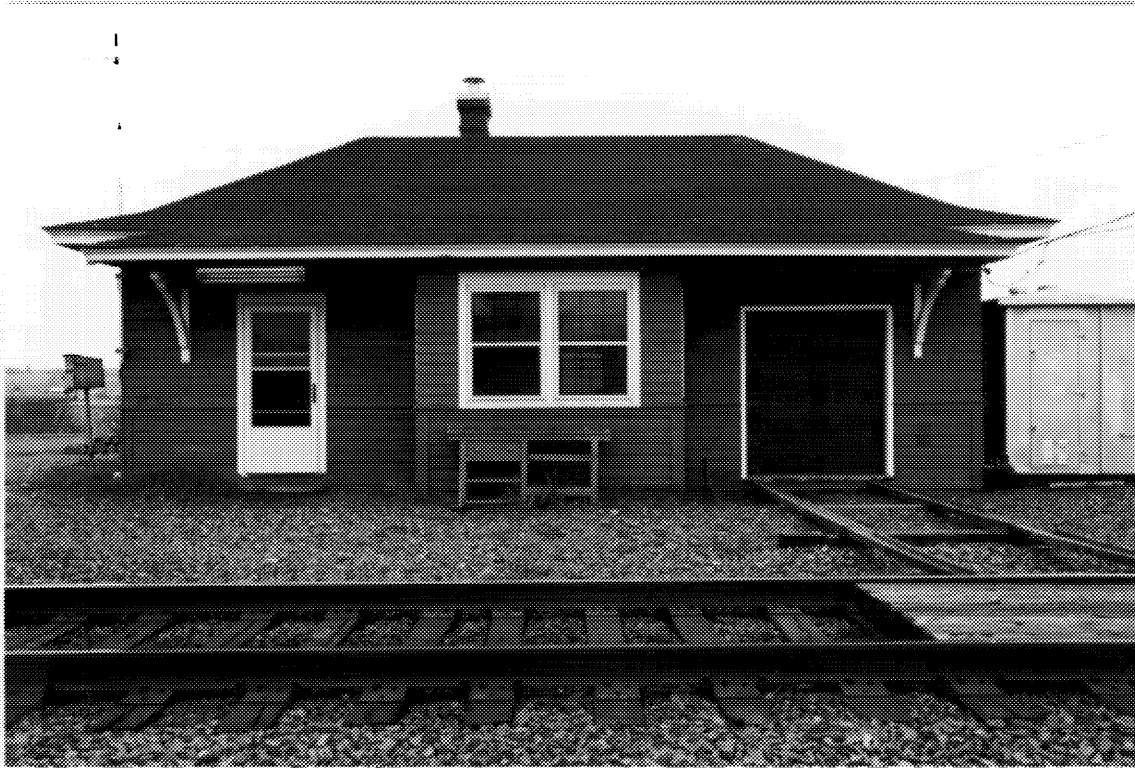
Endnotes

- 1 Robin H. Wyllie, Heritage Inventory of Pre-1940 Railway Stations In Nova Scotia (Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture, 1989), p. 21.
- 2 G.R. Stevens, Canadian National Railways: Sixty Years of Trial and Error vol. I (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1960), p. 162; Marguerite Woodworth, History of the Dominion Atlantic Railway (Kentville, Nova Scotia: Kentville Publishing Co., 1936), pp. 34-45.
- 3 J. Murray Beck, Joseph Howe: The Briton Becomes Canadian 1848-1873 vol. II (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1983), pp. 32-3.
- 4 Ibid., p. 33.
- 5 Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), Halifax, Record Group 28, vol. 12, no 11a, "Address of the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly to Sir John Harvey, Lieutenant-Governor [1851]."

- 6 Stevens, Canadian National Railways: Sixty Years of Trial and Error, p. 112; Sandford Fleming, The Intercolonial (Montreal: Dawson Bros, 1876), p. 239.
- 7 E.R. Forbes, "Misguided Symmetry: The Destruction of Regional Transportation Policy for the Maritimes," in E.R. Forbes, Challenging the Regional Stereoscope (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989), pp. 117-18.
- 8 Ibid., p. 120; G.R. Stevens, Canadian National Railways: Towards the Inevitable vol. II (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1962), p. 282.
- 9 Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, "Canadian National Railways Station, Stewiacke, Nova Scotia," Railway Station Report 46, 1991.
- 10 Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1901, gives a population of 950 for Brookfield.
- 11 Fragments of the Past: History Notes on Brookfield and Area, compiled by Brookfield Bicentennial Committee (Brookfield, Nova Scotia, 1984), p. 14.
- 12 "Brookfield," typed MS, Colchester Historical Society, Truro, Nova Scotia [n.d.].
- 13 "Brookfield, 1771-1960," compiled by Mrs. Alvin Carter, typed MS, Colchester Historical Society, Truro, Nova Scotia, [n.d., 1960]; "Brookfielders," typed MS, 24 May 1984, Colchester Historical Society.
- 14 Mrs. John Lindsay, "Coming of Railway in 1858 Spurred Growth of Brookfield," The Truro Weekly News, 29 June 1967.
- 15 "Brookfield, 1771-1960"; "A Diary of Real Success: Brookfield Creamery, Ltd.," undated newspaper clipping, scrapbook 89.20, Colchester Historical Society, Truro, Nova Scotia; "History of Brookfield Dairy Products Ltd.," Halifax Mail Star, 3 December 1964, pp. 12-13.
- 16 "Brookfield, 1771-1960."
- 17 PANS, Record Group 28, vol. 18, no. 16, report of James Laurier, Civil Engineer, to Commissioners, Nova Scotia Railway, 31 January 1859.
- 18 "Brookfield, 1771-1960"; Forbes, "Misguided Symmetry: The Destruction of Regional Transportation Policy in the Maritimes," pp. 120-24.
- 19 CNR Regional Office, Brookfield file, detailed estimate for new station at Brookfield, Nova Scotia, 6 October 1937; ibid., Fred Condon to C.S. Pushie, L.H. Robinson, G.L

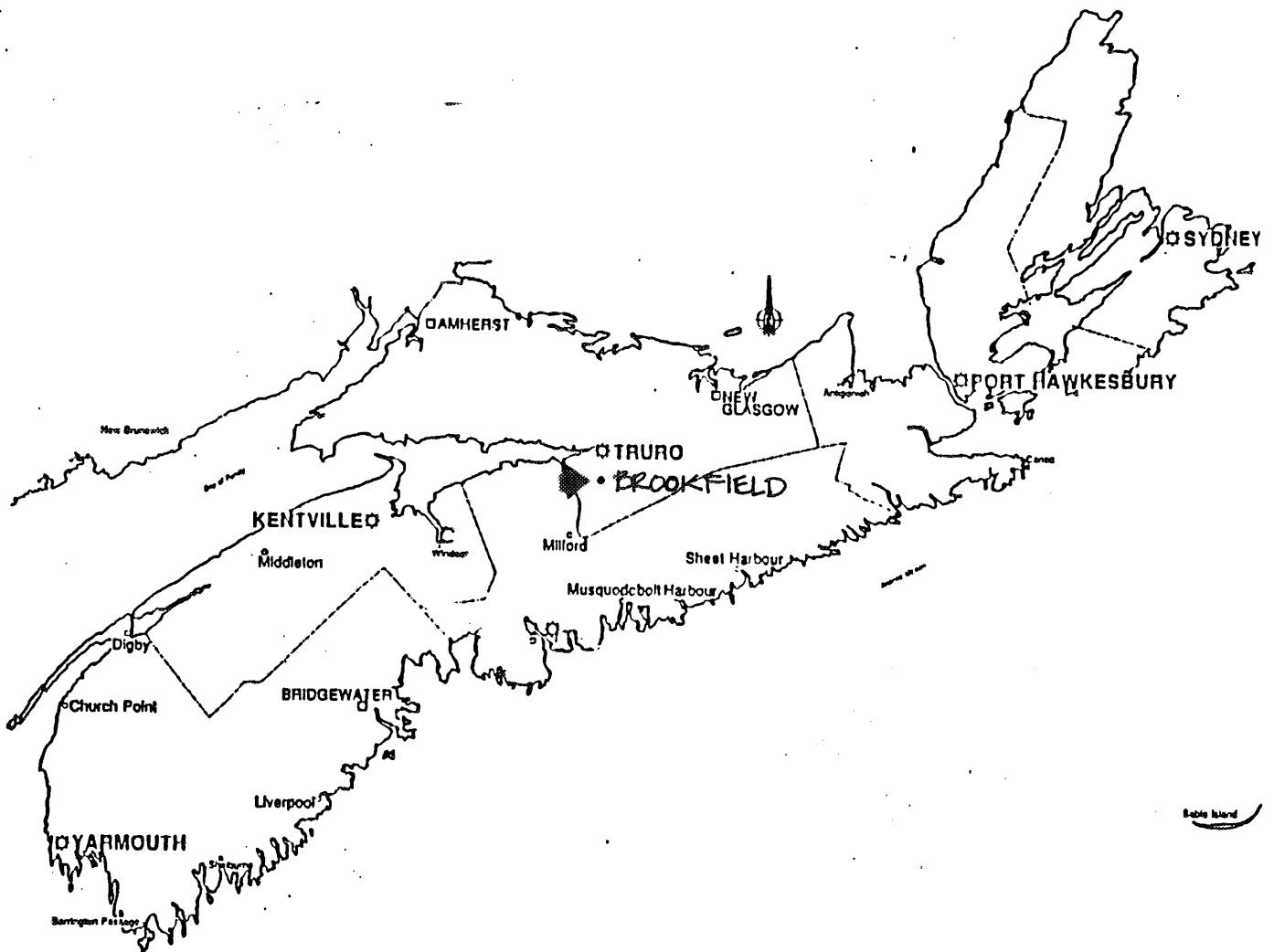
- Dickson, 18 April 1939.
- 20 PANS, Record Group 28, Series S, vol. 53, "Passenger Revenues, 1953-1959, Brookfield, N.S."
 - 21 Mrs. J.L. Lindsay, " Son of Truro Family First Settled Brookfield in 1785," Truro Weekly News, 14 July 1960.
 - 22 Ibid., vol. 58, "Freight Received Book, June 1 to July 29, 1956."
 - 23 CNR Regional Offices, Moncton, New Brunswick, Brookfield file, W.H. Roberts to D.A. Slack, 23 August 1974.
 - 24 Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, "Canadian National Railways Station, Stewiacke, Nova Scotia."
 - 25 CNR Regional Office, Moncton, New Brunswick, Brookfield file, Detailed Estimate, new station at Brookfield, Nova Scotia, 6 October 1937.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BROOKFIELD, NS



- 1 Canadian National Railways (hereafter, CNR) station, Brookfield, Nova Scotia; constructed 1938-39, plans dated 24 March 1938, prepared by the office of the regional chief engineer, Moncton, New Brunswick; track side elevation. (Harry Jost, Delta Four Associates Inc. - hereafter DFA - 1992.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BROOKFIELD, NS



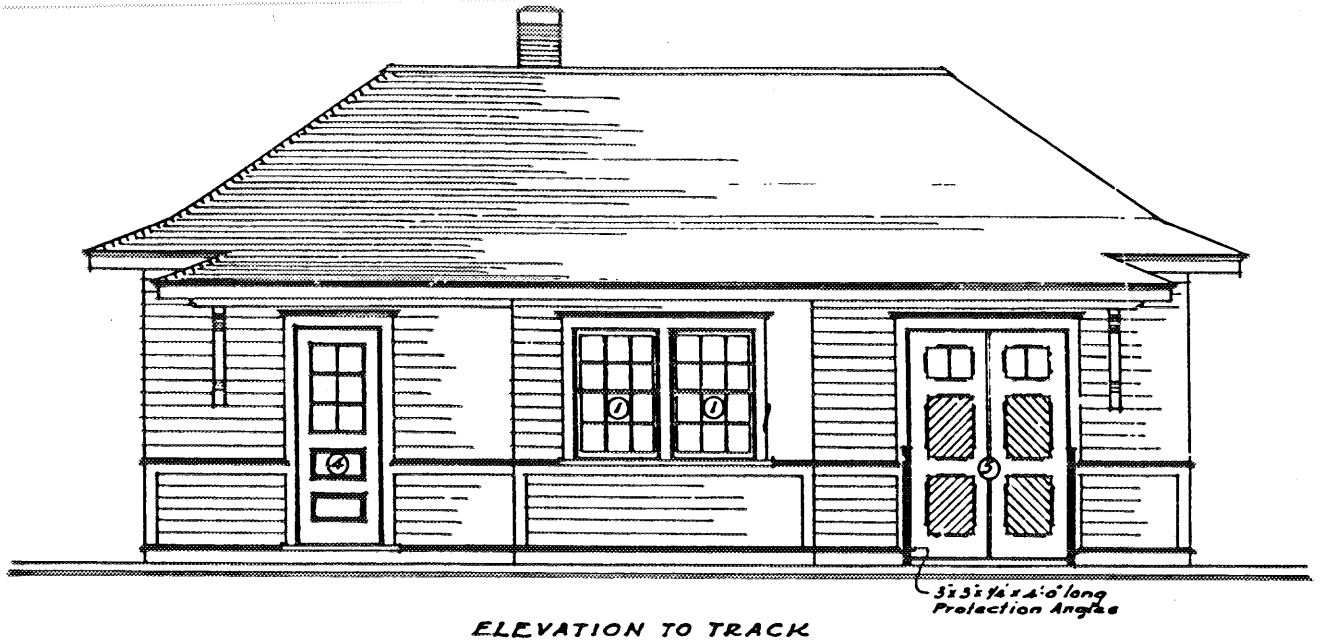
2 Contemporary map of Nova Scotia showing location of Brookfield. (Complete atlas of Canada and the world, George Philip and Son Ltd., n.d.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BROOKFIELD, NS

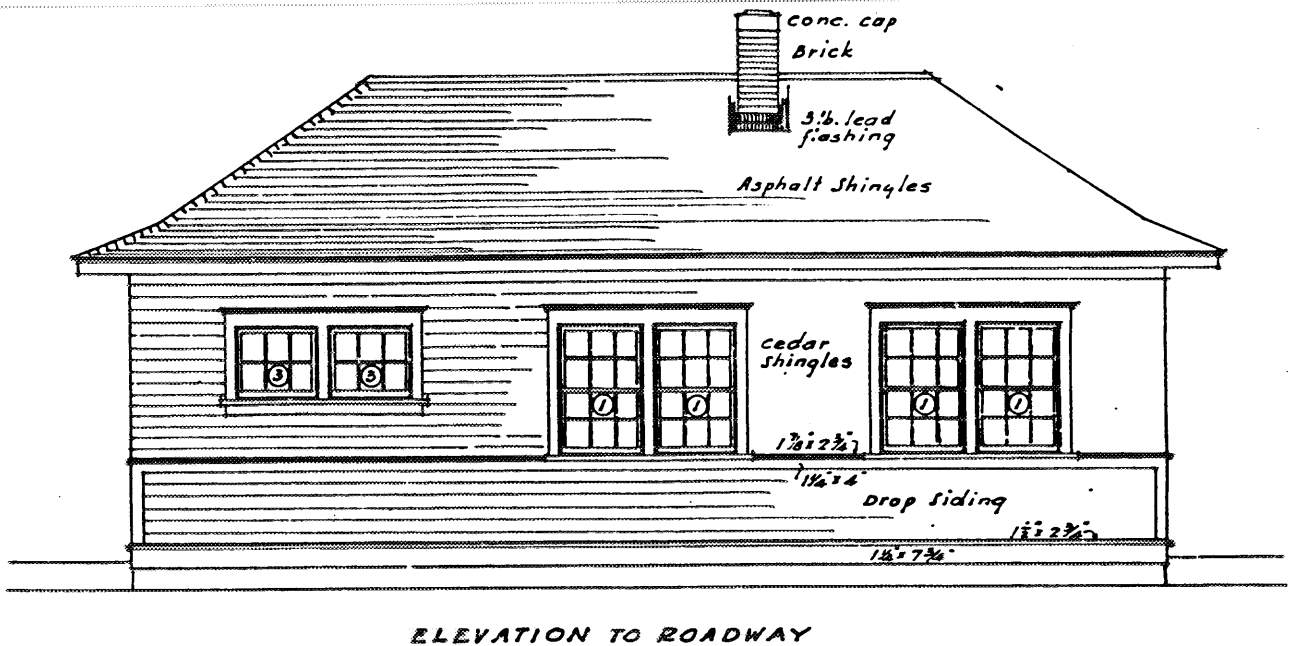


3 Map of Brookfield, Nova Scotia, showing station location. (Plan courtesy of Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, n.d.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BROOKFIELD, NS

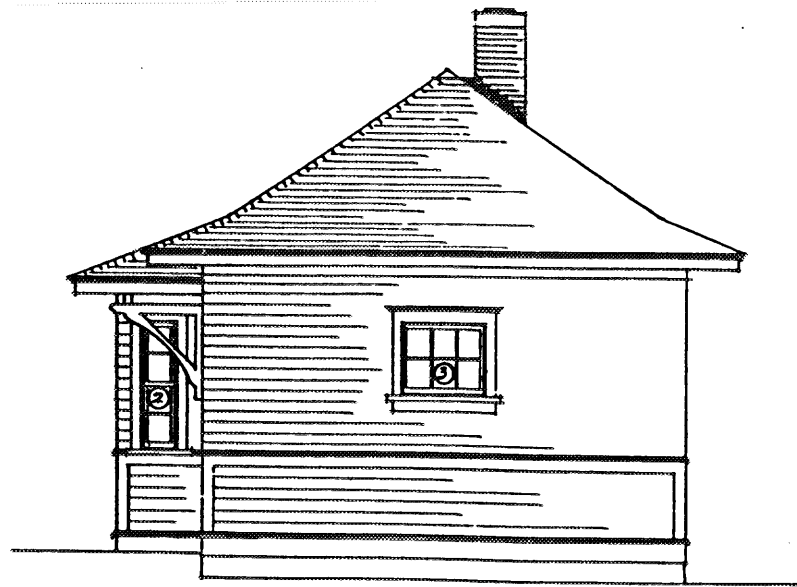


4 CNR station, track side elevation, 1938. (Drawing courtesy of Canadian National Railways, Moncton, New Brunswick.)



5 CNR station, rear elevation, 1938. (Drawing courtesy of Canadian National Railways, Moncton, New Brunswick.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BROOKFIELD, NS



END ELEVATION (BAGGAGE ROOM)

6 CNR station, end elevation, 1938. (Drawing courtesy of Canadian National Railways, Moncton, New Brunswick.)



7 CNR station, detail showing siding, track side elevation.
(Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



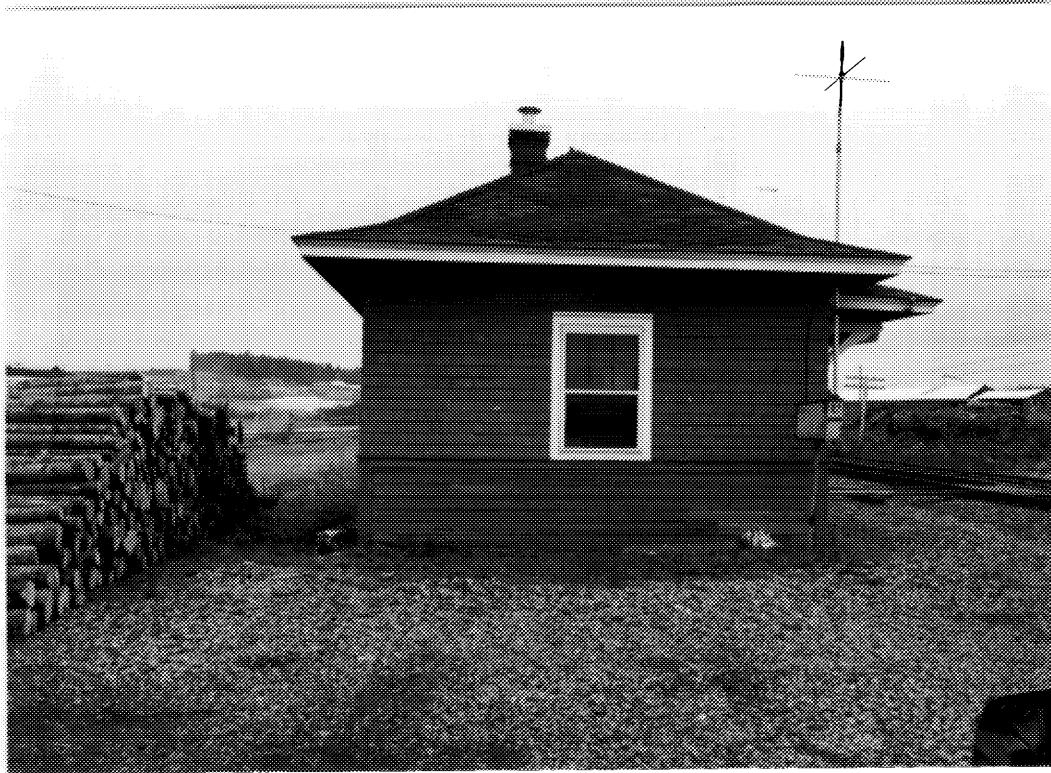
8 CNR station, detail showing bracket, track side elevation.
(Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



9 CNR station, rear elevation. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



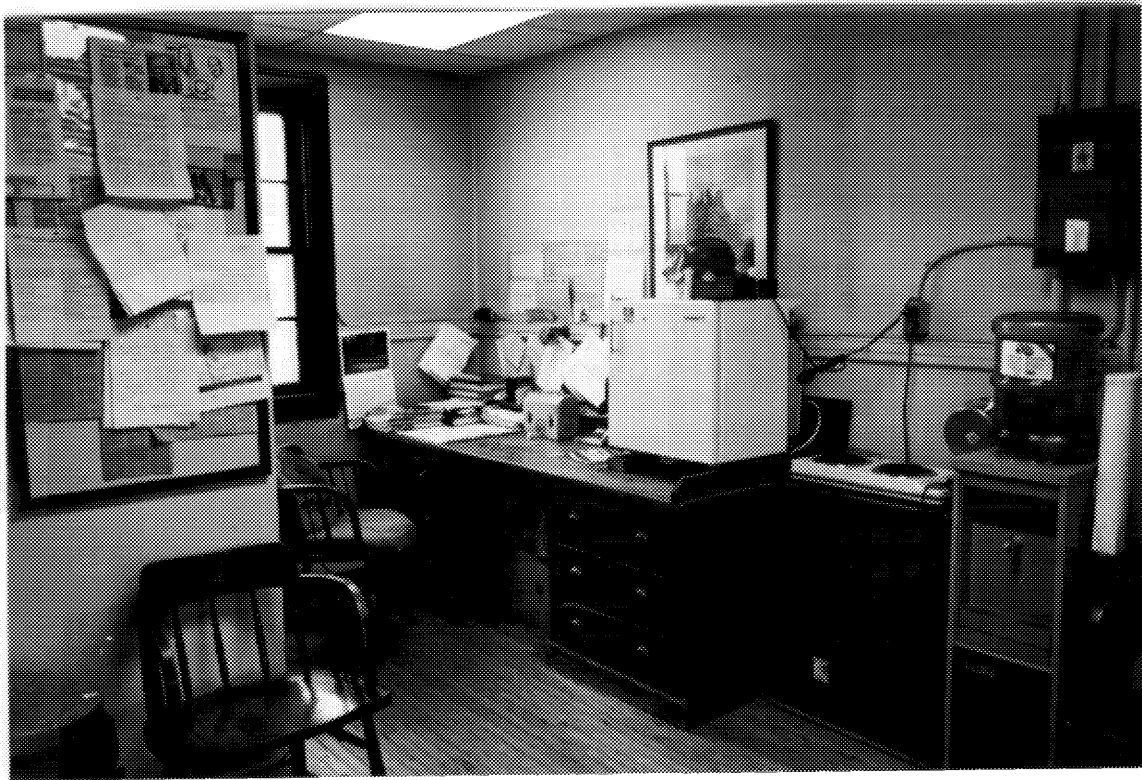
10 CNR station, end (north) elevation. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



11 CNR station, roadside (south) elevation. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



12 CNR station, detail showing aluminum entry door, track side elevation. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)

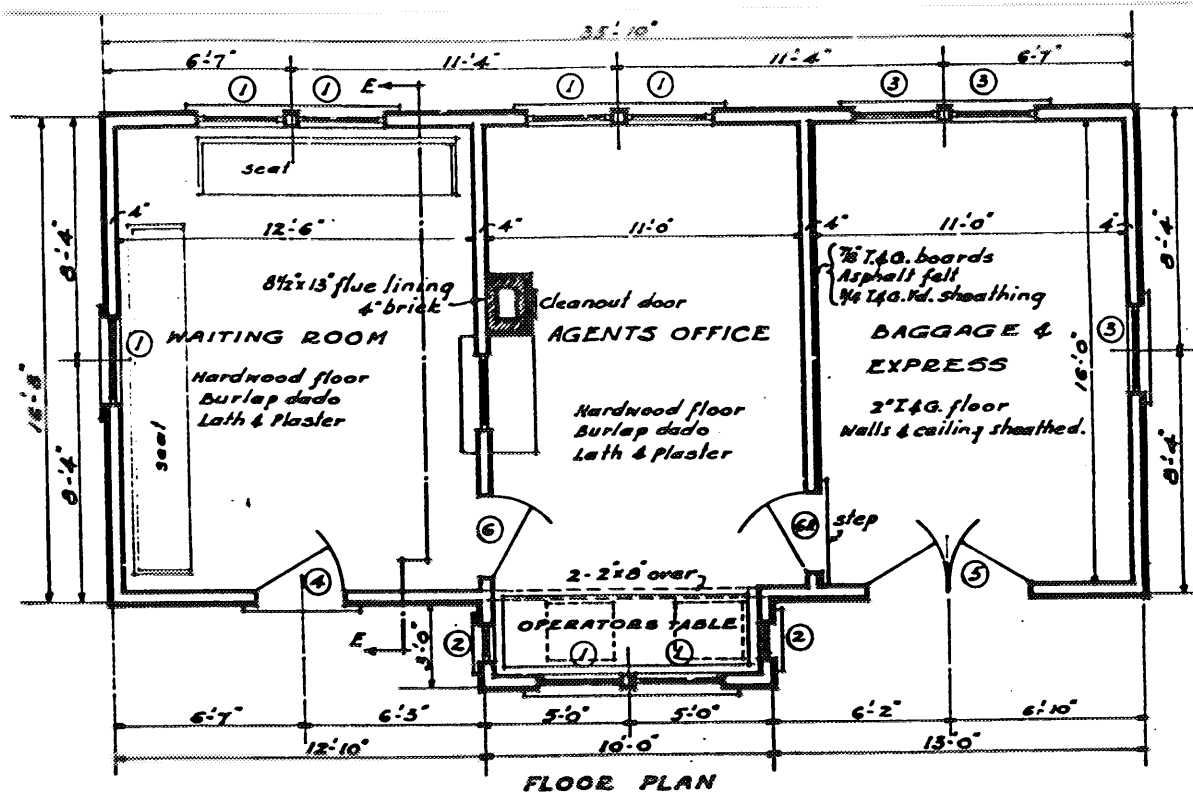


13 CNR station, detail showing wainscoting and agent's desk.
(Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



14 CNR station, detail showing tongue and groove finish. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BROOKFIELD, NS

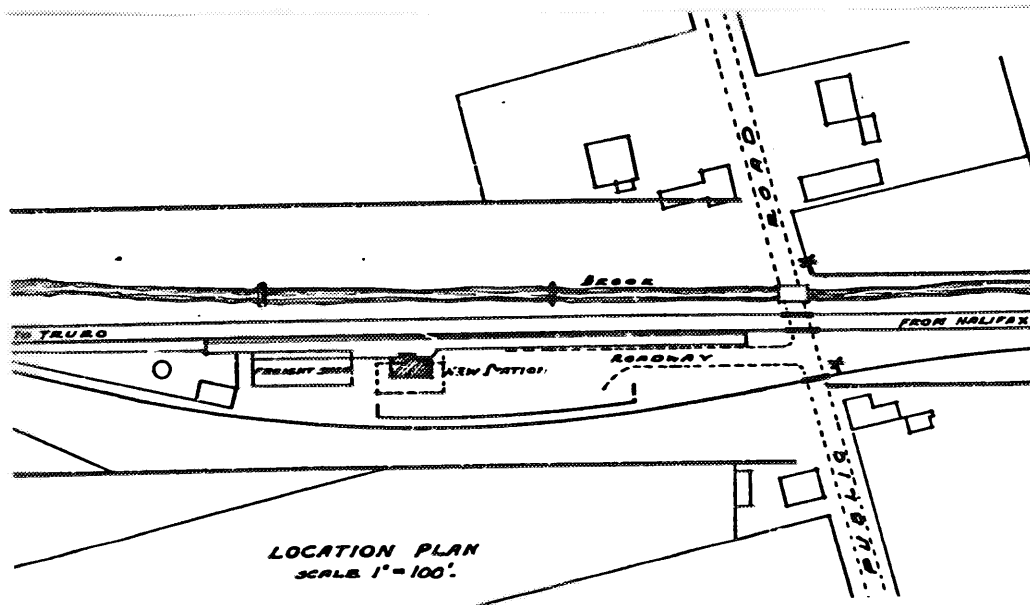


15 CNR station, floor plan. (Drawing courtesy of Canadian National Railways, Moncton, New Brunswick.)

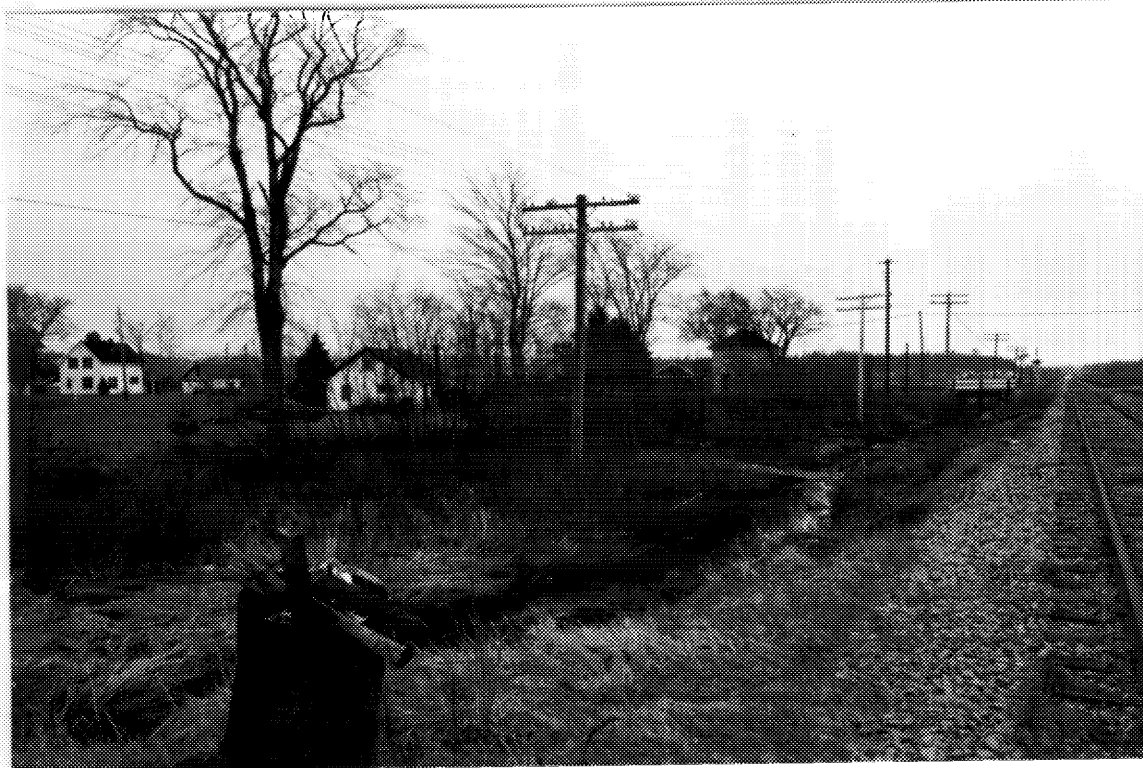


16 CNR station, detail showing furnace in waiting room. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)

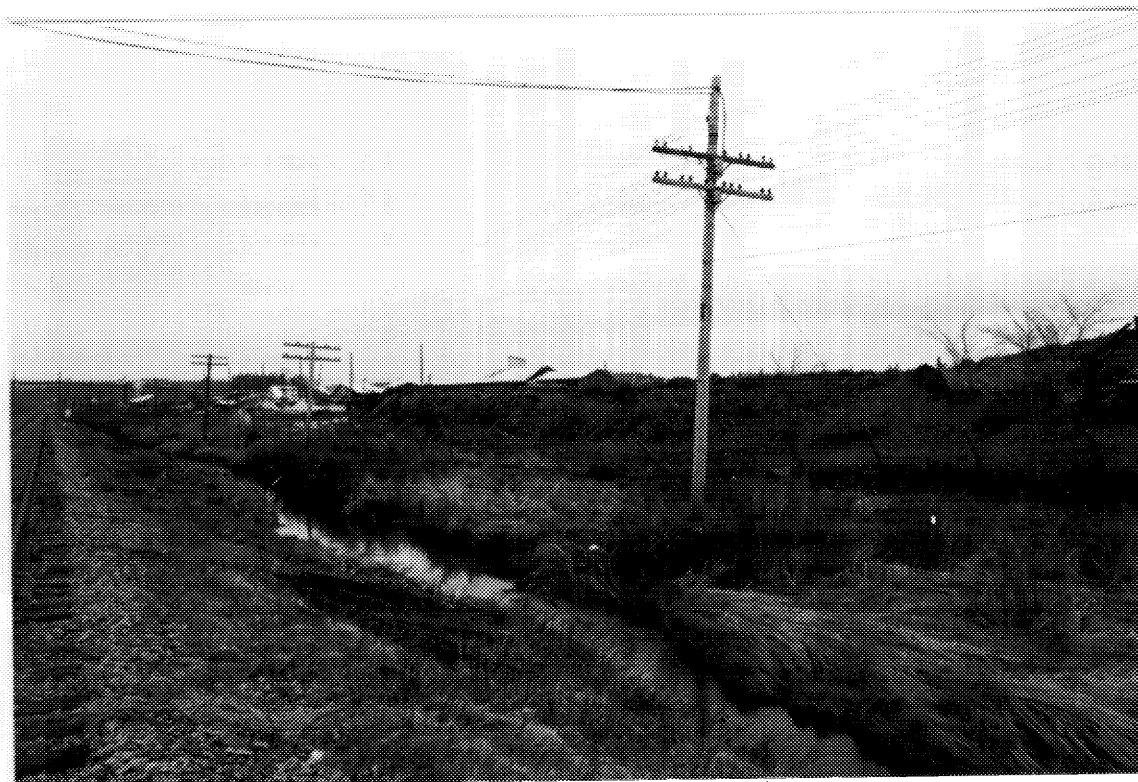
CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BROOKFIELD, NS



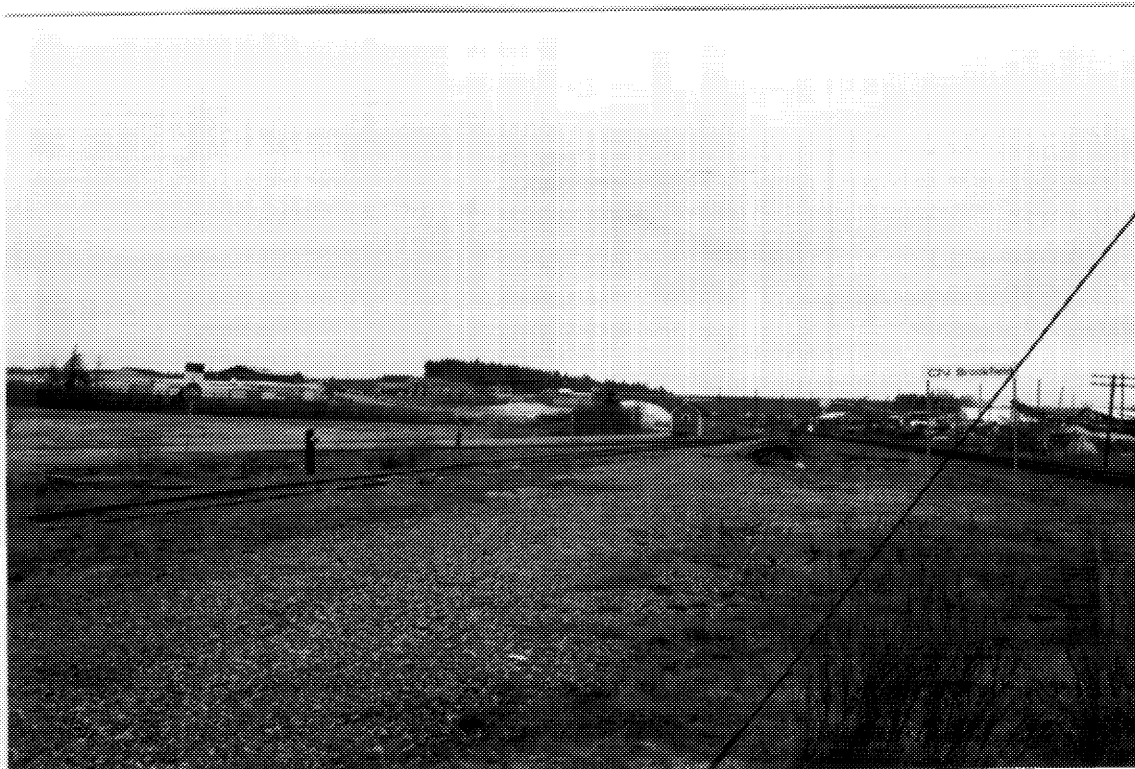
17 CNR station, site plan. (Drawing courtesy of Canadian National Railways, Moncton, New Brunswick.)



18 View from CNR station, showing adjacent residences. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



19 View from CNR station, showing lumber yard. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



20 View from CNR station, showing lumber yard. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, BROOKFIELD, NS



21 View from CNR station to road. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



22 CNR station, debris to north of station. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)



23 View from CNR station, showing adjacent park. (Harry Jost, DFA, 1992.)