

**HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA**

**RAILWAY STATION REPORT**

**Title: Canadian National Railways Station  
Mimico (Etobicoke), Ontario**

**Source: Staff Report, Heritage Railway Stations Division**

# **RSR-142**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The evolution and decline of the Canadian National Railways (CNR) station at 15 Judson Street in Mimico (Etobicoke) (Figures 1-3) illustrates the marginal role of passenger traffic in 20th century railroading. The diminishment of passenger services at Mimico is documented through a series of design drawings and administrative decisions from 1857 to the present, and is visible in the site and surrounding railway environment. When it was built in 1917, the Mimico station combined services to suburban commuters with extensive freight marshalling yards and crew accommodation on the western fringe of Toronto.

Designed in the Toronto office of the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) Bridges and Buildings maintenance division, and built as part of a general upgrading of facilities, the station resembled a series of contemporaneous designs in southern Ontario. Although the station was completely closed in 1987, the yards are still used for Government of Ontario (GO) Transit train servicing. The GO passenger shed is located on the east side of Royal York Road, visually separate from the station building but near the site of the first Mimico station.

## **HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS**

### Thematic

The design of the Mimico station, and the subsequent development of the site, clearly express a realignment of corporate priorities in the first quarter of the 20th century. Passenger traffic had never been a paying proposition for the railway companies,<sup>1</sup> and by 1916, when the GTR was under intense financial pressure, only the most essential requirements could be considered. At Mimico, these chiefly involved freight traffic and marshalling yards.

The years from 1895 to 1917 represent the "betterments" phase of

railway history in Canada, a period of expansion precipitated by the abundant harvests of, and demand for, prairie wheat.<sup>2</sup> Two transcontinental lines were flung across the country to the west, but the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific, coupled with the unanticipated effects of the Great War, bankrupted its parent, the GTR. During construction, however, prospects still looked rosy, and the company engaged in ambitious and continual reconstruction and upgrading across the system as part of a capital reinvestment programme.

The Mimico site was chosen for the relocation of downtown Toronto marshalling yards when city core congestion interfered with the effectiveness of railway traffic. An inspection tour by senior company officers Rivers-Wilson and Hays clinched the decision to remove the shops between John and Bathurst streets,<sup>3</sup> and in 1909 the Toronto Little York yards were "abandoned" and all yard work was concentrated on Mimico.<sup>4</sup> Locomotive houses that had been built at Mimico in 1904 were enlarged in 1914, and the station was planned shortly after.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1915 and 1917 the GTR was under a series of orders from the Canadian Board of Railway Commissioners regarding the Mimico station; first to clean and relocate it, then to build a new one.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the freight yards took precedence over passenger services despite frequent admonitions from the Railway Commissioners to correct the imbalance. In these years, company reports focused more on the construction of new shops, particularly at Port Huron, than on the dozens of new town and village stations. Canadian passenger traffic had never exceeded a third of gross earnings, and even at its numeric peak of 51 million riders in 1920, passenger traffic represented an average 21 per cent of gross revenue.<sup>7</sup>

A new challenge to the railways came in the form of electric interurban "radial" railways. In the Toronto area these ran over 70 miles into the surrounding countryside, carrying passengers and serving small communities with regular deliveries of mail, newspapers, milk, and freight. In 1905 the Toronto and York Radial ran a line out from the GTR Parkdale station west of Toronto, to Port Credit, with a stop at New Toronto, south of Mimico.<sup>8</sup> The importance of connecting train shipments with alternate surface transportation was forcing the railways to grapple with new competition. The Mimico station was built as a result of the Railway Commissioners' insistence on providing passenger facilities at that location, even though the community was already benefiting from interurban rail service into Toronto. Private automobiles effectively killed the radials, and along with intercity bus lines, crippled railway passenger services. The subsequent conversion of the Mimico station to non-passenger uses, and the opening of GO Transit services nearby, make this station an interesting example of the tensions between freight and passenger business in 20th century railroading.

## Local Development

The lands in Etobicoke Township were surveyed under order from Governor Simcoe in 1795 to provide farm lots for discharged Queen's Rangers. The capital at York, later Toronto, was accessible by a rough overland trail along the lake, or by water along the shoreline. The area developed slowly, acquiring churches, schools, and stage service to Toronto, until the general prosperity of the 1850s brought greater settlement, and the railway.

The first line through the township was constructed by the Toronto and Hamilton Railway Company, which was bought out by the Great Western Railway before completion in 1855.<sup>9</sup> The impact of the railway was the determining factor in the emergence of a village, and would continue to shape the growth of the community. It also produced plans for an early commuter suburb developed in the slipstream of English Christian socialism.<sup>10</sup> The boom in land speculation quickly collapsed, however, and Mimico did not become a true suburb of Toronto until about 70 years later.

Politically, the township organized an elected council in 1850. The little settlement of Mimico petitioned for permission to organize as a police village in 1905. From incorporation in 1911 the village went to town status in 1917; and in 1947 the councillors of Mimico decided that the entire metropolitan York region needed a joint administrative government. Their petition in that year was the first of nearly a dozen that lead to the creation of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto.<sup>11</sup> Other small communities in the district, particularly New Toronto and Long Branch, followed similar patterns. Although the disparate communities have been amalgamated back into the city of Etobicoke, they retain their distinct identities.

These growth-related changes were largely due to the presence of the railway. The construction of the freight yards in 1906 introduced the railway industry, one of the largest manufacturers in the country, to Mimico. With it came working railway families, and in their wake, those who provided the housing, goods and services that sustained them. In effect, the railway built the community.<sup>12</sup>

The nature of railway work demanded reliability and punctuality, and in return it offered relatively high wages. The railway workers in Mimico have been perceived as stable homeowners interested in community life, who virtually created the 20th century town.<sup>13</sup>

The importance of the railway for the local economy infiltrated the physical landscape as well as the social sphere. Construction between 1906 and 1914 greatly enlarged the communities of Mimico and neighbouring New Toronto, as parts of the plans initially envisioned for the model suburb were laid out and built. The yards themselves were renovated in the late

1940s, expanding to over 90 tracks for receiving, classifying, and working on cars, and handling over a hundred trains a day.<sup>14</sup>

In 1965, the regional freight terminal was moved from Mimico to new yards in Vaughan township north of Toronto, and the Mimico yard became a distribution point for west-of-central Toronto rail business.<sup>15</sup> The yard presently serves GO transit servicing and assembly needs.

## **ARCHITECTURE**

### Aesthetic/Visual Qualities

When it was built, the Mimico station faintly echoed a style that had been developed through the 1890s and early 1900s for GTR second-class stations. In its present condition, the allusions are even more tenuous. In form the station is a long rectangle broken only by the shallow projection of the operator's bay on the south track side, and by a matching projection on the north that encloses the lavatories (Figure 4). The gabled roof has slightly flared eaves, and is hipped on the ends, with small gable peaks framed with ventilating louvres offering a little visual interest. Soffits are attractively boxed with butted boards near the building, and carried by spoonbill rafter ends along the eaves. The rafter ends are a stylistic pretence recalling GTR bracket details that were characteristic of company buildings since their first stone stations of the 1850s (Figure 5). The long, straight horizontal of the roof is answered by a dark insulbrick dado around the base of the building. The windows float between them in a light stucco that is scored in imitation of ashlar (Figure 6). All door and window openings are securely boarded up against vandalism.

With the exception of the light plywood boarding, this general colour balance was probably integral to the station as built in 1917. Design drawings specified drop siding in the dado (resembling clapboard), and stuccoed upper walls. Fenestration was one-over-one single-pane sash with high meeting rails giving a transom effect to match the high transoms over the doorways. The doors had five horizontal panels stacked vertically, a significant switch from the identifiable, diagonally-boarded doors of the previous period in favour of a mass-produced catalogue-type design.

The design drawings do not specify interior finishes, although fragments of a vertical matchboard finish can be detected in the former passenger waiting room and in a lavatory.<sup>16</sup> The station interior was thoroughly reworked to cover the historic wall, floor, and ceiling surfaces and to reconfigure the spaces, so that it is difficult to appreciate whatever survives (Figures 7-9).

The Mimico station is unusual in having a graphic record of its design development preserved in the National Archives of Canada, although most of the designs were never executed. The earliest design from 1887 for a "suburban station" conferred a specific picturesque and ideological status, architecturally expressed, but it was never executed (Figure 10). The station that was probably built was the typical tripartite way-side station, a mere shed similar to those of the Toronto and Nipissing line in the 1870s (Figure 11). In 1915, a series of three designs were produced in succession, moving from airy timber structures with open shelters at either end, and small, multi-pane transoms typical of Edwardian domestic detailing, to the present building, which had none of those features (Figure 12).

Its overall form is actually closer to GTR precedents than the somewhat experimental plans concocted in Montreal in October and November, 1915. The low, sheltering roof, with peaked gables above the hips, brackets, and a vestigial bellcast awning, and the colouristic division of the design from roof crest to foundations by banding expressed through permanent materials, were signal elements that had been evolving for 20 years. Not all wartime stations were so frugal: Toronto's downtown Union Station and the alternative Union Station north on Yonge Street were both palatial buildings designed by leading Canadian architects.

Few comparable Ontario line stations were built in these years. Those built at Alexandria (1917), Orillia (1913), and St. Catharines (1916) utilized numerous familiar motifs, such as brackets, flared eaves, and square wall planes, but those towns were not adjuncts to a central operation in the way that Mimico was.<sup>17</sup> The Mimico station was a reluctant effort, forced on the company by the Board of Railway Commissioners, to maintain the respected GTR standards in the face of more urgent priorities.

#### Functional/Technological Qualities

Most combination stations in southern Ontario were equitably divided into passenger waiting rooms, agent's office, and a room for handling baggage and express. At Mimico, each function was expanded, and the office space in particular was emphasized. The plan subverted the expectations set up by traditional station plans and the architecture itself in several aspects. Firstly, entry was not marked by the projecting gabled elements more or less centred on the facade; that signalled the lavatories (Figure 13). The one public door on the street side of the building opened into a vestibule beside the men's toilet. Uncharacteristically, this passage was also used by railway employees to enter the file room, a new innovation, and thence the office.

Reduced local passenger service and the social mobilization brought about by the Great War seem finally to have shaken one of the most dominant qualities of earlier station design: what has

been called "the desire of their male designers and operators to protect women" through the device of separate waiting rooms.<sup>18</sup> Passenger access to the single waiting room at Mimico was restricted to the track platform. In these respects, the amenities typical of a second-class station were provided without undue elaboration, and with minimal grace. The baggage area of the present station does not conform to the plan of 1916, and the plan was itself in conflict with the elevations drawn on the same sheet. The chief lapse seems to be the replacement of the centred double doors by single-leaf door openings at either end of the space, approximately where windows are indicated (but difficult to read) on the plan (Figures 4, 14). How the station actually functioned may be surmised from the configuration of external openings, but is almost impossible to discern from the interior.

The wartime economy is reflected in the use of plain materials, such as asbestos roof shingles, and the re-use of bridge ties for principal floor joists.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Setting

The route of the railway was determined quite independently of the town, which grew up later and has since been subsumed by larger forces around it. Over the years, the station building and its location were moved north and south of the tracks, and east and west of what is now Royal York Road. The construction of the present station was governed largely by the needs of the freight yard. Consequently, it is located at the throat of the yard where tracks cross over Royal York Road (formerly Church Street), which continues to be a principal north-south traffic artery. The station sits on high ground relative to the road, and would be more visible if the site were better maintained (Figures 15-16). It is reached by a driveway off Judson Street. While the uses of the railway buildings and yard have changed since 1917, the relationship of the station to its site has not significantly altered.

The station grounds are in use as untended parking. A flatroofed yard office dating from about 1950, covered in peeling grey insulbrick, dominates the approach to the site (Figure 17).

The Mimico station is one of the few not to have a raised platform. The track view is obtainable only by trespassing, however; public access to GO trains is located on the east side of Royal York Road. None of the early signalling mechanisms or standpipes survive.

## Community Status

The railway station is listed on the inventory of historic buildings for the city of Etobicoke, which numbers several hundred structures. The railway station attracted the intense concern of the municipal Historical Board about three years ago (i.e., 1989), and they organized a drive for the relocation of the building to a municipally-owned park site farther east along the railway track. CNR was willing to relinquish the building for a token fee of one dollar. No viable, self-supporting use could be developed, however, and the committee, which had recently exhausted itself in another, unsuccessful preservation battle, withdrew from the plan.

Mimico does not have a local historical society that might independently continue the struggle for the conservation of the station.<sup>19</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 John A. Droege, Passenger Terminals and Trains (1916 rpt. Milwaukee: Kalmbach Publishing, 1969), p. 1.
- 2 Christopher Andreae, "Railways," in Norman Ball, ed., Building Canada: A History of Public Works (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 94.
- 3 "G.T.R. Development," Canadian Railway and Marine World (CRMW) (September and December 1909), pp. 651, 891.
- 4 "G.T.R. Development," CRMW (October 1909), p. 721. Engineers, brakemen, and some locomotive repairs were moved to Belleville.
- 5 "G.T.R. Development," CRMW (September 1909), p. 651, (January 1914) p. 3.
- 6 "Orders by the Board of Railway Commissioners for Canada," CRMW (October 1915), p. 394, (January 1916), p. 9, (April 1917), p. 135. Each of the citations contains references to earlier orders.
- 7 Andreae, "Railways," in Ball, Building Canada, p. 101.
- 8 Christopher Andreae, "Railway Heritage in Toronto" (London: Historica Research Limited, for the City of Toronto, 1983), pp. 38-39.
- 9 Harvey Currell, The Mimico Story (n.p.: Town of Mimico and Library Board, 1967), p. 41.
- 10 Benevolent paternalism toward the poor and working classes had reached a level of fashionability in England when the

Prince Consort sponsored model workmen's houses at the Great Exhibition of 1851. So called "5 per cent philanthropy" attracted enlightened manufacturers and capitalists, some of whom built model manufacturing towns in England. The Mimico experiment, shown on Tremaine's map of 1860, was premature. Working men and women were not yet compelled to travel so far to find the requisite balance of affordable housing an acceptable distance from the workplace. Currell, The Mimico Story, pp. 43-44. Cf. Peter Goheen's analysis of the movement of the poor around Toronto in Victorian Toronto (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); also John N. Tarn, Five per cent philanthropy: an account of housing in urban areas between 1840 and 1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

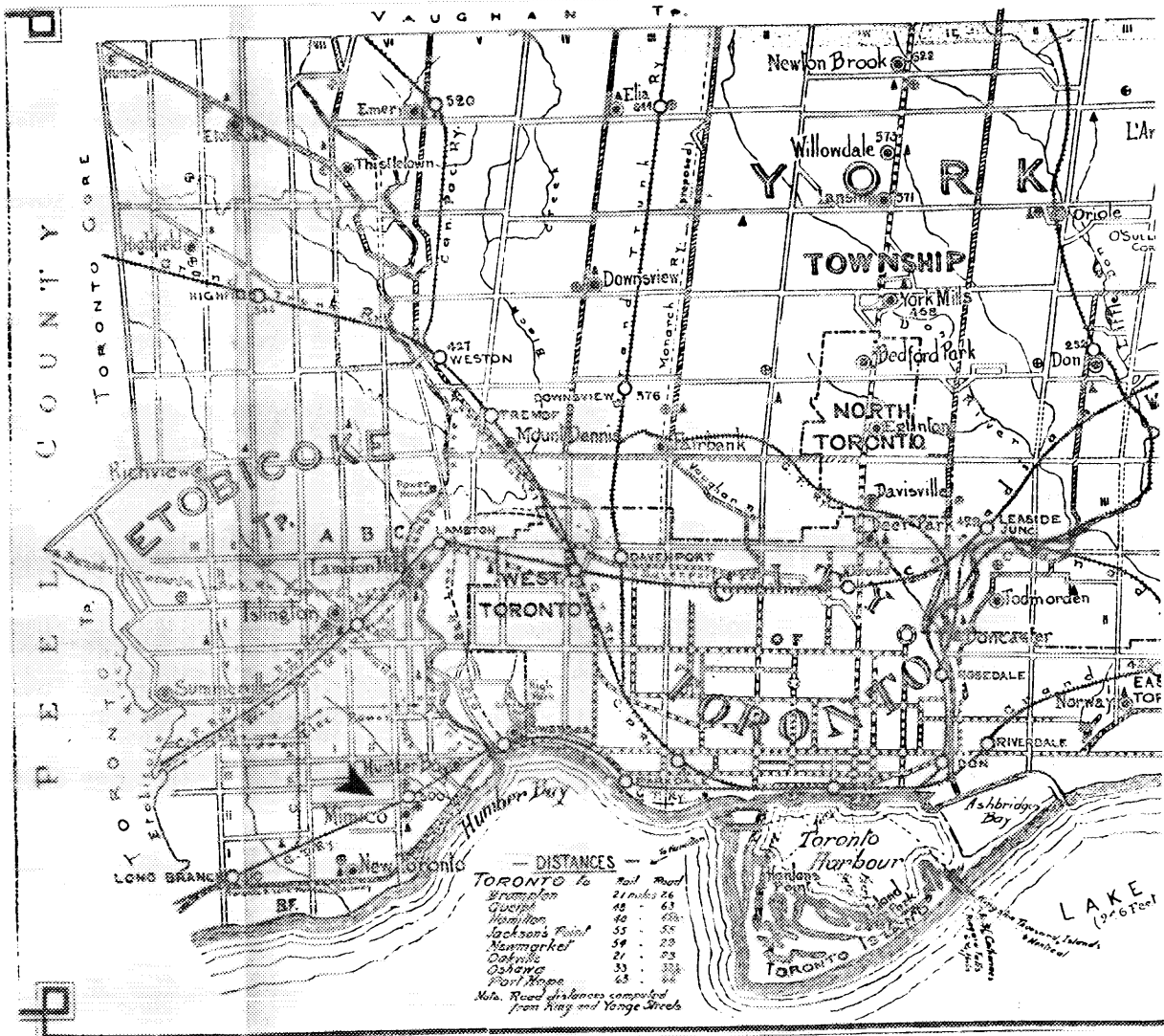
- 11 Currell, The Mimico Story, pp. 81, 101-03.
- 12 The importance of the railway is strongly asserted by Currell, The Mimico Story, p. 63 and passim.
- 13 Ibid., p. 65.
- 14 Ibid., p. 68.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 The exceptional efforts of CN staff are acknowledged through the permission of B&B Master P. Haydon, and the assistance of L. (Monty) Currie.
- 17 The dates and illustrations for these stations are listed alphabetically in "Planning for Heritage Railway Stations: Inventory" (Toronto: Ontario Heritage Foundation and Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, 1978).
- 18 Jeffrey Richards and John M. Mackenzie, The Railway Station: a social history (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 158.
- 19 Molly Sutherland, Committee Secretary to the Etobicoke Historical Board, in conversation with the author, 19 August 1992.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



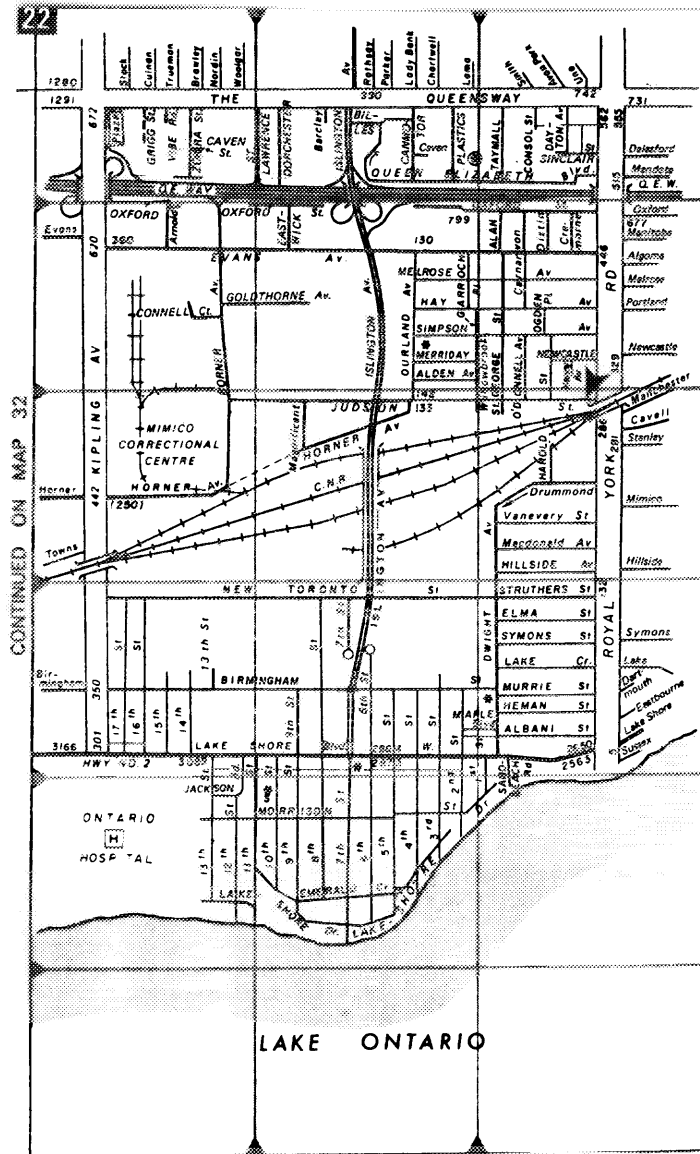
- 1 Canadian National Railways station, Mimico (Etobicoke), Ontario, built in 1917 by the Grand Trunk Railway. South elevation. (Heritage Railway Stations Division [HRSD] files, 1991.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



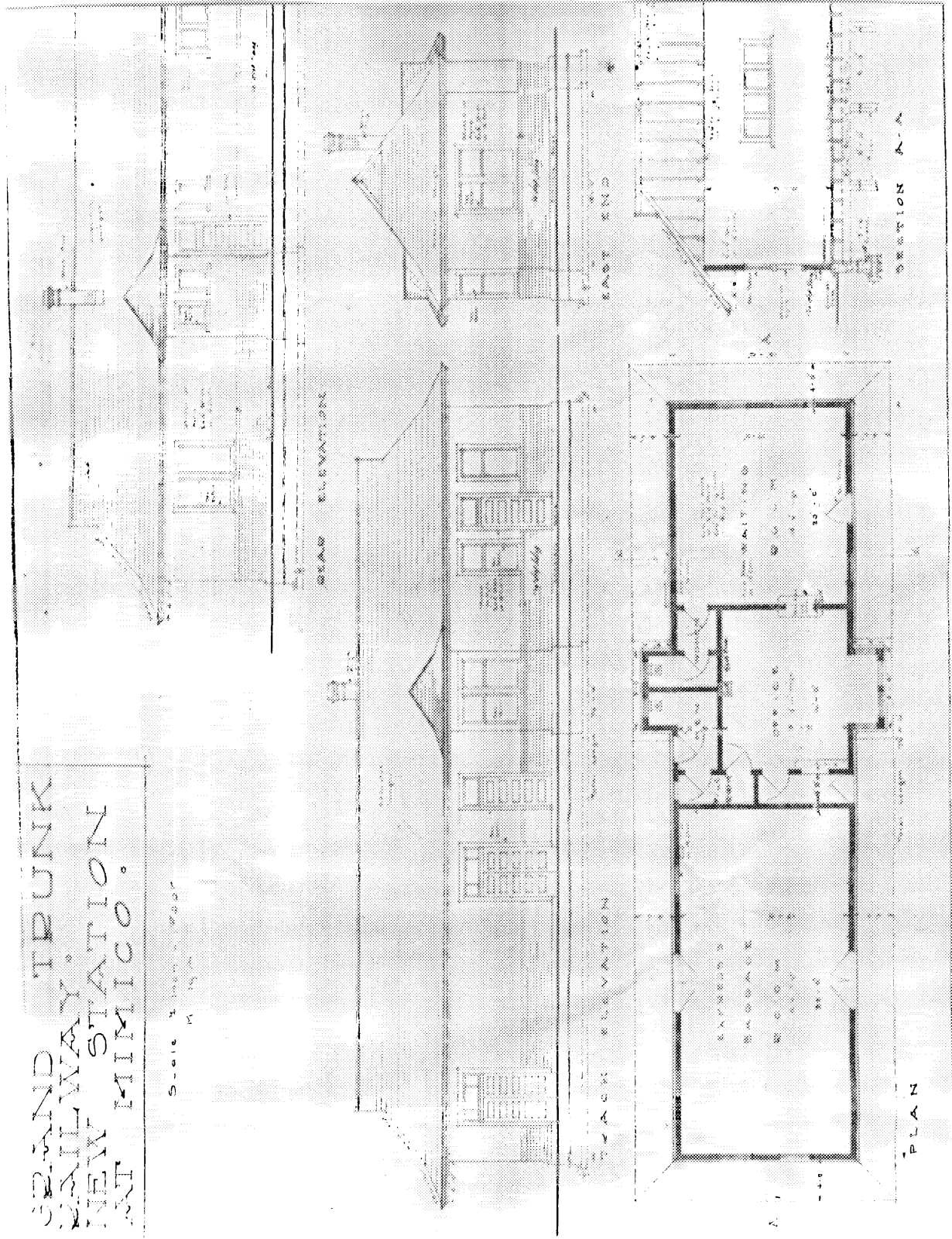
2 "Algate's Automobile, Motorist and Pedestrian Map, Toronto Environs - Compiled & Published by Map Specialty Co.... Toronto," 1911. (National Archives of Canada [NAC], National Map Collection [NMC] 0004491.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



3 Map of the Mimico area of Etobicoke. The arrow indicates the location of the station at Judson and Royal York Road. (Perly's 1980-81 B. J. Map Book [Toronto: Perly's Maps Limited, 1981] Map 22.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



4 "Grand Trunk Railway. New Station at Mimico." Designed for a site on the north side of the tracks in 1916. When built, some of the baggage room doors were not executed as shown. (NAC, NMC 0078622.)

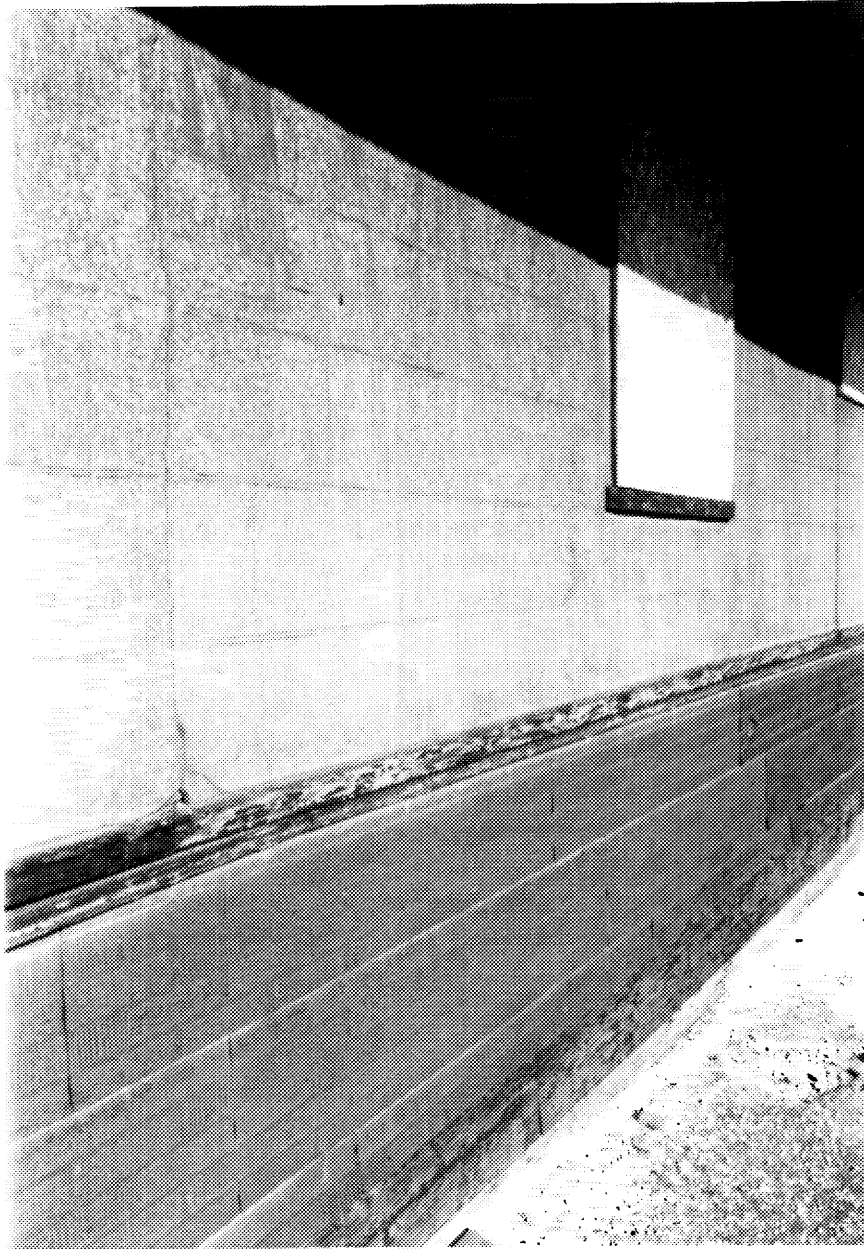
CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO

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5 CNR station, Mimico, southwest corner showing detail of brackets around operator's bay. (HRSD files, 1991.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



6 CNR station, Mimico, detail of scored stucco above insulbrick dado on south elevation. (HRSD files, 1991.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO

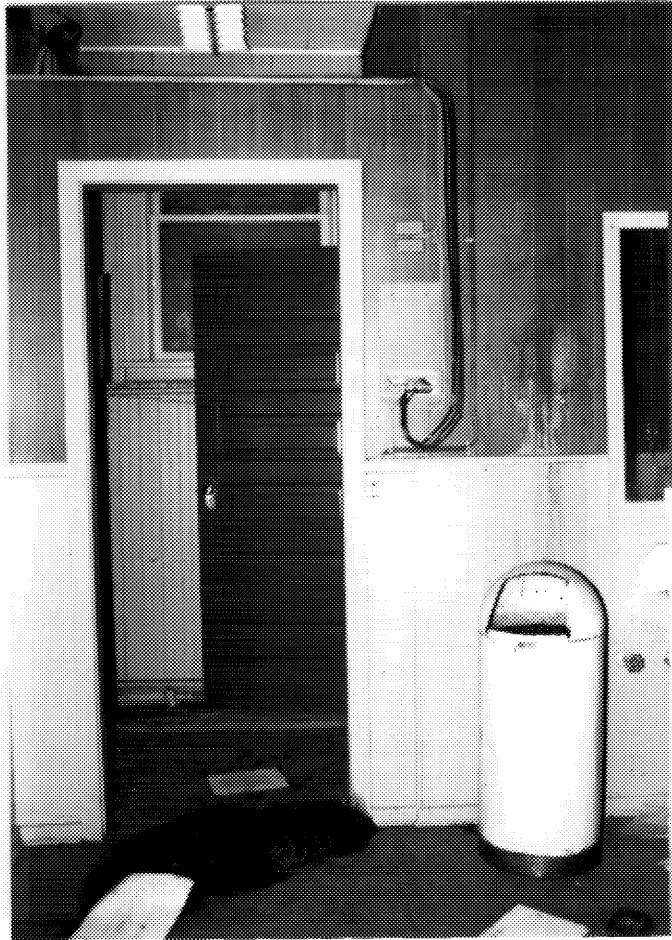


7 CNR station, Mimico, main interior space. (HRSD files, 1992.)



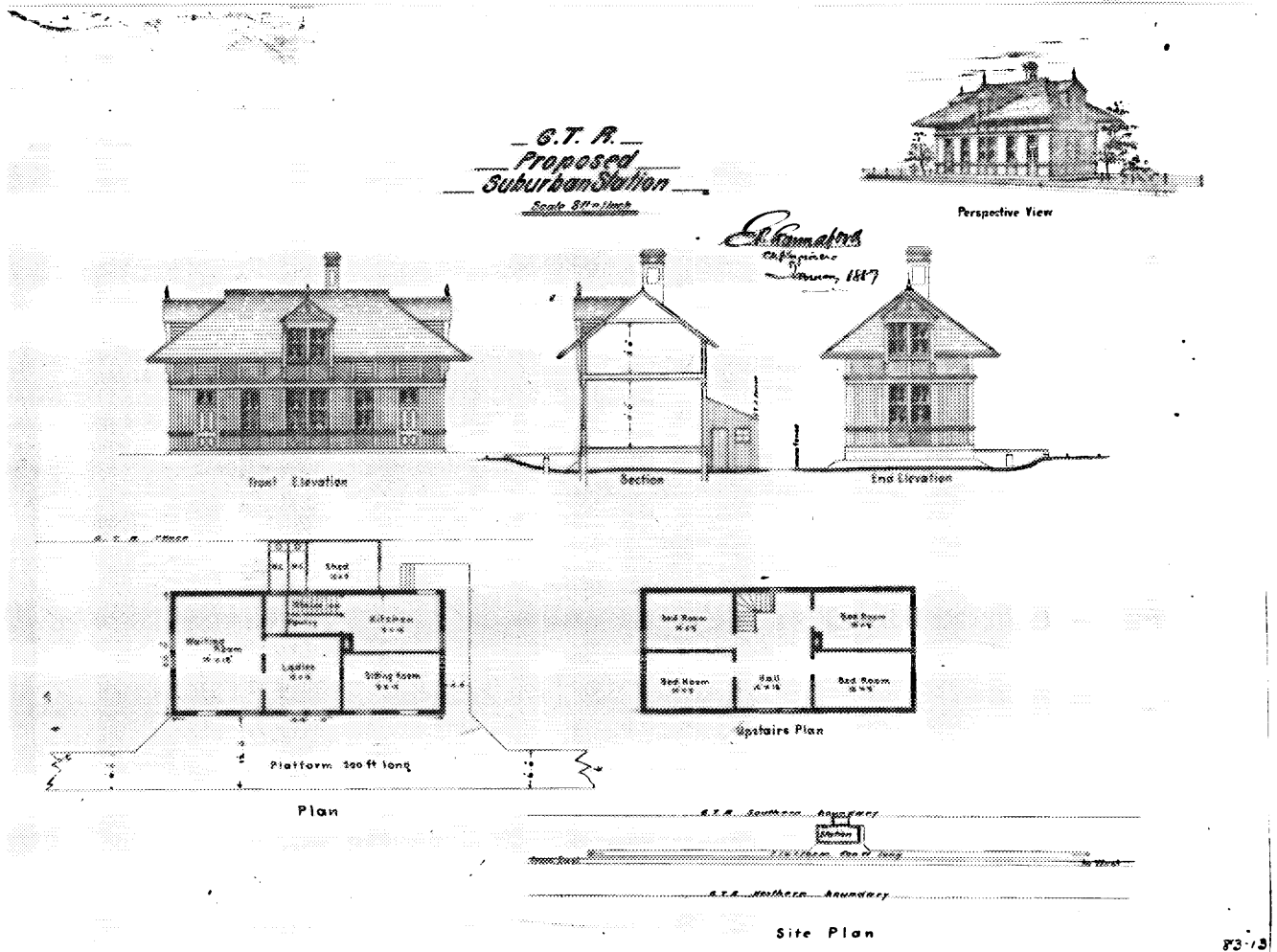
8 CNR station, Mimico, former passenger lobby, with doors to lavatory and main space. (HRSD files, 1992.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



- 9 CNR station, Mimico, interior of west end, looking through late partitions toward original south wall. (HRSD files, 1992.)

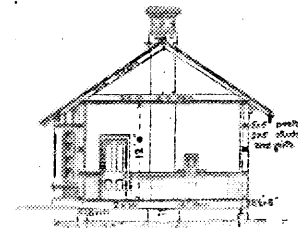
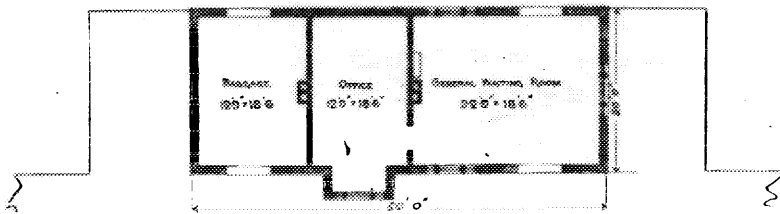
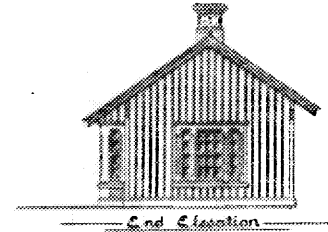
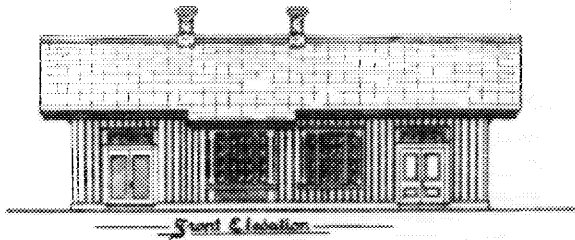
CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



10 "GTR Proposed Suburban Station," January 1887, by E. P.Hannaford, Chief Engineer. (NAC, NMC 98862.)

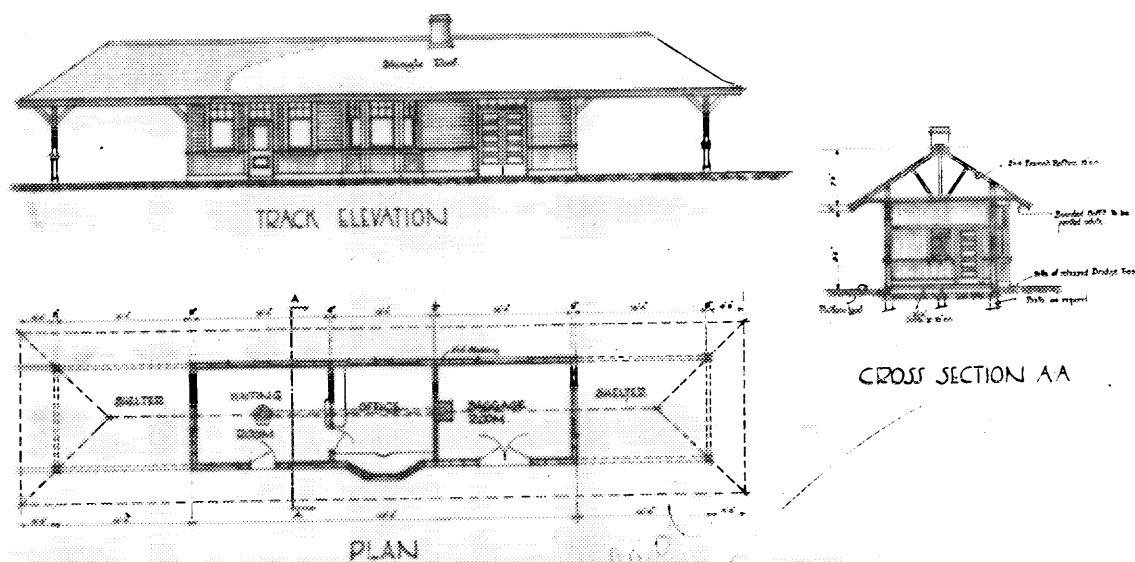
Plan of Station Building at Mimico

Scale  $\frac{1}{8}'' = 1'$



- 11 "Plan of Station Building at Mimico, January 27th, 1888" by E. P. Hannaford, Chief Engineer. (NAC, NMC 00788608.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY SYSTEM	
TORONTO TERMINALS	
<b>MIMICO</b>	
PLAN, SECTION & ELEVATION OF NEW STATION	
Scale 8/16 to 1 inch	
Office of Chief Engineer	Tel. No. 47802
Montreal, Oct. 1915	File No. 44712

- 12 "Grand Trunk Railway System. Toronto Terminals. Mimico. Plan, Section & Elevation of New Station." Dated Montreal, October 1915, handwritten "cancelled." (NAC, NMC 0078609.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



13 CNR station, Mimico, north elevation. The little gable at the left indicates the lavatories. (HRSD files, 1991.)

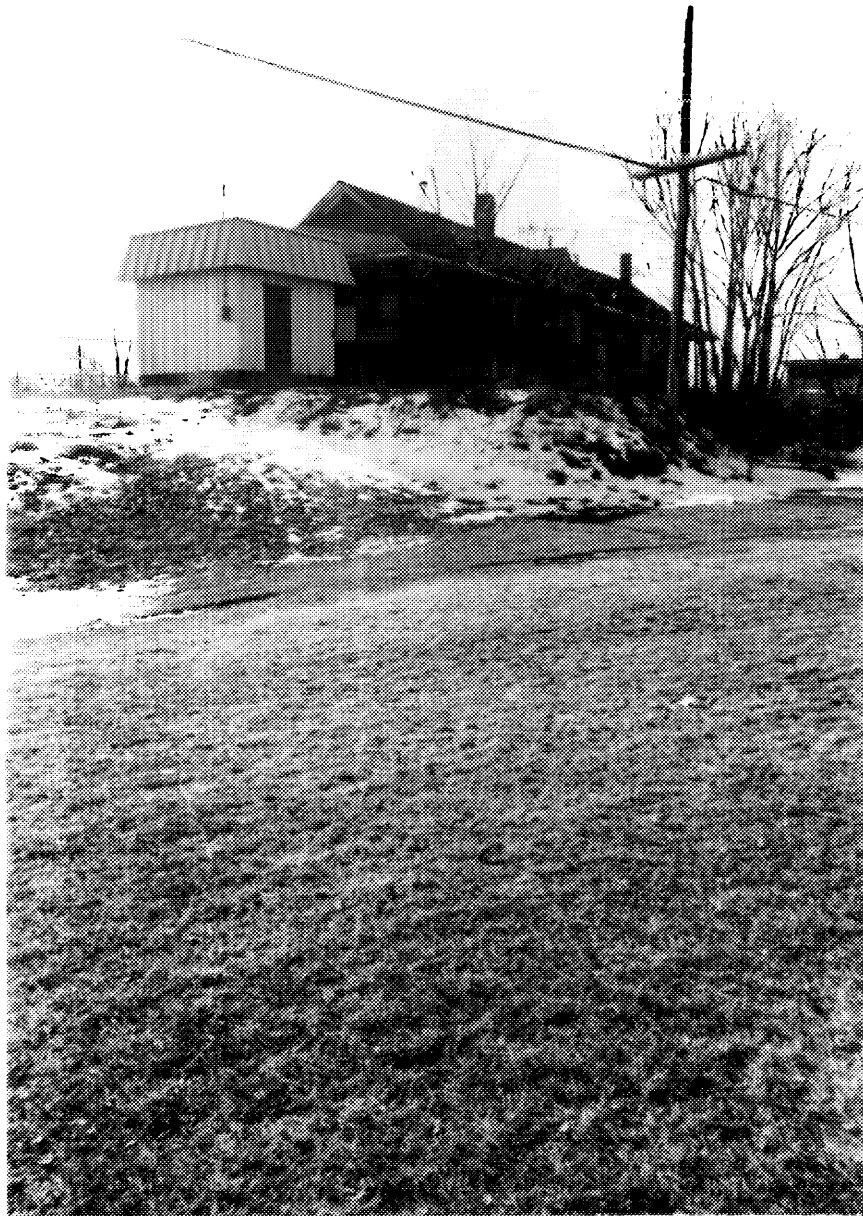
CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO



14 CNR station, Mimico, south elevation of baggage section. (HRSD files, 1992.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO

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15 CNR station, Mimico, view from Judson Street to north elevation. (HRSD files, 1991.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO

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16 CNR station, Mimico, view west along tracks. (HRSD files, 1991.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, MIMICO, ONTARIO

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17 CNR station, Mimico, view from northwest with railway office on right. (HRSD files, 1991.)