

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

RAILWAY STATION REPORT

TITLE: Canadian National Railways Station
Field, Ontario

SOURCE: Margaret Carter and Jennifer Mueller,
Heritage Research Associates Inc.

RSR-254

INTRODUCTION

Field's former Canadian National Railways (CNR) station was built in 1936 using a Standard Station No. 4 Third Class plan (Figures 1-3). This plan originated with the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR), and was passed to CNR when it was formed in 1919.

Standard Station No. 4 is a combined residence and station commonly used in small communities across Canada during the first half of the 20th century. In the middle of the Depression, it was selected as a cost-effective replacement for the station destroyed by fire in Field. This new station was built as a result of C. D. Howe's innovative approach to railway management. After 1936, the CNR became a useful public resource for stimulating the Canadian economy.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Thematic

Field was a station stop on the CNR. It is located on the Montreal-Ottawa-Port Arthur section of the transcontinental line completed in 1914.¹ Today that line is operated by CNR.

World War I occurred just as this track was finished, and so no station was built in Field until 1919. By this time, the CNoR had collapsed under heavy debt obligations. Its difficulties were resolved by an agreement to nationalize the line in 1919 "to protect Canada's credit and more than half of its railways".²

Early CNR operations were never lucrative. As a public line CNR responded to political pressure, and service was inclusive rather than curtailed within cost-effective limits. One result of this priority was that the Depression hit CNR hard. Had it been a privately owned facility, the company would have folded. As a public one, CNR continued even though it was responsible for "a

Field was one of the first locations where this philosophy was put into practice.

Since "nothing is purchased that is not needed,"¹⁰ station construction was a rare undertaking. Stations were built only in instances where expenditures were "essential for safety of operation, or necessary to comply with requirements of regulatory bodies, and because of curtailment in or postponement of programmed work due to traffic failing to measure up to the volume upon which the budget was based".¹¹ In 1935, a rare station was built in London, Ontario, where station construction was associated with a subway required for public safety. Under the Conservatives, such projects were almost non-existent.

Field's present station was built in 1936. Replacement became an issue when the previous station burned that June. It was approved because regulations required an adequate station be in place. The Liberals were in power, however, and replacement occurred with an eye towards the spin-off benefit - provision of lumber to support local employment. As a consequence, the station built was both new and larger than its predecessor. This is an instance where C. D. Howe's approach to railway management was put into action.

Field remained a station on the Montreal to Capreol section of CNR's mainline until it was closed during CNR cutbacks in 1981. After that, the building continued to be used as a track maintenance facility.

Local Development

Field is a small French speaking community just north of Sturgeon Falls. It began as a lumbering area. Field Township (Figure 2) developed when Ottawa's J. R. Booth began to exercise timber rights he had purchased from lumber barons Barnet & Mackay in 1866.¹² Settlement occurred as the land was cleared. The first settler arrived in 1888, and by 1894 several families had located in the area. Most of them were Quebecois, with a few settlers from eastern Ontario and the United States.¹³ By 1899, a small community had developed with its own post office, store and church. In 1905 J. R. Booth opened the community's first major industry, a sawmill. Booth sold his local timber rights in 1911 just before the railway arrived.

When CNoR surveyors reached the Field area in 1912, they plotted a route for the line that ignored the "most part of population and the best part of land too ... [which was located] at Field Church at the village now started."¹⁴ The villagers, led by their priest the Rev. A. Chapleau, petitioned to have the route changed to create a station site on Lot 14 Concession 6, near the village and sawmill. This location was too low to readily accommodate the railway, and so a deal was made which provided the CNoR with a higher station site on nearby church land, and the church with \$10,500 for a new building.¹⁵ The first CNoR

train travelled through Field on 19 November 1914 just as war began, inaugurating the section of track between Capreol and North Bay.¹⁶

Under wartime conditions, an old rail car located some 300 feet southwest of the present site served as a station.¹⁷ Once war was over,¹⁸ this facility was replaced by a small CNoR Standard Type B Station (Figure 4), a single-storey building with passenger and freight facilities. It dealt with small goods and local passenger traffic, while the town's new sawmill, the Field Lumber Co. had its own siding.¹⁹ During World War I sawmill facilities were enlarged, and so by the time a station was constructed in 1919, Field was a thriving concern.

When CNR assumed control of the CNoR in 1919, it completed the Longlac-Nakina cutoff shortening the line's east-west rail route by a hundred miles. At the same time, CNR reduced traffic on the Toronto and Northern Ontario line between North Bay & Cochrane,²⁰ and routed passengers and freight through Field. Freight quarters in Field were enlarged in 1923²¹ (Figures 4, 5) to accommodate this new activity. The station received an addition, while the former separate freight and baggage shed was devoted to freight.

In the years that followed, Field prospered slowly. By 1926 its population had grown to 1,250.²² While some local agriculture developed and the Ministry of Natural Resources opened an office about 1930, lumber remained the basis of the area's economy. The sawmill continued to operate under a variety of owners until 1933 when it was purchased by Edgar Gagné, a local resident. He provided employment throughout the Depression, surviving with the assistance of government contracts.²³ When Field's CNR station was destroyed by fire on 12 June 1936, a new one was constructed in the fall with lumber from the local mill. The new station (Figure 6) was built on the foundation of its predecessor, but it included an extra storey to accommodate station master's quarters.

Since the appearance of this station, life in Field (Figure 7) has evolved slowly. A bridge was constructed across the Sturgeon River in 1948.²⁴ Hydro appeared in 1950 and general telephone service in 1959.²⁵ The mill (Figure 8) was incorporated as Field Lumber in 1956. Despite these changes, the town's population had declined to 655 by 1971.²⁶

Today Field remains a small village. It is a well-organized active community, with its own library, Golden Age Club, recreation centre and school. It has become a tourism and recreation area for nearby communities. Numerous local beaches, rivers and lakes encourage such sports as swimming and fishing, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing.²⁷ Field retains a population that is 70% French Canadian.²⁸ Its lumber mill still operates. Today this mill is the only steam mill still functioning in North America.²⁹

ARCHITECTURE

Aesthetic/Visual Qualities

Field CNR station (Figures 9-12) was built in difficult times. In 1936, CNR had strict policies of re-use: stations were "transplanted" from the existing building inventory wherever possible. Despite this policy, CNR Capreol Division management decided to construct a "new station"³⁰ in Field. This decision may have been regarded as a spur to employment at the local mill. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the plan used was well-worn. Field was a CNR "Standard Station No. 4".

This plan (Figure 13), signed by Geo. C. Briggs, Architect, was one of the first approved by CNR in May of 1919, just after CNR assumed control of the CNoR. It is, in fact, a duplication of CNoR's plan for Standard Station No. 4 (Figures 14-16), prepared in Toronto by the CNoR in May of 1911. Such duplication was typical of early CNR operations.

During its early years, Canadian National in most cases used the designs of its predecessor companies when a new depot was to be built. In most instances, Canadian National relied on the design of the later versions of Canadian Northern Third and Fourth Class stations when a new depot was needed.³¹

This was a Third Class Station plan, one often used by both the CNoR and CNR. It was a variation of CNoR plan 100-3, "the most common plan used by the Canadian Northern throughout all of its lines in Canada."³² It was one of a family of station plans that originated in the first decade of the 20th century, and continued to be used until the end of World War II.³³ Standard Plan No. 4 appeared often in Ontario (Figures 17-19) and Quebec (Figure 20).

Variations of it were also common in western Canada. They include CNR Third Class Plans 100-184, -197, -227, -250 and -253. These were prepared from a "CNR prototype design [that] emerged sometime after 1923 and was used throughout the CNR system, some being built as late as 1945"³⁴ (Figures 21-22). Field station was not one of these later designs. The later versions varied from Standard Station No. 4 in that their roofs had a slight ridge, their second storeys contained four separate rather than two double windows, and their interior staircases were oriented in a front-to-rear rather than a side-to-side position.

The Standard Station No. 4 plan used in Field provided a modest building. It was defined by a central, square, two-storey portion topped by a four-sided gable roof which rose to a short central ridge. Each facade of the building was defined in halves, with apertures situated one above the other. The telegrapher's bay, with its double windows, also respected this subdivision.

Functions not housed in this central area were accommodated in one storey projections. These all had pitched roofs that rose to a central gable whose height corresponded to the roof edge of the central building. The roofline of the single-storey freight shed tipped to form a platform cover that extended across the front of the station, terminating in projecting ends. These were sloped to echo the pitch of the central roofline, adding coherence to the design. In the original design, these platform ends were supported with ornate brackets.

All facades under this roofline were covered with cove siding. Those above were finished in a contrasting material. This provided vertical subdivision that added to the visual interest of the design. These subdivisions are no longer visible on Field station: it was covered with stucco during renovations in 1966.³⁵ The projecting platform cover (Figure 6) was probably removed at the same time.

The former CNR station in Field was built to a common standard plan following domestic models. Like most other examples of that plan, it was amended in the 1960s removing the surface texture and platform cover that added interest to its exterior design.

Functional/Technological Qualities

The former CNR station in Field was a combined station and residence. As Charles Bohi noted in his book, Canadian National's Western Depots, use of such combined stations was the cheapest possible way to offer service.

In addition to meeting the needs of the railway's customers an agent had to assist the dispatcher in controlling train movements. This was done by requiring the station agent to report train movements past his station... so that a dispatcher could know where trains were and plan meeting and passing points.³⁶

If the agent lived in the station, a single agent could monitor traffic effectively. Resident agents were, therefore, the most efficient way of ensuring train control in areas with a low passenger volume. This seems to have been the situation in Field since the community's first station was built in 1919. According to local historian Roger Lafond, CNR owned a separate stationmaster's residence that was "identiques à la station no. 4".³⁷ The fate of this building is not known. It is possible it burned in the 1936 fire that destroyed the station. Parts may have been reused to create the present structure.

The present station in Field conforms completely to the CNR Standard Station No. 4 floor plan (Figure 13). The most distinctive features of this plan, the east-west stairwell and chimney position are still intact (Figure 23). The few alterations that have been made complement the original layout

rather than obscure it. A washroom was added in the alcove behind the stairwell in the baggage room. It uses the original baggage room door, and a second door has been created. The northwest bedroom on the second storey has been converted into a bathroom.

The woodshed behind the kitchen was integrated with the kitchen proper once it was no longer required, and so the kitchen extends into the addition behind the building.

The most significant change to the interior of Field station are the finishes added during 1966 renovations. At that time, walls in the upper storey and passenger area of the ground floor were insulated and covered with wallboard. The original cove siding was left in place in the kitchen, living room and stairwell areas where it is still visible today (Figure 23). Few of the station's doors and windows have been replaced (Figure 24). Parts of the unfinished wood surface of the freight shed are covered with metal (Figure 24). The station's rear foundations have begun to crumble.

From 1919 to 1970, Field station was composed of two buildings. These were a station and a separate baggage/freight shed that was used for freight only after 1923 (Figure 6). The secondary building was destroyed in a tornado 20 August 1970.³⁸

CNR had a consistent philosophy for the development of station facilities in small communities that is reflected at Field. Although traffic volume was small, all services would be supplied as cost effectively as possible.

ENVIRONMENT

Setting

Field's 1936 station was built on the foundation of its predecessor. It is, consequently, on the same site on the hill less than a block to the north of the village centre. The original station was built on this site to provide the village "the most convenient place for the greatest accommodation." This site was both central and sufficiently high to permit railway operations.

The station site on Lot 14 Concession 5 was originally owned by the Roman Catholic Church, and intended for use as a cemetery. When the CNoR built its line, surveyors planned to by-pass Field because the grade through the town was too steep. Instead, they plotted a course to the east of the community with a station on Lot 11, Concession 5, Field Township. When the local MP, Charles McCray approached the CNoR on behalf of the town he was told

It would be possible to place a station about a mile to the west of Field if this would be more advantageous but we have not got the land for

this purpose and I understand that this location would interfere with some church property. If however the church would deed us a site for a station we might be able to meet them.³⁹

The church was happy to comply, and the station was located beside the road to Ferguson, closer to (but not in) the new village centre (Figure 3).

Field's station sits on a high strip of land up the hill north of the village centre. The site originally housed two buildings, with the freight shed sitting to the west of the station (Figure 25). Figure 25 indicates CNR also owned property south of the track, but there is no evidence it was ever developed for railway use.

At the front of the station site there is a natural rock outcrop which provides a safeguard between the station and the track (Figure 26). The site is entered from the west side by a driveway just north of the crossing. Today the area to the north of the station has become an industrial parking lot. This lot has been levelled in recent years, causing a steep fall in the land next to the station. In comparison with 1970s photos, Field's station sits lower on its site (Figures 27, 10).

This former CNR station sits apart from the major commercial area (Figures 28, 29), and its dimensions are coincident with the residential and low scale industrial buildings that are scattered in its immediate neighbourhood. While it scenically crests a hill overlooking the town (Figure 30), Field's station is not a prominent local building.

Community Status

As a community, Field has evolved rather than "developed". Older people play an active part in community life, and their memories are important. The station is treated with respect as a material artifact. Evidence of vandalism is remarkably rare.

Field is interested in its past. One long-term resident, Roger Lafond, works with the Franco-Ontarien cultural centre in North Bay as he gathers history of the community. Field Public Library is collecting local history materials. A former priest prepared a special curriculum to enable community history to be taught in the school. To date, Field Lumber is the only building which has been commemorated under Ontario heritage legislation. It has become part of an aggressive tourism plan for "Heritage North" designed to link various wood manufacturing sites in a visitor loop.⁴⁰ To date, the station is not envisaged as part of that plan.

Field's CNR station has been reviewed in the Province of Ontario's survey of heritage railway stations. There, it was identified as Class "B. Architecturally significant. Rare example of station type similar to Kakabeka Falls."⁴¹

Endnotes

- 1 Robert Legget, Railways of Canada (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1973), p. 115. Also, "Canadian Northern Ry. Construction Betterments Etc.", Railway and Marine World, April 1913, p. 178.
- 2 Donald MacKay, The People's Railway: A History of Canadian National (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992), p. 21.
- 3 Ibid., p. 91.
- 4 Ibid., p. 108.
- 5 Ibid., p. 110.
- 6 "Changes in Transcontinental Passenger Service, Canadian National Railways," Canadian Railway and Marine World [CRMW], August 193, p. 410.
- 7 Mackay, op. cit., p. 118.
- 8 "R.C. Vaughan Speaks on Canadian National Railways Matters", CRMW, May 1936, p. 195.
- 9 "Vaughan", CRMW, May 1936, p. 195.
- 10 Ibidem.
- 11 "Canadian National Railways in 1935", CRMW, May 1936, p. 207.
- 12 Nick & Helma Mika, Places In Ontario, Vol. 1 (Belleville: Mika, 1981), p. 25.
- 13 Adrien Prieur, Field (Sudbury: La Société Historique du Nouvel-Ontario, 1962), p. 14.
- 14 National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG 30, V-A-9-h, Vol. 9379, file 1046-68-43. Canadian National Railways, Legal Department, 1912, Canadian Northern Ontario Railway Company, Station Sites, Regarding the Location of Station Grounds at Field Ontario. Petition, Rev. A. Chapleau et al, to Honourable C. McCray, M.P.P., Toronto, n.d. [1912].
- 15 Prieur, op. cit., p. 22.
- 16 Ibidem.

- 17 Ibidem.
- 18 "Station du Canadien National à Field," notes by Roger Lafond, Field, Ont.
- 19 NAC, RG 30, V-A-9-h, Vol. 9375, file 1046-67-67. Canadian National Railways, Legal Department, "The Canadian Northern Ontario Railway Company, Spur Lines, Field Lumber Co., Field, Ontario, 1916."
- 20 "Longlac-Nakina Cutoff, Canadian National Railways, Completed," CRMW, January 1924, p. 13.
- 21 NAC, NMC 96649. Canadian National Railways, Alterations and Addition to Station at Field, 9 August 1923.
- 22 Prieur, op. cit., p. 42.
- 23 Isabel Mosseler, "Field Lumber A Heritage Site, The Tribune (North Bay), October 1991, pp. 1-2.
- 24 Mika, Places In Ontario, Vol. 1, p. 25.
- 25 Prieur, op. cit., p. 27.
- 26 Mika, Places In Ontario, Vol. 1, p. 26.
- 27 M. Reynald Charron, Field (Ottawa: Association des enseignants franco-ontariens, 1978), pp. 57-59.
- 28 West Nipissing Industrial Commission, "Sturgeon Falls and Area Profile" (report on file Field Library, 1985).
- 29 "Field houses a relic of the past," The Tribune's Summer Guide to West Nipissing (North Bay: Tribune, 1989), p. 16.
- 30 Research notes of Roger Lafond (from NAC, Board of Railway Commissioners, File 22780.107, missing). Letter, S. Moreau, Canadian National Railways, to the Canadian Railway Board of Commissioners, 25 August 1936.
- 31 Charles Bohi, Canadian National's Western Depots (Toronto: Railfare Enterprises, 1977), p. 59.
- 32 Leslie Steven Kozma, A Building Survey and Brief Architectural and Graphic Examination of Railway Stations in Alberta: 1883 to 1930, prepared for the Historic Sites Branch of the Government of Alberta, 15 October 1976, p. 208.
- 33 Harold Kalman, A History of Canadian Architecture, Vol. 2 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 483.
- 34 Kozma, op. cit., p. 361.

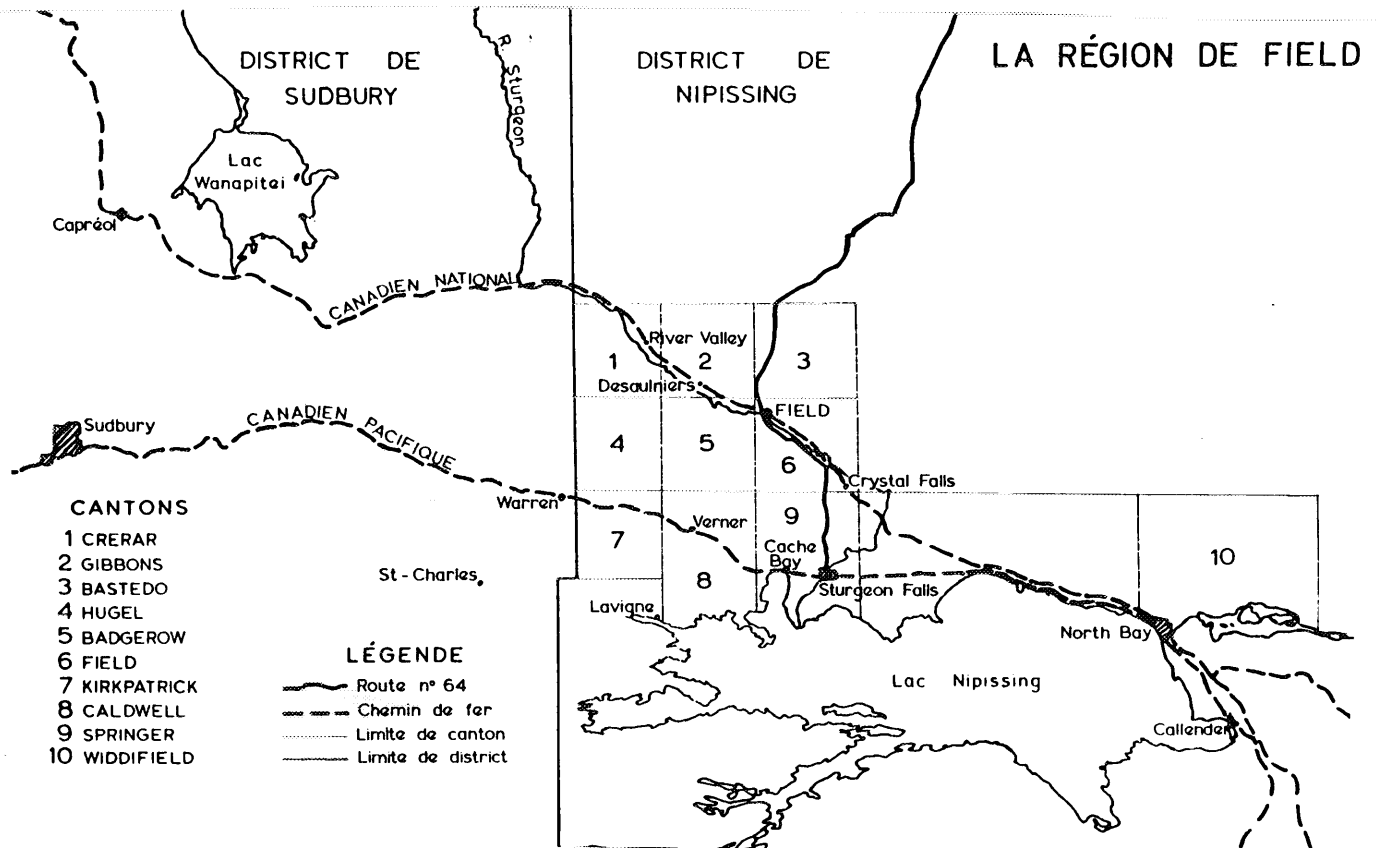
- 35 Research notes of Roger Lafond.
- 36 Bohi, op. cit., p. 15.
- 37 Research notes of Roger Lafond.
- 38 Ibidem.
- 39 NAC, RG 30, V-A-9-h, Vol. 9379, file 1046-68-43. Canadian National Railways, Legal Department, Canadian Northern Ontario Railway Company, Station Sites; Regarding the Location of Station Grounds at Field, Ontario. Letter, R. H. M. Temple, to Charles McCrea, M.P.P., Toronto, 14 March 1912.
- 40 Isabel Mosseler, op. cit.
- 41 Ontario Heritage Foundation, Planning for Heritage Railway Stations. Inventory (Toronto: Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, February 1987) Vol. 2, alphabetical.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



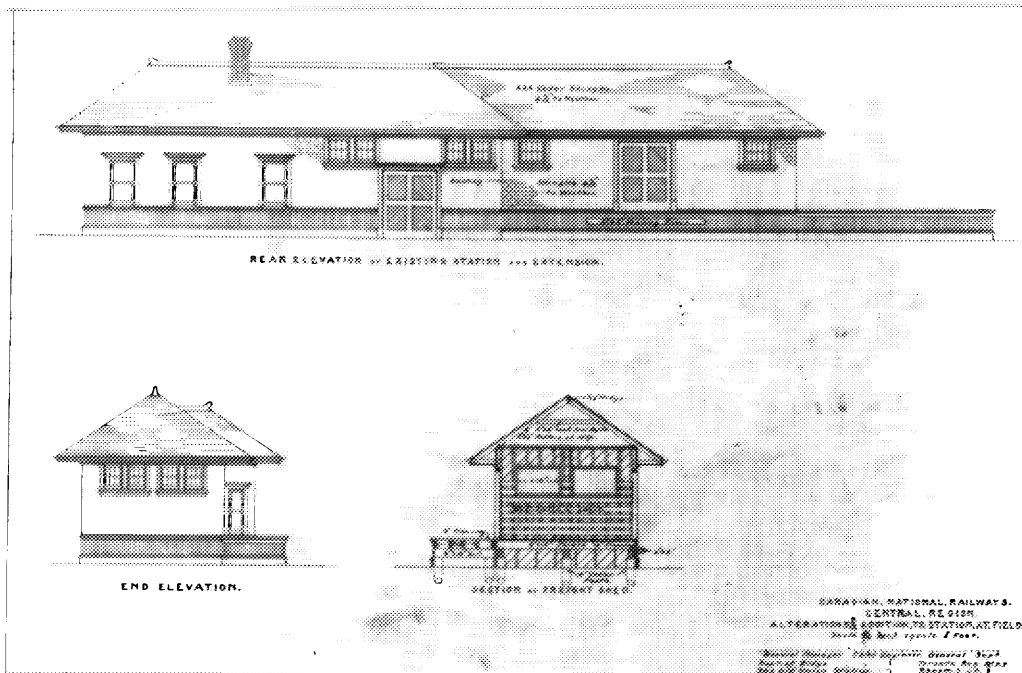
- 1 Canadian National Railways (CNR) station, Field, Ontario. Built in 1936. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO

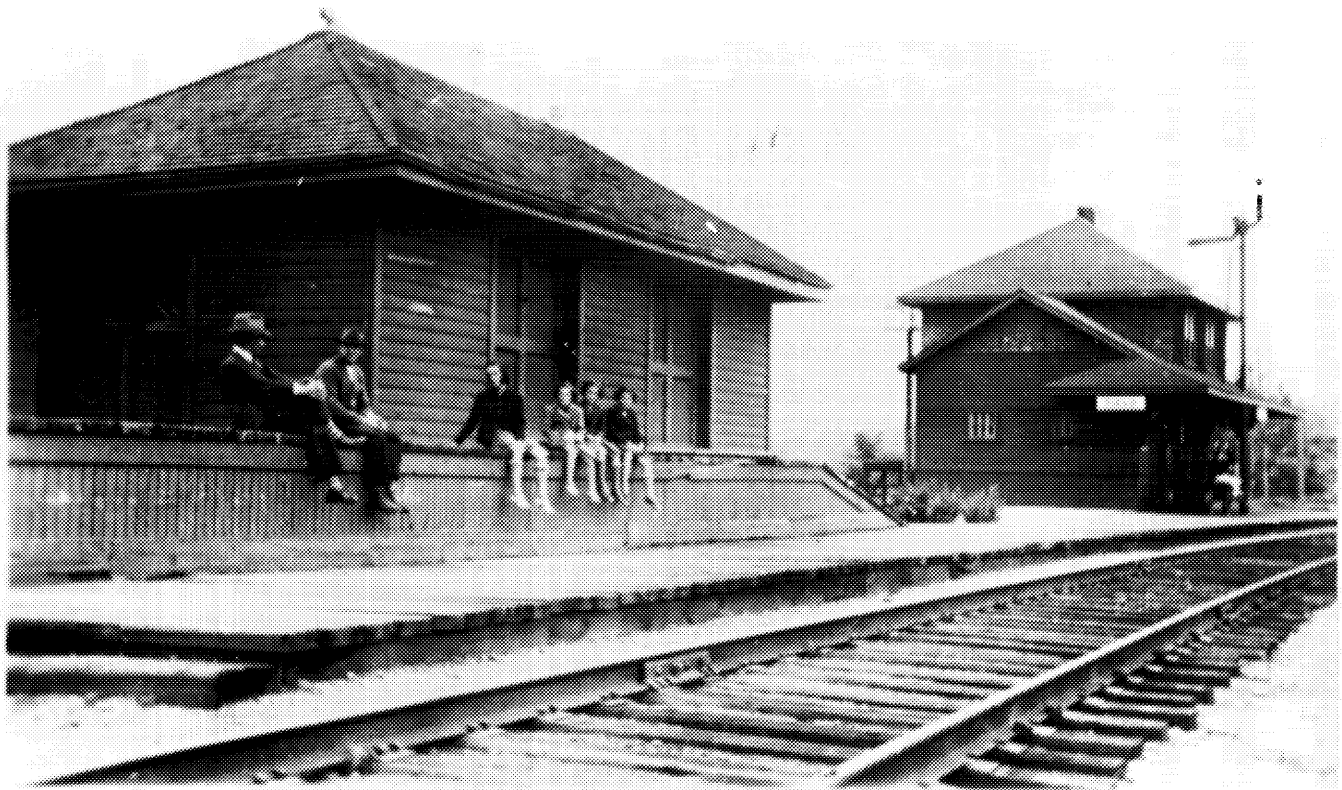


2 Location of Field Ontario on the Montreal to Capreol CNR mainline. (M. l'Abbé Adrien Prieur et al, Field [Sudbury: La Société Historique du Nouvel-Ontario, 1962] [M. l'Abbé Adrien Prieur], p. 10.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



5 Rear elevation drawing, dated 1923, showing the first CNR station at Field (right) with its freight shed addition, 1923. (NAC, National Map Collection, NMC 96650.)



6 Field CNR station, 1943-45. (Field Public Library.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



7 Field about 1950 from Lot 14, the Church property.
(M. L'Abbé Adrien Prieur, p. 26.)



Le moulin de la Field Lumber.

8 Field Lumber, 1960s. (M. L'Abbé Adrien Prieur, p. 24.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO

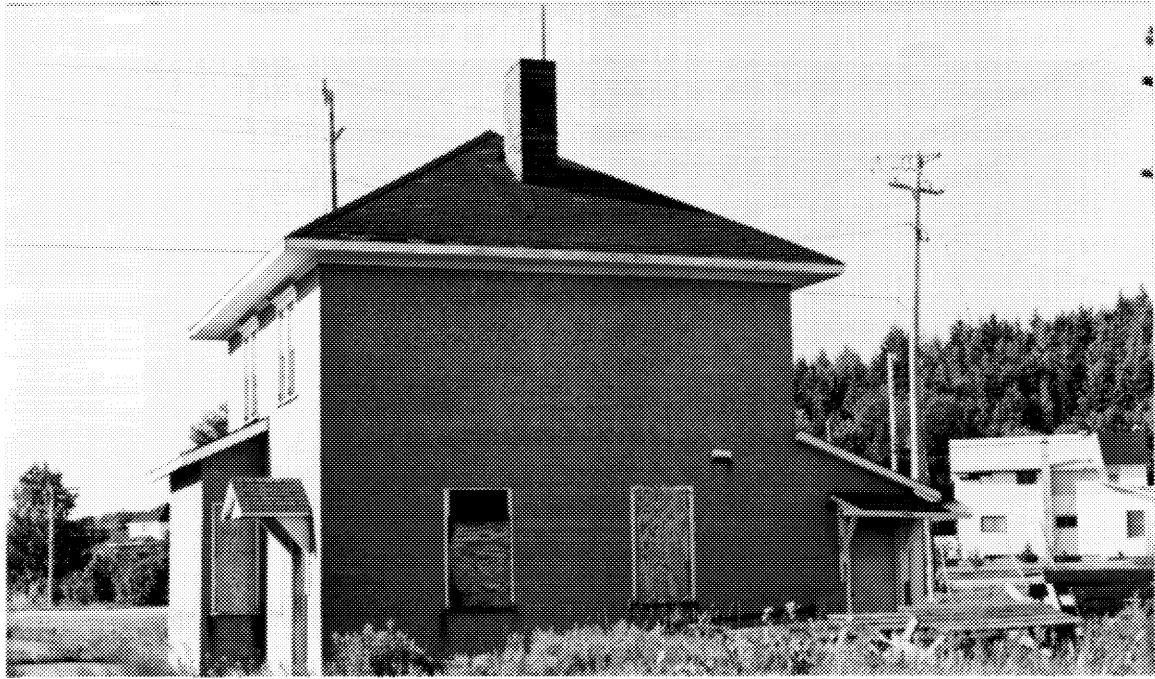


9 South (track) facade, Field station. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)



10 North facade, Field station. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO

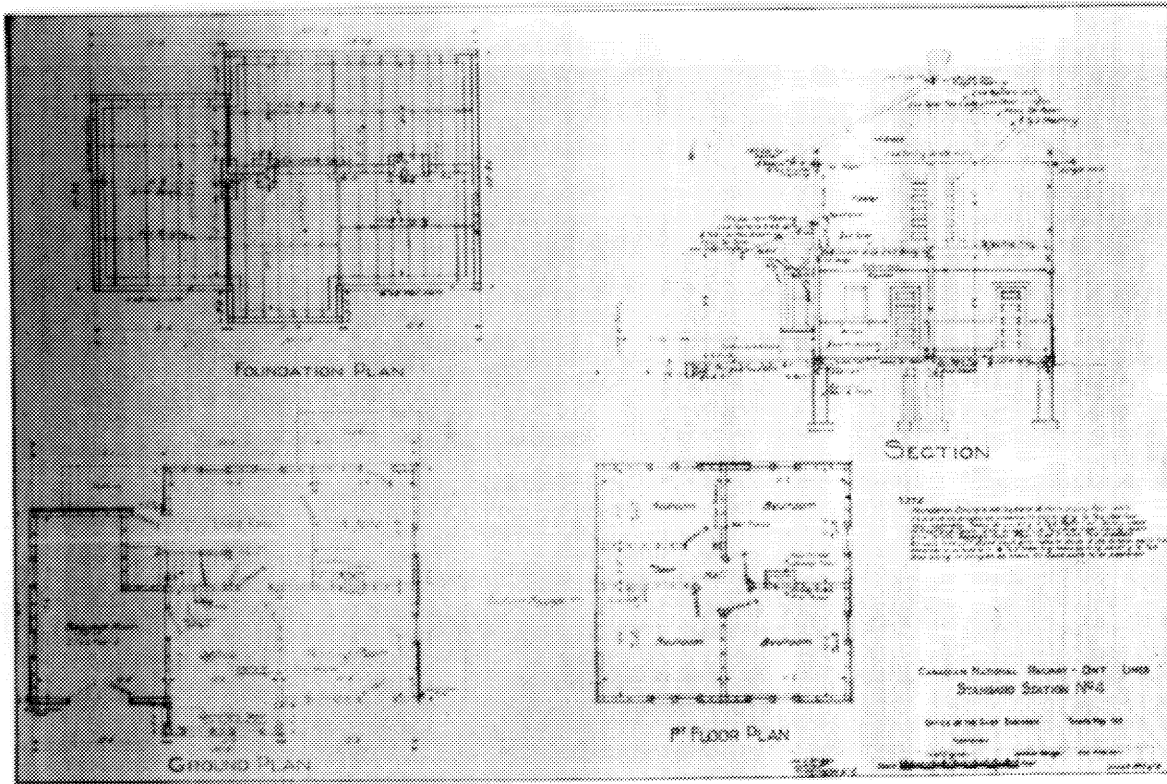


11 East facade, Field station. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)



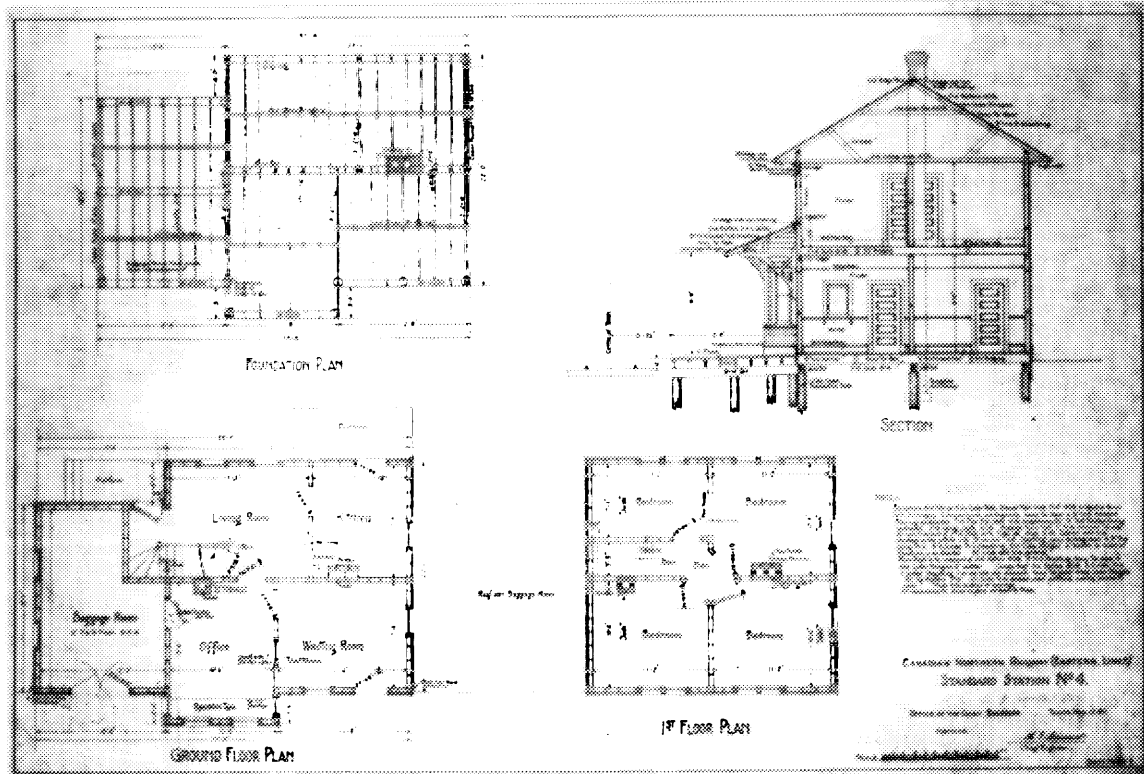
12 West facade, Field station. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



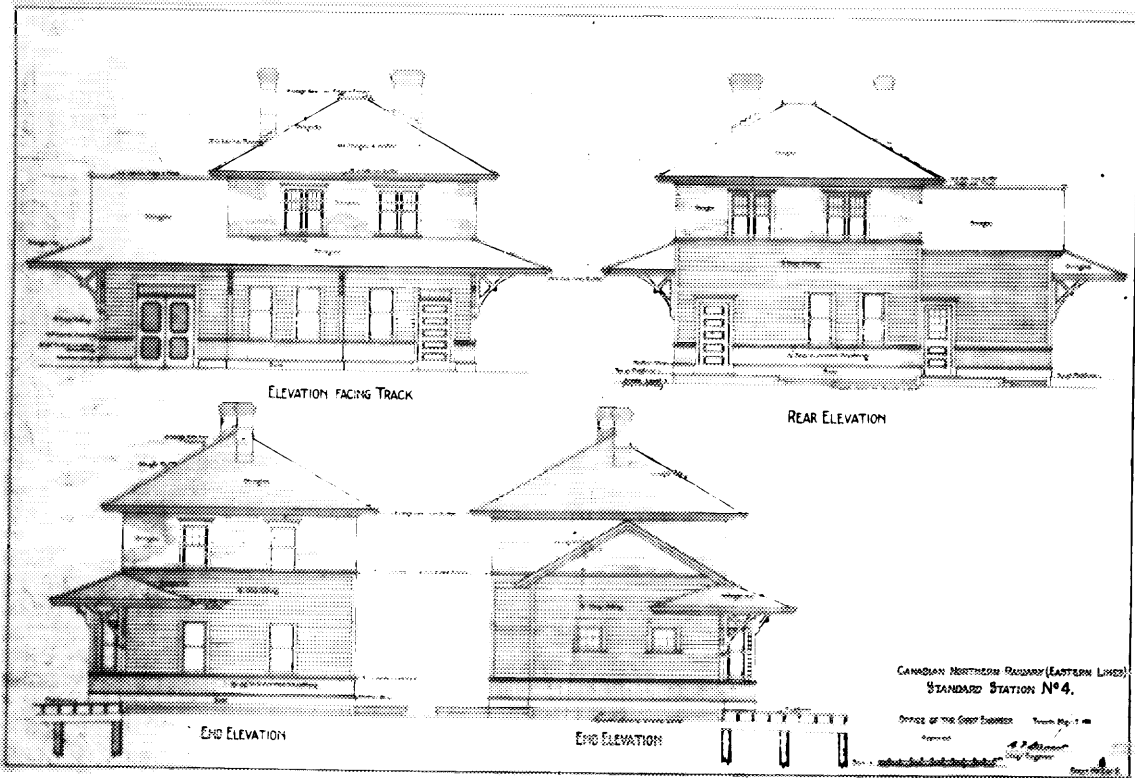
13 Section and Floor Plan, CNR Standard Station No. 4. Office of the Chief Engineer, Toronto, May 1919. Geo. C. Briggs, Architect. (NAC, National Map Collection.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO

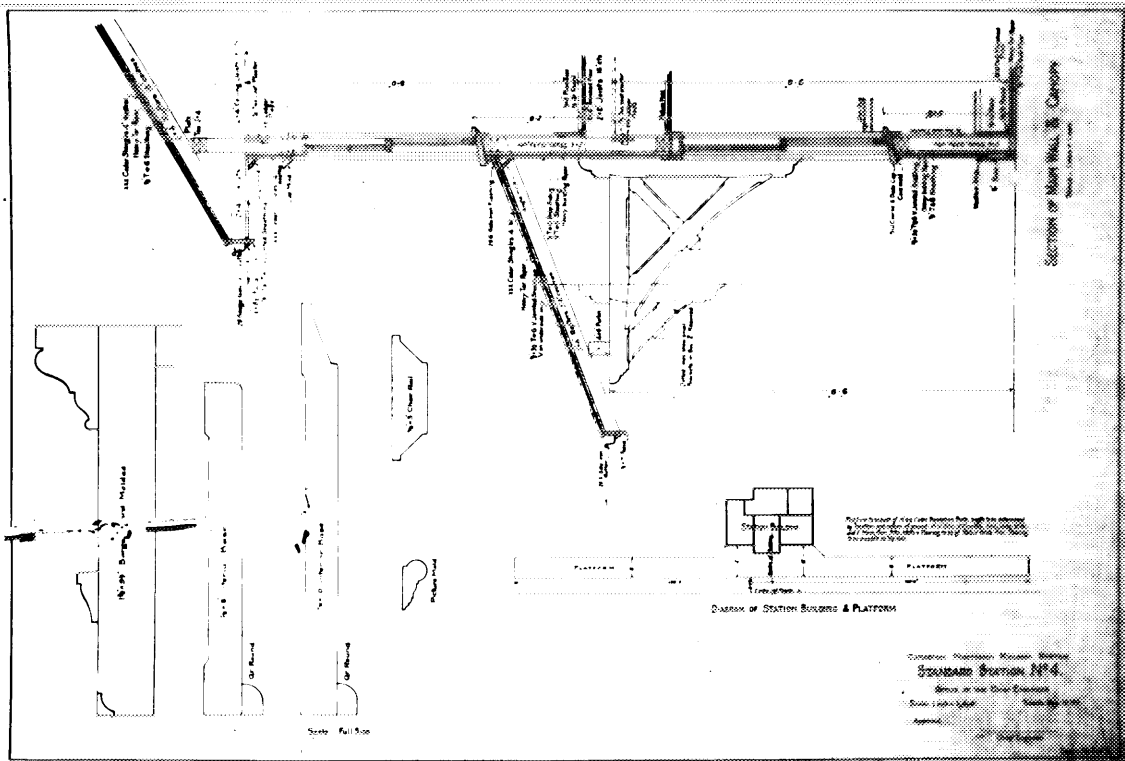


- 14 Section and Floor Plan, CNOR Standard Station No. 4. Office of the Chief Engineer, Toronto, 17 May 1911. Approved by B. R. C., July 9 1913. Order #(1)9771. A. J. Swinnart, Chief Engineer. (NAC, National Map Collection.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO

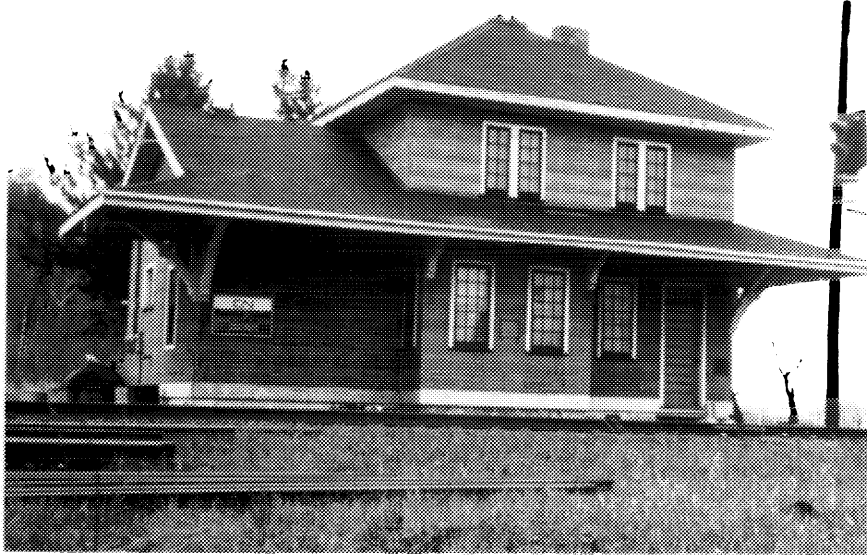


15 Elevations. CNOR Standard Station No. 4. Chief Engineer, Toronto, 17 May 1911. (NAC, National Map Collection.)

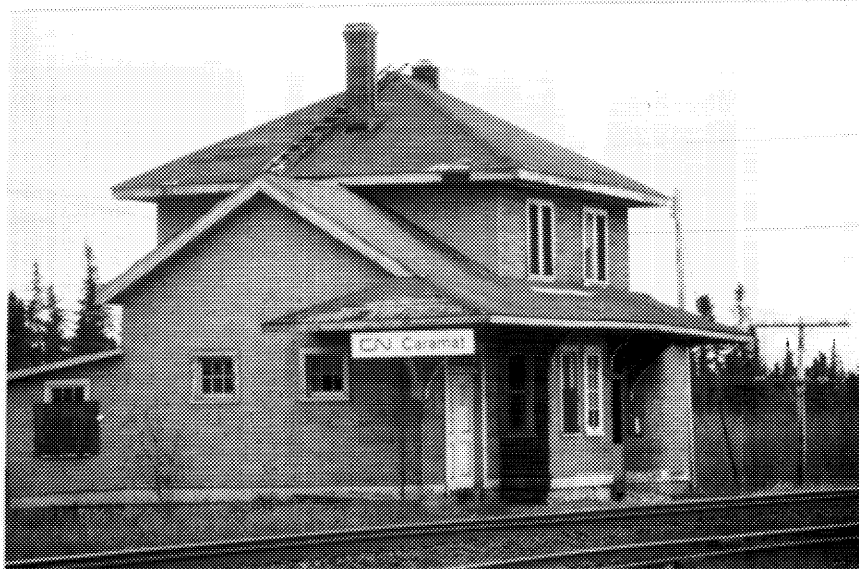


16 Details. CNOR Standard Station No. 4. Chief Engineer, Toronto, 17 May 1911. (NAC, National Map Collection.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



17 Standard Plan No. 4, example CNR station, Burwash, Ontario.
Front facade. (CIHB, 06005500000056.)



18 Standard Plan No. 4, example CNR station, Caramat, Ontario.
Side view. (CIHB, 06020000000001.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



- 19 Standard Plan No. 4, example with extended freight quarters.
CNR station, Coniston, Ontario. (CIHB, 0600550000055.)

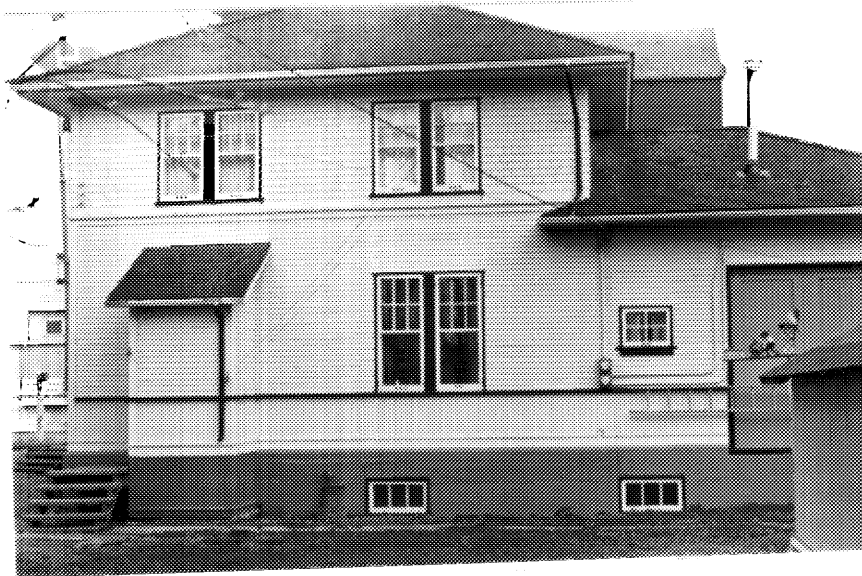


- 20 Standard Plan No. 4, example CNR station, Montauban, Quebec.
(CIHB, 0500880000018.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



21 CNR Plan 100-197. Front facade, station Cudworth, Saskatchewan. (CIHB,08011400000036.)



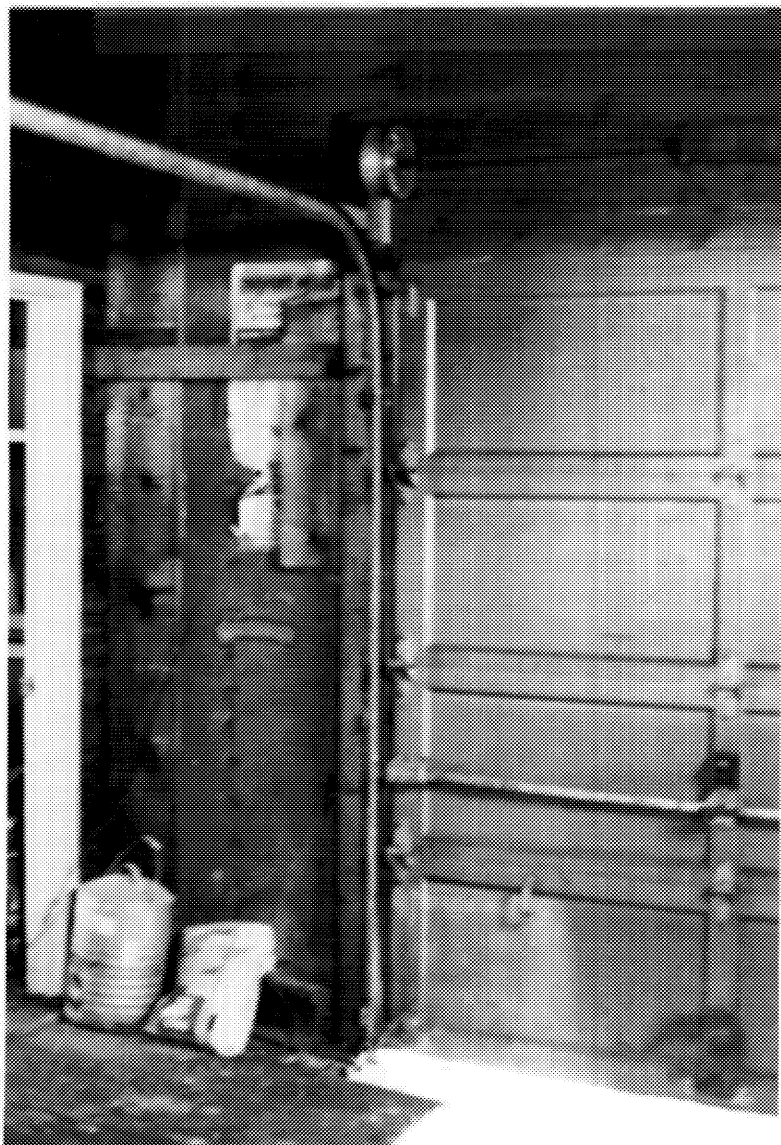
22 CNR Plan 100-197. Rear facade, station Cudworth, Saskatchewan. (CIHB, 08011400000036.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



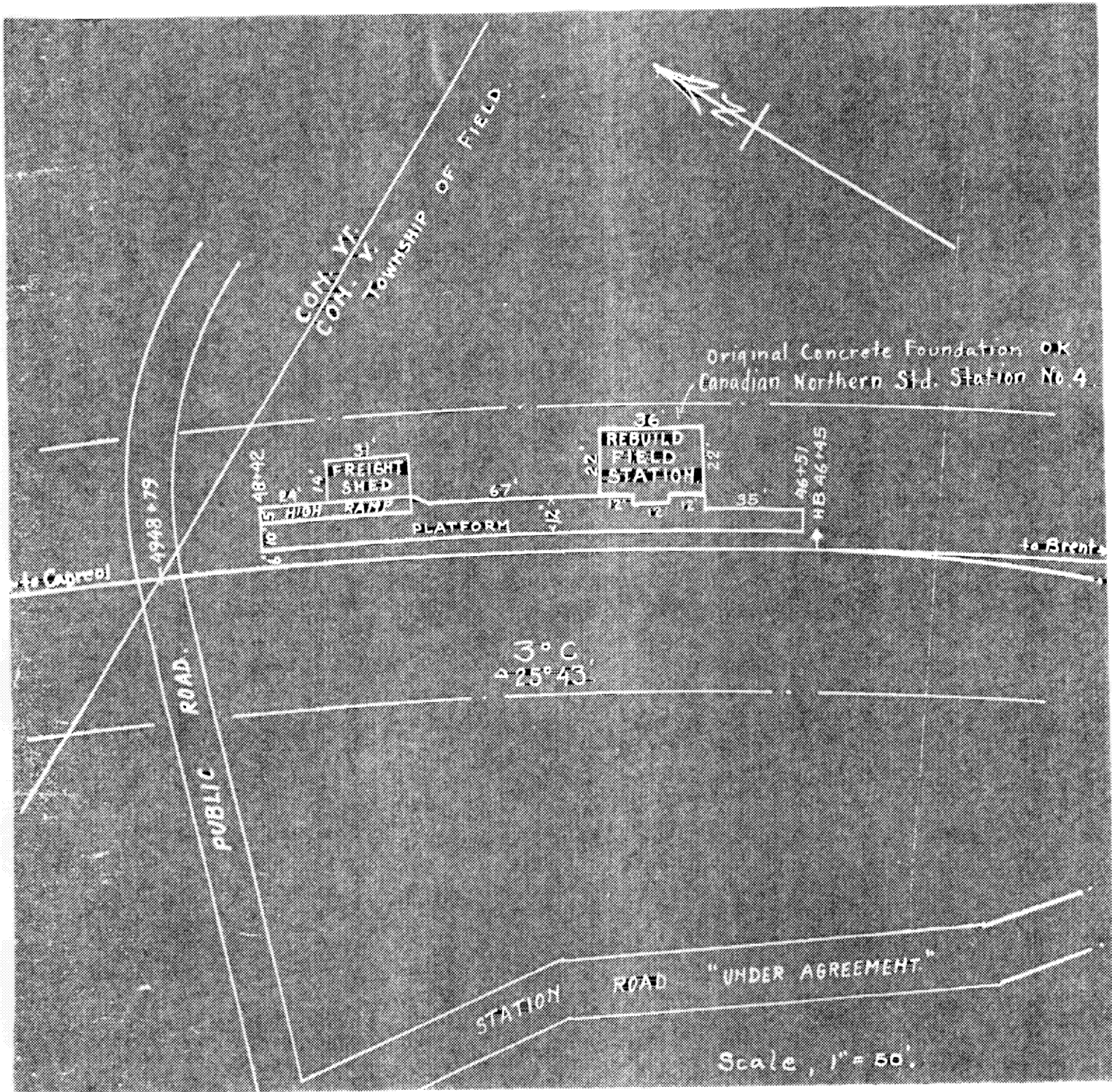
23 Interior details, Field station. The photo on the right shows the waiting room with its 1966 wallboard. The photo on the left shows the distinctive stairwell and original siding. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



24 Interior details, Field station. The photo on the right shows the details of the living room and renovated kitchen. The photo on the left shows the interior of the freight shed. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



25 Site plan for the rebuilding of Field station, Office of the Division Engineer, CNR, Capreol, 17 July 1936. (Railway Commissioners of Canada papers, copies in possession of Mr. Roger Lafond, Field.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



26 Field station, 1975. The site had natural protection from train accidents. (Field Public Library.)



27 Rear, Field station, 1973. This photo shows the porches on the west and north sides that have since disappeared. (CIHB, 06014800000001.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



28 The commercial heart of Field. The road to the station is to the left of the grocery. (Ontario Archives, 13708-41.)



29 View of the centre of town from the intersection by the station. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, FIELD, ONTARIO



30 Field station as seen from the town road. (M. Carter, Heritage Research Associates, 1994.)