HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

RAILWAY STATION REPORT

Title: **Canadian National Railways Station**
Glencoe, Ontario

Source: **Anne M. de Fort-Menares, Toronto**

RSR-268

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian National Railways (CNR) station at 1 McRae Street in Glencoe (Figures 1-3) was built by the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) in 1904 to replace a station building of 1902 that was destroyed by fire. Glencoe was a busy and important junction point with the Air Line Railway established by the Great Western Railway (GWR) in 1873 on the heavily trafficked through line from Sarnia and Windsor to Buffalo. This is the fourth station to be built at the junction, the third by the GTR.

Architecturally the station is distinguished by Queen Anne Revival gable and tower elements which contribute to a more sophisticated rendering of the combination frame structure typical of GTR work around the turn of the century.

VIA Rail has a new shelter stop at Glencoe, but CNR kept the station, which since November 1992 has been used only by radio technicians. For nearly ten years local groups have been involved in plans to restore the station. In 1995, the station was in process of purchase by the municipality for rehabilitation and anticipated community use.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Thematic

The junction at Glencoe was a product of international competition among the five companies moving freight traffic across the southwestern Ontario land bridge. First the Great Western, then the GTR, Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), and Wabash railways stopped their Chicago to New York trains at Glencoe. GTR replaced the old GWR station in 1900, but that burned the next year, as did its successor. The construction of a high profile station, three times in three years, demonstrated the GTR's commitment to upgrading community service and corporate image at this important junction.

In 1904 GTR General Manager Charles Melville Hays wrote a conciliatory letter for publication in local papers such as the Glencoe Transcript, assuring customers, "Branch Lines Will Be Looked After Better in Future."[1] Describing "constantly increasing traffic over the last six years," Hays notified his critics that the company had spent over $4 million on new steel bridges, double tracking, constructing sidings, purchasing new rolling stock, etc. Defending the expenditure on main lines that carried the majority of traffic, Hays sidestepped the nature of improvements proposed for the branch lines, but promised better equipment and improved service. His principal intention was to cast the inconvenient delays occasioned by construction as a providential advantage, and to discredit the competition, which was particularly pressing around the turn of the century - so much so that in 1902 he had announced the company's intention to build a transcontinental line from northern Ontario to the B. C. coast. Hays concluded that the "heavy expenditures in making the system first-class" would consequently provide patrons with "a greater degree of satisfaction...than they have experienced heretofore, and much more than they could ever hope to receive from any company not so well equipped as the Grand Trunk Railway..."

As a British-run and financed company, the GTR had been sharply criticized by local shippers for neglecting short run and less-than-carload freight in favour of continental shipments of profitable products such as grain, dressed meat, and livestock. Poorly managed and drained of operating capital from its construction in 1856, the GTR experienced its first decade of growth, stability and unprecedented profitability under the management of Charles Hays, who brought American railroading experience to the office of General Manager in 1896.[2] Hays succeeded to the office of President in 1909, and his death on the Titanic in 1912 removed "the only business genius" the company ever had.[3]

Hays can be credited with introducing American operating methods, rebuilding much of the physical infrastructure of the railway, and extending the system to the Pacific. By 1897 he had eliminated the floating debt, and in 1898 claimed the best earnings of that decade. By statute, the company had to pay in dividends all revenues not allocated for operating and interest, which crippled renewal of capital investment even though ordinary stock returned nothing to its investors, and preference stock paid only occasionally.[4] Hays altered the accounting procedures to reduce dividends and diverted the newly available funds to major upgrades across the system. Double track increased from 404 to 956 miles, enabling greater efficiency and safety in train movements; car capacity and locomotive power were both up 30% through the purchase of new stock; new elevators, repair shops, and a Montreal head office had been constructed, all entered as maintenance costs against income.[5] Between 1898 and 1904, 95 new passenger stations were built across the country, and 1480 passenger and/or freight buildings were remodelled entirely.[6]

The Glencoe station was one of those built in 1900, but it fell to fire in 1901, as did its replacement in 1904, resulting in the construction of the present station: a handsome reminder of the serious renewals and reconstructions that transfigured the GTR in these prosperous years at the turn of the century.

Local Development

The origins and development of Glencoe are somewhat mysterious, as the destruction of documents in the 1950s has thwarted the compiling of a local history. Laid out in 1860, the village apparently expanded from a routine fuel stop on the GWR. Glencoe was preceded by the construction of the GWR in 1854, when a tiny railway labourer's community called Pratt Siding was the larger settlement. Apparently the site of Glencoe offered a better situation, being slightly higher than the surrounding area, and Pratt Siding disappeared.[7]

The GWR was the province's first bridge line. Although heavily financed by British backers, it was conceived by American interests with the object of moving freight across the shorter Ontario land route as quickly and cheaply as possible from the midwestern states to the Atlantic seaboard by connecting with existing American railways and shipping routes at Detroit and Buffalo. Its first trains ran from Hamilton to Toronto, and from Sarnia and Windsor to Niagara Falls via Hamilton. It initially enjoyed the great advantage over the GTR of interchangeability with American cars during the ill-advised Canadian wide gauge period.[8] The GWR served as the principal traffic connection between American carriers in New York and Michigan until faced with intense competition from the Canada Southern Railway (CSR), which opened a rival route in 1873. The GWR created the "Air Line Railway" parallel to the CSR, to link its Windsor-Toronto main line from Glencoe to Bridgeburg/Fort Erie and Buffalo (Figure 4).[9] At the same time, in 1873 the London and Port Stanley Railway was leased to gain access to Lake Erie (important for coal shipping, among other things), and provide a direct line into the London repair facilities.[10]

In 1882 the GTR successfully took over the GWR. GTR had a main line coming from Sarnia, and with the construction of the tunnel there in 1896, and its electrification in 1906, most freight was sent over that route, with its fast river crossing, and on through London. Glencoe nevertheless remained a busy interchange for passenger trains in particular on the Detroit to Buffalo route.

Incorporated as a village in 1875 with about 750 inhabitants, Glencoe emerged as a regional agricultural center, in part owing to its good shipping connections. The town grew around the railway, which ran through the centre (Figure 5). Grain elevators and produce storage warehouses were a prominent part of the railway corridor. Industries included a fertilizer supplier, established in 1962, and a grain and seed supplier, both located

along rail sidings; National Tubular Products, which made fuel, brake lines and hydraulic equipment for farm machinery; and the Forest City Knitting Company, which evolved into Tender Tootsies, still a strong manufacturer.[11]

The present station is the fourth for Glencoe, replacing the GWR station of 1854, and GTR stations of 1900 and 1902 which both burned. Recounting the demise of the two previous stations, the Transcript noted that "a mistake seems to have been made however in putting in the same system of heating...as there appears to be no doubt that as before the heating apparatus set fire to the building..."[12] At the time it served as the passenger depot for the GTR and the Wabash, which enjoyed trackage rights over the old Air Line to Buffalo. With the creation of VIA Rail in 1977, CNR and Canadian Pacific were relieved of responsibility for passenger service. CNR kept the Glencoe station, and VIA Rail has a small enclosed shelter on the platform west of the station. The last staff agent was withdrawn from Glencoe in 1992, and the station function has been superseded by a radio transmitter.

ARCHITECTURE

Aesthetic/Visual Qualities

Glencoe enjoyed a station of strong, distinctive Queen Anne Revival design that was still clearly recognizable within the envelope of standard GTR station types. It was said to be "the same size and pattern" as the 1902 building destroyed by fire in February 1904.[13] Overhanging eaves carried on braced struts defined a firm rectangle, within which the textures, rhythms, and projections of the wall surface expressed the familiar functions and services. On the roof, however, four separate elements contributed to the distinct identity of this junction.

The gable of the roof ridge breaks the hip of the west end, and a small window is carried in the resulting typanum. The roof breaks pitch at the wall edge, so that the eaves are carried out at a flatter angle (Figure 6). On each of the north (townside) and south (trackside) elevations, gables on the axis of the operator's bay feature shingled planes that slice above, and curve in to, deep-set sash windows, a device popular in Queen Anne Revival domestic treatments (Figure 7). Finally, an octagonal tower set into the east end was carried down to define the glazed, pavilion-like space of the ladies' waiting room (Figure 8). This tower, with a medium height cap, was glazed above the drum with 15-light, apparently fixed windows set horizontally. Fenestration on ground floor passenger area windows featured eight small panes as a transom above large one-over-one sash; fenestration in the working spaces appears from photographs to have had multi-paned sash, or cages over single lights, for practical purposes (Figure 9).

The walls were divided into the usual three horizontal registers, with board and batten cladding on the register occupied by the windows. The ornamental brackets were exceptionally prominent, comprising X forms bending in toward a centre strut, whose profile gave the building a cage-like quality in silhouette (Figure 10). The operator's bay was reflected on the townside by an identical projection, an unusual elaboration that accommodated the need for train control on both sides of the station (Figure 11).

Numerous changes were made after the conversion from passenger traffic to freight use. Externally these involved the introduction of three freight doors where there had been windows; the closing of the baggage door on the west end; and the presumed door-into-window alteration on the north wall of the ladies' waiting room. A pair of original baggage doors survives on the south elevation (Figure 12).

The station has suffered somewhat from neglect and closure, although many of the visual defects are actually protective measures. General maintenance of the site stopped when the building went out of public service. All the windows are now boarded up, as is the trackside gable. The wood shingles and metal ridge rolls of the roof have long since been replaced, and the roof is temporarily draped in battened plastic to mitigate leaks. Decades ago the frame materials were covered in composite shingle sheeting, which is now brittle and breaking (Figure 13). Exposed wood members, such as the struts, badly need painting, and deterioration of the roof has caused rotting of the soffits.

The configuration of this station was in wide use in GTR designs of the period, but the Queen Anne style gables are an unusual detail rarely seen in central Ontario. Tower features were introduced in GTR designs after 1902, and emerged in standard station types of the CPR shortly afterward.[14] The prominent tower at Glencoe recalls the ladies' waiting room looking down the tracks at Palmerston, another important junction point serving the Bruce peninsula whose boxy two-storey station was remodelled with a separate tower and bayed waiting room in 1900 (RSR 75) (Figure 14). Dual operator bays were seldom needed, but the relatively near-by CNR/GTR station at Jarvis, of 1906, is characterized by the same form, also to accommodate train control requirements.

The late 19th century phenomenon of domestic revival as an architectural style contributes generally to station imagery, but appeared more specifically in details like the decorative gabled dormers lighting an unfinished attic; in ornamental half-timbering of such gables, as was done by Edward Maxwell at the Woodstock (RSR-55) and Galt (RSR-56) stations of 1898-99 for CPR; and in the multiple panes of upper sash and transoms. The Glencoe station is considered provincially unique in the railway station inventory and assessment carried out by the Ontario Ministry of Culture.[15]

Functional/Technological Qualities

The interior is distinguished by decorative pressed metal walls and ceilings at a time when the typical GTR interior comprised narrow boarded panels. The preceding station of 1902 was also said to have had a "handsome metallic ceiling" with finishings in Georgia pine.[16] This unusual treatment may have been occasioned by the propensity of Glencoe stations to fire, two having burned in the previous three years.

The plan was simple but elegant. Four separate spaces, each with their own access and through axes, fronted on both sides of the station. From east to west, these were the ladies' waiting room, the agents office, the mens' and general waiting room, and the baggage/freight room. Ticket wickets have large glass casements opening onto counters carried on console brackets (Figure 15).

The irregular space of the ladies' waiting room joined a small rectangular space, almost an open vestibule, onto the polygon under the tower (Figures 16-17). This room probably had doors on both north and south, but only the south door is still in place. The north opening is a window.

The agents' office is a generous open room with built-in counters, cabinets and shelving from various periods (Figures 18-19). The only access was from the general waiting room, although both waiting rooms had ticket counters, on offset axes. A quantity of telegraph equipment survives in place, plus a freestanding cast iron safe, and what may be an early counter dividing the room on the north end.

The former baggage room has been altered the most: its west door closed, windows turned in to freight doors, and new, elevated door openings with exterior loading docks installed (Figure 20). The room was enlarged to take in the whole former general waiting room. The wall between baggage and the general waiting room was torn down, the floor raised, and a new partition built to create an entry corridor between the agents' office and the enlarged freight room. The ceiling cove of the original spatial configuration has been left, however, so it is easy to see the dimensions of the waiting room (Figure 21).

The floor of the ladies' waiting room has been dramatically distorted by ground movement, although the maple strip flooring remains solidly intact. Tiny water closets have been built into one corner of this waiting room, and at the end of the altered entrance corridor. When early benches and interior fittings began disappearing after the station was slated for closure, some fittings and fixtures were removed for safekeeping by the town.

ENVIRONMENT

Setting

The station was built on land adjacent to the main street, closing the south end of the business district. The town has expanded considerably south of the tracks, and west of its original centre, but trains at the level crossing still delay traffic on Main Street.

The station now sits isolated on a long sweep of bare ground where historically there had been dozens of railway and related structures: elevators, livestock pens, coaling towers, section houses, freight sheds, two turntables, and sidings (Figure 22). A section house and hand car house survived from 1854 well into the 20th century; a hand car house of 1874, and from 1906 a gateman's house, sand house, coal shutes and stock pens, demonstrate the continuing evolution of the site in its earlier years.[17] It is believed that the 1854 station was kept in use as a freight building into the 20th century as well, and appears in the edge of historic photographs. This occurred at Grimsby (RSR 218), another GWR site where the 1855 building is now the only survivor. There is no evidence on the site of an additional freight shed built in 1911.[18]

The station is dominated by the radio transmitter on its northeast corner. Sidings on the north side of the building are still in use for parking freight cars, and the main line to Windsor/Detroit is still in use for freight and passenger trains. The station is highly visible from the main street, and with the attendant industries situated near the station grounds and along the track, it has a strong impact on the form of Glencoe.

Community Status

The station has been the subject of high community concern for about a decade. In the late 1980s the municipality withdrew support from an agreement with the Ministry of Culture, CNR, and VIA Rail to restore the building; those agencies have since lost their capacity to fund such projects. The Glencoe & District Historical Society subsequently funded a rehabilitation feasibility study, and the present reeve now supports municipal ownership. The municipality is negotiating to purchase the station from CNR at nominal cost, and is investigating acquiring part of the site.[19] It is expected that much of the work will be carried out by volunteer labour.

Endnotes

1 "Service on the Grand Trunk - General Manager Hays' Reply to Criticism...," Glencoe Transcript (28 January 1904), p. 7. From the nature of the letter, it seems likely that it was released on a wire service for copy by locals.

2 The 1853 prospectus for the venture proposed an unrealistically low ratio of 40% working expenses to gross revenues, a figure not met by the most modern operations in the 1990s. The company began in a bad market, was plagued with political and financial difficulties, and expanded beyond its means to keep market share. Cf. Archibald William Currie, The Grand Trunk Railway of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), pp. 21, 31, 138, and passim.

3 Currie, p. 416.

4 Currie, pp. 372, 479.

5 Currie, p. 393. The 872 miles of double track from Chicago to Montreal, with the branches from Sarnia and Bridgeburg/Fort Erie (Black Rock) were "the longest stretch of continuous double track under one management of any railroad in the world" in 1906. Semi-Annual Report of 6 April 1906 cited in Currie, p. 422.

6 "Service on the Grand Trunk - General Manager Hays' Reply to Criticism...," Glencoe Transcript (28 January 1904), p. 7.

7 "Pratt Siding Thrived as Centre in Building of Great Western," unidentified newspaper clipping in Mosa Township (excerpts from No. 9 Mosa Women's Institute [Tweedsmuir history]) 1919-65, (photocopy at Glencoe Public Library).

8 William J. Wilgus, The Railway Interrelations of the United States and Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), p. 81

9 Wilgus, p. 108, states Air Line opened 1873. Robert Tennant, Canada Southern Country (Erin: Boston Mills Press, 1991), p. 15, indicates that the Air Line was "formed" in 1862 and strengthened by federal charter in 1871.

10 Currie, p. 204.

11 Middlesex County (London: Civic Sales and Services, 1964), p. 48.

12 "Burned Again," Glencoe Transcript (18 February 1904), p. 1.

13 "Glencoe and Vicinity," Glencoe Transcript (28 April 1904), p. 5. In a similar situation at Grimsby Ontario, when the 1902 station burned, the 1904 replacement subtly updated the design with a tower and other details.

14 CPR developed a broad turret, used at Orangeville in 1905, Goderich in 1906, and Parry Sound in 1908 (all points in central Ontario); a taller narrow turret was used by the Toronto, Hamilton and Buffalo Railway at Smithville in 1903.

These are discussed in Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Limited, "A Study of Canadian Pacific's Heritage Railway Properties," (Ontario Heritage Foundation and Ministyr of Culture and Communications, in cooperation with CP Rail and VIA Rail Canada, 1989), pp. 46-47.

15 "Planning for Heritage Railway Stations. Inventory," (Toronto: Ontario Heritage Foundation and Ministry of Citizenship and Culture with CNR and VIA Rail, 1987), n.p.

16 "Burned Again," p. 1.

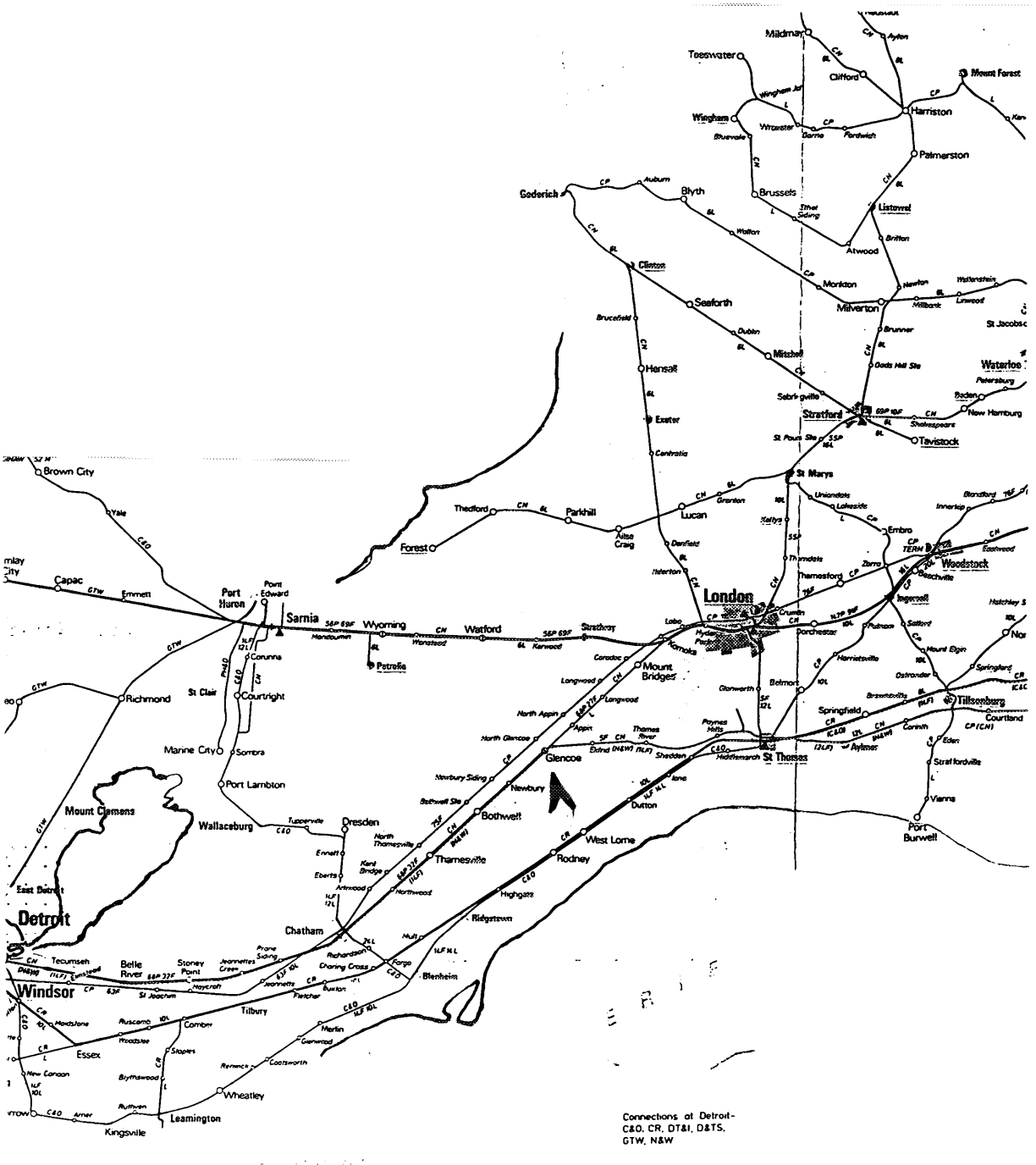
17 A partial description of buildings on the site in 1906 is available from Grand Trunk Railway System, Bridges and Buildings Southern Division (Montreal: Grand Trunk Railway, 1907), p. 62. These "Blue Books" of the system's inventory are incomplete, however, and the Glencoe listing is fragmentary in the copy available.

18 "G.T.R. Construction, Betterments, Etc.," Canadian Railway and Marine World (January 1912), p. 20.

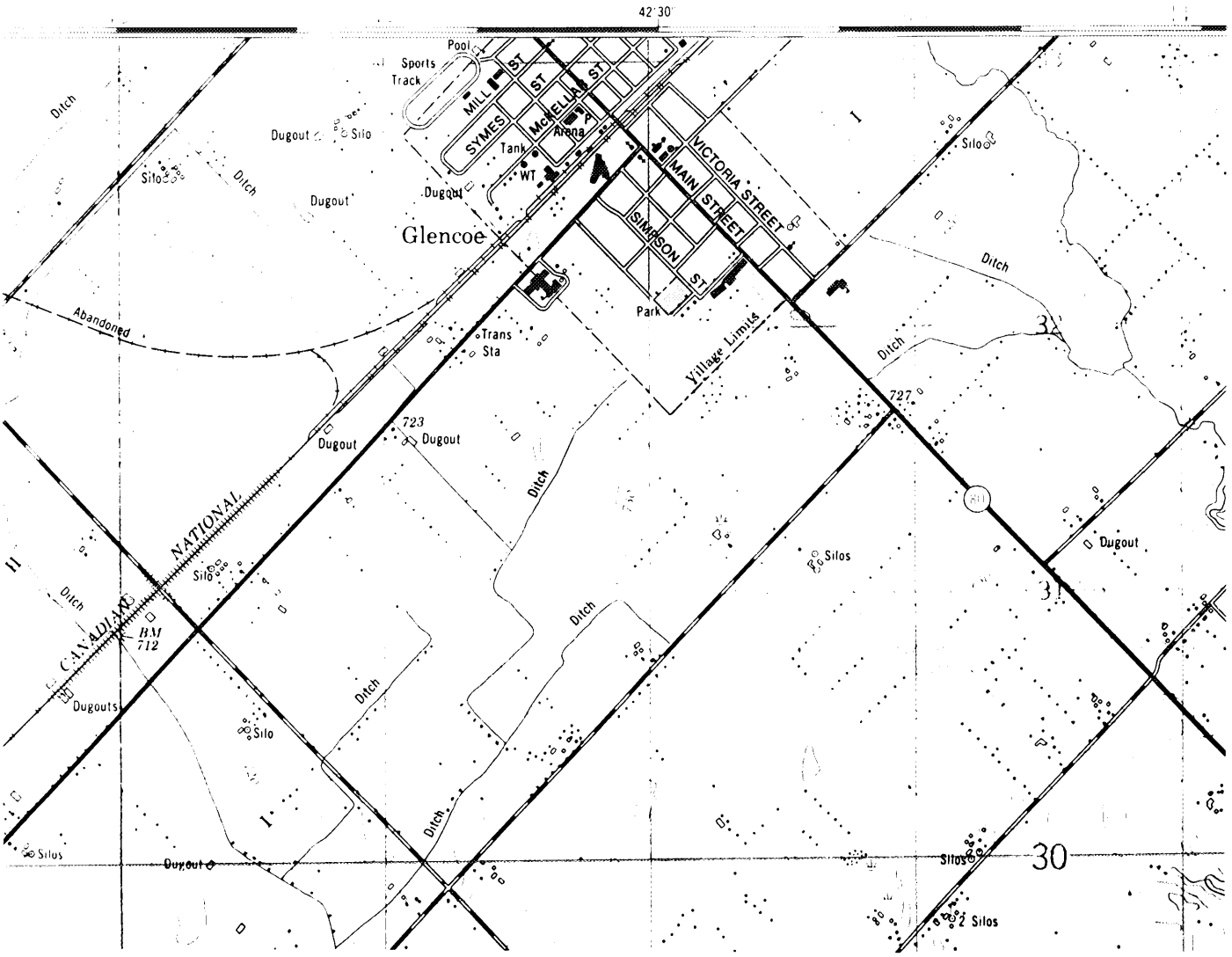
19 Assistance from Reeve D. McDonald, Clerk William Black, and Harold Carruthers, Chair of Glencoe LACAC, who generously arranged a site inspection 15 September 1995.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, GLENCOE, ONTARIO

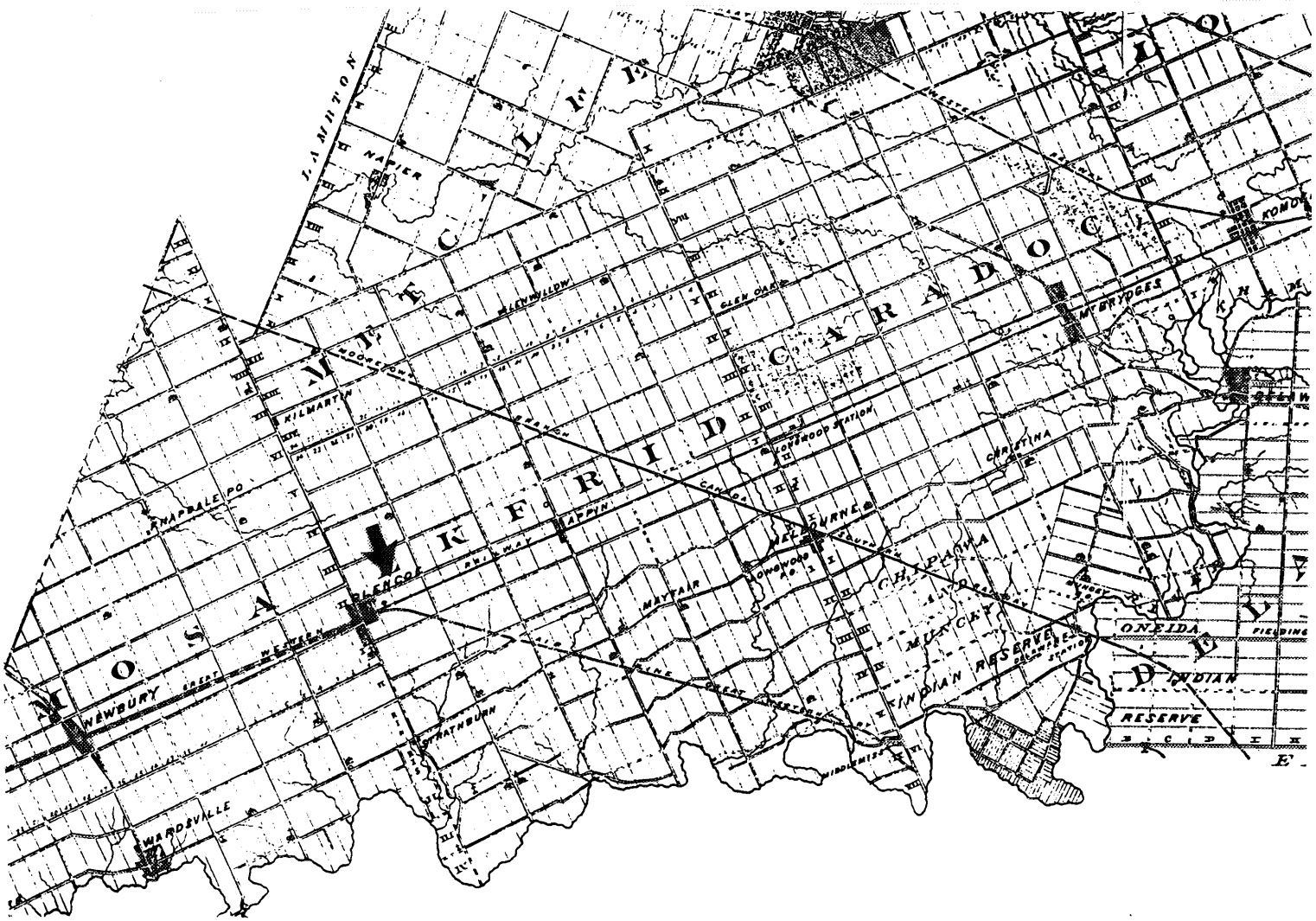
1 Canadian National Railways station, Glencoe, Ontario. South, main line elevation. Built 1904 by Grand Trunk Railway. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)



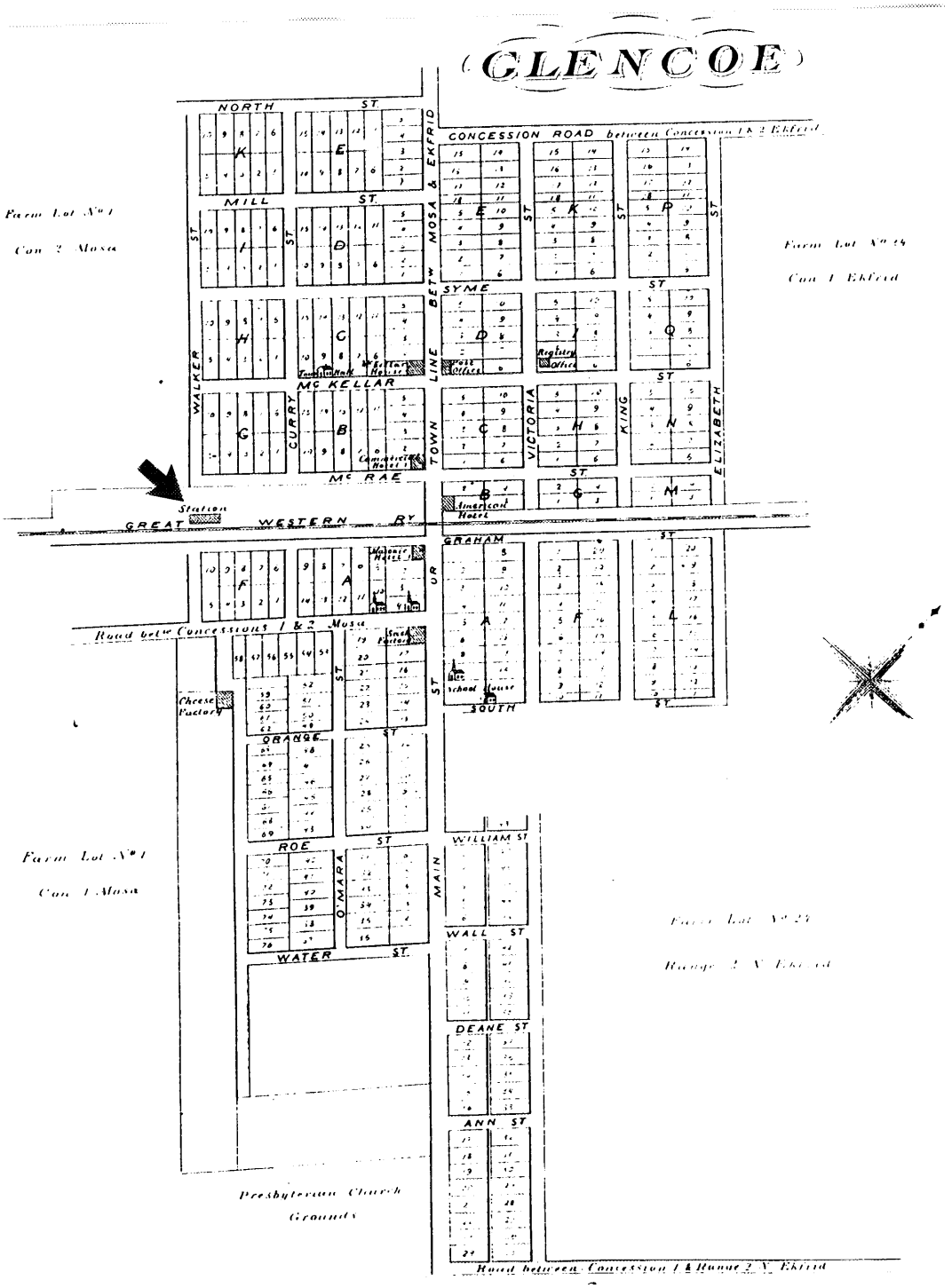
2 Location of Glencoe. (Railway Map of Southern Ontario [Guelph: Clyde Publishing Ltd., 1984].)



3 Map of Glencoe, showing location of the station. (Canadian Topographical Series 40I/12G, 1974.)

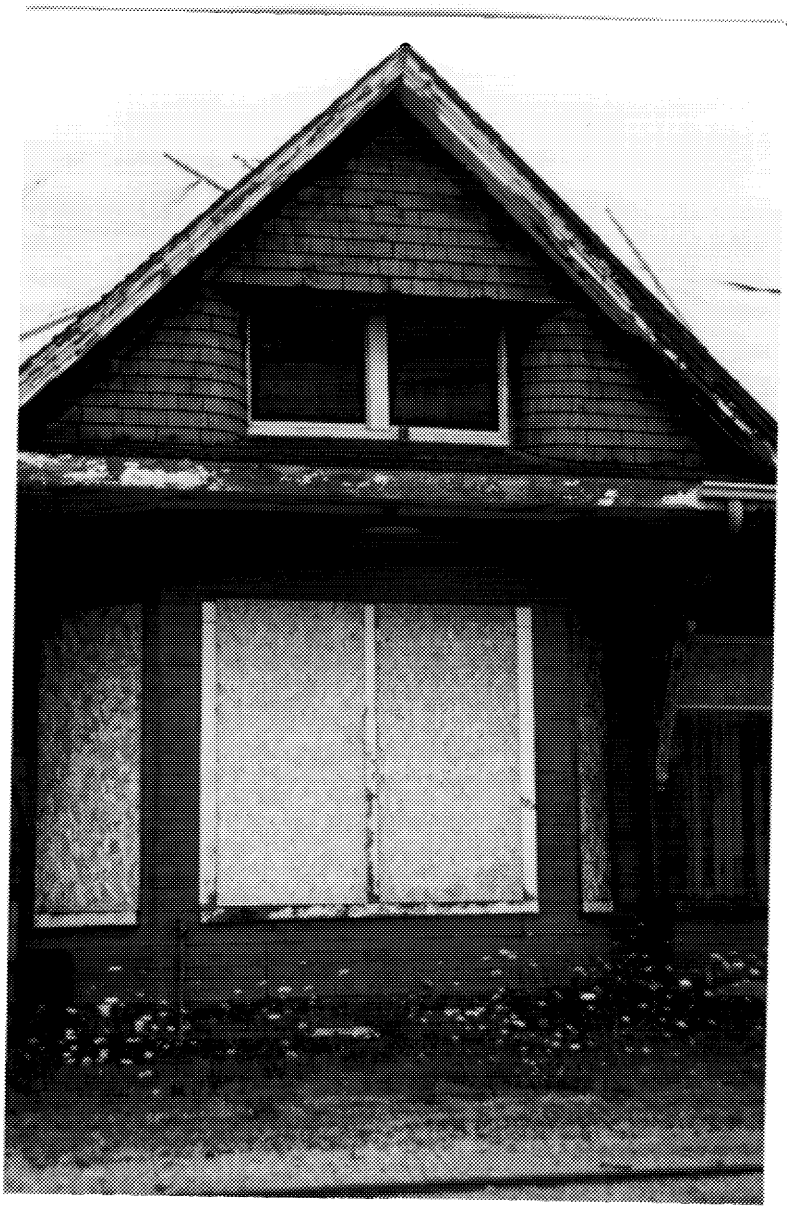


4 The Air Line cut-off at Glencoe, parallelling the Canada Southern Railway through Middlesex County. (H. R. Page & Co. Historical Atlas of Middlesex County, 1878, p. 24.)



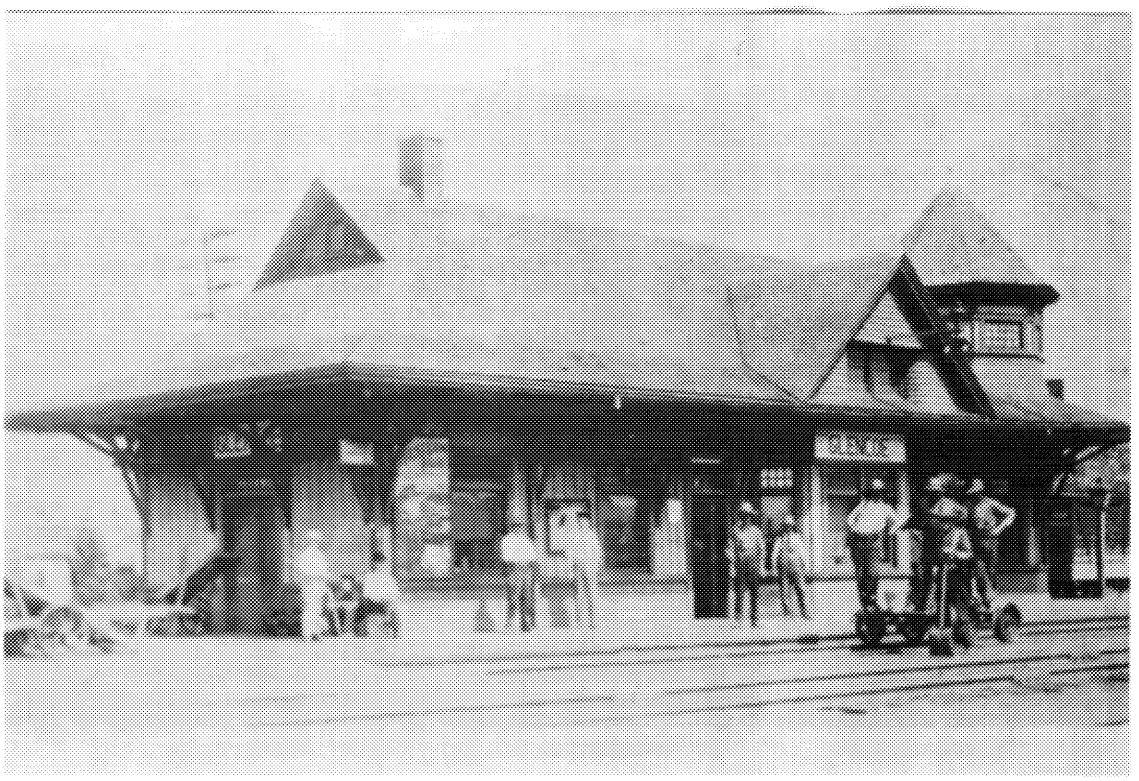
5 Glencoe in 1877. ((H. R. Page & Co. Historical Atlas of Middlesex County, 1878, p. 51.)

6 Glencoe station, west end from south. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)



7 Glencoe station, Queen Anne Revival gable on north. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)

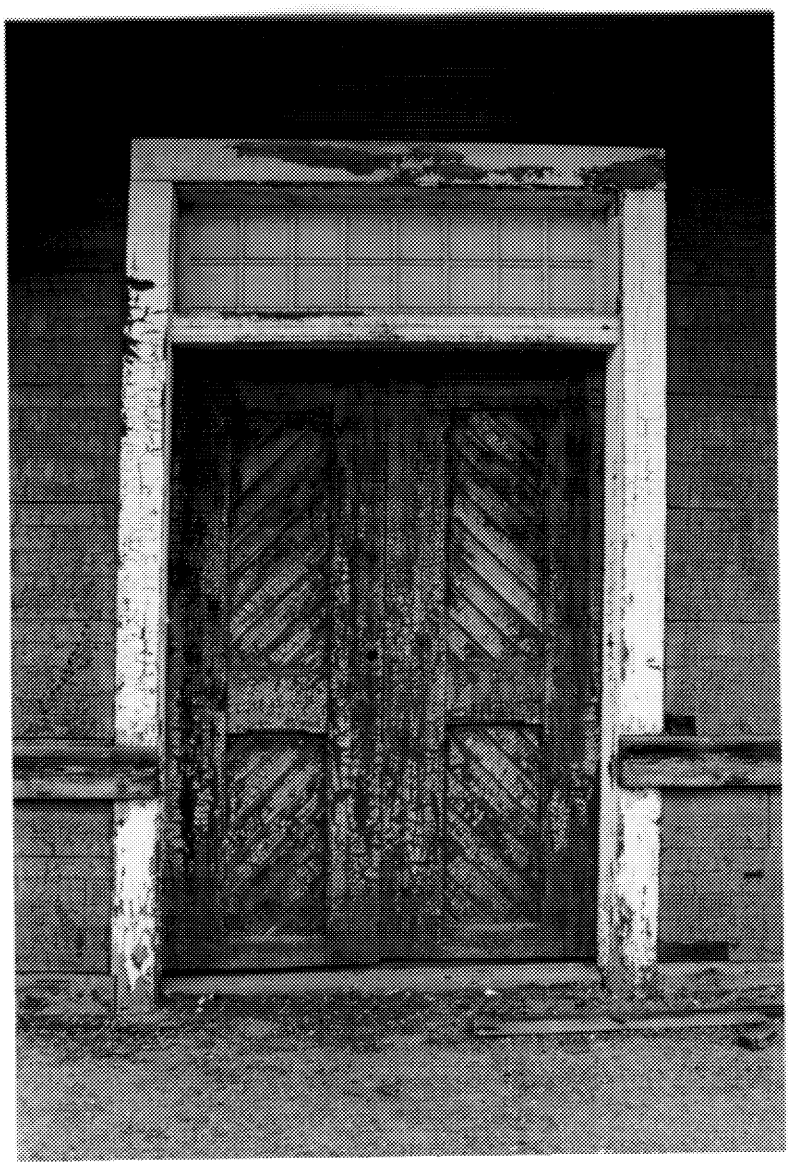
8 Glencoe station, tower on east end with boarded windows. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)



9 Glencoe station, historic photograph of south elevation with wall poster from 1911. (Glencoe & District Historical Society.)

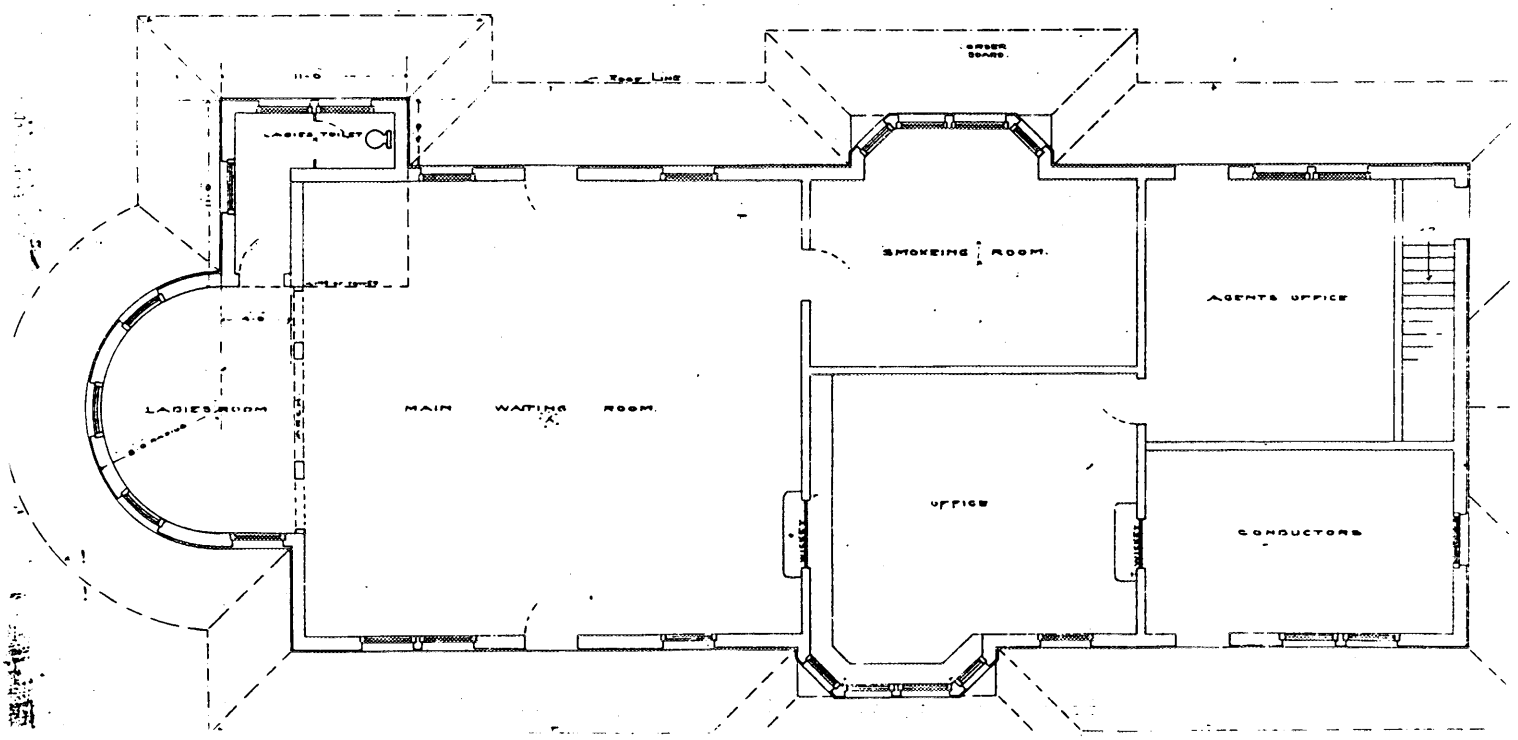
10 Glencoe station, detail of brackets, east end. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)

11 Glencoe station, north townside. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)



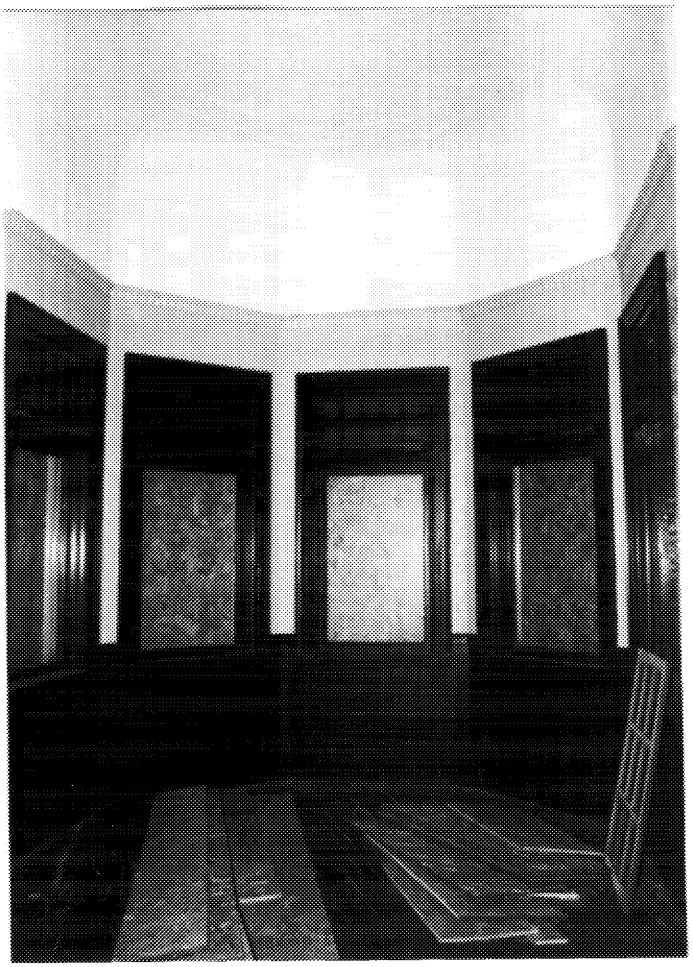
12 Glencoe station, baggage doors on south elevation. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)

13 Disintegrating sheet shingle material and overgrown weeds on south track front of Glencoe station. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)

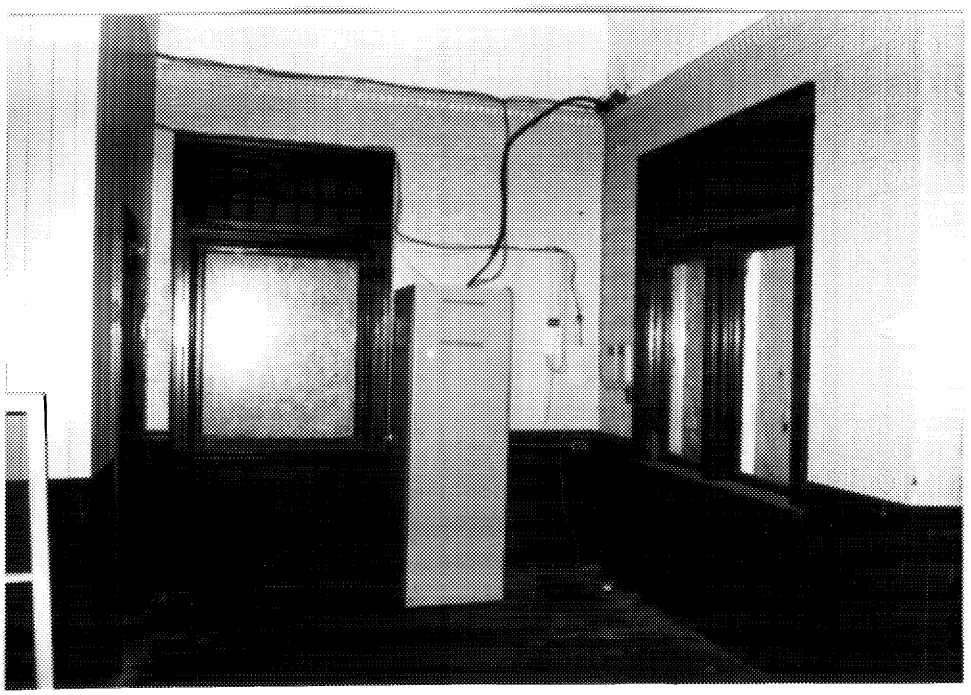


14 GTR Palmerston station, 1900 "Plans of Proposed Additions," first floor showing semi-circular ladies' room added to end. (National Archives of Canada [NAC] National Map Collection [NMC] 51544 item 486.)

15 Ticket wicket in general waiting room, Glencoe station. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)

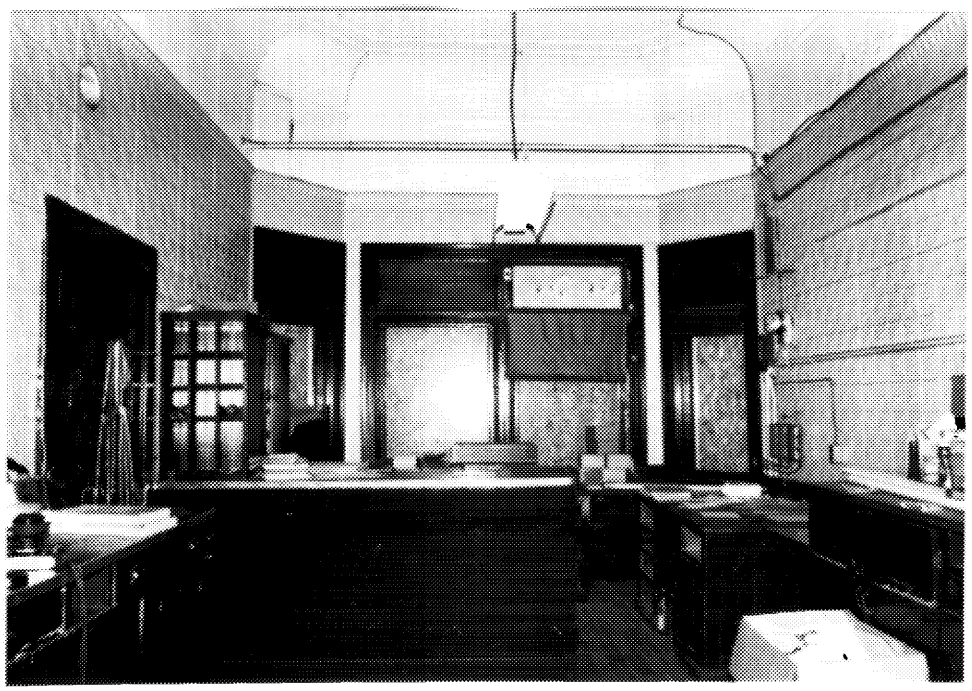


16 Ladies' polygonal waiting room looking east, Glencoe station. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)



17 North entry wall and east wall in vestibule area of ladies' polygonal waiting room, Glencoe station. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)

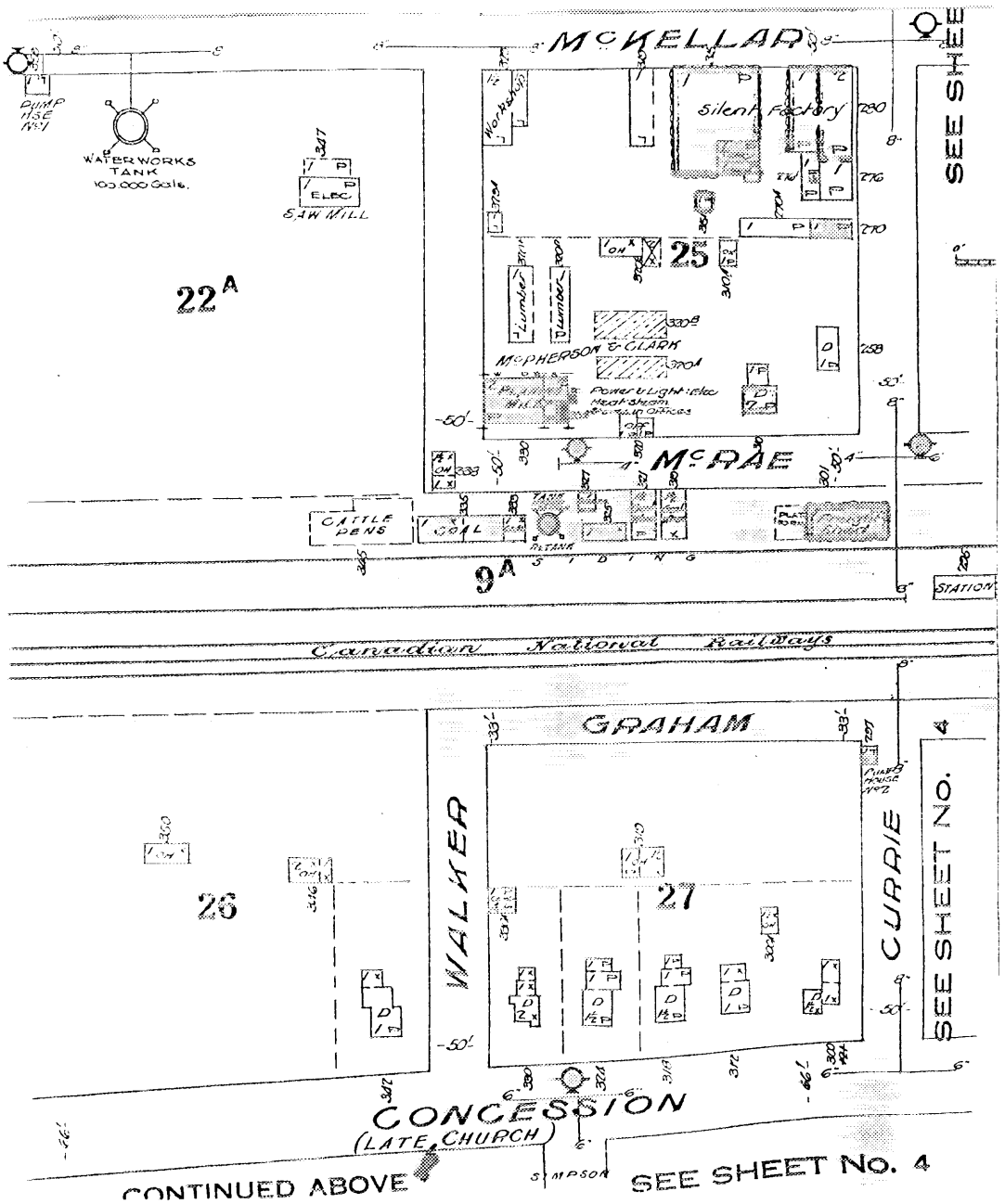
18 South bay of agents' office, Glencoe station. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)



19 North bay of agents' office, Glencoe station. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)

20 South wall of baggage room with new door opening on the left, orignal paired baggage doors on right. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)

21 Interior of baggage room combined with former general waiting room, north wall, Glencoe station. The ladder on the left leans against remnants of the partition between the two rooms. The freight door on the right is an alteration. (A. M. de Fort-Menares, 1995.)



22 Plan of industrial area around the Glencoe station in 1930. The intersection with Main Street, not shown, was occupied by oil storage tanks on the west side, and by grain elevators on the east. (Fire Insurance Plan of Glencoe [Toronto: Underwriters' Survery Bureau, 1930], sheets 1-2.)