

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

RAILWAY STATION REPORT

Title: Canadian National Railways Station  
Windsor (Walkerville), Ontario

Source: Anne M. de Fort-Menares, Toronto

## RSR-289

---

### INTRODUCTION

The VIA Rail station at 298 Walker Road, Windsor (mileage 105.60, Chatham subdivision) (Figures 1-3) was built by Canadian National Railways (CNR) in 1962 to replace a downtown terminal as part of its system-wide programme to upgrade passenger facilities.

Originally freight and administrative offices were combined with passenger services, but most administrative uses are now confined to the basement. The station is open 18.5 hours a day, seven days a week, for up to 300,000 passengers a year.

### HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

#### Thematic

The Windsor (Walkerville) station reflects the well developed standardized approach to modernising the public image of the CNR. Throughout the 1950s, management introduced new technologies and processes across the system, including ways of developing huge rail yards made obsolete by dieselisation and rationalisation of operations. Although new designs were devised for car interiors and passenger stations, by 1959 it was recognized that the public image of the company was still lagging: "like an iceberg, CNR modernization lies mostly below the visible surface."<sup>1</sup>

A new logo was designed, and coordinated colour schemes applied across the system. In small station design, the architectural department adopted elements of International Modernism such as the flat roof, curtain wall glazing, signage pylons, and durable, bright interior materials like glazed ceramic tile and terrazzo.<sup>2</sup> At Windsor, the relocation and modernisation of the station facilities coincided with a larger reorganization of company operations with respect to the waterfront rail yards.

#### Local Development

Of the many urban and economic studies carried out for Windsor between 1948 and 1992, passenger rail has not been mentioned as

either a planning priority or social objective.<sup>3</sup> CNR relocated Express and passenger services to Walkerville from a major waterfront terminal at the head of Ouellette Street in 1962, and eventually withdrew from their shops and yards along the city's downtown waterfront.<sup>4</sup>

Walkerville, a suburb of Windsor, began as a company town of 600 around the distillery, flour mill, store and hotel owned by Detroit industrialist Hiram Walker. Incorporated in 1890, Walkerville amalgamated with Windsor and the other Border Cities in 1935.<sup>5</sup>

Windsor's economy is driven by the automotive industry based in Detroit; high levels of car ownership, along with bus service and improved roads, had seriously depleted passenger rail in the 1920s.<sup>6</sup> The three American lines that ran through Windsor dropped passenger traffic in the 1930s; only CNR and CPR continued the service.

## **ARCHITECTURE**

### Aesthetic/Visual Qualities

The standard one-storey, flat-roofed modern station design CNR introduced in the early 1950s is modified at Windsor to adapt a high-use border terminal to a linear site with limited access. The parking lot and track elevations constitute the principal facades (Figures 1, 4). An overall aesthetic suggesting classical modernism derives from the prominent horizontal, delicate supports, and non-axiality, as advocated by proponents of the International style, such as architect Mies van der Rohe.

From the track, the station is dominated by the deep steel fascia of the projecting roof, which establishes a regular spatial envelope that is in fact subverted by the varied wall planes of the station structure beneath. (Similarly, the major horizontal plane of the fascia is composed of flush metal panels that run vertically.) Two triangular skylight structures stand above the roof and slope down to the fascia over the canopy and ticket office (Figure 5). Early signage is augmented by later lettering on the track frontage and in "(Walkerville)" (Figure 6). An extensive canopy projects on one end (Figure 7).

The back elevation is more broken and lively, with orange red brick wall planes intersecting with glazing and metal; the proportions and geometries reflect more contemporary commercial architectural practise (Figures 8-9). Trends here which are seen in other CNR stations of the period (such as Oakville, 1955, and Cornwall, 1957) include the contrast between the highly glazed passenger area and the solid street-side wall planes, and the

inclusion of lettering as part of the design. Gone is the ornamental brickwork, the clerestory fenestration, and the thin roof plane, replaced by a more robust, classically-based modernism that looks ahead to the ground-breaking station at Ottawa of 1965-66.

### Functional/Technological Qualities

The station has a through axis from the track to the parking lot, with a cross axis from the waiting area to the ticket office and baggage room. As was typical of these modern stations, a large, daylight, open space for waiting occupied about a third of the floor plan, with services around the perimeter (Figures 10-11).

Although the Windsor interior has been extensively renovated, the oblong glazed wall tiles and green terrazzo floor squares endure as prominent characteristics of CNR modernism, first introduced around 1950. At the ticket and baggage counters, dark terra-cotta tile flooring is used. Instead of the usual dropped ceiling, this station has exposed steel trusses and air ducts, with 55 four-foot fluorescent luminaires hung perpendicularly to the trusses (Figures 10, 12). The ticket counters were replaced in 1986, the seating in 1991, and crowd control measures such as line-up stanchions and steel platform fencing were introduced.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### Setting

Built near a junction triangle serving Ford Motor Company and Hiram Walker Distilleries, the brick planes of the station echo the brick boxes of the distillery that loom over the site; their presence is made more explicit by a large boxed enclosure carrying pipes over the railway site. There are no other related railway structures. The station is distinguished by its recognizably commercial Miesian architecture, and the building gains added civic composure from three flagpoles planted along the approach side (Figures 13, 1).

### Community Status

The Inventory of Historic Buildings of the City of Windsor, which lists nearly 600 properties, does not include the VIA Rail station, although other modern buildings are listed. City council designates only if there is no opposition from the property owner.<sup>7</sup> The Mason and Rice designed baggage and express building of the Lake Erie, Essex and Detroit River Railway, currently at risk,

is a focus of conservation concern. The CN station (former Michigan Central Railroad terminal RSR-267) was designated by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1995.

### Endnotes

- 1 "New Trademark Symbolizes 'Movement,'" Canadian Transportation (February 1961), p. 19.
- 2 The early evolution of CNR modernism is discussed in Susan D. Bronson, "Canadian National Railways Station Senneterre, Quebec," Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada RSR-260.
- 3 Examination of a number of planning and forecast documents indicate an underlying passivity respecting the quite onerous impact of the various rail lines on urban matters. Among those consulted were: "CN riverfront lands study" (Windsor Dept. of Planning; Dept. of Parks & Recreation, 1983); E. G. Faludi and Associates Town Planning Consultants, Limited, "Preliminary Report on the Redevelopment of the City of Windsor," (1948) and "A fifteen year programme for the urban renewal of the City of Windsor and its metropolitan area," prepared for the City of Windsor (Toronto, 1959);  
  
"Windsor as a regional community : a brief presented to the City of Windsor directing the city's attention to the St. Clair economic region and to the proposed St. Clair Regional Development Association," (Windsor : s.n., 1962);  
  
Economic Strategic Planning Committee, "Prosperity 2000: offering world-class competitiveness & jobs for Windsor-Essex in the nineties: a recommended economic strategy," (Windsor, Ont.: The Committee, 1990).
- 4 E. G. Faludi and Associates Town Planning Consultants, Limited, "A fifteen year programme for the urban renewal of the City of Windsor and its metropolitan area," prepared for the City of Windsor (Toronto, 1959), p. 228
- 5 In addition to Walkerville, Windsor took in East Windsor and Sandwich. Neil F. Morrison, Garden Gateway to Canada (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954), p. 10.

Hiram Walker built the Lake Erie, Essex and Detroit River Railway in 1885 out of Walkerville. The corporate mergers and takeovers leading from the Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway through Pere

Marquette, Chesapeake and Ohio, and Conrail to CSX are clearly outlined in Tennant, *Canada Southern Country*, op. cit., p. 134-37, 167-72, 193. The first .08 miles of the Walkerville line were abandoned by CSX in 1992, a portion of which were sold to VIA Rail as right-of-way; the remaining 1.2 miles to Walkerville Junction serve industries via the Essex Terminal Railways connection at Walkerville. Ferrophiatic Column, UCRS Newsletter (April 1992), p. 11 .

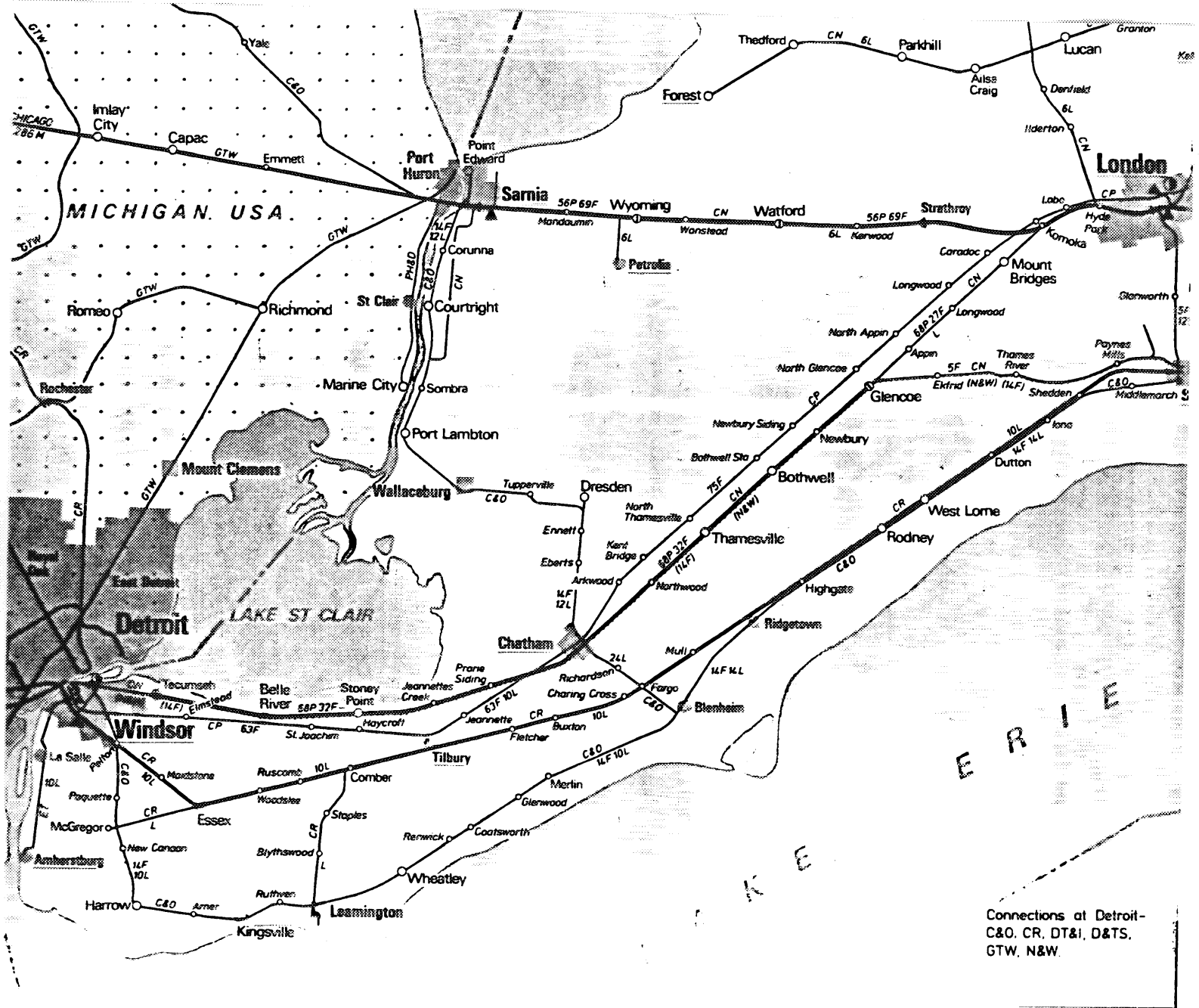
- 6 Morrison, pp. 270, 306, cites the opening of the "all cement route" from Amherstburg to Montreal in 1926.
- 7 Planner Evelyn McLean in conversation with the author, 14 March 1996.

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO



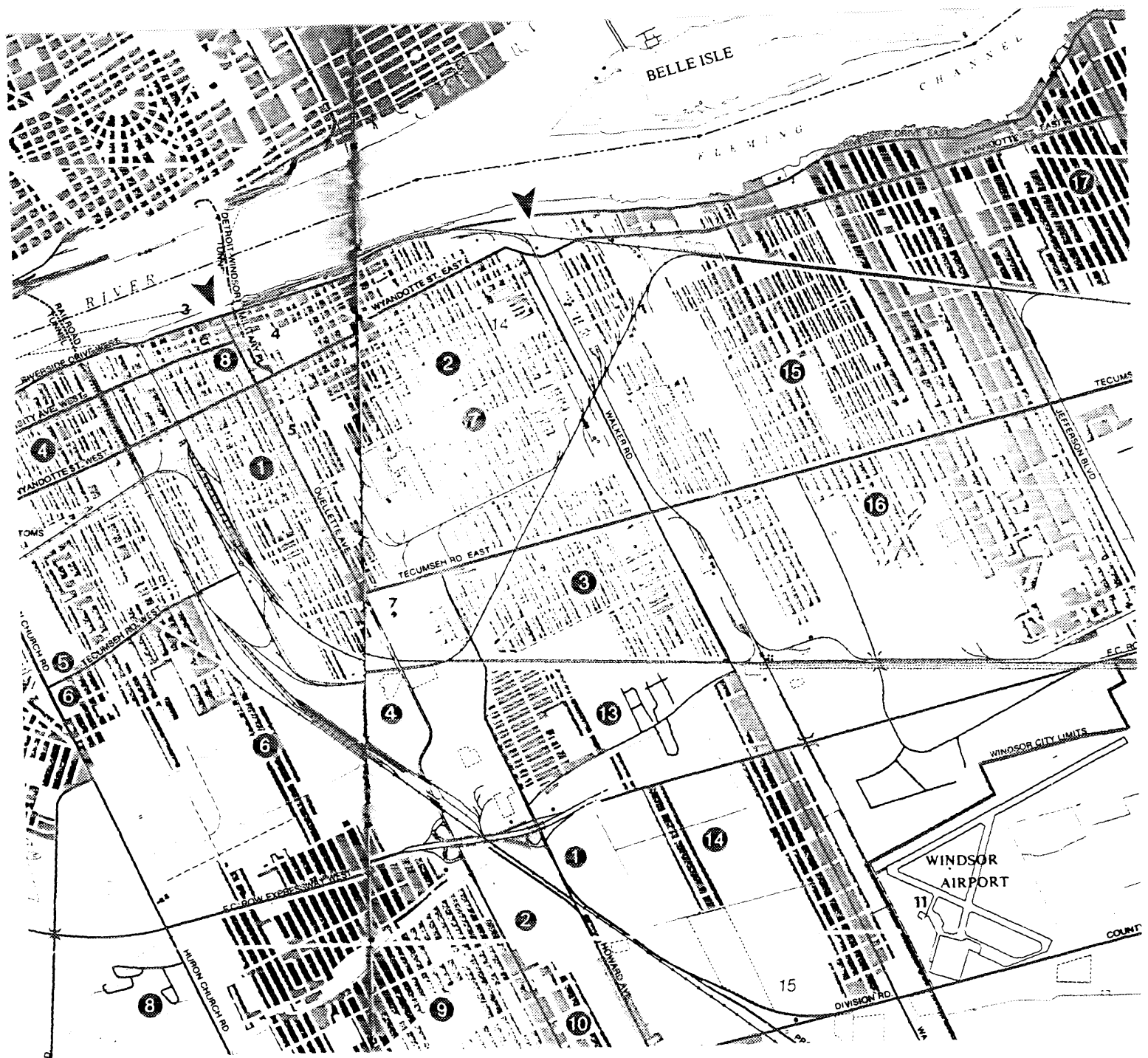
1 Canadian National Railways/VIA Rail Station, Windsor, Ontario. Built 1962. View of track frontages. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO



2 Rail lines leading into Windsor. (Railway Map of Southern Ontario [Guelph: Clyde Publishing Ltd., 1984].)

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO



3 Map of Windsor area, showing location of the downtown terminal heading Ouellette Street, and the location of the 1962 station on Walker Road. (Moving to and around Southwestern Ontario [Toronto: Moving Publications, 1985/61, pp. 32-3.]

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO



4 Windsor station parking lot elevation. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)



5 Windsor station, skylight structures. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO



6 Windsor station, two styles of lettering on side of fascia. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO



7 Windsor station, canopy shelter. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)



8 Windsor station, north back of station. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO



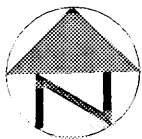
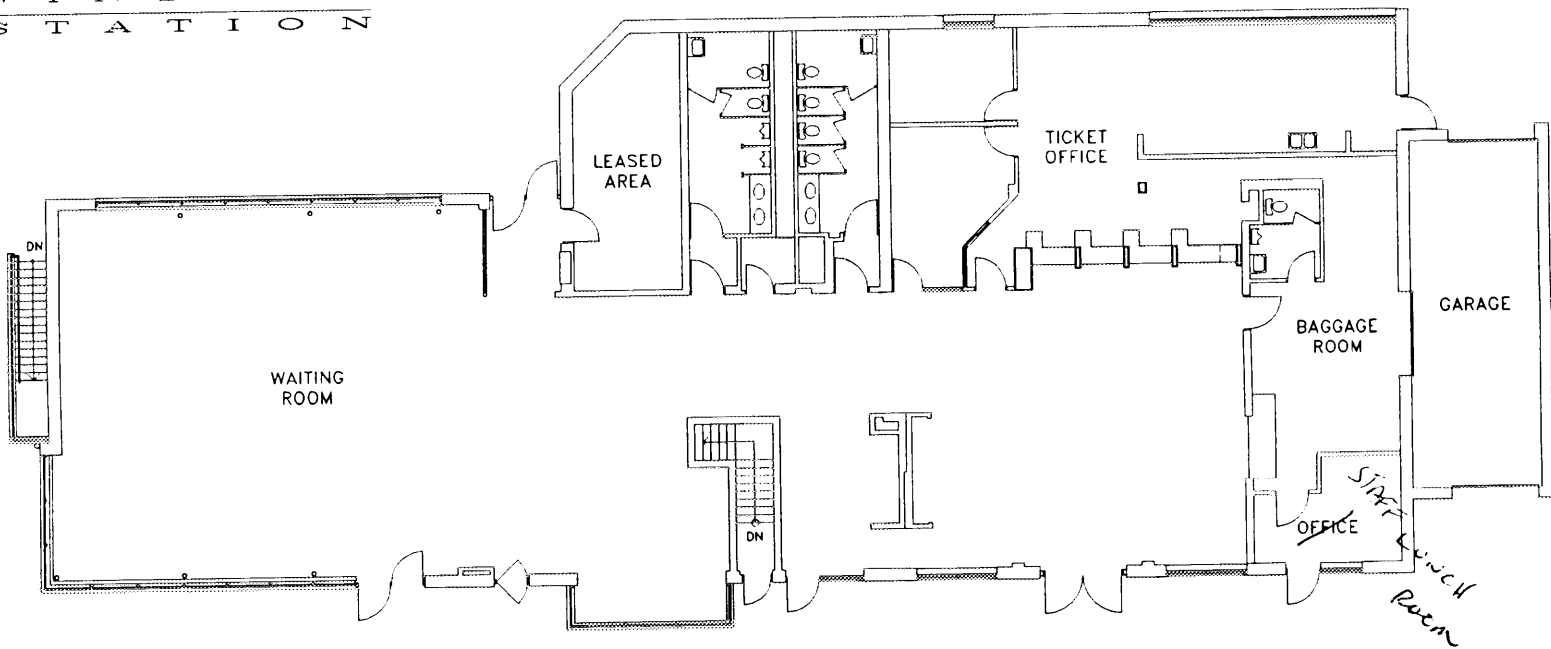
9 Windsor station, north back of station. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)



10 Windsor station, interior of waiting room. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO

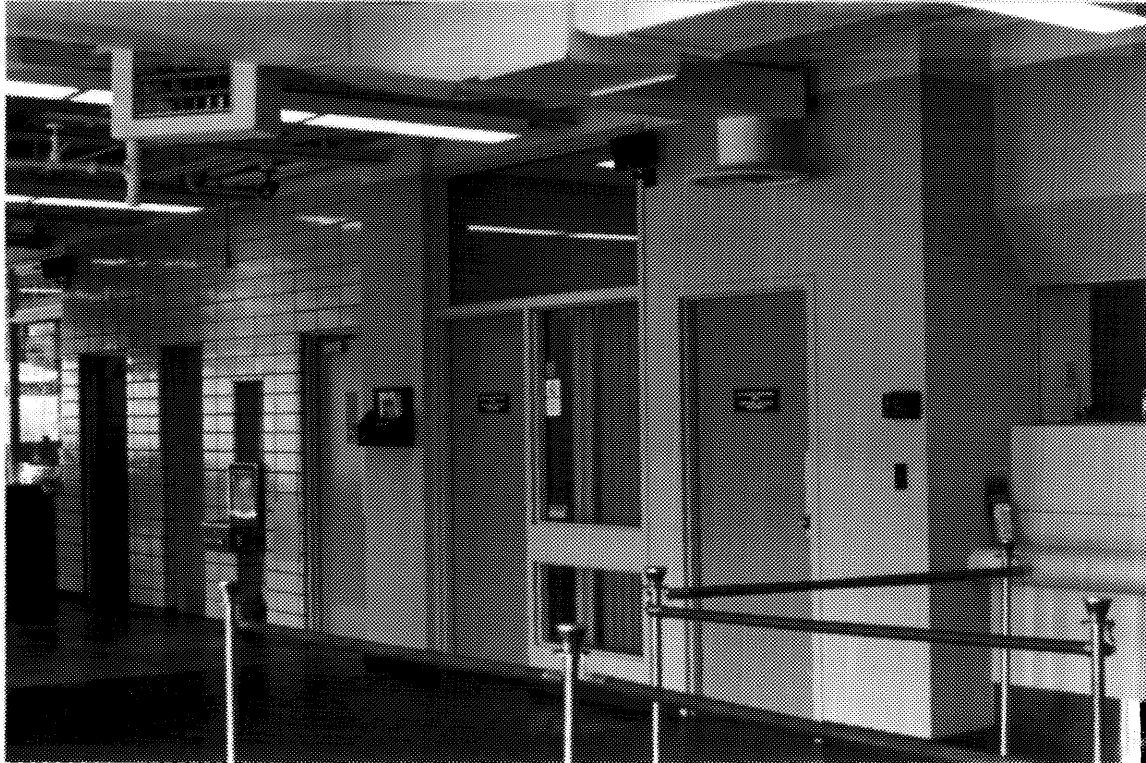
WINDSOR  
STATION



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

11 Windsor station, plan of station. (Courtesy VIA Rail.)

VIA RAIL STATION, WINDSOR (WALKERVILLE), ONTARIO



12 Remodelled ticket counters, extreme right, exposed mechanicals, and original wall tile and terrazzo on left. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)



13 Hiram Walker distillery pipe running across railway site. (Heritage Research Associates, 1995.)