

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS BOARD OF CANADA

RAILWAY STATION REPORT

Title: VIA Rail/Former Canadian National Railways Station
Ingersoll, Ontario

Source: Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa

RSR-199

INTRODUCTION

The former Canadian National Railways (CNR) station at 45 Thames Street South in Ingersoll, Ontario (Figures 1 and 2), was built in 1889 for the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR), to designs by Joseph Hobson, the chief engineer of the Great Western division of the GTR. The modest size of the station reflects the era of troubled finances experienced by the overextended GTR, as it struggled to compete with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). Although small, the station demonstrates the maturity of the designs coming out of the GTR chief engineer's office by the end of the 1880s. The location of this station at its present site was responsible for the expansion of the town of Ingersoll north of the Thames River, and this formative role is still visible in the site and setting of the structure.

Now the property of VIA Rail, the station has been boarded up, in favour of a relatively new passenger shelter a few meters down the track. The town is considering options for the future use of the building.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Thematic

The station at Ingersoll is an example of the second generation of GTR railway stations built in southwestern Ontario, as the company struggled to compete with the newly-created and aggressive CPR. After a generation of swallowing the smaller lines of the region, the GTR had consolidated its position somewhat, and it hoped to fend off competition from the CPR by obtaining permission to expand westward right to the Pacific. Ottawa responded by stipulating that the GTR must first provide better facilities along existing lines before it would be allowed to lay tracks farther west.¹ The new station, therefore, can be

seen as part of the larger GTR strategy to construct a transcontinental line.

The original Ingersoll station was built in 1854 by the Great Western Railway (GWR), which connected Niagara Falls, Hamilton, Woodstock, Ingersoll, London and Windsor. While the initial survey for the line would have by-passed Ingersoll, a deputation from the village convinced the GWR officials to build the line through the village along the north shore of the Thames River (Figure 3).² Rapid expansion gave the GWR some 1280 kilometres of track in southwestern Ontario and a further 288 kilometres in Michigan by 1882. Hasty construction and the consolidation of American lines made it increasingly difficult for the GWR to maintain its share of the lucrative American traffic that ran through Canada between New York and Michigan against rival American companies, and especially against the GTR.³ In the end the GWR was swallowed up by the GTR, as were many other small lines in southwestern Ontario.⁴

Competition among railway companies was fierce, goaded on by ambitious small towns like Ingersoll. The businessmen running Ingersoll's civic affairs promoted competition between railways in the hopes of keeping the freight rates low. They backed the Credit Valley Railway (CVR) in the 1870s,⁵ then the Ingersoll, Tilsonburg (as it was then spelled) & Port Burwell Railway (ITPBR); both of these lines were later absorbed into the CPR.⁶

The GTR now faced one large, aggressive rival. The company considered that its survival depended upon the creation of a new transcontinental line to compete with the CPR. The federal government insisted that existing facilities be upgraded before a new charter could be issued. As part of the GTR's general consolidation of lines, and as part of its campaign of improvements in western Ontario, the GTR decided in 1885⁷ to replace the 1854 former GWR station (Figure 4).

Joseph Hobson, originally chief engineer of the GWR, and then chief engineer of the Great Western Division of the GTR after the 1882 merger, was responsible for designing the new Ingersoll station. Hobson's original, full-blown picturesque design of 1885 (Figure 5), was designed to curry favour with the federal government. Successive, scaled-down designs (Figures 6 and 7) were developed for the Ingersoll station, which reveals the GTR's cost-cutting measures for replacement stations, especially in towns such as Ingersoll where the initial boom period was effectively over. The present building, modest in scale yet solidly and handsomely designed, represents the replacement stations erected by the GTR to satisfy federal demand for better service in parts of Canada already served by the GTR.

Local Development

The Ingersoll station represents the crucial link played by the railway companies in the development and on-going prosperity of

local agriculture and industry. The station also represents the role played by the railway companies in the urban development of the towns through which they passed.

Located in the midst of a fertile agricultural district, the site attracted Major Thomas Ingersoll, who settled in the 1790s at the point along the Thames River where the Mohawks left the river trail to visit their chief, Joseph Brant, at nearby Brantford. The major's son, Charles Ingersoll, established the first post office in Oxford County here in 1821, and in 1831 he laid out a town site which in 1852 was incorporated as the village of Ingersoll, with a population of 1,190 people.⁸ Ingersoll was effectively a service centre for the southern half of Oxford County, but area farmers, with the highest production of wheat in Ontario,⁹ were hampered from marketing their crops by their landlocked location.

The push by Ingersoll entrepreneurs to be on the GWR route was more than justified once the railway came through. The railway brought a boom in population, and the location of the GWR station on the north bank of the Thames across from the village proper (Figure 3) led to rapid development of the area around the station. In addition to becoming a centre for the export of wheat and for a thriving hardwood trade, Ingersoll experienced substantial commercial and industrial development, led by the manufacture of agricultural machinery,¹⁰ the marketing of which was made possible by rail connections. Once dairying replaced wheat as a mainstay of local agriculture,¹¹ Ingersoll became a major centre for the export of cheese to Britain. In 1860 Ingersoll was incorporated as a town; its population jumped from 1,190 in 1852 to 2,577 in 1861, to 4,318 in 1881.¹²

By locating the GWR depot on the north bank of the Thames River, the railway shifted the geographical focus of Ingersoll. Local speculators purchased land in the vicinity of the station, and then built houses and shops for the newcomers pouring in to the village. By 1863 the north side of Ingersoll contained one third of the town's population. The railway also shifted the commercial focus of Ingersoll away from King Street, the old stage road running parallel to the river two blocks to the south. Thames Street, running north from King and across the river, became the main business street.¹³ As happened in other river communities,¹⁴ there was competition between the two areas. The CVR, later absorbed into the CPR, was located south of the Thames River.

Only three years after the GWR was merged into the larger GTR, Ingersoll pressured the GTR for a new station. After three decades, the 1854 station was beginning to show its age, and its board-and-batten construction reflected poorly on the railway and on Ingersoll. More specifically, in an age of frantic rival boosterism among regional communities, the construction of a new picturesque brick GTR station in nearby Woodstock in 1885 prompted Ingersoll to lobby for a replacement station.¹⁵ The

new station was built on a larger site on the south side of the GTR tracks in 1889, away from the existing freight buildings and the 1854 building.

The 1889 station consolidated industrial growth in Ingersoll, and confirmed expanding development on the north side of the river. The CVR had drawn factories to its location south of the river in the 1870s and 1880s, but the new GTR station drew development to its proximity in the 1890s and early 1900s. Even after the CPR built a new station south of the river in 1908, the GTR, with its more numerous passenger trains, remained the more popular of the two railways. The GTR station was, furthermore, more conveniently and more attractively located, near the main business street on the banks of the river.

This station remained an important focal point for the community well into this century. Once the Canadian National Railways took over the GTR, the CNR remained committed to passenger service from this building. Indeed, local passenger traffic increased with the closing of the electric railway that operated between Ingersoll and Woodstock from 1901 to 1925; this is reflected in the larger new baggage and express section which was built on the east end of the station in 1946. As a centre for the area's agriculture, and as a manufacturing centre, Ingersoll remained heavily dependent upon railway service for much of this century.

But times changed. Bus parcel service won away most of the express business, and the original baggage room at the station's west end was removed by the early 1960s. Passenger traffic increased temporarily when the CPR closed down and then demolished its station south of the river, but inevitably the advent of private vehicles and bus travel has had its effect. The building is now the property of VIA Rail. VIA has discontinued service from this station, and it is now boarded up.

ARCHITECTURE

Aesthetic/Visual Qualities

The former CNR station in Ingersoll (Figure 1) is a neatly designed, modestly sized brick structure, one and a half storeys high, with a one storey wing, having some decorative features taken from the Gothic Revival style. Several earlier plans were contemplated (Figures 5, 6 and 7) before the present one was chosen. The structure's three sections were built at three different times: the original, 1889 brick GTR station (Figures 8 and 9) is the one and a half storey portion, lacking the western baggage room (room A in Figure 10). On the east side is a brick baggage/express addition built in 1946, and appended to this is a lean-to structure erected at some undetermined date. The brick walls (Figure 11) are presently painted grey. Several openings feature the pointed, Gothic Revival arch (Figures 12, 13 and 14).

The roofs are shingled with asphalt, and the fascia brackets and other wood details are all painted white (Figures 15, 16 and 17). The lean-to consists of iron poles resting on a concrete platform (Figure 18).

The surviving main section of the 1889 station remains substantially true to the design created by Joseph Hobson, despite the removal of the original 1889 baggage room. In its picturesque qualities, and in its reference to the Gothic Revival style, this building's design is typical of its time. The main facade was originally asymmetrical (Figures 8 and 9) with an off-centre projecting gable and bay window as the visual focal point of the track-side elevation. The steep roofline, wide eaves, deep canopy, and carved fretwork in the eaves combined to create a pleasantly picturesque design, complemented by the liberal use of pointed, Gothic Revival windows on the street side and in the track-side gable. The coat of grey paint that now covers the building obscures the polychromatic surface treatment that would have contributed significantly to the visual appeal of the structure: the brick walls combined red and yellow brick, with buff sandstone used as trim around doors and windows. The canopy originally ran around the four sides of the building, but it has been removed from the east, west and south sides (Figure 18). While the removal of three sides of the canopy, and the removal of the 1889 baggage room have tended to make the central, more prominent portion of the building symmetrical, the picturesque qualities of the structure are still foremost, at least on the track-side elevation. In this regard, the addition in 1946 of a brick baggage/express wing to the east is not out of place in the overall design.

The new 1889 station at Ingersoll was typical in size and design of GTR stations in medium-sized towns in the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th. The formula - with some variations - of asymmetrical building under a steep roof, punctuated with a prominent gable and encircled with a deep canopy was repeated at various locations, including Dundas (1901; Figure 19), Hawkesbury (1891; Figure 20) and Merritton (1898; Figure 21). All three of these buildings are still standing. Due to this repetition and variation of design, the GTR presented a consistent corporate image throughout the region.

Changes were made over the years, some of which had more impact than others upon the architectural character of the structure. An express room was carved out of the northwest corner of the men's waiting room at some time between the late 1920s and the mid-1940s. In 1946, a brick addition on a concrete foundation was built onto the east end of the station (Figure 18).¹⁶ It contained a small boiler room and coal storage area, for a furnace that replaced the four stoves used throughout the station previously; and a large express area. The old baggage area on the west end, with two sets of double doors and low accessible windows, was too easy a mark for vandals, and in the 1950s or 1960s this section of the original 1889 station was removed

entirely along with the verandah along the west, south and east walls. By the mid-20th century the slate roof was replaced with an asphalt shingle roof, and all the exterior walls were coated with grey paint. Notwithstanding continual neglect, the overall structure remains sound apart from a small crumbling section of brickwork on the south side (Figure 11). The removal of the western baggage room and the removal of the surrounding canopy have had the most significant visual impact (Figure 18).

Functional/Technological Qualities

The interior arrangement of the 1889 Ingersoll station - now much altered - was typical of GTR late Victorian era small town replacement stations. Its various functions were clearly demarcated: passenger-related activities were separate from freight operations across the tracks, and men's and women's waiting rooms were separated. Interior finishes - many of which are still intact - were also typical of the times.

The 1889 GTR station was built on a stone foundation, with a crawlspace rather than a full basement, which is still accessible through a trapdoor located in the floor of the women's lavatory. The attic was never intended for any specific function, and it was made accessible through a trapdoor located in the ceiling of the men's lavatory.

In a station of such modest dimensions, the agent's office had no door of its own out to the track, but access was just around a corner and out the men's waiting room door (Figure 8). The bay window in the office provided the agent with an unobstructed view east and west along the tracks, and across to the freight building. The agent could look out the ladies' waiting room wicket through doors and windows to see traffic approaching from town. The separate waiting rooms for men and women were typical of late 19th century railway station design.

The new express section with its high small windows, public waiting area and large storage area ensured greater security and better service than the prior express wing. The interior of the 1946 addition has been rearranged by CN Rail work crews during the last generation. The old 1889 section of the station is no longer used for any activity, but a doorway has been opened between the two sections.

Much of the original interior detail of the 1889 station survives, including cornices, wall surfaces, wainscoting, wickets, window sashes, and one set of original double doors, albeit all of these features are in a poor state of repair.

ENVIRONMENT

Setting

The station still overlooks the Thames River and one of the busiest freight and passenger lines in Canada, but the extensive freight sheds and most of the nearby factories have disappeared in the last generation. The new station was designed primarily as a passenger facility, and to that end it was built across the tracks from the 1854 depot so that the traffic coming to it was well away from the freight shed located beside the old depot (Figure 22). The new location also meant that two-thirds of Ingersoll's population no longer had to cross the double set of GTR tracks when travelling to the station. With plenty of level ground on the west, south and east sides, the new station location offered ample parking space. A plank platform was conveniently at hand on the south side of the baggage room. The verandah roof protected passengers. There is no evidence that any thought was given to landscaping the area around the station when it was built, apart from providing a roadway in from Thames Street and maintaining some form of lawn. The lack of a garden is somewhat surprising, since gardens were fairly common as embellishments to railway stations.¹⁷

The 1925 elevations (Figure 8) and 1946 renovation plans show an extensive brick platform with a concrete curb between the station and tracks and along the side walls as the main feature of the station grounds, with a plank platform along the south wall. This brick platform was most likely installed at some point after 1910, since much larger centres such as Stratford did not enjoy the luxury of a brick station platform until the early 1910s.¹⁸ The brick platform was covered by asphalt beginning in 1946.

Community Status

It was not until the 1960s, when railway passenger traffic was at an all time low, that Ingersoll inhabitants began to worry that the CNR station would be removed. The demolition of the CPR station in 1976¹⁹ caused some concern, but Ingersoll's public leaders still hoped for a resurgence of train travel. In 1973 the combined forces of the Ingersoll town council, the North Oxford township council, the Ingersoll Chamber of Commerce, the Ingersoll Business Improvement Association and the town major together convinced the CNR to re-institute morning passenger service,²⁰ but this experiment proved a failure. In December 1978 VIA Rail announced it would not take over the CNR station, since the revenue from seven or eight passengers daily did not cover operating costs.²¹ VIA Rail opted instead to rent one of the waiting rooms, but upon hearing that CN Rail would remove the station, VIA Rail in the early 1980s built a small heated passenger shelter nearby (Figure 23).

During these years, the heritage value of the old station became apparent to concerned citizens. Local inhabitants protested the threatened closure and demolition of the CNR station. The use of the 1946 addition by CN Rail crews as an operations base incidentally worked to save the building. Ingersoll does not have a Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee to motivate designation of the old structure. The Ingersoll Historical Society, formed in April 1993, has declared its intention of having the former CNR station designated the first heritage structure in the town.²²

Endnotes

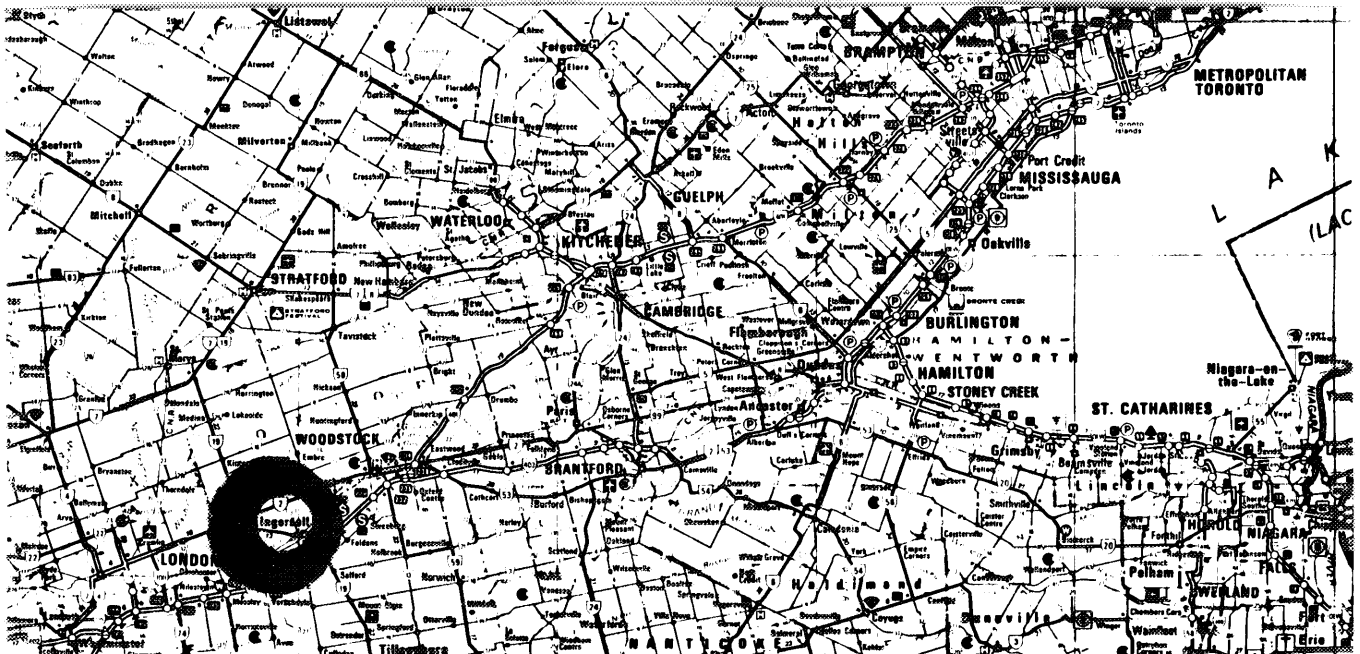
- 1 Heritage Research Associates, "Former Canadian National Railways Station/Now VIA Rail, Kitchener, Ontario," Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC), Railway Station Report (RSR) 146, p. 109.
- 2 James Sinclair, History of the Town of Ingersoll (Ingersoll: the author, 1924), pp. 12-13.
- 3 The Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1988), p. 935.
- 4 Sentinel-Review (Woodstock), 18 August, 1882, p. 2.
- 5 Robert Dorman, comp., A Statutory History of the Steam and Electric Railways of Canada, 1836-1937 (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, 1938), pp. 176-77.
- 6 Dorman, op. cit., pp. 587-88; and Donald M. Wilson, The Ontario and Quebec Railway (Belleville: Mika Publishing Company, 1984), pp. 141-46.
- 7 The planning of the new Ingersoll station is chronicled in the series of plans shown in Figures 5, 6 and 7.
- 8 Nick and Helma Mika, Places in Ontario (Belleville: Mika Publishing Company, 1981), Vol. 2, pp. 340-41.
- 9 R.M. McInnis, "The Early Ontario Wheat Staple Reconsidered," in Donald H. Akenson, ed., Canadian Papers in Rural History Vol. 8 (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1992), p. 40.
- 10 George Emery, "Adam Oliver, Ingersoll and Thunder Bay District, 1850-82," in Ontario History, Vol. 68, No. 1 (March 1976), p. 34.
- 11 Edward Moore, When Cheese was King: A History of the Cheese Factories in Oxford County (Norwich, Ontario: Norwich and District Historical Society, 1987), pp. 2-11.

- 12 Canada. Board of Registration and Statistics, Census of the Canadas, for 1852-53 (Quebec: John Lovell, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 56; Census of the Canadas, 1860-61 (Quebec: S.B. Foote, 1863), Vol. 1, p. 66; Census of Canada, 1880-81 (Ottawa: Maclean, Rodge and Co.), Vol. 1, p. 83.
- 13 Emery, op. cit., pp. 25-26.
- 14 For a parallel example, see Glenn J Lockwood, Beckwith: Irish and Scottish Identities in an Canadian Community, 1816-1991 (Carleton Place: Corporation of the Township of Beckwith, 1991), p. 390.
- 15 Glenn J Lockwood, "Former Canadian National Railways Station/now VIA Rail, Woodstock, Ontario," HSMBC, RSR n.p.
- 16 17 July 1946 plan and elevations of Ingersoll CNR station with proposed extension, provided by courtesy of Dave Sutherland, CN Rail, North America Division, Toronto, Ontario.
- 17 Edwinna von Baeyer, Rhetoric and Roses: A History of Canadian Gardening (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1984), pp. 14-97.
- 18 Glenn J Lockwood, "Former Canadian National Railways Station/now VIA Rail, Stratford, Ontario," HSMBC, RSR n.p.
- 19 Telephone interview with Rosemary Lewis, Ingersoll Public Library, 12 January 1993.
- 20 Daily Sentinel-Review (Woodstock), 3 April 1973, p. 3.
- 21 Daily Sentinel-Review (Woodstock), 6 December 1978, p. 2.
- 22 Telephone interview with Shirley Lovell of the Ingersoll Historical Society, Ingersoll, Ontario, 29 June 1993.

FORMER CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, INGERSOLL, ONTARIO

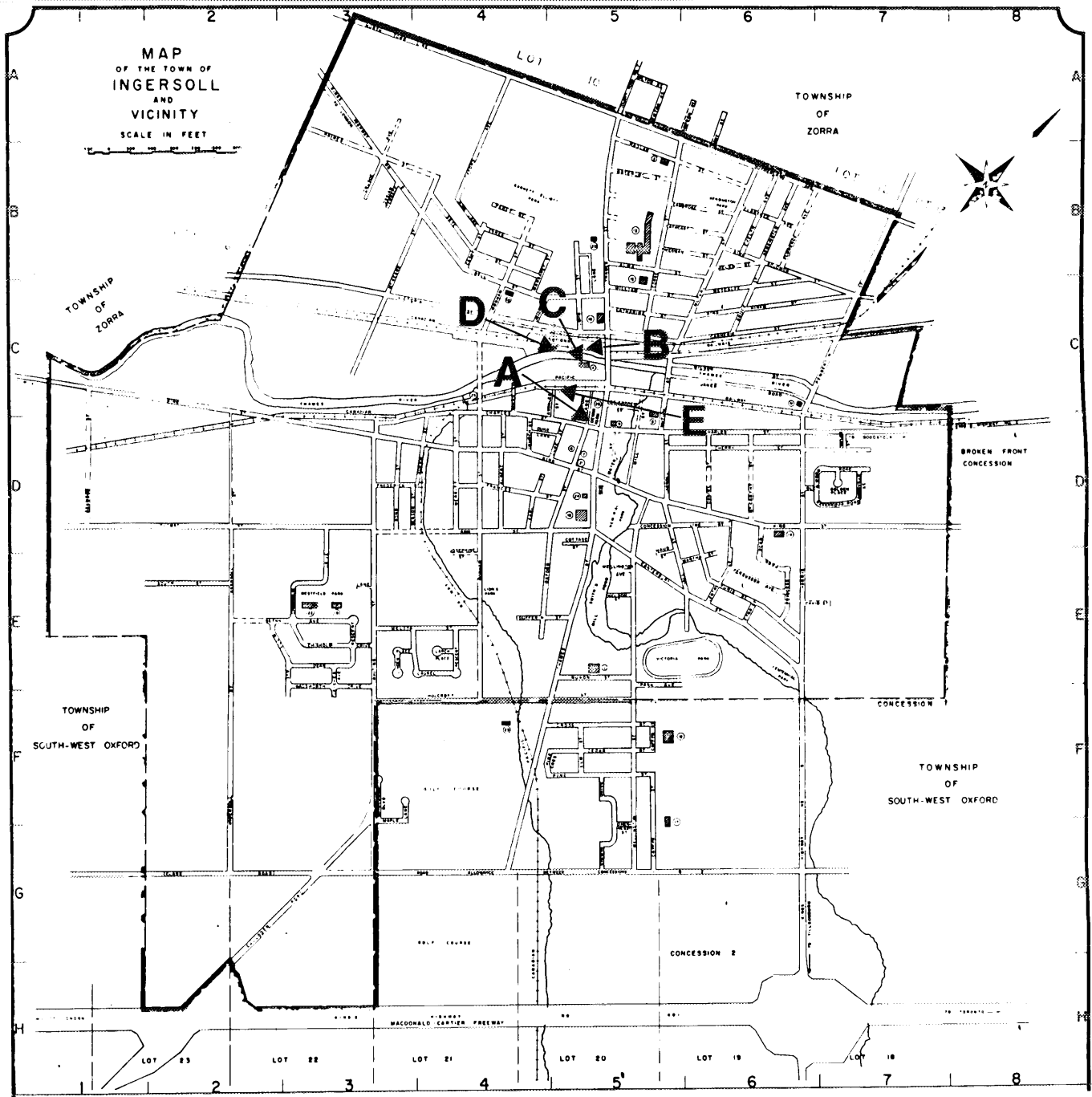


- 1 The VIA Rail, former Canadian National Railways station, Ingersoll, Ontario, as photographed from the north in November 1992. Despite the removal of the west end of the station at some point between the late 1940s and the early 1960s, it remains substantially true to the design of Joseph Hobson in 1889. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



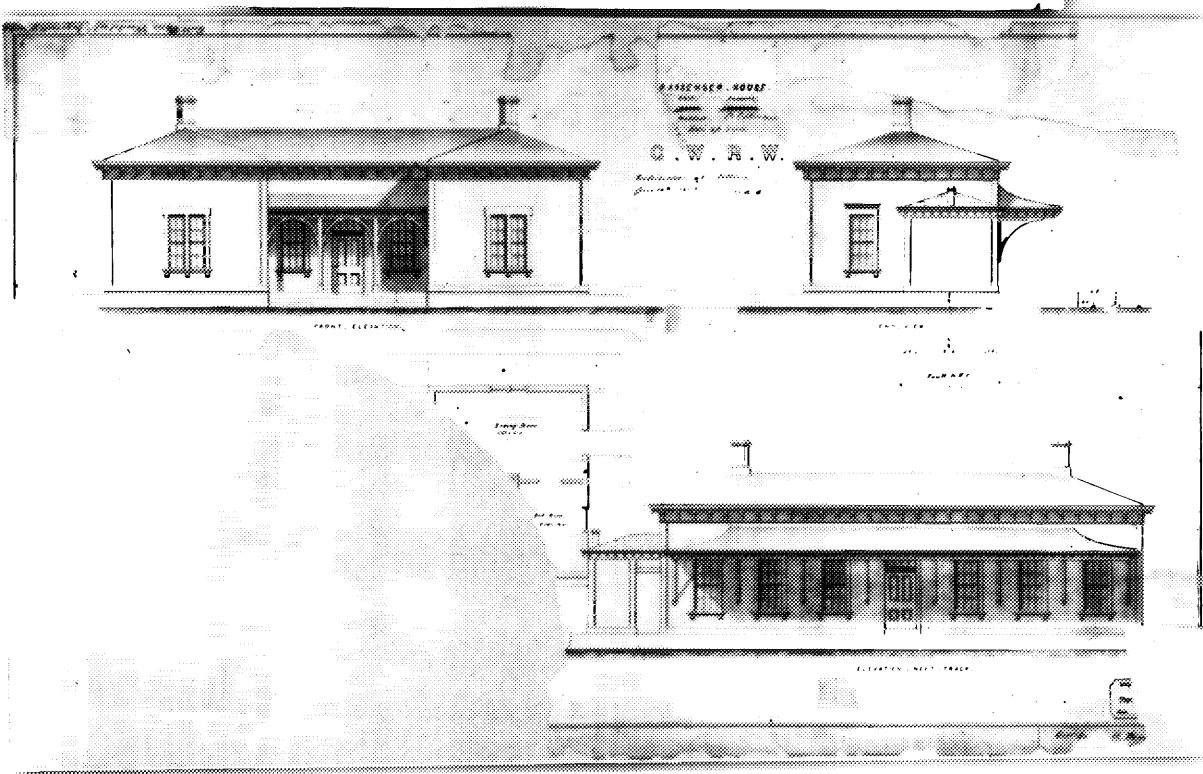
- 2 Location of Ingersoll in southwestern Ontario. (MapArt Ontario Road Map ca 1988.)

FORMER CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, INGERSOLL, ONTARIO

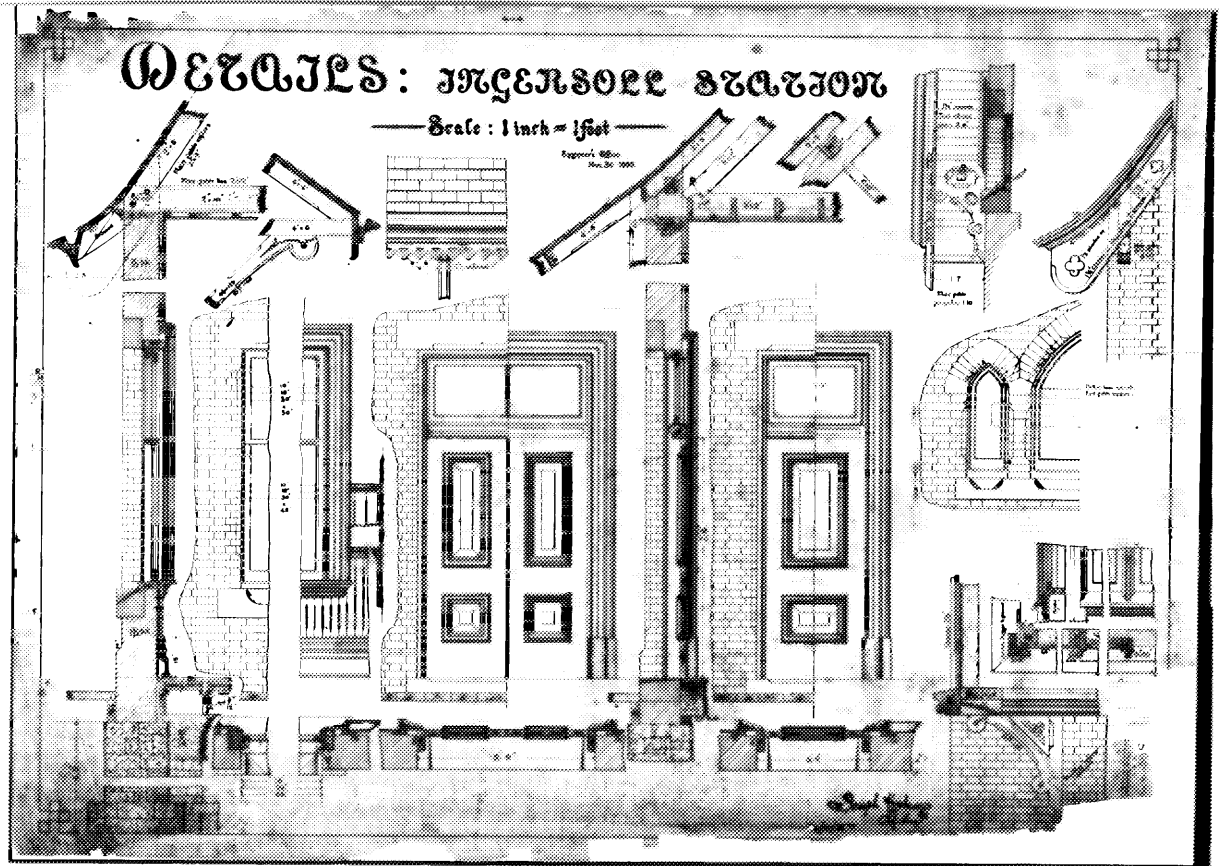
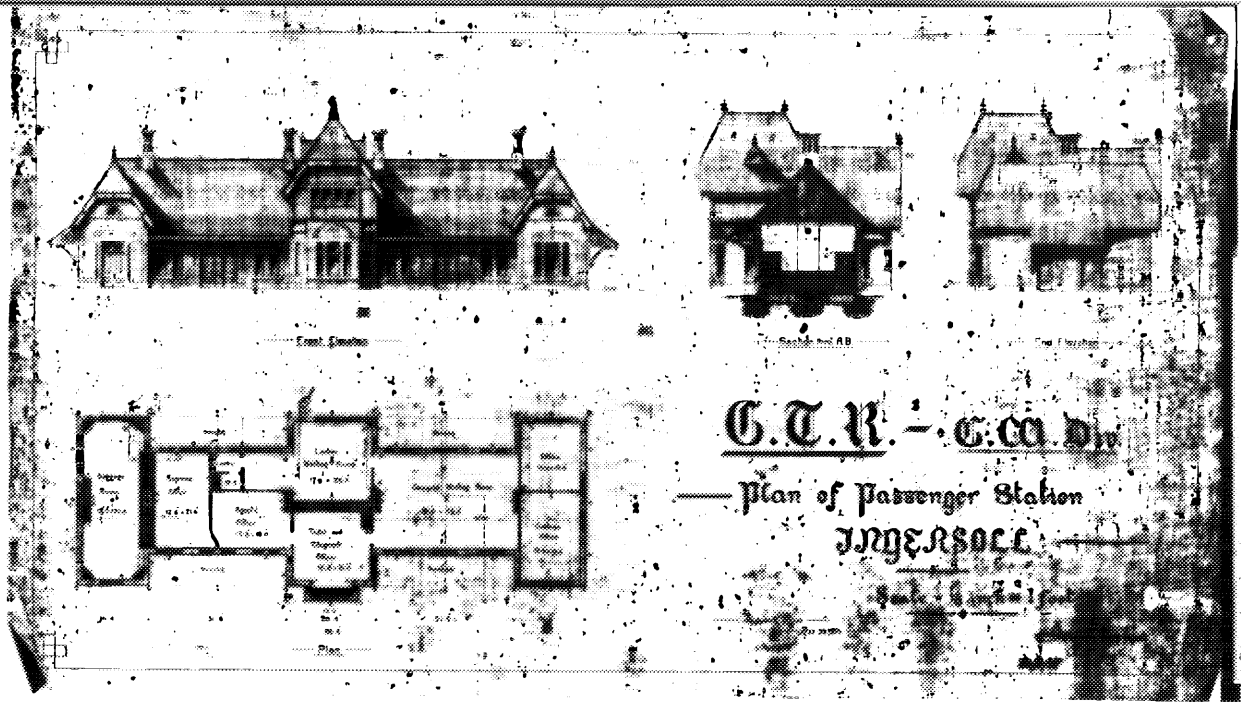


3 Map of Ingersoll, ca 1965, showing the location of the original village centre (A), the 1854 Great Western Railway station (B), the 1889 Grand Trunk station (C), the Grand Trunk freight building (D), and the 1908 Canadian Pacific Railway station (E). (National Archives of Canada, NMC-13658.)

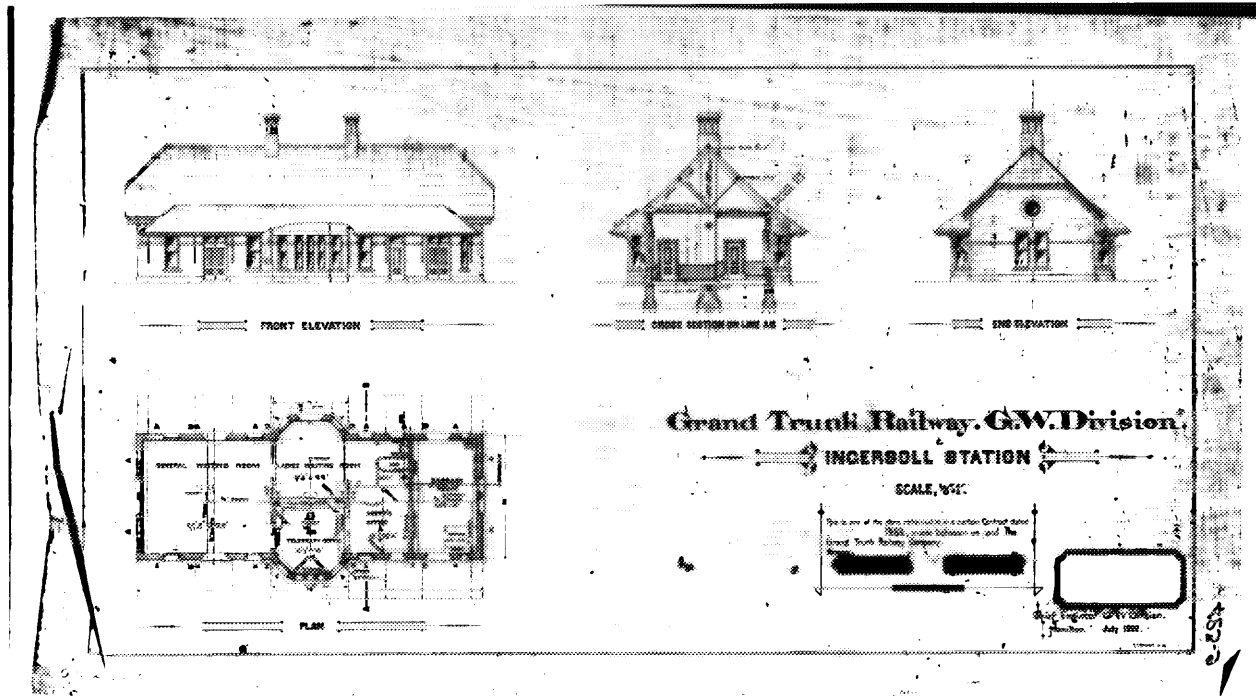
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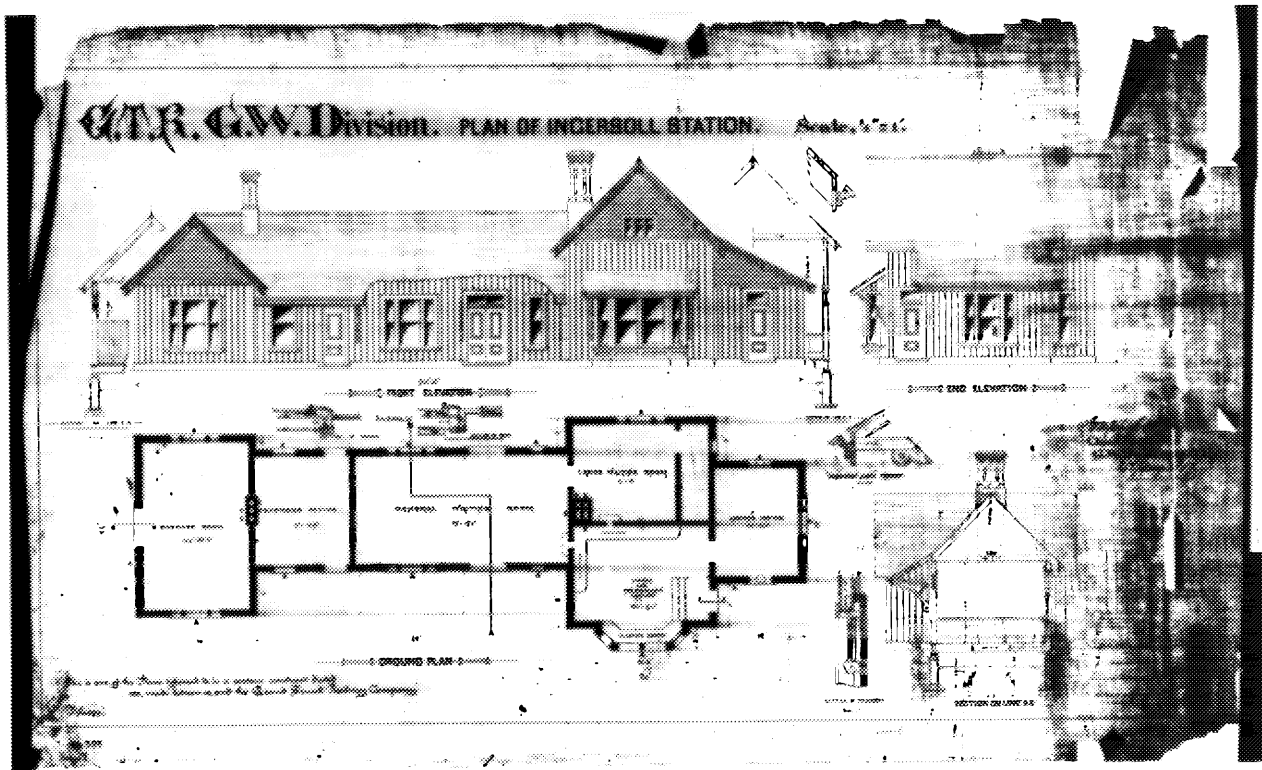
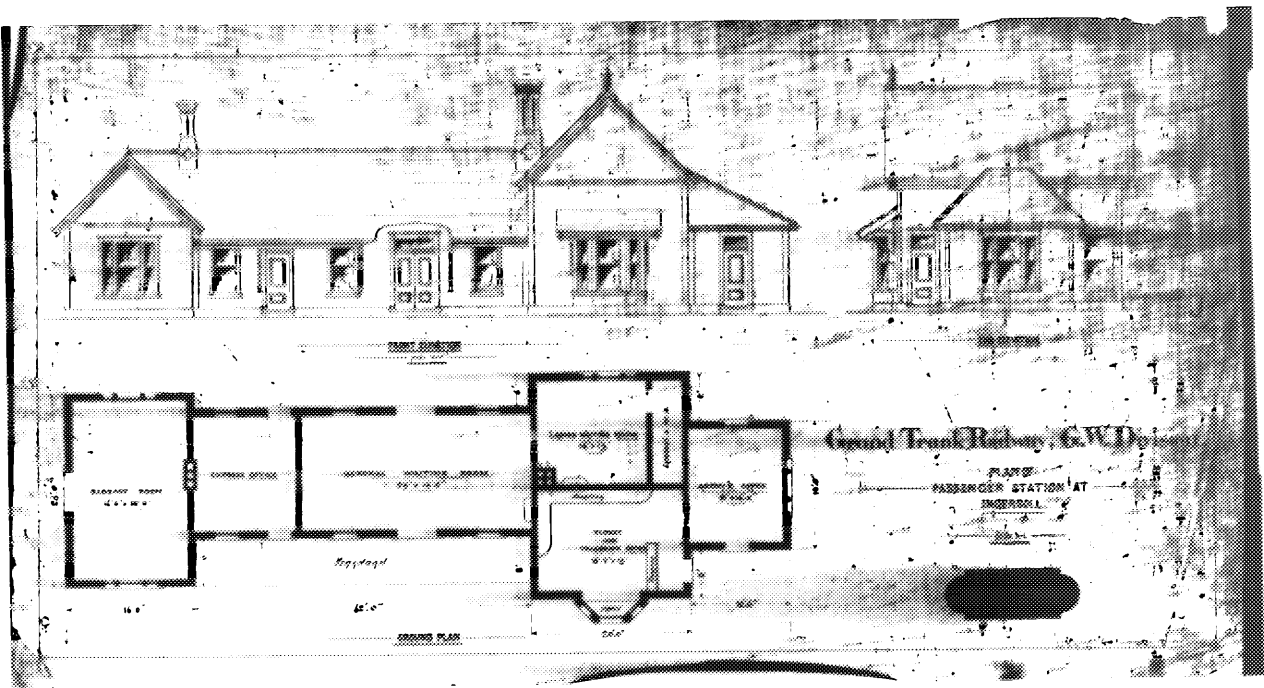
4 Plan and elevations for Passenger Houses of the Great Western Railway proposed to be built at Galt, Ingersoll, Paris, Woodstock and Chatham, 10 June 1853. (National Archives of Canada NMC-21670.)



5 Proposed plan of Passenger Station in the Great Western Division of the Grand Trunk Railway, at Ingersoll, by Joseph Hobson, 30 November 1885. (National Archives of Canada NMC-96738.)

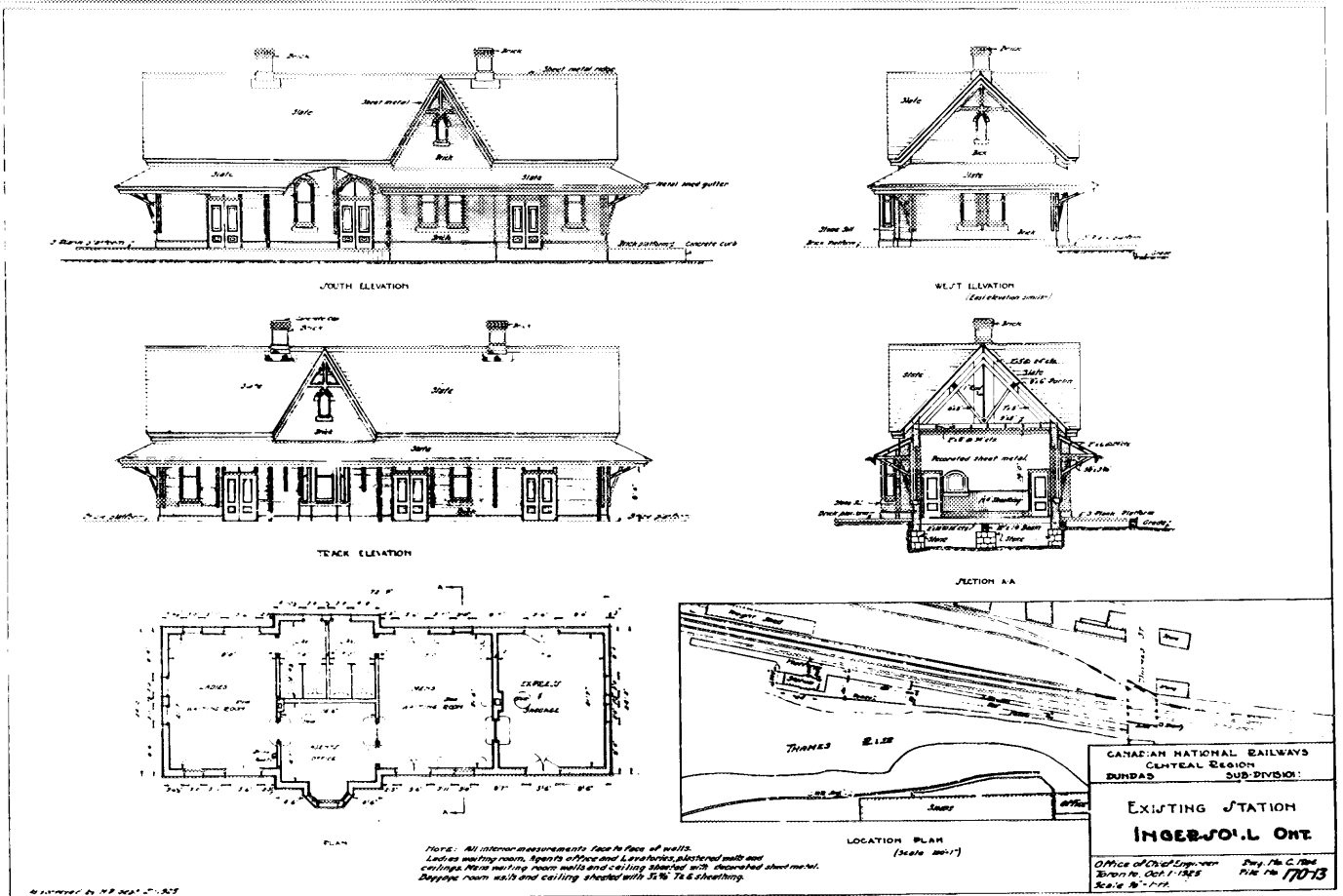


6 Second proposed plan and elevations for Grand Trunk Railway, Great Western Division, Ingersoll Station, by Joseph Hobson, July 1888. (National Archives of Canada NMC-96739.)



7 Alternative proposed plans and elevations for Ingersoll Grand Trunk Railway station, designed by Joseph Hobson, January 1889. (National Archives of Canada NMC-96740 and NMC-96741.)

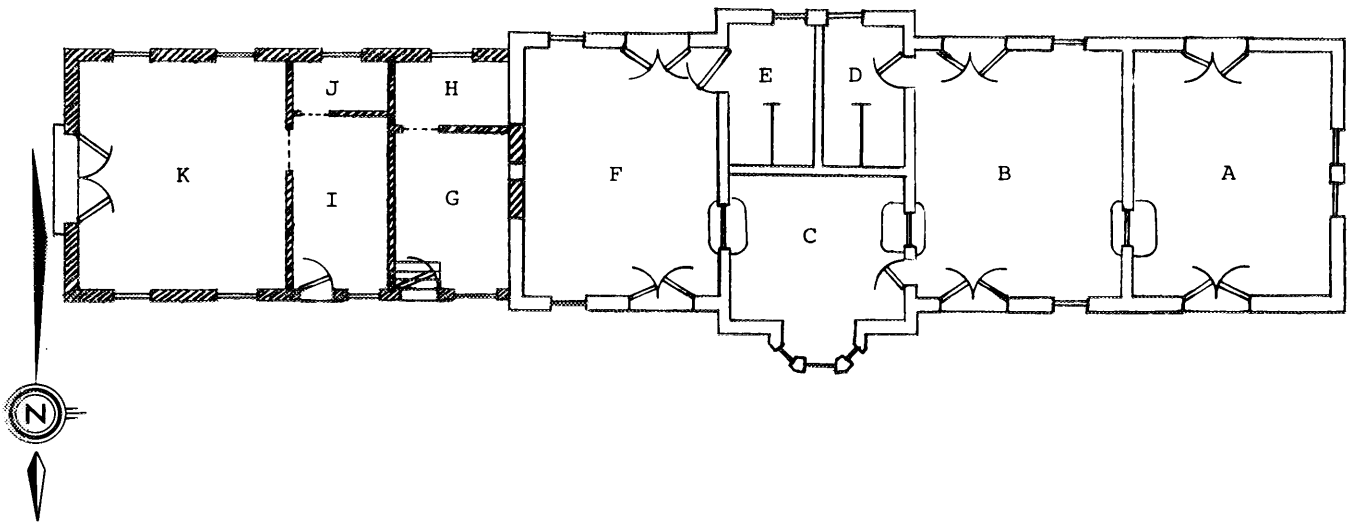
FORMER CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS STATION, INGERSOLL, ONTARIO



8 Elevations and plan of Grand Trunk Railway station at Ingersoll, designed by Joseph Hobson, as built in 1889 and drawn for Canadian National Railways in October 1925. (David Sutherland, CN North America, Southern Ontario District.)



- 9 The former Canadian National Railways station, Ingersoll, as photographed from the northeast, and presented on a postcard mailed in 1917. (Shirley Lovell, Ingersoll Cheese Factory Museum.)



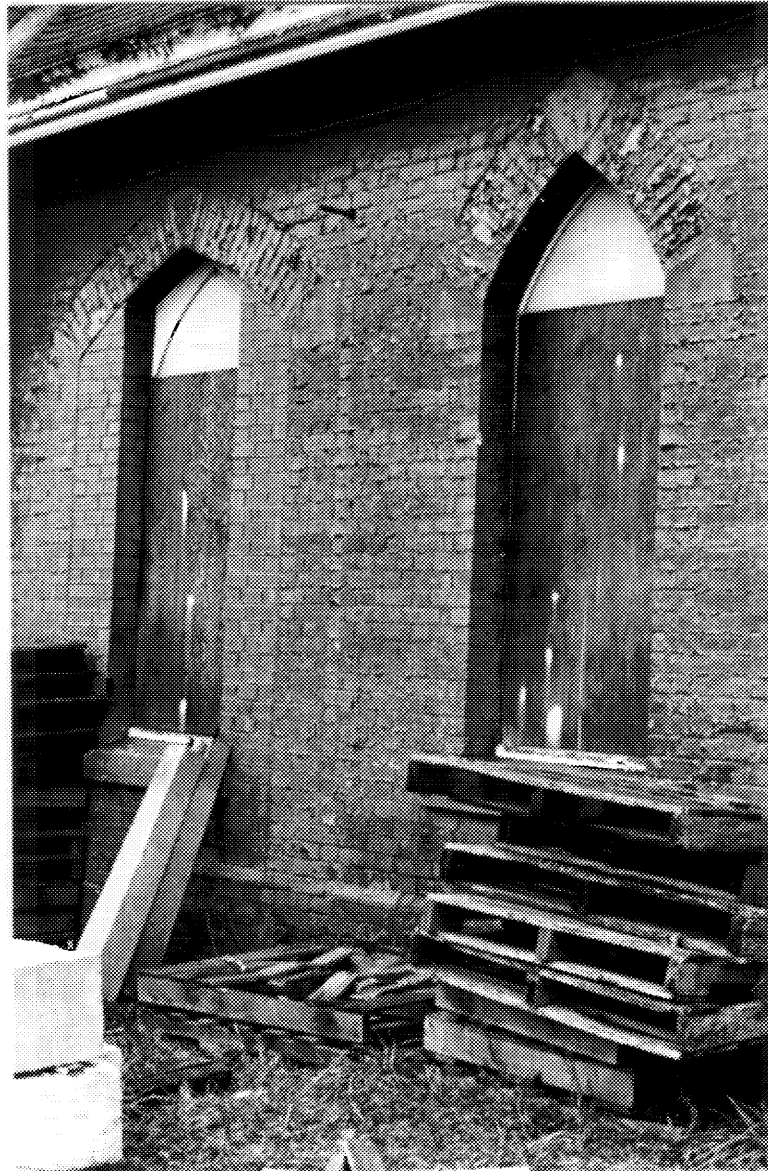
10 Floor plan of the former CNR Station, Ingersoll, as it appeared after construction of the 1946 addition. The 1889 GTR station consisted of the express and baggage room (A; which was removed), the men's waiting room (B), the ticket agent's office (C), the men's lavatory (D), the women's lavatory (E), and the women's waiting room (F). The 1946 addition is shown by shaded-in walls. The rooms in the new addition consisted of a boiler room for the furnace (G), a coal room (H), an office area for the new express area (I), an On Hand room (J), and the storage area of the express area (K). Dotted lines indicate sliding doors in this plan. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



- 11 Detail of lower part of bay window on northern facade of former CNR station, Ingersoll, showing polychromatic use of brick and stone, as photographed in November 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



12 Detail showing surviving original doors of men's waiting room on south facade, former CNR station, Ingersoll, as photographed in November 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



13 Detail showing partially bricked-in doorway to women's waiting room and boarded up windows on south facade, former CNR station, Ingersoll, as photographed in November 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



14 Detail of gable on southern facade of former CNR station, Ingersoll, showing details of verge-board mouldings and stick work, as photographed in November 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



15 Detail of gable, northern facade of former CNR station, Ingersoll, showing flanged fascia and mouldings, as photographed in November 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



16 Detail of open timber support for narrow section of overhang, former CNR station, Ingersoll, as photographed in November 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



17 Detail showing open timber supports for wider section of overhang on north facade of former CNR station, Ingersoll, as photographed in November 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



18 The former CNR station, Ingersoll, looking northwest, showing the warehouse/boiler room section added in 1946, as photographed in November, 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)



19 CNR Station, Dundas, Ontario. Built by the GTR in 1901. (Parks Canada, Canadian Inventory of Historic Building [CIHB], 1973.)



20 CNR Station, Hawkesbury, Ontario; built in 1891 by the GTR.
(Parks Canada, CIHB, 1973.)



21 CNR Station, Merritton, Ontario; built in 1898 by the GTR.
(Parks Canada, CIHB, 1973.)



22 Air photograph showing the former CNR station, Ingersoll (A), CNR freight buildings (B), the Thames River (C), and the Canadian Pacific Railway line (D), as photographed in April 1966. (Canada, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Resources, EMR-120 1450 Z C152.)



- 23 The former Canadian National Railways station, Ingersoll, Ontario, shown beside the VIA Rail shelter built in 1990, as photographed from the northeast in November 1992. (Glenn J Lockwood, Ottawa.)