



FAREWELL WEST TORONTO
CP STN

Newsletter

INCORPORATED 1952

NUMBER 399

JANUARY 1983

APPLICATIONS
ON ABANDONMENTS
CP LITTLE CURRENT



UPPER CANADA RAILWAY SOCIETY
BOX 122 STATION "A" TORONTO, ONTARIO



Farewell West Toronto

In the early dawn of November 25, 1982 a five-man CP Rail demolition squad moved in on the railway's West Toronto passenger station and in a few short hours reduced it to rubble and kindling wood. The station had been the subject of a three-year preservation effort by the West Toronto Junction Historical Society as well as by certain other private individuals, including a few UCRS members. Built in 1911, the building had been extolled by the Toronto Historical Board as "an excellent example of railway architecture and site planning for the period at the beginning of the century, featuring pressed brick walls, a high gable in the central passenger structure, and openings with segmentally arched brick lintels." The WTJHS had engaged the City of Toronto in a proposed co-operative venture to acquire, and find a new use or uses for, the station. The use most prominently discussed was a farmers' market, but among other uses mentioned from time to time had been that of quarters for a railway historical organization (one wonders what group that might have been).

Toronto Mayor Arthur Eggleton rushed to the demolition scene as work was in progress and ordered city officials to issue a stop-work order because no demolition permit had been issued as required by the Ontario Building Code. The demolition gang blithely ignored the order and continued its work, undeterred even by the issuance of individual personal summonses. The Mayor also sent a telegram to CP Rail President W.W. Stinson in Montreal, citing the demolition as an "illegal act, which amounts to vandalism and corporate irresponsibility". He further threatened to stop all negotiations on the part of the City of Toronto with CP (Marathon Realty) on the planned redevelopment of the railway's downtown yard properties. He revealed that CP, through its Marathon subsidiary, had called him during the previous week, apparently to warn him, or to discuss with him on a "last ditch" basis, the imminent demolition. The caller, who could not contact the Mayor, was accused of leaving no indication of the purpose of his call, and no one at City Hall had any prior inkling that November 25 was D-Day. It was not explained why City Hall had not called back in an effort to discover the purpose of the call.

The station was removed in order to permit the laying of a third main track through the area in order to provide greater flexibility for GO Transit operations, and the track was laid very quickly following removal of the rubble. In accordance with CP's usual practice, the station had been offered to any prospective purchaser for \$1 provided that purchaser would remove it from railway property. It cannot be said that ample notice of intention to demolish had not been given, and the station's fate was ultimately the result of too much talk and too little action. While CP has been almost universally condemned in the press and by local preservation groups for its apparent "end run" on November 25, with liberal references to the other Ontario stations (Streetsville, Pembroke et al) which have disappeared in recent months, nobody locally has mentioned the successful preservation and reuse of Park Avenue Station in Montreal.

A factor complicating the situation was the withdrawal, about a week prior to the demolition, of CP Rail's application to the Canadian Transport Commission for permission to remove the station, an application originally made in October, 1981. The railway defended this action by stating that its legal advisors had determined that, having been closed to passengers since 1979, West Toronto Station was no longer subject to CTC jurisdiction. The Commission, however, acted swiftly, giving CP until 10 A.M. on November 26 to answer charges that the Railway Act had been violated by the unauthorized wrecking of the station. (The Act makes it illegal for a railway "to remove, close or abandon any station or divisional point...without leave of the Commission"). The CTC determined that there should be a hearing in the matter, and same was held at Toronto's Westbury Hotel on December 13 and 14. The City of Toronto also took part in the hearing, the results of which had not been revealed to the time of writing.

In the meantime it came out that D'Alton Coleman, CP Rail's Vice-President of Eastern Operations, had issued the order to demolish. Upon hearing of this, certain members of the West Toronto Junction Historical Society and other aggrieved parties picketed the official's midtown Toronto residence, after having earlier picketed in front of Union Station over the weekend of November 27-28.

Who was the "good guy" and who was the "bad guy" in this sorry chain of events? The CTC decision may purport to tell us, but probably only the long light of history will put it all into perspective. As a 1911-built station, it was not really very historic, but it was certainly of architectural interest. As Patrick Conlon, writing in the Toronto Sun, opined: "CP's image has been dry-docked for serious repairs". However, as CP stated in a telex to the CTC: "The site is required for railway purposes. (The station) is not suitable for a farmers' market or any part of a pedestrian or bicycle path" (in reference to other City of Toronto plans). In any event, would-be station preservationists elsewhere can learn from what happened at West Toronto, and it is to be hoped that discouragement is not to be the primary reaction.

--Yet another Ontario CPR station is the subject of a current preservation effort, i.e., that at Guelph, although in this case the railway is out of the picture. Of similar age and architecture to West Toronto, the Guelph station is under the threat of demolition by the end of January if the Grand River Division of CRHA cannot raise \$100,000 to remove the structure to a safe haven at Cambridge. The building is owned by Key Properties Ltd. of London, Ont., which intends to build a shopping centre and apartments on the site, and which has donated the station to the Division.