

Harwood's Rail Heritage

A Brief History in Four Parts *by Ted Rafuse*

Part 2. Harwood Station

With the certainty of rail construction, Harwood experienced an unprecedented flurry of building activity. In 1853 the village became home to scores of men engaged in the construction of Rice Lake Bridge and ancillary railway buildings. Amongst the latter were several structures in the hamlet itself.

Throughout the first summer of construction work crews excavated earth and levelled a berm for the railway. Track layers followed laying rail north from Cobourg. Carpenters were busy laying the framework for the bridge. Efforts continued throughout the winter of 1853-54 to bring the railway to reality the following year.

Early in 1854 work on completing the road bed and laying the rails to Harwood became a prime project for construction crews. A number of recently arrived German immigrants were amongst the navvies working south of Harwood that early Spring. Their lodgings were little more than crude earthen dugouts. This may have contributed to an outbreak of cholera that ravaged their encampment. Many who worked on the railway died and fourteen of these were buried in simple wooden boxes adjacent to one of the railway berms just south of Harwood. A roadside plaque erected in 1987 marks the eastern edge of the field in which the graves are located.

This same year a station was erected at Harwood on the west side of Front Street near the lake shore. The appearance of this station was unknown for many subsequent years. Jumping ahead of its chronology, the station was disassembled and moved in the first decade of the 20th century to Roseneath where it was modified and renovated and served for many years as a community centre. As rebuilt its exterior facade was of milled lumber, the latter a popular material widely in use after its origination in the late 19th century. It was not until a recent photograph was discovered in the William Notman collection that confirmed the original facade of the station was of board and batten style. The Notman photograph of the Harwood Station was taken in 1895 with the station still standing at its original site.



Harwood Station

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The photograph suggests that the station may never have been painted which given the nature of the C&PRy's finances may well be true.

When built in 1854, the station building was not an unusual structure as there was at the time no particular architectural style for a railway station. Designed presumably for function the structure nevertheless appears remarkable similar to many edifices which were later constructed to a common station form of construction. Between the station and the track was a plank platform constructed of 2 by 10" lumber approximately 8 feet wide and perhaps 100 feet long.

The station appears to have been built without a basement but on a foundation of field stones elevated marginally above ground level. Exterior dimensions of the storey and one half building was 24 feet wide by 60 feet long as indicated by the Roseneath reconstruction. The Notman photograph indicates the board and batten wooden construction of the exterior facade and with wooden shingles providing a roof covering. Several openings occur along the east facade of the station, that side facing the track. From south to north there are two windows, a door, a window, a door a window and a final door. A projection appears from the north end which suggests some form of second storey balcony may have been constructed along that end. A single chimney projects from the roof line at the north end of the station. There is no illustration of the western or northern side of the original building.

No plan of the interior is known. The multiple doors might suggest a male and female waiting room with separate entrances as well as an express/freight door. In later versions of stations a large 6-8 foot wide express/freight door was generally installed but as this station was constructed in the infancy of railway station architecture this door opening may not have been considered necessary. It is also not certain as to whether or not there were living quarters for a station master included in the original station. The first station master however was Robert Craig.

A freight shed across from the station may have been constructed but this cannot be confirmed. A turntable and water tank were also constructed at Harwood although their precise location is unknown at present, although it is quite plausible they were both erected on the east side of the track south of the station. A wooden wharf was also constructed by the railway company to the north and east of the station adjacent to the track leading to Rice Lake Bridge.

By the end of April 1854 the rails were four miles south of Harwood. The following month in time for the celebration of the Queen's birthday the line was opened to Harwood. On that weekend presumably the station was completed and witnessed several train excursions from Cobourg to Harwood. The citizens of the time took advantage of the construction company's offer of a free ride to Harwood and hundreds of interested area residents took advantage of that tender.

From 1854 onward, Harwood Station became the nucleus for the hamlet. Until the bridge was opened late in the year, Harwood Station was the northern terminal of the C&PRy. After the bridge opening, Harwood was the most important station between the two terminal towns. From here many products were shipped and passengers entrained on a journey. Many goods arrived in the community at the station and many recreational passengers detrained here to enjoy the many facets of Rice Lake. When the bridge later collapsed, Harwood station for a second time became the northern terminal and transshipment point for the subsequent railway companies. Only at the beginning of the 20th century did the structure lose its significance as Harwood's railway station.