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Preserving the past in the present for the future

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NEWS RELEASE

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MODEL OF ALLANDALE STATION ENCHANTS HISTORIANS

When we learned that Robert Scruton would be showing his model of the old Allandale Station at our November meeting, most of us thought of something like a doll house, only a station house instead. Probably no one was prepared for the elaborate and intricate model that Scruton had on display at Parkview Centre last Tuesday, Nov. 20.

Those acquainted with the sad-looking station of to-day may find it hard to believe that little more than thirty years ago it was the pride of Ontario stations. That past glory shone in Scruton's model. And when the lights in the room were turned off, the night-time splendour of the lights around the buildings, shining in the darkness, giving welcome to the approaching train, let us understand that the arrival in Allandale must have been, to passengers, in itself a great part of the pleasure of the journey.

How many remember the station restaurant? It was the white building in the middle. A stand-up bar, of mahogany, in a separate room shielded the "manly" custom of drinking from the ladies. Windows on

the west side of the restaurant overlooked well-maintained flower beds, as well as the movements of trains in the busy yard beyond. This restaurant was considered to be **THE** restaurant for many functions in Allandale and Barrie, as well as the best on the line for the train passengers.

The building to the south, also white, held the women's waiting room, the men's smoking room, and the ticket office in the middle. Behind the ladies' waiting room was a nursery with an attendant who changed babies while their mothers went to the restaurant for refreshments.

The red brick building to the north held offices and the heating system for the whole complex.

Scruton raised the roofs of all of the buildings to show the model interiors, to the details of which he had given as much attention as to the exteriors.

Around these buildings he had also laid out tracks, on which he ran an electric train.

On a wall was displayed the layout of the track and building system in Allandale, in its complexity, including the round house, ice houses, and all of the former necessities of a rail yard.

There was, also, a map of present-day Barrie, on which was marked the route of the former Hamilton and North Western Railway.

The originals on which the models and graphs were based have, of course, a history - one briefly outlined by Scruton.

The first station house, built to serve the needs of passengers from 1853, was destroyed by fire in the late 1890s. An interim building, later moved, was used until the present white buildings were constructed in 1904-5.

The railway that reached Allandale in 1853, named The Ontario, Simcoe and Huron, (later The Northern) was the first real railway in Canada. The first stage, from Toronto to Aurora, opened in the spring of 1853; the second stage, to Bradford, in June, 1853; and the third, to Allandale, in October. By January 1, 1855, service to Collingwood began. Allandale was not intended to be a goal in itself, just a step on the way to Collingwood and the shipping of the Upper Lakes. In 1865 the line was continued north through Barrie, and eventually to Orillia and Muskoka. The Hamilton & North Western, serving the communities in the western part of the county (Tottenham, Beeton, Alliston, Cookstown, Thornton, Vine) reached Barrie in December, 1877. Other lines followed, mergers occurred, names were changed, until finally there was established the Canadian National Railway Company.

It is hard for us to realize the tremendous impact of the coming of the railway to Ontario, and specifically to Simcoe County. The former arduous journey over bad roads, by horse, by foot, by stage coach, or by buggy, or wagon, (with taverns every mile or less along the way ready to ease the distress of travel) between Barrie and Toronto, a return trip taking at least several days, could now be accomplished in

several hours each way. The first run (non-stop, for officials only) to Collingwood from Toronto, in December, 1854, lasted three hours - little less than a miracle.

This was the beginning of a boom, dependent on the railways. Through all of the frenetic development of the following years, Allandale was the centre, a focal point - and its station alive with the activities of a burgeoning economy for which rail was the prime means of transportation.

The railway era is past. But for over 100 years it was vital to a way of life, which it had initiated. Historians are ever grateful to people like Robert Scruton who forestall the loss of homage to such an important agent in our development.

There will be no S.C.H.A. meeting in December. But another delight awaits the members and visitors on January 15. when Brian Baker will give a pictorial presentation on the Georgian Bay elevators - another aspect of our county's development which is now past history.

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