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Description: A newspaper article about the life at Beeton's CN station. The article gives a biography of longtime station master Howard Galbraith as well as an excellent account of what life was like when the train made its regular journey through Beeton.

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Life at Beeton's Canadian National Station

by John Thompson

It's just a patch of vacant land today, but 40 years ago the open area north of present-day Danielle Gate in Beeton was the site of a busy railway station and yard. The two-storey, frame Canadian National Railways station was located here, as well as a coaling tower to fuel steam locomotives, a yard, and a wye for reversing locomotives.

The station stood on the east side of the tracks, about a hundred feet west of Dayfoot St., while the coaling tower, a massive wooden structure, was at the south end of the yard, where it narrowed down. The tower's concrete footings may still be spotted, as can part of the wye. Traces of the station have been pretty well obliterated. By the way, the historically correct name for such a structure is "railway station", or "railroad depot", not the current and incorrect "train station".

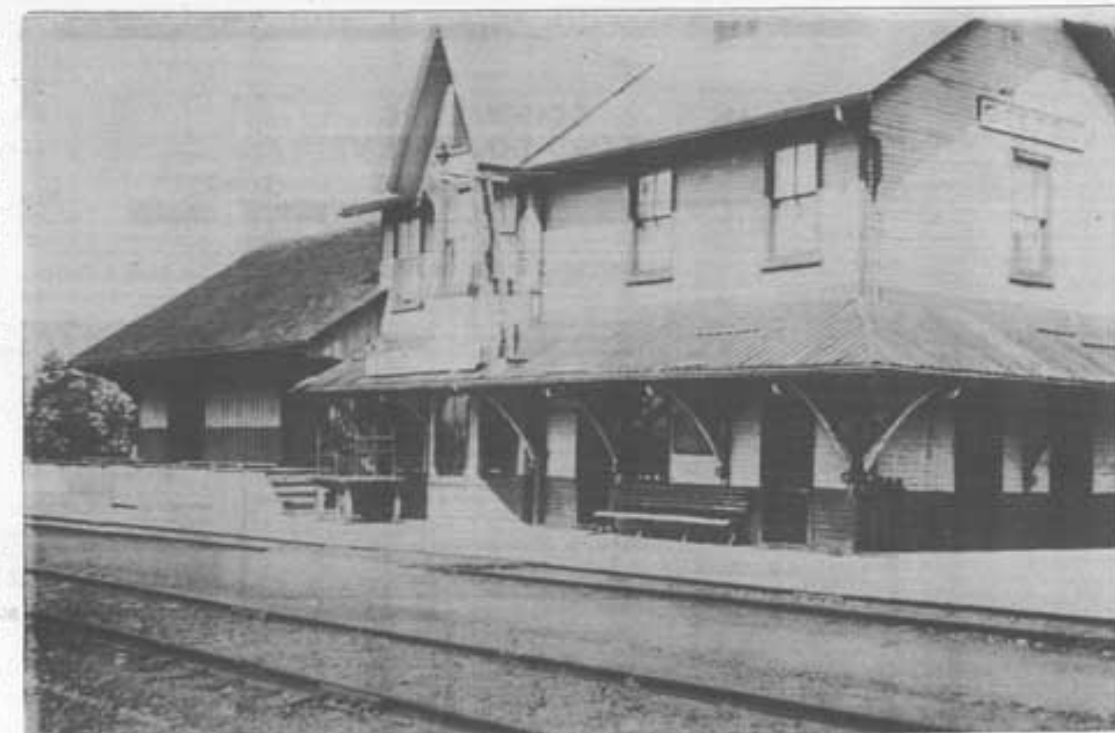
For over 10 years, from 1937 until about 1949, the Beeton CNR station was home for Olga Galbraith (now Parsons) and her parents, Howard and Julia the station agent there for some 20 years, and the family lived upstairs.

Howard had started with CN at Deseronto, near Belleville, in the 1920s; subsequent transfers took the family to Advagh, near Parry Sound, and Udney, in the Orillia area. "The Udney station was threatened with closure, and there was a vacancy at Beeton, which Dad applied for and obtained," Olga recalls.

"When we arrived here," she continues, "I think that the population of Beeton was about 400 - 500 people. Dad liked working at the Beeton station. It wasn't as busy as a mainline station, which the previous ones were."

The CN station was, in many ways, the focal point of the community. The CP station, located further west of the village and on the railway's main line, never had the same friendly, down home atmosphere.

For example, men would come over to the station for a game of checkers with Howard. The village postmaster drove over to pick up the mail from the trains, and to drop off outgoing letters and parcels. The hardware, grocery and clothing stores, as well as garages, obtained items by railway express, carried on the train. Coal for heating also came in; even shipments of seeds. The Toronto afternoon newspapers arrived on the late train, and newsboys were there to



THE FORMER BEETON CN STATION

pick them up for delivery around the village.

Howard's duties included selling tickets, accepting express shipments, taking off the trains and notifying the consignees, sending telegrams, copying train orders from the CNR dispatcher, and giving them to the train crews. He was on duty from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; as a rule, there were no train through after that time.

Track maintenance was performed by a crew of workers known as the section crew, so called because they were responsible for a specific section of tracks, usually about seven miles. Among the crew members were Jake Sunnerton and Earl Collins.

Trains came north into Beeton from Hamilton and Georgetown, destined for Barrie and Collingwood. And, until October, 1955, Beeton even originated its own train, heading up the back route to Collingwood, via Alliston, Everett, Lisle, Glenora, Creemore, and Duntroon. This train, which was known as a "mixed train" (both passenger and freight cars), was affectionately dubbed "The Blue Mountain Special", "The Hog Special" and "The Beeton Flyer", among other names, by locals. It was withdrawn in October, 1955.

Train time was a major event of the day in Beeton; anyone who could get away would drop by the station to watch arrivals and departures, to talk with the train crews, to see who was coming into town, or leaving. For young boys, of course, the big attractions were the magnificent steam locomotives that pulled the trains, with their chugging exhausts, clanking sideroads, tolling bells, and best of all, their beautiful, mournful whistles that sent shivers up and down the spine.

On hot summer days, when the air was still, the mournful whistles could be heard for miles up the valley from Tottenham. If there was some switching to be done at Beeton, often a

friendly engineer would give a cab ride aboard his locomotive to a youthful villager, inviting him up to a world of gleaming brass gauges, huge levers, throbbing pumps, and a firebox containing a raging coal fire. For some, this childhood initiation to locomotives led to a lifetime fascination with railways, perhaps even a career as a railroader. Olga, naturally, was no stranger to engine cabs. "Of course, all of the crews knew dad."

In later years the passenger train was an unusual self-propelled set of coaches, powered by a cantankerous gas-electric power plant. When this unit, not infrequently, broke down, one of the reliable steam locomotives would take its place. One of these locomotives is displayed in Centennial Park, Barrie, just north of the former Allandale station.

The Galbraiths' living quarters were on the second floor of the station, including bedrooms, den, bathroom and living room. The kitchen and pantry were on the ground floor, adjoining the waiting room and agent's office. When the trains were due, Olga or her mother would have to close the windows, to keep out the billowing coal smoke.

Cooking was done on a coal range in the kitchen, situated on the east side of the station. Another coal stove provided heat for the building. The waiting room's walls were of varnished



OLGA GALBRAITH (now Parsons)

wood. The exterior was painted cream and green for many years, then finally in a brownish-red colour. An old caboose was located near the station for the conductor and brakeman for the Creemore branch train to sleep in.

In the grounds on the east side, Howard planted a row of trees. He also maintained a vegetable garden, and planted flowers. Another pastime was raising pigeons and pheasants.

Many local teenagers including Olga, rode the train to the high school in Alliston to attend Grade 13, as the Beeton Continuation School did not offer the final

year. "On that train, the coaches were wooden, with plush seats, almost antique, even in the 1940s."

In 1939, on the eve of World War II, the Galbraiths rode the CN's transcontinental train out to Western Canada. "That was a wonderful trip for a 15-year-old. We travelled in the sleeping car, and met people from all over. The dining car was lovely, with polished silverware, fine china, linen tablecloths, and excellent food."

In addition to his duties at the station, Howard Galbraith took an active role in the life of the community. He coached baseball, became involved in the construction of the arena, worked on beautification projects such as flower planting, sold insurance, and was a member of the local Masonic Order. "Dad was also a keen fisherman, both summer and winter," Howard retired from the CN in the late 1950s, and died in 1968.

Christmas was a busy time at the Beeton station, with people coming home for the holidays, and shipments of Christmas presents due to arrive. "People would order them from the catalogue, and become very anxious, as Christmas Eve drew near, for their arrival at the station. Sometimes Dad delivered them around town."

The Second World War brought business back to the railway, due to gasoline and

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Beeton station

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fire rationing. Both people and freight rode the rails in high numbers until the end of hostilities. With postwar prosperity came ever-increasing volumes of cars and trucks travelling over improved roads, and Beeton's railway began a long decline into oblivion.

In July, 1960, CN, faced with declining passenger loads, withdrew passenger service. However, the venerable Beeton station would witness several special passenger trains before it fell to the wreckers about 1970. In the fall of 1965, the Upper Canada Railway Society operated a special excursion

train, powered by diesel locomotives, from Toronto through Beeton to Barrie. Then, in early 1967, one of the CNR's largest steam locomotives, Number 6218, ventured down through

Beeton with a wintertime excursion.

After years of disuse, the tracks were lifted in 1994 from the south end of the yard, past the station site, and all the way up to

Highway 400, east of Thornton. The Alliston spur, remnant of the abandoned Creemore line, also vanished at this time.

However, strange and wonderful things sometimes

happen. This year the South Simcoe Railway extended its service right into Beeton, bringing back part of those wonderful railway experiences that the Galbraiths were part of.

'Swimmer's Itch' a nuisance

The heat is driving many to the beaches. A swim in the refreshing water is a welcome relief, but you may notice you're spending time vigorously scratching an itch. So you won't be surprised to find that your itch is appropriately called "swimmer's itch".

"This comes from a parasite called schistosoma which can penetrate human skin causing intense itching and a rash," says Dr. George Pasut, Simcoe County Medical Officer of Health.

These parasites don't usually infect humans since birds are their normal host.

In birds, they develop into an adult stage and lay eggs. Birds pass the eggs through their droppings into the water. The eggs hatch into tiny free-swimming larvae that then look for snails to continue their development. After leaving the snails, they would normally complete their life cycle in water birds, but can infest others, including you! In humans, the parasites can't mature so they die under the skin, resulting in an allergic reaction causing itchiness and a rash with red circular blotches. This commonly starts in the early summer