

23gb Coboconk Station

GENERAL STATION BACKGROUND

(See also Leaflets 23g The Toronto & Nipissing Railway, and 23ga, the T&N agency stations.)

The second half of the 19th century saw the rapid development of a railway network across southern Ontario. This development was promoted by the construction of two trunk railways, the Grand Trunk (GTR) and the Great Western (GWR) Railways. Civic and developer interests combined to initiate a great number of pioneering lines to connect with these major trunk railways and with each other. Typically, both trunk and pioneering railways designed their own stations and had local craftsmen construct them all along the line according to a basic template, usually only varying the dimensions of the building according to the traffic needs of each community.

The 3' 6" narrow gauge Toronto & Nipissing Railway had its Toronto terminus at Berkeley St. with a more commodious version of the stations it built all along the line. It had an agreement with the GTR to lay a third rail inside the Grand Trunk's track as far as Scarboro Jct., where it diverged to the northeast. Stops along the line were Agincourt, Millikens, Unionville, Markham, Stouffville, Goodwood, Uxbridge, Marsh Hill, Wick, (moved in 1883 to become Wick and then Blackwater Jct.), Sunderland, Cannington, Woodville, Lorneville (also known as Midland Junction), Argyle, Eldon, Portage Road, Kirkfield, Victoria Road, Corson's Siding and Coboconk ("Coby"). This was the terminus of the intended first phase of the railway, a colonization or development road that was ultimately intended to reach Lake Nipissing for connection to the planned transcontinental railway (CPR). By the end of the 19th century however, the GTR had emerged as the dominant railway in southern Ontario, having absorbed its arch rival the GWR in 1882, and among others, the Midland Railway (the intermediate owner of the Toronto & Nipissing Railway), in 1893.

Between 1900 and 1914, the GTR embarked on an Ontario-wide station replacement program to what was a more or less basically standard (and once abundant) country station design. The reasons for this station replacement program were primarily threefold: **(a.) dilapidation** (most early stations were built as "temporary" wooden structures and although some survived well into the 20th century, many were already "in poor condition") **(b.) track realignment/amalgamation** (prompted by the frenzy of railway mergers in the late 1800s), **(c.) community growth** (necessitating more station space). Incidental additional reasons, all applicable to Coboconk, were the need **(d.)** to provide for station agent accommodation (usually on a second floor, as in the case of Coboconk, **(e.)** to add telegrapher's bays for better operating efficiency, and **(f.)** to replace losses by fire.

THE COBOCONK STATION

Nothing has come to light to confirm the initial design of Coboconk's first station, but it was likely built at first (in 1872 or 1873) to the standard simple Toronto & Nipissing Railway design, similar to the stations that have survived at Unionville and Markham. Today's Coboconk station is a Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) station built to replace the station that succumbed to a lightning strike on August 4, 1908.

There is some uncertainty as to whether the replacement station is Coboconk's second or third station, since the 1907 Grand Trunk inventory of stations dates the preceding station from 1894. However, a replacement station was newsworthy, and while research in the contemporary press has a report in 1893 of a new engine house "to take the place of the one that burned a month ago", the only report for 1894 is that "the GTR has filled up all the low places in the yard here with gravel, fixed up the station and put a new platform around it." It seems safe to conclude therefore that the "fixing up" consisted of a rebuild in 1894 of the original station to the more commodious dimensions shown in the photographs of it that survive, namely likely with a second storey that accommodated the agent and his family, and perhaps with platform canopies with valances on both sides of the main portion of the building. (Stations to a similar design were remodelled at Kirkfield [1892], Victoria Road [1894], and at Brown Hill [1906] on the Lake Simcoe Junction Ry [a subsidiary of the former Toronto & Nipissing Ry].) It is also possible, however, that this station (and the others named) may have been built with the two-storey design at the outset, but that seems unlikely as the need to provide station agent accommodation was a developing competitive issue in the latter part of the 19th century. Coboconk's replacement station lasted until the end of service in 1965, and after the lifting of track at the end of service, the station served for a number of years as storage for a local building centre, before being acquired by the City of Kawartha Lakes and being moved to its present location in nearby Legion Park for restoration and use for community events.

Sources and further reading

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