

STAYNER AND ITS STATION

125 Years of service

Peter F. Oehm

On or about May 15th. 1854, the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway was finished to Nottawasaga Station, now called Stayner. Thus, began major settlement of northwest Simcoe County, 125 years ago. At that time Simcoe County was only eleven years old.

By December 14th. 1854, the Ontario (Oats), Simcoe (Straw) and Huron (Hay) Railway reached its terminus of Hens and Chickens Harbour, now Collingwood. This line then connected Toronto and Collingwood. Its main function was to act as a portage system or short cut between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay to transport people and goods destined for western Canada (via Port Arthur) and the western United States (via Chicago).

However, in the process, the railway opened up the vast agricultural and lumbering potential of Simcoe County. Stayner in this context became an important service centre for these two major activities.

Settlement at Stayner coincided with the arrival of the railway in 1854. Construction of the line had begun in Toronto in the Autumn of 1851; rather swift progress, considering the technology of the day.

Roderick McDonnell, a land speculator, acquired a large portion of the townsite from the Crown early in 1836. It was sold to various people over the next few years, but not until 1854 and the approach of the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway, did settlement commence. Edward Shortiss purchased 150 acres in Lot 25, Concession 2, Nottawasaga Township, on February 15th. 1854. On May 31st. 1854, a group headed by John Alexander Macdonald of Kingston (later, Canada's first Prime Minister), purchased the adjoining Lot 24 for \$990.00.

Andrew Coleman, a sub-contractor for the railway, was the first permanent white settler in what was then known as Nottawasaga Station. He opened up a boarding house, the first of a number of hotels, that he operated in the village over the succeeding years.

In 1855, the village was named Stayner, after Thomas Allan Stayner of Toronto, who had owned land in the area (Concession 3, Lot 25) since 1839. Thomas Stayner was also deputy Postmaster General between 1827 and 1851.

The Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway, like most early railway Companies, changed names and ownerships regularly. In 1858, the nicknamed "Oats, Straw and Hay Railway", became known as the Northern Railway of Canada. It was later amalgamated with the nearby Hamilton and Northwestern Railway to become the Northern and Northwestern Railway. In 1888 it was bought out by the Grand Trunk Railway. In 1922 the G.T.R. was expropriated by the Dominion Government to become part of the newly formed Canadian National Railways.

A study of passenger train tickets is one indication of the interrelationships Stayner had with many other points. I was fortunate to receive a collection of tickets issued at Stayner in 1935 from David Ariss of the Stayner Farmers Co-operative. It is quite interesting to note that the passenger train took Staynerites to so many important and fun activities:

Afternoon passenger train #56 southbound at Meaford Ontario, July 1953, powered by Pacific type 5041. (Paterson-George Collection)

- the dentist's chair in Collingwood (not so much fun)
- a visit to the Browns in Duntroon
- a ski outing at Craigeleith
- the farmer's market in Kitchener
- a symphony in Toronto's Massey Hall
- a trans-Atlantic steamship in New York City or Montreal
- two World Wars
- one of the seven wonders of the world - Niagara Falls
- a weekend visit to your parents home

My mother, for example, on many Friday afternoons left Stayner at 4:30pm aboard train #56. After a long fifteen minute coffee break in Allendale, she'd travel on by train #68, which arrived in Newmarket at 6:30pm. From Newmarket she would take the York Radial Railway, an interurban electric line which connected Toronto and Newmarket to Sutton. It got mother home to Sutton West before 8:00pm.

It's hard to believe in 1979, but passenger trains were the life-blood to Stayner travelers for 106 years, even if only for an overnight visit to Duntroon or Creemore (located on the Beeton to Collingwood line). During many of those years Stayner was served well by three passenger trains in each direction, with connections at Collingwood and at Allendale for Toronto, Hamilton and North Bay (see timetables in effect June 26, 1910).

Using the 1935 ticket sample, Map A illustrates the local points to which Staynerites travelled. Other longer distance destinations included New York City, Kirkland Lake, Detroit and Chicago.

At this time rail passenger travel was aggressively marketed. There was a vast assortment of special rail travel packages available from a small town like Stayner:

- clergy rates
- commercial travellers fares
- first class tickets
- special excursion fares with a three day return limit
- child's half fares
- regular fares (the regular fare one-way to Toronto was \$2.45, whereas the excursion rate was \$1.60)
- weekend fares (50¢ return to Collingwood)
- teacher' return fares (\$2.25 from Stayner to Newmarket)

As 1979 is the 125th. Anniversary of the CN line from Toronto to Collingwood, a sample of passenger tickets of various types are illustrated. Sample tickets are also included for points west of Collingwood.

As well as the three regular trains daily, there were all kinds of passenger specials:

- to a Billy Graham meeting at the Toronto CNE grounds (steam engines 5033 and 5041 double-headed this 14 coach special)

