

WE USED TO HAVE A RAILWAY RUNNING THROUGH THORNBURY

We used to have a railway running through Thornbury. It was the Canadian National Railway's Meaford subdivision of the Allandale Division, which naturally enough ran from Allandale (now part of Barrie) to Meaford until the early 1960's. Lines to Allandale ran directly from Toronto and, through Collingwood, from Hamilton. The line from Hamilton to Allandale actually ran through Alliston and Beeton and, when it reached Collingwood, the track ran up the middle of Walnut Street and across First Street (Highway 26), where it turned right to join the track from Meaford heading for the station.

From Thornbury in the early 1950's, you could catch the 6:19 a.m. or the 2:35 p.m. passenger train to Collingwood and on to Allandale and the 1:20 p.m. or the 9:47 p.m. to Meaford. Every day but Sunday (and Monday heading for Allandale). On Sundays, the train headed "south" from Thornbury for Allandale at 5:49 p.m. The night train to Meaford stayed there overnight and returned to Allandale the next morning. These were passenger trains, although freight cars were sometimes pulled behind the passenger coaches, and ski excursion trains ran on weekends from Union Station in Toronto to Craigeleith.

Of course, there was also a healthy freight business as well. Meaford had a complex and busy yard, with large lumber shipments among other things, but Thornbury was busier than you might think. In addition to the main line, which ran more-or-less where the Georgian Trail runs in downtown Thornbury, a siding or "team track" split to the south just east of Elgin Street, paralleled the main line and rejoined the main line just east of Mill Street. On the south side of the team track, along Highway 26, there was a coal shed, a stock pen, the Georgian Bay Fruit Growers' warehouse (in the building where the cidery is now), the CNR freight shed and the Beaver Valley Co-op's cold-storage warehouse (where Tigs is now). Another short spur ran just north of the main line across Bruce Street with Parks Fuel (coal) on the west and the Snetsinger/Miles fruit warehouse on the east side.

Refrigerator car loads of apples and consignments of Mitchell's apple juice were shipped from the fruit warehouses in the late autumn and winter – to Northern Ontario, the mid-West and Great Britain. During World War II, when space was available in the fruit warehouses, Canada Packers and Swifts also stored eggs until they were exported to England.

Both Thornbury and Meaford naturally had passenger stations as well as freight sheds. Meaford's was turreted, quite ornate and featured in many railway photographs of the area in the 1950's. Thornbury's station was just north of the new medical centre on Highway 26. Before the station was built, McCauley Street ran north towards the Bay across King Street (Highway 26) and then continued across Huron Street as well. It was blocked off when the passenger station was built in the dead centre of where McCauley had run north of King, and what used to be McCauley simply became the driveway to the station. You crossed the spur line to get to the passenger station.

Although there were plans to extend the "Meaford sub" to Owen Sound, it was never a very busy line and the track work only allowed relatively light steam engines to run on it. The line was "dieselized" starting in 1952 but the early diesels were so unreliable that steam engines often had to be substituted. Passenger service was reduced by half in 1955 and ended in 1960. There was a move around 1980 to establish a steam excursion train run from Collingwood to Craigeleith. The track was still down but skiers at Craigeleith successfully campaigned against it on the grounds that it would be noisy and dirty.

