

Fort Erie Railroad Museum

B-1 Grand Trunk Station

est. 1873



Fast Facts

- 1873 - B-1 built by Grand Trunk Railway to coincide with construction of the International Railway Bridge.
- 1982 - B-1 moved from original location to the Fort Erie Railroad Museum.
- \$1.25 - 1982 purchase price for B-1.
- B-2 - Companion station at Black Rock, N.Y.

B-1 in Gothic Revival Style

The Gothic Revival style harkens back to “Olde England”. Popular with parliaments, churches, and universities, the choice of Gothic Revival architecture provided instant visual ties with England, and all that it represented. Even when buildings were brand new, if built in the Gothic Revival style, they had associations with that which was established. What better way for the railroads, a young venture in Canada, to convince the nation and investors of stability?

The Gothic Revival style of architecture began in England in the mid 1700's. The hallmarks of this style include steeply pitched roofs, irregular outlines, bay windows, decorative chimneys, and often windows with a pointed arch. Some Gothic Revival buildings have added decoration, in the form of gingerbread trim, and some rely on the form of the building itself to make its statement.

The International Railroad Bridge

The concept of a bridge spanning the Niagara River to accommodate rail traffic was first proposed by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1857, but it took until 1870 for the project to begin taking form. The cost was \$1.5 million.

The project was an exercise in ingenuity for engineers Casimir Gzowski and E.P. Hannaford, and designer T. Hobson. The Niagara River presented a host of design challenges, including “treacherous currents, fluctuating water levels, ice floes, and problematic features on the river-bed.” Yet, the technology of the time prevailed, and the gap between countries (both physical and economic) was closed.

Opened formally on November 3, 1873, the International Railroad Bridge has played a large part in the history of Fort Erie. “The continuing effect of the bridge was to make Fort Erie one of the main entrance points for rail freight along the whole Canada- United States border, and to play an important part in making Buffalo one of the major railroad centers in the United States”.

For more information, refer to Many Voices: A Collective History of Greater Fort Erie, published by the Fort Erie Museum Board, 1996. The above quotes are from this source.

What happened to the community of International Bridge?

Yes, there was a community of International Bridge. The following excerpt from the book Many Voices, briefly answers the question “what happened?”

“A mile north of Fort Erie another community developed in the early 1870’s and surpassed Fort Erie in commerce and population by the 1890’s. Its multiple names were Victoria, International Bridge and Bridgeburg. This community was part of Bertie Township and a direct result of the construction of the International Railway Bridge. The bridge opened in 1873, and boarding houses, stores, taverns, a school and church rapidly appeared.

Named after the reigning monarch... this village was called Victoria until 1877. At that time a post office was granted, and to avoid confusion with other Victorias in Ontario, the name International Bridge was chosen... Population grew to 895 in 1895, and in that year it broke away from Bertie Township and incorporated as the Village of Bridgeburg. In 1915 its status was changed to the Town of Bridgeburg... In 1931 this corporation joined with Fort Erie and Amigari to form the expanded Town of Fort Erie.”

Q: How do you move a building?

A: Carefully!

Buildings have been moved in North America since late 18th C. At that time, building materials were very costly and acquiring them labour intensive. Therefore, moving whole structures was an economical decision.

A historic building should only be moved as a last resort. Moving a structure unavoidably destroys some historic fabric, no matter how carefully the work proceeds. It also reduces the historic integrity of a building (often the relationship of the building to the original site is a large factor in its historic significance. Once lost, that relationship, or context, is impossible to recreate in another location). If no alternatives exist to preserve a structure in situ, then moving is certainly preferred over demolition!

Essentially the process of moving a structure is simple. It is first stabilized, then freed from any existing foundation. Cribbing and jacks are used to slowly raise the structure, to get it onto a vehicle for transport. Truck beds, railroad flat cars and river barges have all been used for transport, depending on convenience. A reversal of the cribbing and jacking process gets the structure onto a new foundation, where it is fastened into place.

The most important work is done before any work crews arrive. The structure should be thoroughly documented, with photographs, video tape and measured drawings.

It's better to be safe, than sorry!

For more information, refer to Moving Historic Buildings, by John Obed Curtis, published by AASLH Press.

