

Our Past: Aultsville Station to be restored **by Alex Mullin, staff writer**

Few things stir the memory of times past like the sight and sound of a railway station, the hustle and bustle of a station.

The old time railway station unquestionable played a greater part in local living than comparable facilities today. They were, for many years, the hub and centre of the smaller communities, the lifeline of communication with the great world out yonder.

People took the trains to go to school, to go shopping, to visit their friends, to go on that once in a lifetime trip, to be remembered and talked about forever afterward. The young people, perhaps too often, left home on the trains, sometimes never to come back.

So the joys and sorrows of the community centred around the railway station to a much greater degree than they do today, and for many years the railway in this area was the Grand Trunk. Opened in 1854 and serving all the communities in the St. Lawrence Valley until it was absorbed in the Canadian National in 1923, it was the railway most of the older generation grew up with, the line they dreamed of becoming engineers on.

One Survives

There is only one station from the old line surviving and it is of course, the former Aultsville station at Upper Canada Village. Although there as been an interesting display of an old train and some artifacts and documents on show at the station, ever since it was set up at the close of the Seaway years, about 1956, it is a long way from an effective recreation of Aultsville station, either as it was in the days just before the Seaway or in an earlier era when the line was the Grand Trunk.

But plans are to change that. The St. Lawrence Parks Commission in a project for the next two or three years, hopes to restore Aultsville station to what it was in the period of about 1920, when the Grand Trunk era was nearing its end, but before the automobile made a major impact and railways were at the peak of their influence on the community at large.

Curator of technology at UCV, Chris Porter, outlines the considerations which influence the planning for the restoration. During this past summer, Mary-Pat McKinnon, working in an Experience '77 project, made a detailed study of Aultsville Station, its origin and present situation.

This shows that the original station was built about the time the Grand Trunk was built through the area. But it was small and eventually became outgrown, so in 1889 the railway built one of its "Standard No. 1" stations at Aultsville according to a pattern apparently established 30 years before.

Plans Available

The plans for the building and grounds are still available, but later events influenced the actual details at Aultsville. The original plans called for a ladies and gentlemen's waiting room with an office in the centre. It is thought that the old station remained on its old location and served as a freight shed.

But one day in the mid 1930's, the date is no longer known, a westbound freight jumped the tracks and wiped out the outbuildings although it only scrapped the corner of the station itself.

As a result, the railway rebuilt the former men's waiting room as a baggage and express room and freight office, which was essentially the east end of the station. The former ladies waiting room became a general waiting room.

Mr. Porter is particularly anxious to talk to anybody who can remember that wreck, establish the date, and especially, give some details of Aultsville station as it was before it occurred.

The plans are to restore the station to what it was in the last days of the Grand Trunk, and to restore the old train which is also on display to the same period. Old engine No. 1008, a Mogul from the Canadian Locomotive Company of Kingston was built in 1910. The passenger car, a one-time first class express coach, later converted by the CNR to branch line mixed train service by adding an independent stove heating system, dates from 1901, and the express car was built in 1920.

Color Scheme

All three are in keeping with the 1920 period. In those days Grand Trunk rolling stock was painted dark green with red roofs, which made an interesting color scheme, says Mr. Porter. The locomotives were black, with gold leaf lining and lettering.

The UCV restoration is intended to retain the appearance of Aultsville station as exactly as possible. But there may be room for some museum displays of the railway with a small town.

Part of the project will probably include adding enough track to make the short length along the station double tracked, as it was since 1903. The engine and train are now eastbound on a single track - once there is a double track laid down the train should be headed westbound on the south track.

There will be no attempt made to restore old No. 1008 to useable condition; because there is no link with the existing rail line possible, there would be nowhere to go.

Although work will start this winter in repairing the leaky roofs of the old passenger and express cars, in order to prevent further deterioration, serious restoration is still in the planning stage.

The burden of cost will probably be such that the work will be spread out over two or three winter seasons.

In the meantime, however, the success of the project rests on the planning and research that goes into it. For that purpose Mr. Porter needs information which may be among the memories of those who knew Aultsville station in its Grand Trunk days or later. He has already contacted several people and would like to talk to many more before the thick stack of plans become final and are translated into action.