

# FORMAL HERITAGE EVALUATION OF GTR / CNR REPAIR SHOPS STRATFORD

prepared by the Designation Sub-Committee, Heritage Stratford

September 2014

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**Motion** by Cynthia Venables, seconded by Lesley Walker-Fitzpatrick that the Heritage Stratford Advisory Committee begin a formal heritage evaluation of the former Grand Trunk/Canadian National Railway property (Cooper Site) to determine its merit as a candidate for heritage designation. The evaluation will include a statement of heritage significance as well as a list of heritage attributes and elements on site. Carried.

Heritage Stratford Committee June 10, 2014

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## 1. Ontario Heritage Act Statement of Cultural Value or Interest (Statement of Heritage Significance)

Following the Criteria for Determining Cultural Merit established by the Ontario Heritage Act Regulation 9/06.

1. *The property has design value or physical value because it,*
  - i. *is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method,*
  - ii. *displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit, or*
  - iii. *demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.*

The former Grand Trunk/Canadian National railway property and Repair Shops (Cooper Site) located at 350 Downie St. in Stratford is an extraordinary example of Canada's early industrial and railway heritage. The repair shops erected between 1907 and 1909 demonstrate a high level of creative engineering achievement in design and planning in response to the rapidly developing technology and the highly skilled production processes of the early 20th Century. The building was planned so that it could accommodate the increasing demands of a growing railway industry. Even in 1907, the Repair Shops were vast in scale and today there are few structures of this type and purpose left in Canada.

The building was constructed using a super structure of riveted iron and steel including a roof truss system. At 182,000 square feet of floor space, the building includes massive open expanses, high ceilings, good ventilation, ample natural light from many large windows and abundant skylights. The design, created by the Arnold Company of Chicago and executed by the Canadian Bridge Company of Walkerville, creates a dramatic interior landscape and is an example of a seminal advance in early 20th Century industrial architecture. A design reflected

in the University of Waterloo Centre for Digital Media<sup>1</sup> built in 2012 in the shadow of the repair shops.

2. *The property has historical value or associative value because it,*
  - i. *has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community,*
  - ii. *yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture, or*
  - iii. *demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.*

The GTR/CNR railways played a critical role in the development of our country and in doing so brought rapid growth and massive employment to Stratford. The shops were the industrial heart of Stratford for more than 100 years, and at their peak the railroad payroll represented 80 per cent of the Stratford work force. From 1856, when the GTR first built in Stratford, until 1964, when the repair shops closed, Stratford was primarily a major rail centre as suggested on the crest beside the main entrance to Stratford's city hall. During the First World War, the GTR shops also built shells in support of the allies' overseas effort. By the mid-1930s, other manufacturing (involving furniture, textiles, meat packing, metal, rubber, and shoes) developed in Stratford because of the skilled labour and transportation advantages resulting from Stratford's importance as a railroad hub, locally and nationally. As of 1949, Stratford had the largest motive repair facility in the entire CNR system. Generations of the same family worked at the shops as skilled workers, repairing huge locomotives including the family of Tom Patterson, whose dream to create a Shakespeare Festival was directly related to the changing economic situation in Stratford as steam power was replaced by diesel.

The GTR/CNR shops have a direct association with the social and cultural development of Stratford, having provided a unique sense of identity and place. Stratford was a railway company town with an excellent apprenticeship training program, a GTR employees' library, concert bands, greenhouses, a fire brigade and a recreation association comprising teams and leagues for a myriad of activities. In 1902 the GTR paid a third of the cost to build the YMCA (as well as heat the pool and provide all the necessary electricity from the railway's nearby powerhouse). In 1924 worker teams at the shops pooled their money to buy shares at ten dollars apiece to help finance the construction of what is now the William Allman Memorial Arena. In 1934 CNR workers built National Stadium and in 1940 the tennis courts in the station park. The city's public library, YMCA, Stratford concert band, fire service and some of its sports teams can trace their origins to GTR and CNR local initiatives. In 1953 the railway shops also played a direct role in the beginning of the city's now internationally recognized Shakespearean festival -- with the CNR male chorus singing in the first production of Richard III, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> "The 45,000 square foot, three-storey facility is located on a brown field site and is inspired by the industrial and railway heritage the adjacent industrial railway buildings. Beginning with the robust simplicity and powerful structure that characterizes the existing buildings on site, our design looks to create something new from old including the multi-level Event Space that opens toward the street." *ZAS Architects*

providing stage crew and props production for the new theatrical venture. The early success of the festival is also due to theatre patrons coming to Stratford on special trains.

The Stratford that we know today was given to us by the dedicated men and women who spent their working lives in the railway repair shops. The massive shops also provide insight into the origin and structure of industrial towns in the early and mid-20th Century, but more than that, they reflect the national, outward-facing nature of Stratford, Ontario, which played an important role in the development of our nation.

3. *The property has contextual value because it,*
  - i. *is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area,*
  - ii. *is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings, or*
  - iii. *is a landmark.*

The huge GTR/CNR repair shops are a unique presence and landmark in Stratford physically, historically and culturally. Located in the central core of the city, they had a major impact on the location and organization of developing neighbourhoods, both commercial and residential. The presence in the core of this substantial industrial complex defined the development of our now designated downtown Heritage District. The layout of city streets, the resulting streetscapes, and adjacent properties -- including the train station and hotels, were directly influenced by the substantial presence of the repair shops, so close to the commercial heart of Stratford.

The massive shops have been a Stratford landmark for more than 100 years; their physical and historic shadow is large and long. They represent a community which from the beginning has had a vision of itself that is local, national and international. The GTR/CNR shops formed the basis of all that was and is our wonderful city and a living legacy to each of the Stratford citizens who devoted their time and their trade in this significant heritage building.

The former Grand Trunk/Canadian National Railway property (Cooper Site) is an extraordinary industrial site and an important asset within Stratford. In all three categories, it meets the criteria for cultural merit, established by the Ontario Heritage Act Regulation 9/06.

## **2. List Of Heritage Attributes and Elements**

### ***Interior of the Repair Shops***

- the complete 1907-1909 super structure of riveted iron and steel of the building including the roof truss system and skylight frames (roof monitors)
- the reinforced concrete for the base structure circa 1907-09

- the foundation of concrete piles and column footings— the piles driven in groups and capped with reinforced concrete—as well as spread footings circa 1907-09
- the iron window frames 1907- 1909 of the entire building
- the date stone on the westerly end wall of the shops, bearing the date “1907 ”
- a portion of (see attached map #1, #2, #3) the west or north walls of the formed poured concrete, a material which was a “high tech” material of its time circa 1907

#### ***Site Exterior***

- a portion of the railway tracks (see attached map #4) that entered the property from the east circa 1910 that remain on the site
- a portion of the narrow gauge track running in a westerly direction from the east end of the site and well into the interior of the building (see attached map #5)
- the track switch ( see attached map #6)
- the turntable 85 feet diameter and tracks that radiate from it, that served the tender shop (see attached map #7). The extent to which this feature remains cannot be determined at this time.

### **3. Additional Considerations**

The “former repair shops” were recognized in 1993/11/01 and are listed as ‘Heritage Value’ on the Canadian Registry of Historic Places under the former Canadian National Railways station recognition listing. Heritage Canada’s National Trust has stated the GTR/CNR shops are an extraordinary industrial site, an exceptional example of its kind in Canada and an important cultural heritage asset, July 2014.

### **4. List of Heritage Attributes and Elements**

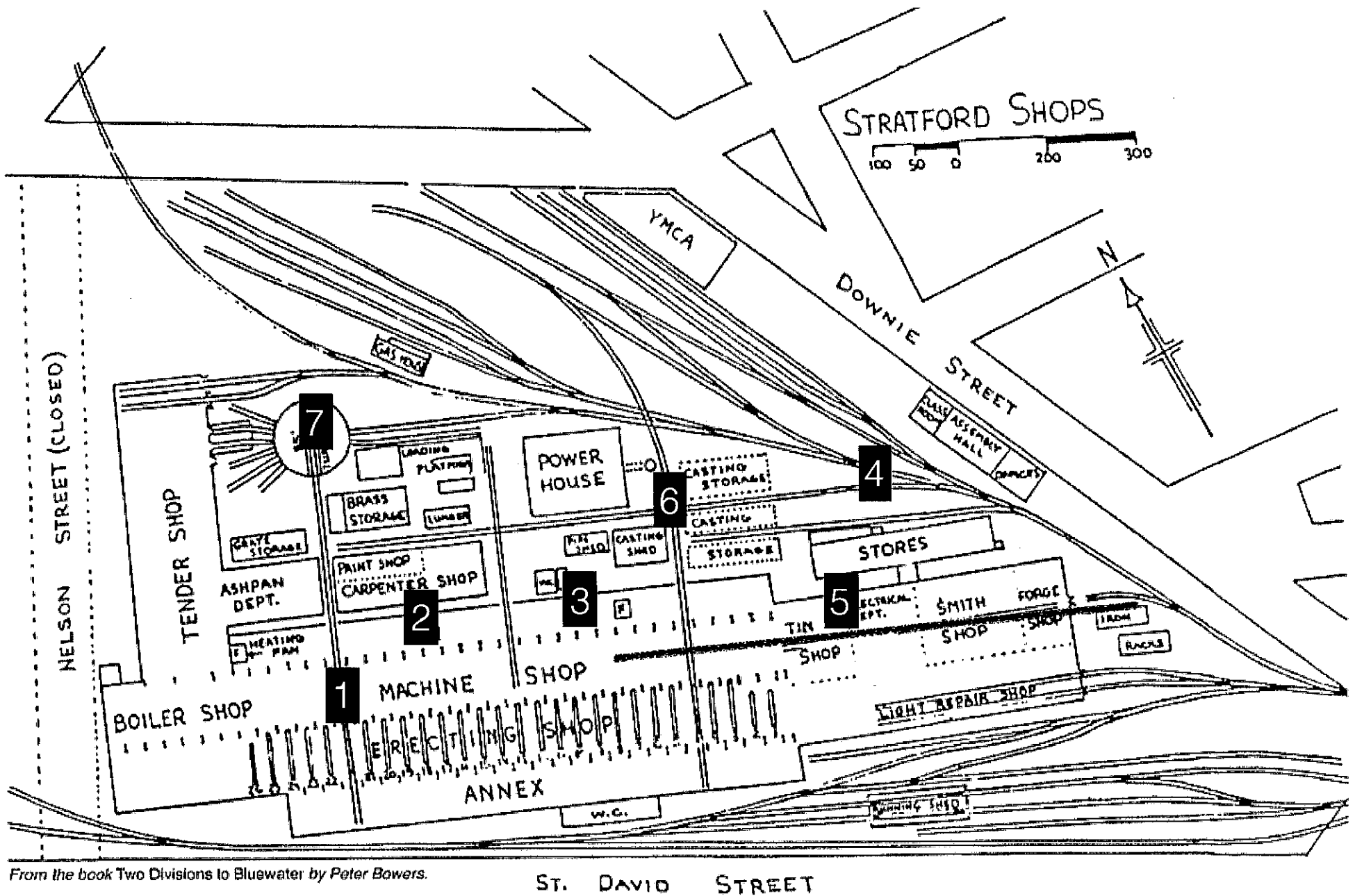
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From the book *Two Divisions to Bluewater* by Peter Bowers.

ST. DAVID STREET