

Heritage Railway Stations

service provided at enormous cost to taxpayers. Rather than operating it as a Post Office paid for by the taxpayers in general, the Government is now trying to move it into the local grocery store or the little hardware store, which is sometimes the very last building in these little towns.

The reason these little towns are closing down is that the people themselves are speaking with their cars and their feet, so to speak. They are driving off to larger centres which are usually 30 or 40 miles apart now, rather than eight or nine miles, which was the configuration when we had railways and very poor highways. Now we have super paved highways and people want to use them. They simply drive to the larger centres to buy their groceries and clothes. Because of that the businesses are closing down, including the post offices.

In many ways that is the same with the railway. The early steam engines required stations every eight or nine miles primarily to get water. That is no longer the case. Diesel engines could go much greater distances. With the great superhighways farmers could haul their grain into larger centres and a lot of these railway stations were no longer needed.

Over the weekend my wife and I had the privilege of travelling to Stratford. We went up through Goderich and down through Great Bend and a number of small towns in Ontario. Since the history of Ontario dates back 150 years there is no doubt that there are some magnificent railway stations which deserve to be kept. In the West there is a fewer number of railway stations which are of tremendous historic significance in the sense that they can be structurally preserved for all time. Some of them will disappear, and quite properly so. However, there are a certain number which are architecturally and historically significant enough to be preserved. I think my friend's Bill will go a long way toward leading us in that direction.

I am anxious to hear what other Members have to say. I can assure the Member from Bow River that the Minister is monitoring this debate carefully. I am sure the House will make the proper decision at the proper time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne Blouin (Montmorency—Orléans): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), is to be commended for his abiding interest in protecting heritage railway stations. I would also like to comment briefly on the subject matter of this Bill.

Stations have been disappearing at a steady pace for many years. They are first closed down, and then, if no one buys them, they are often destroyed.

Madam Speaker, I think all Members will agree this is most unfortunate. In addition to being a reflection of our past, our old railway stations are often representative of an architectural style that is typical of North America. They bear testimony to

the expansion of our country and are a heritage that cannot be replaced.

Why are heritage railway stations disappearing?

As far as the railways are concerned, many stations have fallen into disuse because of major changes in the infrastructure of transportation services during the last 20 or 30 years. The increasing popularity of highway and air transportation caused a decline in the number of passengers. At this point, CN and CP started to concentrate on freight transport which, over time, became their main source of revenue. Later on VIA Rail was added to the network, many lines were abandoned, and intermodal transport systems appeared.

Because of these developments, the stations lost their *raison d'être* and were gradually forgotten by the railway companies which were not interested in keeping them operational.

Madam Speaker, we realize that the railway companies had other priorities, including keeping pace with the development of this country, and we can hardly blame them for the fact that these stations have been all but forgotten.

However, when we hear that despite the joint efforts of municipalities and members of the community, some stations were destroyed, that is a sure sign something must be done to protect them.

In 1976, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board recommended declaring some 20 stations as being of national historic significance. The minister at the time accepted the Board's recommendation, and in some cases commemorative plaques were put in place. In Quebec, for instance, commemorative plaques were installed at the stations in Lévis, Isletville, Saint-Jean-d'Iberville, Acton Vale, Berthier and at Windsor Station in Montreal. However, this measure was far from adequate, considering the desired goal.

In fact, when the Historic Sites and Monuments Board submits recommendations for having certain buildings declared of historical value, this does not put any obligations or constraints on private or public owners.

The growing public awareness of our heritage in recent years is a sign of the good will of all concerned.

There are a number of examples, including the situation in Acton Vale, Quebec. The station in Acton Vale, no longer in use, could thus be preserved and become a source of pride for the entire community.

There are hundreds of railway stations in Canada that could still be preserved. Their historical role should not be forgotten, and in fact, they are very much a part of the memories of many Canadians. At a time when railway tracks are disappearing, they are the last vestige of the conquest and settlement of this country. They represent important milestones in the building of our railways. They are part of our national dream.