

The Railway comes to Stittsville

On September 16th 1870, the first steam train passed through Stittsville. It traveled along a newly completed railway line that connected Brockville and Ottawa. The massive locomotive, named the "H. H. Abbott," was built of shining steel with brass and red painted trim. It was decorated for the occasion with Union Jack flags and red, white, and blue ribbons. One month before, a huge forest fire had destroyed much of Carleton County, so it must have been strange to witness this gleaming new train set against a blackened, charred landscape.



In the days that followed, supply trains delivered badly needed provisions to local families who had begun to rebuild their lives. Stittsville's center, which had been located near the former site of the Stittsville Flea Market, was completely destroyed by the fire. Many businesses therefore chose to rebuild in the area of the new railway station. The railway station was situated one mile to the south of the former village, at the present day site of the Village Square park.

Prior to the arrival of the railway, people in Stittsville had travelled to neighbouring towns and villages by foot or by horse. The new rail line therefore had a huge impact of the lives of Stittsville families. Stittsville's youth, for instance, could now travel by train to the High School in Carleton Place. The rail line also provided an economic boost to the small community, allowing its farmers and tradesmen to do business on a much broader scale. Stittsville's rural station had telephone and telegraph connections, and the village's mail was carried by train. In this way, the coming of the train can be compared to our recent technology boom.

An interesting fact is that station's signage read "STITTVILLE". The village had just recently been named, and the use of the second 's' had never been formally decided. While 'Stittsville' has emerged as the more common name, the Canada Central Railway never bothered to correct its signage.

Trains remained Stittsville's principle means of out-of-town travel and transport until automobiles became popular in the 1950's. Stittsville Station was demolished in 1969, but trains continued to pass through the village until 1990. On January 14th 1990, the last train passed through Stittsville. It was a Via Rail passenger train called 'The Canadian,' which was on its way to British Columbia.

*Imagine what it would have been like to witness the first locomotive as it passed through Stittsville **or** what it would have been like to travel to school by train.*

Image: The Canadian Pacific Railway station at Stittsville, c. 1895.