

THE E & N RAILWAY



E & N Station being constructed

Courtenay & District Museum 989.204.3



Girl Guides at Royston Station, 1928

Courtenay & District Museum 990.16.26



Station and train, 1919

Courtenay and District Museum 972.233.1

The Dunsmuir Agreement to Build the Island Railway

In 1871 when British Columbia became a Province, one of the main conditions for joining Confederation was construction of a train line connecting east with the west. There was always a belief that the train line would go north to Campbell River, with the intention of crossing to Bute Inlet making a connection to the mainland. When the terminus was to be at Burrard Inlet instead of Bute Inlet, the provincial government became concerned that Vancouver Island would not be considered part of the rail system. It was a controversy that raged for years within Parliament in Ottawa and the Legislature in Victoria. It was resolved in 1885 when an agreement was made with coal baron Robert Dunsmuir who was anxious to have a train line built on the Island from Victoria to Wellington to accommodate his vast business interests. When the Government was unwilling to fund the cost of the Island rail line, he brought together a consortium of five American investors, four of whom were railway tycoons with the Central Pacific Rail Company.

The Terms agreed upon for the arrangement between Dunsmuir and the Investors have been listed as "Giving Away Vancouver Island" because besides a \$750,000 subsidy there was a land grant of 1,900,000 acres including the Indian Reserves at Nanaimo, Esquimalt and Victoria. It gave Dunsmuir all mineral rights including, "Coal, Coal-oil, Ores, Stones, Mines, Minerals and substances whatsoever thereon therein and thereunder", as well as all timber rights. The profit of any production was all to be tax free.

The Last Spike

When the original 73 miles of track was completed, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald arrived at Cliffside, south of Shawnigan Lake, where he was provided with a gold spike and silver hammer and drove home the last spike.



THE E & N RAILWAY

The Day the Train Arrived

“On 06 August 1914, the train came whistling up the tracks gay with bunting and flags. There were horses and rigs, farm wagons and mounts standing under close supervision around the new station. People had come from all parts of The Settlement to welcome the modern addition to the district. Precautions were taken to see that no horse panicked at the sight and sound of the train. The steam whistle was a thrilling sound heard as far away as Royston and across the valley to Comox and up the valley for several miles. Grandparents, parents and children down to the youngest were brought to the station for the event. A cheer went up from the crowd as the engine pulling a baggage car, express car, four passenger coaches and the observation car pulled into the station. The journey from Victoria had taken seven hours.”

(The personal recollections of Jim Crockett and his sister Edith McNish as remembered in August 1974.)



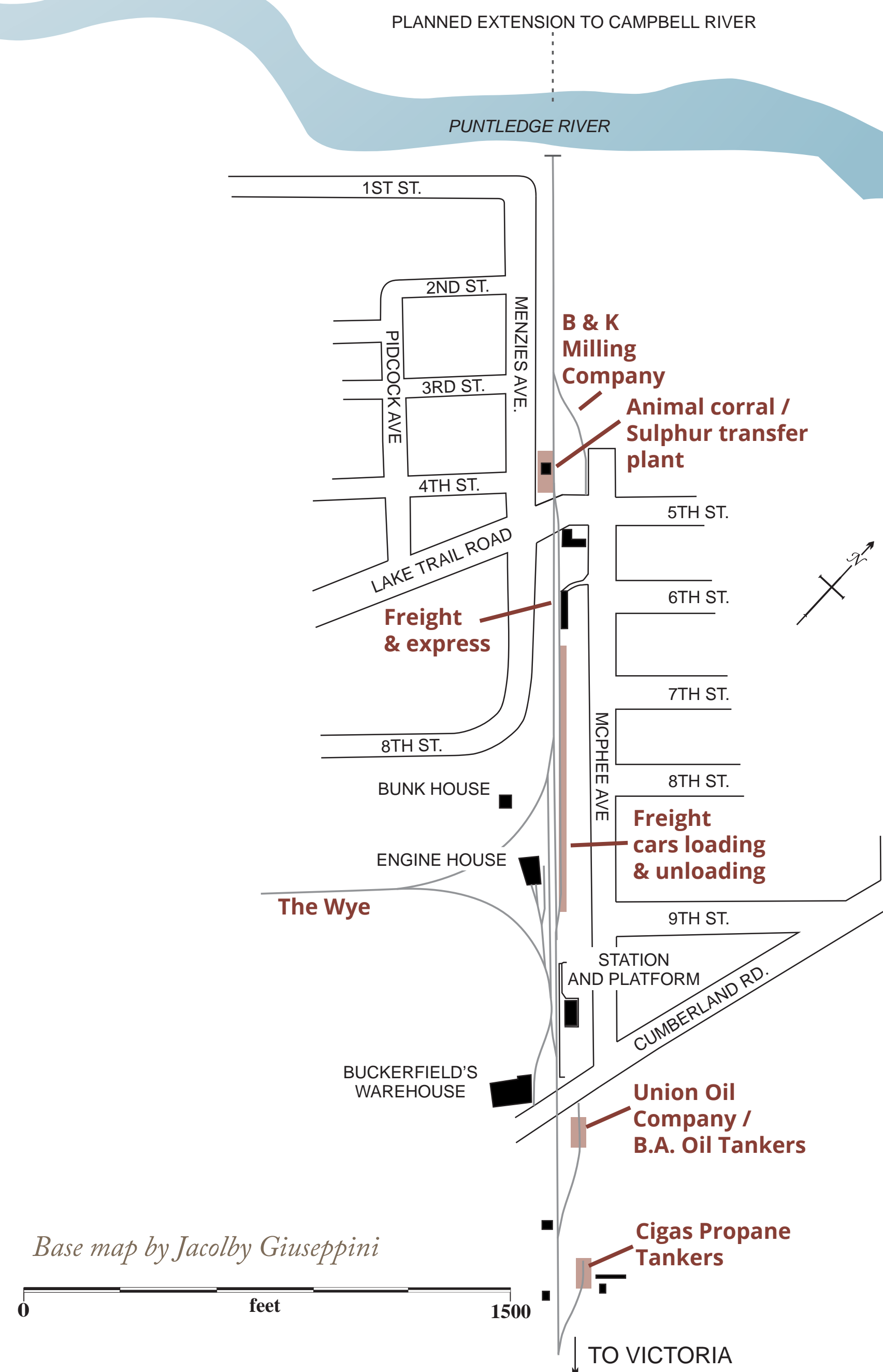
E & N Station interior, 1942



The Station

The Courtenay Station was built in classic “Number 9” Style like many CPR Stations built across Canada. They were designed by R.A. Bainbridge, Divisional Engineer. They were utilitarian with no pretension to architectural effect. The Duncan Station built in 1912 was almost identical to the Courtenay Station built in 1914. The CPR desired steady married men to run their business so living quarters for a family were incorporated in the plans. The living room (13x5) and kitchen/pantry of the same size were located downstairs and three bedrooms and bath and two storage rooms were upstairs. For the passengers there was a large waiting room (19.5x27) with a small Ladies Waiting Room (10x12) plus a washroom.

The upper story was gabled with the station’s name painted in enormous white letters on the lower hip of the roof. The half timber rough detail gave a rustic charm to the red CPR station as did the lattice work along the four foot wide veranda on the street side of the building. The raised baggage platform had two sets of doors front and back. There were 24 slender wooden canopy brackets for exterior detail adding a special touch to the building.



Outbuildings

On 05 December 1912, the Courtenay Review noted that “The E&N Railway is clearing ten acres between Lake Trail and Cumberland Roads for the erection of a roundhouse and machinery buildings.”

Eventually there were maintenance and freight sheds and a “wye” for movement of the large steam engines. Sleeping quarters for the trainmen were at first the rooms over the station.

Unlike other CPR stations across Canada where CPR crews had moved from one station to the next construction site, the buildings for Courtenay were put out to tender with all materials, and labour to be furnished by the contractor. The total cost for station and building was \$40,000. (In 2018 it would be \$858,400.)

It took some time for townfolk to become accustomed to the night long shunting and hissing and whistling of the freight trains which came in at all hours several times a week.

Over time, individual rail sidings were built along the tracks from Lake Trail road to 17th Street. Box cars would be left on the sidings to allow the freight to be offloaded during the night.

Mail Service

“By 1920, the E&N was running daily service and mail was now transported exclusively by rail with one car designated the mail coach. Al Kerr was the first postal clerk and held that position for many years. He opened the bags from each post office along the way and quickly sorted them into receiving bags which lined the wall of the coach—one for each town which was traded at the station for the outgoing sack.”

(p. 106 from Friendly Port by Jeanette Glover-Geidt)

“They hung the mail sack up on a wooden pole and the fellow in the baggage car would stick his arm out and grab the bag. At the same time he would kick the other sack out the door onto the ground. If he had some fragile mail the train would stop at Fanny Bay”. Joe Walker cited in Friendly Port.

For collection and delivery of the Comox/ Courtenay mail, Ted Cliffe had a truck which became a friendly community service; late comers were free to toss their letters onto the truck as it passed. Mail service ended 30 September 1952.



E & N Main Line

Victoria
Russells
Admirals Rd.
Esquimalt
Palmer
Langford
Goldstream
Silvane
Malahat
Fitzgerald
Cliffside
Strathcona
Shawnigan
Cobble Hill
Hillbank
Cowichan
Koksilah
Duncan
Somenos
Stratfords Crossing
Westholme
Chemainus
Saltair
Blainey
Ladysmith
Brenton
Cassidy
South Wellington
Starks
Nanaimo
Northfield
Wellington
Nanoose
Craig
Parksville
Qualicum
Dashwood
Dunsmuir
Bowser
Mud Bay
Fanny Bay
Buckley Bay
Union Bay
Royston
Courtenay

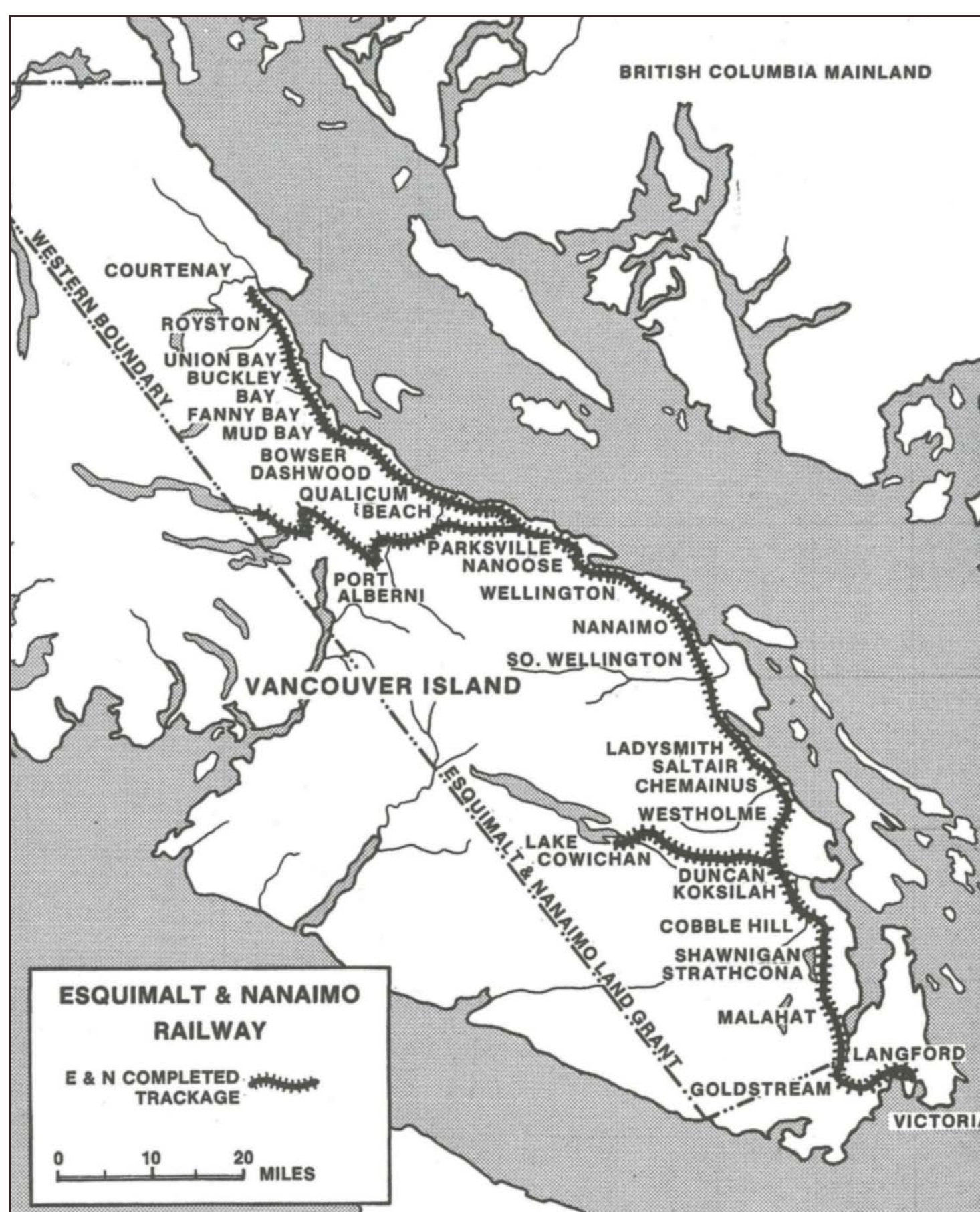
Port Alberni Branch Line

Parksville
Coombs
Hilliers
Cameron Lake
Arrowsmith
Bainbridge
Alberni
Port Alberni

Cowichan Subdivision

Victoria (Pt. Ellice)
Alpha St.
Junction
Burnside Road
Blackwood
Parson's Bridge
Colwood Hotel
Colwood Village
Glen Lake
Happy Valley
Highway Crossing
Metchosin
Rocky Point
Hutchison Cove
Saseenos
Milne's Landing
Leechtown
Sooke Lake
Lakend
Shawnigan Beach
Gleneagles
Napier Lumber Co.
Kinsol
Colpman Lumber Co.
Lakeshaw
National Mills Ltd.
Deerholme
Deerholme Lumber Co.
Camscot
Benallack
Chanlog
Continental Timber Co.
Cowichan Lake
Lakeside
North Arm
Youbou

THE E & N RAILWAY



Expansion to Courtenay Meant Economic Prosperity

There was always a belief that the train line would go north to Campbell River, with the intention of crossing to Bute Inlet making a connection to the mainland. In 1905, the E&N was sold to CPR, but the extension of the line did not happen until track was laid as far as Parksville in 1910 and to Port Alberni the following year.

With the anticipation of the arrival of the train in Courtenay, entrepreneurs began to open businesses along the Union Road on the west side of the Courtenay River. A few merchants in Cumberland opened a second store in this new commercial district and there was talk of Courtenay becoming a city.

Since there was speculation that there would be a boom when the train arrived, developers purchased land to be subdivided in anticipation of the growing population. In 1912, Noah Concinea developed "The Terminal Addition" at the north side of the Terminus at the Union Road. Two years later, Harry Beadnell was selling lots in the "The Station Subdivision" on the east side of Cumberland Road.

The Great War Changed the World

Although it was anticipated that the train would eventually go to Campbell River, and the survey had been completed for a rail line, when War was declared 04 August 1914, no more tracks were ever laid. After 1919, the automobile made the general population more mobile. Roads were built to connect communities that been in isolation. Trucks could now haul the freight. Though a trip to Victoria was an all day journey even as late as the 1950's, train travel declined. Automobiles did not run on schedules and everyone wanted to be in control of their time.

Special Events

On three occasions, in July of 1946, 1951 and 1954, the Clyde Beatty Circus arrived by train with 9 flat cars, 2 stock cars and 14 coaches, which transported all the equipment, personnel and animal acts from one town to the next. It was the era of "the Big Top" which drew big crowds into Courtenay. Early in the morning local boys were either down at the station watching the train arrive then running down to the corner of the Old Island Highway and Ryan Road to assist Circus Elephants haul up the Big Top which was reputed to be the largest in the world. The boys who helped were rewarded with free tickets to either the afternoon or evening show.

On two occasions, the train carried school children down Island to participate in Royal Visits. In 1938, 100 school children went to Victoria to see King George and Queen Elizabeth. Then in 1951, 800 school children were taken by a special eight-car train to Nanaimo where they joined 4,000 children who gathered in the Arena to celebrate the arrival of Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh.



Interesting Facts

When the train arrived in 1914 Courtenay had a population of 600.

In 1914 the station was in the middle of a thick forest with few buildings between it and the developing business community near the Courtenay River.

In 1949, the steam engines were converted to diesel, and in the mid-1950s the passenger cars, which had been pre-World War I vintage cars, were replaced with two modern Budd cars. The passenger service ran daily, but by the 1960s the freight only arrived twice per week.

When the CPR assumed control they encouraged the station masters to plant gardens at the stations.

The track was completed to Courtenay in July 1914. This allowed for supplies to come by rail to complete the station and outbuildings.

There was an assertion that the train arrived in July, but the official date is August 6th 1914 when the dignitaries came up from Victoria.

Since the original track only went to Nanaimo, the railway was called the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railroad, shortened to the E&N. When the line was expanded to Parksville, then Port Alberni and Courtenay the name remained.

When the train arrived in Courtenay the enormous large letters on the roof had been misspelled as COURTNEY. It was some time before the name was corrected.

THE E & N RAILWAY



The Contribution of the Courtenay Rotary Club

In 2015 the Rotary Club of Courtenay had the roof replaced on the train station. As early as 2011 they had been raising funds to repair and renovate the aging station building and to prepare a “Trail along the Rail” on the designated transportation corridor. This walking /biking trail was anticipated to connect to other trails so that eventually there would be a recreation link from Courtenay to the Galloping Goose Trail in the Capital Region. To date, the trail begins at 5th Street and ends at 29th Street.

“The vision proposes a public plaza at the start of the rails with trails as part of a legacy project commemorating both the role of the railway and historic 5th Street in the development of Courtenay”.

VIA Rail Assumes Responsibility of Passenger Service on the E & N

In 1977, Via Rail was formed to take over the rail passenger service of both the CPR and CNR Rail roads. In 1979, it assumed the responsibility of the E&N. In 1989 it was announced that rail service, both freight and passenger, was to end, and in 2011 the “rail service” finally ended.



Heritage Status

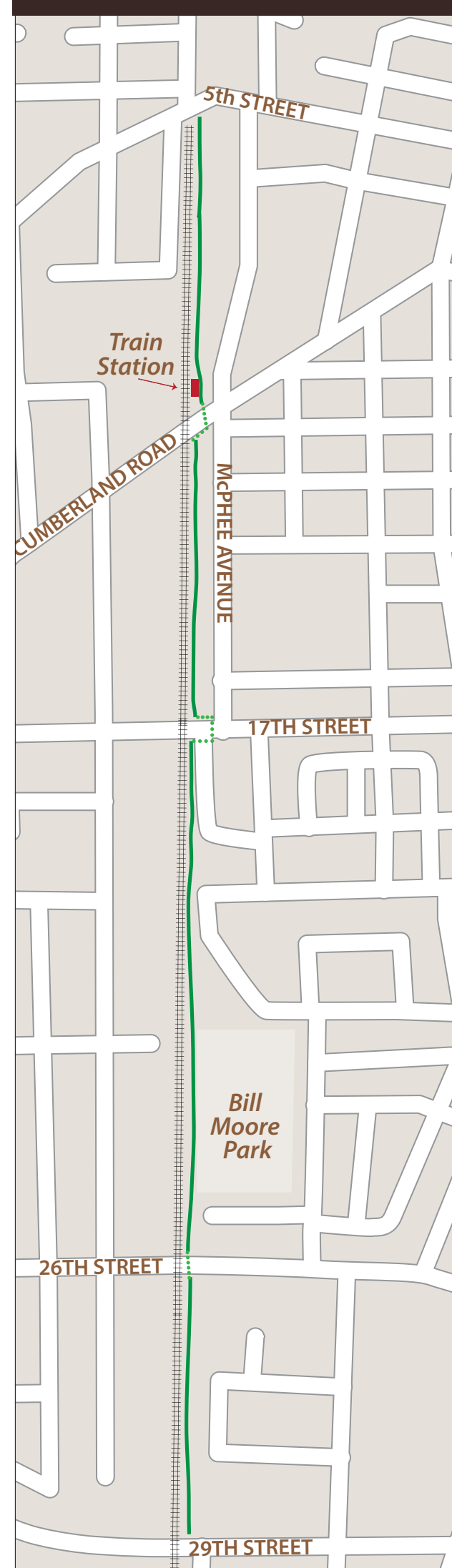
In 1994, the Courtenay and Duncan Stations of the “Number 9 Style” and the Qualicum station with its utilitarian structure were among 44 Canadian Railway stations granted Federal Heritage Status. No one can remove, alter or destroy the building without Federal Government approval.

In 2002, the City of Courtenay recognized the E & N Station’s “historical significance” by placing a Heritage Commemoration Plaque on the building.

In 2009, the City of Courtenay granted the E & N Station Heritage Designation through a bylaw.



ROTARY TRAIL



About this Panel and the Heritage Advisory Commission

Information for this panel was compiled by a working group of the City of Courtenay Heritage Advisory Commission, with the help of resources and staff at the Courtenay and District Museum, and it was designed by City Staff.

The nine-member Commission is in its 20th year of service, and has expanded its scope over the years as it focuses on education about, and promotion of, heritage in Courtenay.

The Cumberland Heritage Faire has been the stimulus for displays on such topics as the Courtenay River and Heritage Neighbourhoods, while the City's Centennial led to the research

resulting in the Commission's 11-panel display on Courtenay's One Hundred Years, available on the City of Courtenay website.

The Commission has developed a Residential Heritage Inventory of over 200 properties. It contributed to the creation of the City's Heritage Register, currently listing 22 properties, and it has an ongoing programme of placing Commemorative Plaques at properties and locations of heritage significance.

More about the Commission and the items mentioned here can be found on the City's website at www.courtenay.ca/heritage