

TORONTO RAILWAY STATION

FROM THE TIME OF RAILWAY OPERATIONS

FASSIFERN – THE 1911 JUNCTION STATION BUILDING

There was a considerable amount of planning undertaken in respect of buildings between Gosford and Broadmeadow, where the track was being duplicated, in 1911. At Fassifern, a new brick building with a gabled roof 70' 6' long was approved. It was designed as if it were on an island platform, with symmetrical 11' 7" wide awnings but it was in fact located on a triangular shaped platform that also serve the branch line to Toronto. The New South Wales Railways had taken over the operation of the privately owned and operated Tramway between Fassifern and Toronto in 1909 but the organisation decided to rebuild the line for used by conventional railway equipment, which enabled the through-running of trains between Toronto and Newcastle. The Railway service to Toronto commenced on 28th May, 1911.

Railway operations got underway well before the new and present brick building at Fassifern was built. The plan is dated 12th October, 1911, and it is a reasonable to assume that the structure was not completed until sometime in 1912. Mostly, the structure reflected features of the then popular Federation-influenced design. The features of the design were very much typical of what was happening at similar design stations, such as at nearby Wyong and Coledale on the Illawarra line which was also approved in 1911. The features of the Fassifern building were:

- 11' 6" ceiling height,
- Small corrugated iron on ceilings,
- 11' wide internal,
- Ladies' room as an ante-chamber to the female toilet,
- Detached male toilet/lamp room with Dutch gable roof,
- Name of station in bottom window sash,
- Rendered string course around building exterior,
- roof extended 25' for provision of a signal box at a later date,
- glass in bottom window sashes noted as 'rough rolled glass' and in top sash were 9 small panes of 21oz. clear glass (as opposed to the previous use of coloured Cathedral glass),
- awning width 11' supported by inverted "U" brackets on stone corbels,
- finials at each end of roof which was covered with corrugated iron sheeting,
- loose seating in ladies' room,
- brick chimneys with terracotta pots serving fireplaces in centre of walls, not corners,

- float and set walls, &
- four-panel doors with the lower panels smaller.

The major change to the standard presentation of similar buildings was the use of a detached male toilet. Normally, the male toilet would be located at one end of the building with entry at the end. The detached toilet was approved because of the higher number of passengers using the station at weekends, requiring additional urinal space. Not only was the male toilet detached but it featured a Dutch gable roof, which had gained departmental popularity with the use of overhead booking and parcels offices in Sydney. Hence, the roof design was a classy feature.

The line through Fassifern had been duplicated in 1910 and is assumed that the small waiting shed on the Newcastle-bound platform was approved at that time, though no plan survives. That building was timber framed, clad externally in weatherboards with a mono-pitched roof. Thus, in 1911 a lovely brick building was approved opposite the very basic timber waiting shed. This inconsistency of design and materials at the station was typical of the period of major duplications throughout the state between 1910 and 1920 and demonstrated that the Department viewed structures in a hierarchy with the dominant building being designed in a superior manner and the subordinate structure designed to reflect its lower status. Very few stations on duplicated main lines received buildings on opposite platforms of the same higher-level design featuring brickwork and double-gabled roofs.

The insertion of the station name etched in white glass on a blue background in the lower window sills was a new feature that had been first introduced at Banksia in 1906. Since then, only Bankstown in 1908 and Hornsby in 1910 had featured this innovation. Fassifern became only the fourth station to which this element was applied but, from this time, the use of station names in the lower window sashes became very popular up until 1930.

In 1933, a bushfire severely damaged all the platform buildings. Only the brick walls and awnings of the building on present No. 2 platform remained. The structure was rebuilt to its 1911 plan.

BLACKALLS PARK – THE KNOWN BUILDING HISTORY

The first building on the platform at this station was a simple rectangular, timber structure with a skillion roof measuring on the plan 19 feet 7.5 inches x 10 feet 6 inches. In 1948, the building was to be extended by 12 feet for the growing parcels traffic. In fact, the extension was only 9 feet 6 inches and the external width was 11 feet. The awning over the platform, which was formed by an extension of the roof rafters, was four feet six inches wide.

A new toilet block was approved in December, 1963, and the work was completed on 20th April, 1964. Revolutionary for the time was the use of a single building containing both male and female toilets. There was a wet store separating the two

toilets. Usually, entrances to these facilities were separated as much as possible. The toilet block measured 19'1" by 11'8". The internal walls were rendered. The Department of Railways did not expect the male toilet to be used extensively and provided a urinal of only four feet in length, thereby allowing the standard urinal stall width of two feet for each user.

At the same time as the new toilet block was being provided, the platform wall was renewed. It was constructed of mass concrete poured in situ and it is possible to observe the timber formwork that was used to construct the structure.

TORONTO – THE TERMINAL STATION BUILDING

About the same time the Fassifern building was approved, a new building was also approved for Toronto at the terminus of the branch. This structure was approved on 15th May, 1911, and, like the Fassifern building, was also not completed at the time railway operations commenced on 28th May of that year. The New South Wales Railways since the 1890s had developed different designs for Sydney/Newcastle and most of the remainder of the rail system. The section of line between Sydney and Newcastle was mostly seen by the Railway administration in a superior manner as being part of the Sydney/Newcastle conurbations. The Blue Mountains and the Southern Highlands were similarly treated as being above all other country stations.

In 1911, the overall design policy of the New South Wales Railways was becoming a little more sophisticated and was focusing more on the relative status of location served. It initially seems that the organisation considered Toronto to be an inferior location compared to Fassifern but it may have well been the case that the New South Wales Railways wanted a superior-looking building at Fassifern because it was a junction station on the main line. In this instance, Fassifern got the better structure being of its Railway role, not its social status.

The platform building at Toronto led a very quiet existence from 1911. Improvements to the pathway to the platform were undertaken in 1912. Asphalting of the access ramp and the approach between the street and the platform buildings was carried out in 1951

In 1924, a septic tank was fitted to the toilets at the station.

It was proposed in 1969 to swap the existing general waiting room in the middle of the building with the existing parcels office at the down end of the structure. This was carried out and the end room became the waiting room. Inspections in the 1970s confirmed that the 1969 rearrangement of rooms did take place as the general waiting room was at the extreme down end. However, the present tenant of the building has rearranged the room tablets adjacent to the building doorways as it was in 1911 and, thus, it is difficult to interpret the use of the down end room for the last 30 years of the building's life.

A new door was inserted in the down end wall of the building but this was not related to the 1969 changes and it seems this additional doorway was inserted at an earlier time. The Railways hand also erected an awning attached to the wall at the down end of the building at an unknown date. This awning was used to protect a newsagent.¹ Possibly, the doorway was inserted for the newsagent for him to store magazines and other stores. The newsagency is known to have been operating from at least 1974.² Now, interpretation is additionally difficult because the doorway in the down end wall has been removed and the space it used to serve has now been converted to an office for the tenant. In short, the changes to the down end of the Toronto building remain a bit of a mystery at this time.

At some stage, the detached male toilet on the platform was demolished and the existing toilet adjoining the ladies' waiting room was converted into a unisex facility and a new doorway was inserted into the Fassifern end wall to provide access to the new toilet directly from the platform. There also existed at the far Fassifern end of the platform a timber framed lamp room, which was sheeted externally with corrugated iron.

The platform wall is brick but it has an unusual profile for the coping for 1911 and probably dates from a time after the conversion to railway operation.

Land was acquired in 1911 for a residence for the Station Master at 98 Brighton Street and the plan for the existing timber residence was approved in 1914 and the structure built in that year. It was unusual for the time for the Railways to provide an official residence so far from Railway property.

PRESS REACTION TO THE 1911 TORONTO STATION

There was no joy in the local press about the location of the station. For a start, it was considered that the station was on the wrong side of the line, making it difficult for people with bags to cross the line and negotiate the difficult access pathway. In addition, the Railway Department was criticised for not locating the platform near the existing wharf, which would have allowed for easy interface between land and maritime transport. In fact, there was an accusation that the Railways had stitched up some dodgy deal with the local publican to give him some business.³ It took the Chief Commissioner three months to decide to improve the footpath linking the station and the wharf.⁴

¹ Advice from Margaret Berghofer, Lake Macquarie District Historical Society, 6th May, 2015. Margaret states that an official State Rail photograph taken in 1981 shows the newsagency in position.

² Email from retired Property Manager, Colin Millard on 10th May, 2015. The relevant file was numbered 74/91432 and was brought forward to a new filing system with number 142056 on 5th January, 1977.

³ *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 1st August, 1911, p. 6.

⁴ *ibid.*, 9th November, 1911, p.3.

The location of the station had been an important issue to the local community since early in 1911. In February of that year, the Toronto Progress Association had assembled a petition to the Railway Chief Commissioner about the location of the station. He had replied that the site was chosen as it was the station for the previous tram service and it promised the community that they would be “provided with suitable station building accommodation.”⁵

A COMPARISON BETWEEN FASSIFERN AND TORONTO BUILDINGS

Like the building at Fassifern, the plan for the Toronto structure had no indication of the approving officer nor any alpha-numerical building code, which was usually provided for new buildings on new lines. It was timber framed and clad externally with weatherboards, measuring on the plan 71’ x 12’ internal. As built, the structure at Toronto was 74’ x 12’ external and platform awning was 10’6” wide.

The structures at both Fassifern and Toronto shared basically the same Federation-influenced design and floor plan. However, there were quite a few differences in the details between the two buildings and the Table below sets out these differences in order to demonstrate how the New South Wales Railways played with building elements to reflect superior and inferior station locations.

TABLE: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FASSIFERN AND TORONTO BUILDINGS, 1911

BUILDING ELEMENT	FASSIFERN	TORONTO
External walls	Face brick	1 inch thick, rusticated weatherboards
Internal walls	Plastered	some rooms featured lining boards – other rooms unlined
Windows	Nine panes of white glass in upper sash – milled rolled glass with name of station in lower sash	Each sash containing two pieces of glass – no name in bottom sash
Fanlights above doors	six panes of white glass	one pair of white glass
Moulding	String course around building and above window heads – aprons under window sills	No ornamentation – no timber aprons under windows
Chimneys	Brick with strapwork and terracotta pots	Roughcast cement – no strapwork – no terracotta pots

⁵ *ibid.*, 17th February, 1911, p. 4

BUILDING ELEMENT	FASSIFERN	TORONTO
Entry to general waiting room	Single doors on each side of building with slate thresholds	Open fronted 7'6" wide – no doors
Design of male toilet	Dutch gable	Double pitched, gabled
Wall material for male toilet	Brick	Corrugated iron
Location of male toilet	Immediately at Sydney end of main building	At the extreme Fassifern end of the platform
Use of vertical, curtain boarding	Applied not only to the ends of the awnings but carried across the ends of the building	Restricted to the ends of the awnings – not across the end of the building

Both the buildings at Fassifern and Toronto were members of the same group of buildings that was used between 1892 and 1935 and the hallmark features of the buildings was the nature of the decoration that was applied to the external walls. This group became the first class of buildings to be used on island platforms and the introduction and expansion of the use of the class of buildings matched the increasing use of island platforms on the New South Wales railway system.

It is noteworthy that there were no alpha-numerical codes is written on the plans for the structures. At the time the plans were approved in 1911, the letters "A" and "B" were allocated and used for simple timber buildings with single-pitched roofs – not larger buildings with double-pitched or gabled roofs. It was not until 1913 that the letter "A" was reassigned to gabled roofed structures, such as the buildings at Fassifern and Toronto. More importantly, both the buildings at Fassifern and Toronto were built by the Existing Lines Branch, which did not normally use alpha-numerical designs. It was only that Branch up until 1911 that used the gabled roof structures but, from 1911, the Railway Construction Branch started using the Federation-influenced design on new line construction in rural areas, though only in the most basic fashion.

The buildings at Fassifern and Toronto share many characteristics, including their rectangular shape, the narrow internal width of 11 feet, their gabled roofs and the design of the platform awnings and they do belong to the same class of buildings. However, the differences provided in the above Table demonstrate that the New South Wales Railways could use individual building elements to allocate a status to the station served.

In essence, the building at Fassifern was an example of a structure normally approved for an urban setting. Given the lack of that urban setting, the other reason

why elegant buildings were sometimes erected was due to its railway function. Fassifern was on the main line but, more importantly, it was a junction station and that role possibly demanded a higher level of building presentation than a normal main line station with lower social status. Certainly, the Station Master at Fassifern would have been much more senior than his colleague at Toronto because of the greater complexity of signalling and safeworking required on the main line.

CLOSURE AND AFTER-LIFE

Despite local opposition, the branch line to Toronto was closed on 10th March, 1990, and a bus service was substituted. The Lake Macquarie City Council entered a formal lease of the structure on 25th March, 1993, and handed over the building to the Lake Macquarie District Historical Society. By time the Society took management of the structure, the building was derelict and heavily vandalised. The Society has done a sterling job of building conservation.

The help of Margaret Berghoffer, Gary Hughes, Colin Millard and Ed Tonks is appreciated in the preparation of these notes.

Stuart Sharp

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