



Richard Deiss und Nick Snipes

Grand Central Terminal and the station at the end of the world

Short stories about 222 train stations of the Americas, from Alaska to the Land of Fire



Contents

Foreword

1. **Canada and Alaska**

1.1 Alaska

1.2 Canada

2. **USA ('lower 48')**

2.1 New York

2.2 New England

2.3 Other parts of the Northeast

2.4 Washington

2.5 Michigan

2.6 Chicago and Illinois

2.7 Great Lakes States

2.8 Midwest – Prairie States

2.9 Southern States

2.10 Texas

2.11 Rocky Mountains States

2.12 West Coast

3. **Central America and Caribbean**

3.1 Mexico

3.2 Guatemala

3.3 Nicaragua

3.4 Other Central America

3.5 Caribbean

4. **South America**

- 4.1 Columbia
- 4.2 Venezuela
- 4.3 Brazil
- 4.4 Andean Countries
- 4.5 Uruguay and Paraguay
- 4.6 Chile
- 4.7 Argentina

Annex

- 1. Remarkable Stations
- 2. Models for stations
- 3. The largest stations by passenger numbers
- 4. Amtrak-Stations by passenger numbers
- 5. Comparison Amtrak - Via Rail
- 6. Railway network length in the Americas

Literature

Foreword

In summer 2007 I published the paperback *Palace of a Thousand Winds and Gooseberry Station*, which contained small stories, interesting facts, and anecdotes about 200 train stations worldwide. Over the course of time, more anecdotes accumulated, so in 2008 I published a new edition with 20 more stations, and in early 2009 I finally published a second volume, *'The Gingerbread Station at the End of the World'* with 200 anecdotes about train stations outside Europe.

But since there are many anecdotes, especially about the United States, there was a need for a separate volume on America to accommodate all the stories.

After a first edition in summer 2009, an expanded second edition in October 2009, third and fourth editions 2011 and 2013, this is the first English language version (revised by Nick Snipes) of a slightly changed, updated sixth edition.

This book contains anecdotes and facts about over 200 American train stations (half of which are in the United States). It begins in Alaska on a north-south tour, then covers Canadian stations, returns to the US in the northeast and works its way through Mexico, Central America, Brazil, and the Andean countries to Tierra del Fuego at the 'end of the world'. Stories in which well-known personalities occur are marked by a circle ☉.

A new edition is planned every two years. Hints for other interesting stories and facts about overseas train stations are therefore always welcome.

Berlin, June 2020

Richard Deiss and Nick Snipes

1. Canada and Alaska

The railroad in Canada and Alaska

North America was once the world's leading region in rail transport. Half of all rails around the world, around 500,000 km, were located here; today it comprises only a quarter of all rails. While almost half of the rail network in the United States has been shut down since 1920, Canada has lost only 20,000 of its 70,000 km of track. Nevertheless, in Canada today, rail passenger transport - with a transport performance of around 2 billion passenger-kilometers - plays only a minor role because the population density is low, the distances are simply too great for the train, and more suitable for airplanes. Existing long-distance trains are used primarily for tourism; besides, there is only significant local transport in the metropolitan areas. Accordingly, only train stations in the area of metropolitan rail transport such as Toronto or Montreal are well frequented. The stations are operated by Via Rail, a state-owned railway company that was created in 1978 by separating loss-making passenger traffic from the two major railway companies, Canadian Pacific, and Canadian National Railway.

By contrast, the railroad in Canada is still an important mode of transport in freight transport. Rail freight transport in tonne-kilometers is four times the transport performance provided in Germany. This puts Canada in fifth place worldwide.

In Alaska, railway lines were built late and primarily through government initiatives. Due to the tax revenue from oil production, there is enough money today to maintain the small rail network including the stations and to operate it by the state. The state-owned Alaska Railroad, which owns the

rail infrastructure, describes itself as the 'last integrated railroad in North America', i.e. one that operates passenger and freight transport.

1.1 Alaska

🕒Nenana and the serum

In January 1925, there was a great calamity in the port city of Nome, with its isolated location on the west coast of Alaska. A diphtheria epidemic broke out and this particularly threatened the Eskimo children because they lacked the necessary immunity. Life-saving serum was urgently needed. But how should you get this to Nome? The port of Nome was icy in January and not accessible by ship and there were no roads to Nome. Alaska also had only two transport planes at the time, both of which had never been used in winter. In desperation, they resorted to a combination of rail and sled dog transport. The serum was brought by train from Anchorage to Nenana, a small train station in the interior of Alaska about 60 kilometers west of Fairbanks. From here it was still almost 1000 km to the west coast city of Nome. This route was to be covered with sled dogs on the Iditarod Trail. On January 27, 1925, a dog sled train set out from Nenana station, where the serum was received, to cross the winter hell of Alaska. In total, more than 100 dogs were used. It was thanks to the experienced Norwegian sled dog leader Gunnar Kaasen and his persistent lead dog Balto that the sled dog train arrived in Nome on February 2nd at 5:30 am. Kaasen and his dog became famous, and a bronze statue was built for Balto in New York's Central Park. A Disney film about the events called Balto was also later produced.

Today, the Iditarod dog sled race from Willow to Nome over a longer distance (1868 km) recreates the race over the trail every year in March

1.2 Canada

Craigellachie and 'the Last Spike'

On November 7, 1885, in Craigellachie, British Columbia, the last rail nail was struck into the transcontinental rail link of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Trains stop there today specifically for tourists. However, it wasn't originally the last nail. The railroad financier Donald Smith bent the initial nail on the first hit, so he had to try again with a new one. Additionally, his nail was soon removed - it was given to the son of the patent office president - and replaced by a third to discourage souvenir hunters.

Jumbo and the train

The city of St. Thomas, which was connected to the railway in 1856 and whose current station was built in 1871-1873, was once an important railway hub in the Canadian province of Ontario. 26 different railway companies have served this station over the years and St. Thomas was temporarily considered the Railway Capital of Canada. Since 1985, the statue of the elephant Jumbo stands at the station.

Jumbo was the name of a very large African elephant who was born in French Africa in 1861, imported from a French zoo, and then given to the London Zoo in 1865. The London zookeepers gave it the name Jumbo, which is probably derived from the Swahili jambo (hello). In 1882, the elephant was finally sent to the P. T. Barnum circus company. Barnum made a lot of advertising for the mighty elephant Jumbo, and as a result, jumbo soon stood for big, huge. For example, the Boeing 747 was later also called the Jumbo Jet. But there was something stronger than jumbo.

On September 15, 1885, Jumbo died when he tried to save a baby elephant on the tracks of the St. Thomas train station whilst overlooking a locomotive that was approaching. The baby elephant survived, by the way, but had broken a leg and was therefore put to sleep. Jumbo died at the scene of the accident. The circus Barnum had the elephant stuffed and gave it to Tufts University in the USA, wherein 1975 a fire destroyed the taxidermic animal. In 1985, a hundred years after the death of the elephant, a life-size monument was erected at the St. Thomas train station.

St. Thomas' big train station

But even without the elephant, the St. Thomas train station is something special. When it was completed in 1873, the local newspaper wrote:

"As far as the architectural substance and solidity, the value in use of the interior layout and the dimensions are concerned, there is no passenger station in Canada, but at most in New York and Chicago, which is comparable to that of the Canada Southern society in St. Thomas. "

400,000 bricks were installed in the over 100 m long station building. Today, the disused railway station needs repair and a local association has been founded to collect donations for its renovation and to restore the original condition of the long building block, which today lacks the typical canopy roof.

Ottawa Union Station

When Union Station was designed in Ottawa in 1908, numerous ideas were copied from the Pennsylvania station in New York, which was then under construction. The Penn Station waiting room, which was modeled on the Roman Baths of Caracalla, was simply copied on a scale of 1: 2. As in New York, the building was provided with hollow Corinthian columns on the outside (but not on all sides). In 1956, however, the Roman-style dome was removed in

favor of a flat roof, and in 1966 the station was completely shut down. The tracks that run along the Rideau Canal, where the train station is located, were also dismantled because the canal bank became the promenade. The canal is now even on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The former Union Station is now a government conference center. A newly built modernist metal construction on the outskirts of the city, which was awarded an architecture prize in 1967 yet is essentially uncomfortable - became the long-distance train station.

Halifax's disaster

The architects of Ottawa's Union Station also designed the new Halifax station. The city's old train station was destroyed in 1917 in the worst disaster in Canadian history. In December 1917, a French frigate loaded with explosives collided with a Norwegian steamship in the city's port. This attracted numerous spectators. At the same time, a sailor rushed into the office of the railway dispatcher Vincent Coleman and warned of an impending huge explosion. Instead of getting to safety, Coleman telegraphed an incoming train that had 700 passengers on board. The passengers were saved, but Coleman, like 2,000 others, was killed in the explosion. He is considered a hero in Canada ever since.

☉Saskatoon - the Prime Minister and the newspaper

On the morning of July 29, 1910, the Canadian Prime Minister Sir Wilfried Laurier (1841-1919) arrived by train at Saskatoon, the capital of the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. He had traveled to Saskatoon to lay the foundation of the first university in Saskatchewan. On the platform, he noticed a bright newspaper boy, from whom he bought a newspaper. He asked the newspaper boy how business was going and expressed hope that he would "later make it." After a lively exchange of views, the 15-

year-old newspaper boy suddenly said, "Good, Prime Minister, I have to take care of my business now and, unfortunately, I can no longer waste time with you."

47 years later, the newspaper boy John George Diefenbaker actually did become something, namely Canadian Prime Minister, an office he held from 1957-1963. Diefenbaker died in 1979, almost 84 years old. According to his last will, he was to be buried on the campus of Saskatoon University, the foundation of which helped him to meet Prime Minister Laurier in 1910. His body was brought to Saskatoon in a funeral train and so Diefenbaker returned to the train station, where his career as a newspaper boy began.

The Canadian Pacific train station, built in 1908, was closed to passengers in the 1990s but is a protected building due to its castle-like style. The trains of the Canadian company Via Rail stop today in the sober New Saskatoon Railway Station. There was also a Canadian National Railway (CNR) station in the city. A shopping center was later built on the site. When it was renovated in the 1990s, the facade was changed to resemble that of the old CNR station.

From London to Berlin

Even before the First World War, you could take the train from London to Berlin without changing trains; not in Europe, but rather in Canada. London is a large city in the state of Ontario and Berlin was once the name of another larger city in the same state. Many Germans lived in the former Berlin and there is still a big Oktoberfest in the city today. However, in World War I the name was deemed no longer appropriate and Berlin (and with it its train station) was renamed Kitchener in 1916 after the British field marshal. Anyhow, passenger trains still stop at this city's train station. However, you can no longer travel by train from Berlin to London.

🕒 **Pétain and the renaming**

The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was less fortunate in naming a station in the Kettle Valley in southern British Columbia. This railway line was a great challenge due to the difficult mountain topography in western Canada, where 5000 workers were temporarily involved in the railway construction. The railway line was completed in 1916. In the same year, during the First World War, the Frenchman Philippe Pétain became the 'hero of Verdun' after successfully holding the city against the Germans. The railway company decided to name a station Pétain on the new railway line. In 1940, however, Pétain became head of the Vichy government, which collaborated with the Germans and which was located in the unoccupied part of France. As a result, he had changed from a hero to a collaborator. In 1940, the CPR renamed the station Odlum after a Canadian general. This station did not last long either because the snowy winters and the competition from large semi-trucks hit the railway line in such a way that it gradually shut down since the 1960s, and a cycle path was created on its route (in line with the policy 'Rails to Trails').

🕒 **Toronto Union Station**

Today's Toronto Union Station building was officially opened on August 6, 1927.

The Prince of Wales Edward came on special occasion from Great Britain and ceremoniously cut an opening ribbon with golden scissors.

On the wall of the large counter hall (nicknamed the Great Hall), the names of important destinations that can be reached by train from Toronto have been engraved halfway up. This includes the city of Sault Ste. Marie, which was misspelled as Sault St Marie. To date, the error has not been corrected.

Montreal CPR Windsor Station

The former Windsor station in Montreal is one of the most impressive station buildings in North America.

The Romanesque Revival-style building was designed by New York architect Bruce Price and later a tower was added. It was so large because it served as the headquarters of the Canadian Pacific Railway. When it was completed in 1889, the station building was advertised with the motto 'Beats all creation. The new CPR station.' In 1993, however, the rail connection to the Windsor station was cut and today the complex is purely an office building.

Montreal Gare Centrale / Central Station

The Gare Centrale / Central Station, built in 1943, is now the most important train station in Montreal. Something happened here in 1984 that is unusual for the relatively safe Canada. A bomb exploded in the station, killing 3 French tourists. A retired former American soldier is said to have planted the bomb to protest against Pope John Paul II's visit to Canada.

However, more typical of Canada are attempts to protect against the cold winters. The station, whose tracks run through the tunnel, has a direct connection via the Halles de la Gare to the underground Ville Souterraine/ Underground City - the largest underground complex worldwide with 32 km of pedestrian tunnels connecting shopping centers, apartment buildings, banks, hotels, Museums, universities and subway stations - thus avoiding the cold winter temperatures on the surface.

Quebec-Gare du Palais

The Chateau Frontenac is a hotel built by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1893 and dominates the Québec skyline. Five years earlier, the railway company in Banff had already built a similarly spectacular hotel. Other impressive hotels followed, such as Place Viger (1898) in Montreal (once with