

The railway age came into Perry in 1885. The building of the Northern and Pacific Junction Railway (later the Grand Trunk and the Canadian National) profoundly changed the Township. The railway directly caused the disappearance of Cyprus and the creation of Novar, the growth of Scotia, and the re-location and further development of Emsdale. Being located away from the railway lines, the communities of Swindon and Star Lake became disadvantaged. Railways accelerated the budding commercial lumber industry; numerous lumber mills sprung up and wood products were quickly delivered to markets near and far. Entrepreneurs (primarily from southern Ontario) came to establish mills, general stores, hotels and other businesses. Amid this economic boom, the Township of Perry was incorporated in 1888 and the population reached 900 during the 1891 census. Commercial development was further intensified in the 1890's with the building of J.R. Booth's railway between Parry Sound and the Ottawa Valley (Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway) with Kearney, Scotia and Emsdale being the main beneficiaries. Having railway access to the vast fertile lands of the west, many Perry families were bitten by the western migration bug. Despite this population drain, the 1901 census of Perry recorded almost 1800 inhabitants. During the early 1900's, harvest trains took young labourers to the western provinces. A Novar news correspondent in the Huntsville Forester once lamented the loss of the Village's young men who didn't return from the harvest that year but hastily added they would come back home when gold was discovered here. By 1911, Perry's population has fallen to roughly 1300 souls which included 300 people in Kearney. Statistics from the Ontario Department of Agriculture indicated that Perry Township's population in 1915-1916 was 884 – a further decline.

By 1920, the lumber industry in Perry had begun to wane which negatively affected the entire local economy. The Canadian National Railway closed the eastern arm of the old Booth railway in 1933 when bridge repairs were deemed financially unviable. Perry residents gradually migrated towards jobs in larger industrialized communities such as Toronto and Sudbury; however, Huntsville became a magnet much closer to home. During that time, more cottages were being built on local lakes and housekeeping cabins were erected to accommodate summer visitors. This burgeoning service industry only partially offset other job losses. Throughout The Great Depression of the thirties, many Perry families sought support from the Township. It was an extremely long and difficult period finally terminated by the onslaught of WWII.