

THE CANORA CHRONICLE

"Preserving Railway Heritage for Community and Economic Benefits"



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Canadian Heartland Training Railway and Canadian Northern Society Open House

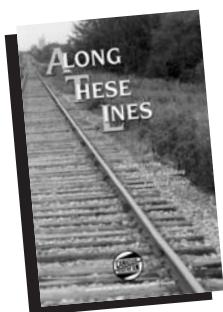
The Canadian Heartland Training Railway (CHTR) together with the Canadian Northern Society hosted over 250 guests on Saturday, August 12, at Big Valley. Visitors were provided with an opportunity to learn about the CHTR's railway educational programs, including an upcoming "conductor training program" that is being offered in conjunction with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, using rail facilities at Big Valley, Warden, and Stettler. Dave Armitage, General Manager of the CHTR remarked, "we were extremely pleased with the turn-out and the genuine interest in the CHTR."

CHTR provided a locomotive for training and operational demonstration to the public, and CHTR representatives were on hand to discuss operational, safety, and training programs. Thanks to Don Gillespie at Alberta Prairie Railway Excursions, a dining car was available for some brief train rides and additional interpretation. Excellent door prizes sponsored by Alberta Prairie, the Canadian Northern Society, and Dominion Railway Services Ltd., were awarded, with the grand prize of a deluxe Alberta Prairie wagon tour going to Marie Gridley of Big Valley.

The event also provided a venue to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Operation Lifesaver—an industry-led program dedicated to public rail safety. Special 25th anniversary pins were handed out, and Operation Lifesaver promotional material—including the Railway Association of Canada's most recent *Interchange* magazine featuring Operation Lifesaver efforts.

Holding the event in the historic railway setting at Big Valley added to the day, with tours of the railway depot, roundhouse, grain elevator, and McAlister's Garage offered. Special thanks to Lois Miller and the Big Valley Historical Society volunteers for their efforts.

Rounding out the event was the presence of a large model railway show in Big Valley, sponsored by a number of groups of modellers coming from among other locations Calgary, Camrose, and Chilliwack. "This show has become an annual event and was the largest 'Free Mo' show of its kind to date," remarked Harry Stuber, Canadian Northern Society director. "This was the third year and it drew by far the most visitors making it an extremely successful event for the modellers."



Limited numbers still available!

Along These Lines books and our special Centennial edition *Along These Lines* DVD are still available. *Along These Lines* book is a wonderfully illustrated publication that tells the story of the Canadian Northern Society and its success in rural heritage preservation.

Please contact Brent Cheek for more information or to order these great centennial items.
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With the DVD available to complement the book this makes a perfect Christmas gift for any railway enthusiast!

Camrose News

It has been a busy but rewarding summer season. Our Volunteer Appreciation evening on September 2 was attended by 42 people. It was a wonderful supper followed by a sing-along with Frank Wilson and Bill Walker. Penny Nelson presented her monologue as Catherine McDonald, one of the first pioneers of the Heather Brae district. Gladys Douglas relayed the story of her Ukrainian family, the Kozaks. The evening ended with a humorous skit by Jessie Asel and Penny. Thank you to all who brought food and who made the evening special by your attendance.

The Garden Party, War Years Tribute, Heather Brae Tribute and Founders Day were very well attended as over 800 people came to these combined events. We are realizing that we require more student hours and will be advocating for these hours in the new year. Thanks especially to Morley Riske and his bands who made the Garden Party and War Years tribute very popular. Jeppa's train was also a highlight for the children and adults alike. Our Ukrainian Buffet was well attended although we didn't have the crowd we have had in previous years. The homemade perogies were wonderful thanks to Gladys.

The last three weeks of the summer were very busy as Penny (summer student) was finished August 5. Thank you to Dorothy Lysons, Carol Roy, Ann Reiten, Carol Rawson, Bill and Gladys Douglas, Carlee and Kalynn Dobos, Korina Cross, Alexa Anderson and Cheryl Prestage who volunteered their help to prepare food and hostess in the Tearoom during this time. Jessie stayed on a week longer than her grant time designated.

The number of projects completed this summer at the station is remarkable. I want to give a special thank you to Murray Roy, Bruce Smith and Bill Douglas. I thank Murray for his inspiration and remarkable gift to envision the projects in a way that conforms with the railway park and in a way that is economically feasible. Murray is working on the plans for the revision of the kitchen as we have had to modify the original plan related to a re-estimate of \$16,000 over the original three years ago. The grant took two years to process. Thank you to Bruce for your constant hard work and the very competent job you do to complete the projects. Thank you to Bill for your hard work and being available to bring a calm and competent presence to the team process. I also want to thank Ferg Kearns and Kurt Bagdan for helping with projects this year. The pergola, trellis seat and walkway, picnic shelter and platform have been completed. Rob Stagg has agreed to start the kitchen revision this fall.

Gary Taylor is a master gardener. He has been writing a column for the *Canadian*. Gary has chosen to do his volunteer hours for the society by donating his time to complete a map of the flower beds for visitors. Gary is a retired teacher and will also host several gardening workshops a year here at the station. Thank you, Gary.

We have hired Nansee Hughes into the position of Administrator. City council has agreed to fund a 20-hour-a-week position.

I would like to acknowledge the following donations to the society and extend our thank you.

- Kate Pasula—\$100
- Ab Krauter—\$75
- Gladys Parent—pictures of her father who worked for Grand Trunk Railway.
- Bill Westergard—Canadian Northern Railway mug obtained from the Meeting Creek station crew when they were dismantling the CN water pump.
- Silver tea service donated by Leo and Effie Regehr.
- W.I. history books for the library *Many and Remarkable* and *Yesterday* by Mildred Liez.
- Tim Bohnet of Azor Lockwork for opening the station safe free of charge.

Please save your gently used white elephant items for our white elephant table. The white elephant table has been very popular and we have made \$500 in the past three months from the table.

Glenys Smith

In History

1856-09-27 (150 years ago): The Grand Trunk Railway opens its broad gauge line throughout between Montréal and Toronto. It was opened in sections as follows:

- Montréal to Brockville: November 17, 1855.
- Oshawa to Toronto: August 11, 1856.
- Brockville to Oshawa: October 27, 1856.

The first through train, consisting of three first-class and three second-class coaches, ran from Montréal (Point Saint Charles) to Toronto (Don Station) and a similar train made the journey in the opposite direction. Departure was at 07:00 from Montréal and 07:30 from Toronto. The trains met in the vicinity of Kingston Junction where a stop of 30 minutes occurred for lunch. The journey took 14 hours.

Welcome New Members

The society would like to welcome new members, Mr. Larry Buchan of Okotoks, Alberta, and Rev. Mr. John Veenstra of Oshawa, Ontario.

Thank you for your support!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to A.N. Krauter of Edmonton for his kind cash donation to the society.

Thank you to long-time supporter and friend of the society Mr. R.A. Spencer for his generous cash donation.

Thank you to Peter Didrichsen of Stettler, Alberta, for his very generous cash donation. Peter is a long-time member and supporter of the society.

Thanks to Morris Henderson at Windwood Signs in Camrose for the discount on the interpretive signs now in the Camrose Railway Station gardens.

Hanna Station On The Move

It appears that the old Canadian Northern Railway depot in Hanna may be on the move. A letter received by the Canadian Northern Society in July from the Town of Hanna indicates that the station will be relocated for "reconditioning" prior to the end of 2006.

Our long-time members will remember that the Canadian Northern Society was instrumental in first preserving this historical railway structure back in the early 1990s. The *Chronicle* will report any further developments.

The Hanna station is a Standard Second Class depot built in 1913. It is virtually identical to the Big Valley station and although it has been modernized over the years, its exterior is reasonably historically intact.

The determined angler staggered up to the counter with an armload of the latest gear. As the cashier was ringing up the total, which came to several hundred dollars, the angler commented, "You know, you could save me an awful lot of money if you'd just start selling fish here."

The Bickleigh Ghost

In 1924, the CPR extended a branchline from Mildred to McMorran in west-central Saskatchewan. Today, these rails have long since been lifted. Heavy steel was laid on this line as it was intended that the line would be built as far as Drumheller, enabling the CPR to access the region's coal deposits and provide an alternative route for grain headed west.

West of McMorran was a huge coulee, and that was as far as the line ever went, as it was decided that it was uneconomic to construct the significant bridge structure that would be required to cross this gorge.

The work of building the branchline was done by horses and manual labour. It was extremely hard work and reports suggested that a number of horses died during the construction and subsequently were buried in the roadbed.

Working on the line was strenuous and often fights would break out among the men. One night after a particularly bitter fight between two men, one man disappeared and was never seen or heard of again. There was some rumours of foul play, and someone suggested "digging in the roadbed to find a body!" but nothing ever became of this, and evidently the man was eventually forgotten about.

After the branch was completed, Bickleigh siding came into being, complete with two grain elevators, a depot, and a section house.

A few years later, in 1932, a series of events took place that brought back memories of the horses who had perished during the construction days, and the disappearance of an "unknown, nameless man."

On a bright moonlit night in the winter, two local sisters, Ivy and Annie Bristow, were coming home in their sleigh after visiting neighbours. As they approached the railway track, their horses suddenly snorted and refused to go any further. The women in the sleigh stood up to see what was frightening the team, and to their astonishment they saw a man on horseback silently galloping down the track. After this apparition had passed out of sight, their horses bolted and galloped wildly down the road for home, with the occupants of the sleigh staring back apprehensively as if trying to ascertain whether they were being followed by a hooved fiend or by the echo of their own horses' hoofbeats.

The next morning the sisters went back with their father to look for hoofprints. Their had been a fresh fall of snow that night, but to their dismay, they found only those left by their own horses.

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"The Bickleigh Ghost," as it became known, did not make its presence felt again until next summer.

Schoolteacher Joe Pitsell and the Pool elevator man Joe Ellis were boarding at the CPR section house. They had a room upstairs which consisted of two single beds on either side of a small table. This table, which was covered by a heavily starched cloth, was used to hold personal sundry items. The coal oil lamp was placed at the back of the table.

One night they had just blown out the lamp and settled into their beds when the both heard articles start to fall off the table. First it was coins that fell and rolled away on the floor, then a knife fell, followed by a pen. One man said to the other "Do you hear that?" and the other replied "I sure do!" With that they both leaped out of bed and struck a match. They saw the lamp on the very edge of the table ready to fall. The starched cloth was crumpled as if a hand had grasped it and slowly pulled it forward. They quickly lit the lamp and looked all around. The door to their room remained closed and nothing else was disturbed. They could find no solution to this phenomenon.

That same summer, at the United Grain Growers elevator, agent Mac McLean and the same schoolteacher were having an early supper. The living quarters for the elevator agent were attached to the elevator office. Up four stairs from the elevator engine room was the elevator office. They had just sat down to eat when they heard someone walk across the floor, come down the steps, and stop at the door of the living quarters.

Mac called out, "Come on in!" There was no answer so he said it again. When no one answered, he said to his friend, "I think someone is trying to scare us. Let's find out who it is." So Mac quickly opened the door to the engine room and ran up the stairs to the office. No one was there. Joe Pitsell ran out the outside door and around the elevator. They met after searching thoroughly but could find no one. They could only attribute this visit to the "Bickleigh Ghost."

George Redhead, who had never heard of the Bickleigh Ghost, bought a half-section of land near Bickleigh, through which ran the CPR. He was breaking up the land and had a small truck cab which he had placed on the ground to sleep in. He had just turned in one night when he heard the sound of a galloping horse. It seemed to be a hard-ridden horse, approaching rapidly. The ground shook from the pounding of heavy hooves, and he was afraid it was going to run into his small shelter. He quickly sprang from his bed and looked all around but could see nothing, despite the fact that the landscape was illuminated brightly by a full moon. The sound of hoof beats gradually receded

into the distance. He was puzzled by this and didn't understand why he did not see the horse.

Another incident near the railway took place in an abandoned house where two men had gone down into the cellar to look for antiques. While they were done their poking around they heard the door upstairs open and someone walk across the floor and stop at the cellar door. They came upstairs to see who it was, but no one was to be found. They went outside and looked around but still found no trace of anyone. There were no other buildings in the yard and no trees—therefore no place for someone to hide. A feeling akin to fear came over them, and they jumped in their car and sped away.

People around Bickleigh have often had the eerie feeling of a "presence" nearby, but nothing tangible has ever been seen.

By Mary O. McLean
— Originally published in the
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About *The Chronicle*

The Canora Chronicle is the quarterly newsletter of the Canadian Northern Society—a registered charity dedicated to providing community service through heritage tourism initiatives.

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