

# THE WHEATLAND ROUNDUP

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## APRIL SHOWERS BRINGS BLOSSOMS TO LITTLE BIG TOWN

Little Big Town keeps getting busier. News of Blossoms opening up shop has the women in town ecstatic. “I will have more than just beautiful bouquets in the store. I will also carry one-of-a-kind furniture and home décor pieces. I plan to be the one-stop-shop for gifts for that special person in your life.” Says Carla, owner of Blossoms. Carla is almost a local to Little Big Town, growing up in Cudworth. She went to the big city of Saskatoon and built a successful business with a stellar reputation and decided to open up a small shop in town.

“I see a real need in Little Big Town for a store like mine. With news of Early’s Seed and Feed also opening a location, I feel it will bring many people to town. The women will have a place to shop when they come to town, and the men will have a place to buy something for their wives to take home with them. Who doesn’t love to get a beautiful bouquet of flowers?” The women in town are buzzing, and they cannot wait and already dropping hints in their men’s ears about how nice it would be to receive flowers for no reason at all. “I have been to Blossoms in the city. The arrangements they have are gorgeous.” Says Betsy Smith. “I am getting hitched this summer and cannot wait to pick out what flowers I will use in the wedding.”

The men, on the other hand, are having more of a mixed reaction. I asked old Joe Jackson if he was excited about Blossoms coming to town, and

he said, “My wife already wants to re-decorate the house and get new furniture from that new store, and it hasn’t even opened yet. It sounds like this store will cost me money” Merv, the Mortician, on the other hand, had a different take. “You know what the best thing about flowers is? They die!” Sheriff Jenkins had no comment but was overheard talking to Carla about a dozen red roses. Adding fuel to the rumors of something going on between him and Big Momma Mopsy.

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# NOBLE NOTATION

## ICE IN THAT, SIR?

Written by Bill Noble

What am I going to have for supper? This is a common question that is quite often answered by a trip to the freezer. And as we search - Hm, I wonder what that green stuff is? - we seldom stop to think that this wonderful convenience has been around for quite a long time. These days, large fleets of 18-wheelers move frozen and fresh food everywhere and freezers and coolers keep it safe until we are hungry. But there was a time when this vital job was handled by railways. There were vast numbers of specialized cars and a gigantic support structure that made it all work; All of it gone from our landscape and evaporated from our memories. This is the story of the railway refrigerator car - the reefer.

A couple of hundred years ago, you ate what you could grow, kill or get from your neighbors. Period. Then in the first half of the 1800s food started to move by train. Grain of course. But also some fruit and vegetables went short distances. And livestock. Producers started to ship live cattle and hogs in stock cars for slaughter in local markets. This worked but losses were a problem. Weight loss and death in transit were significant issues.

In the 1850s an enterprising producer, Gustavus Swift, started to ship dressed beef in box cars with tubs of ice from his Chicago slaughterhouse. This met with limited success - the ice melted quickly. Swift looked for a solution but without much luck. Rail cars of the



day were built from wood and by their very nature had gaps, cracks, and loose-fitting doors. The railroads were not at all helpful. They had a large investment in existing boxcars and wooden stock cars and had a successful business hauling live cattle and hogs. For them, this was a boat that did not require rocking.

Other producers in other parts of the United States were seeking solutions that would enable them to ship their produce to markets that were growing with baby steps. In addition to beef, pork, and chicken, oranges from Florida, peaches from Georgia, and melons and strawberries from California were seeking new markets. Carmakers, entrepreneurs, and tinkerers began to try new ideas and building techniques seeking answers to a simple question - how do we build and operate a railway car that will carry 30 tons of produce and the ice to keep it from spoiling. Across North America?

In 1878, Gustavus Swift commissioned the design and construction of test cars. By 1881, he had a fleet of 200 cars and was shipping 3000 carcasses a week from Chicago to the Boston area alone. In Canada, in 1890 Pat Burns of Calgary started to ship beef and then expanded



to other produce. The race was on. All over the United States and Canada, new concepts were being tried. Construction methods, insulation, and air circulation within the car were subjects of thought and spirited debate. There were dozens of designs that varied widely in detail but were similar in execution. All were double-walled wooden cars with insulation, all gaps sealed, and tight-fitting doors. Insulation techniques matured from horsehair (settled over time) to layers of paper (not very effective), to felt (settled and rotted), flax fiber blankets (expensive and difficult to install), cork (broke up). The industry persevered and today we have fiberglass and other modern materials. Cars were built for the railways and for other private companies. Pacific Fruit Express (fruit from California) began operations in 1907 with a fleet of over 6000 cars. At the peak in the early 1930s, there were over 183000 ice-cooled reefers in operation across North America.

Ah yes. Ice cooled. A refrigerator car needed about 5 tons of ice to keep its 30 or so tons of food safe. And, even with ever-thicker walls and better insulation that ice melted. Reefers needed to be re-iced at least 7 times in a journey across Canada or the U.S.

Railways established ice storage warehouses and icing platforms every 200 to 300 miles along their main routes. That is a bunch of ice. At its peak in the 1930s, ice-cooled reefer operations consumed 13 million tons of ice annually. The industry to harvest or create that much ice was vast. During winter, gangs of laborers cut ice in large blocks from frozen lakes and rivers, then the coffin-sized blocks,

each weighing 200 to 300 pounds, were loaded onto trucks or wagons and then put into boxcars for shipment to nearby ice storage warehouses. These large structures, each the size of several barns, were built from heavy planks. The ice blocks were stacked in the icehouses and insulated with sawdust to keep the ice from melting until it was needed. While natural ice was used in Canada and the northern U.S., in warmer climates such as Florida or California, thousands of tons of ice were frozen in large refrigeration plants.

Reefer operation was straightforward and labor-intensive. Icehouses included icing platforms that ranged in length from a dozen car lengths to over 100 car lengths. The platforms ran along the front of the icehouse and were raised up to the height of the car roof. Hinged panels, the size of large doors folded out onto the cars to form a continuous work surface. Each reefer had an ice bunker at each end with a capacity of 2 to 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  tons of ice. In the car roof over each bunker were two meter-square hatches that hinged up to give access. As the train approached, ice blocks were taken from the icehouse and the sawdust hosed off. The blocks were moved along the platform on a conveyer and then



(Icing refrigerator cars at Canadian National's Pointe-Saint-Charles, Montreal, 1941. Photo Courtesy Canadian Museum of Science and Innovation)

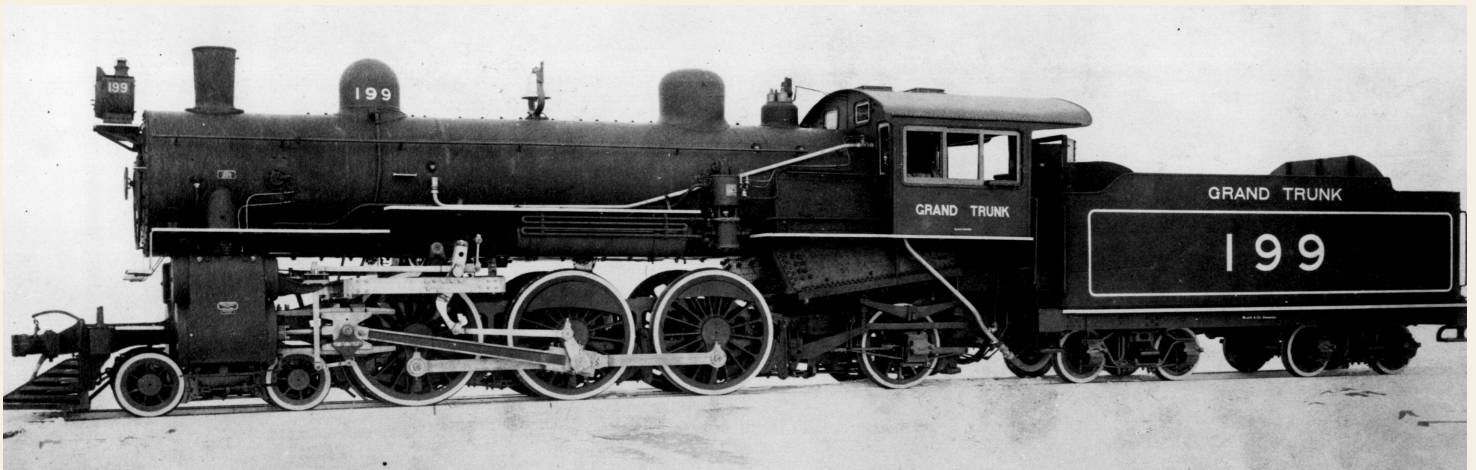
shoved onto the car roofs by laborers with crowbar-like picks. More strong men with ice picks then broke the large blocks into the hatches and added a few pounds of rock salt to lower the melting temperature of the ice. At some icing facilities, ice blocks were mechanically crushed and mixed with rock salt. The resulting slush mixture was then poured in to top up the ice bunkers. Then the hatches were slammed shut, the platform extensions were lifted off the cars and the train was on its way. The brawny choreography was over in a few minutes. This same scene was played out hundreds of times daily all over Canada and the U.S. and thousands were employed.

The reefers themselves were delightfully distinctive. In sharp contrast to drab brick red boxcars and black tank cars, the brightly painted reefers really stood out. Each company's cars were painted in individual

colours with logos and bright lettering. Pacific Fruit Express cars were yellow with red roofs. Labatt's Brewery cars were a dignified green.

Canadian National had a fleet of silver cars to reflect the heat of the sun. Heinz 57 cars featured a large green pickle on a white car with bright red lettering - a personal favorite.

There are still railway refrigerator cars but they are reduced in number and rather ordinary in appearance. Heavily insulated and chilled by starkly efficient refrigeration units they go quietly about their business moving frozen foods. The gaily-painted reefer and the huge ice infrastructure that they required is gone - preserved in historians' photographs and drawings and in countless basement model railway empires. Reminders of a time gone by.



A Look Back - Grand Trunk Number 199 is a typical passenger engine of the period when our Wheatland tracks were laid down (ca 1910). Engines of the time, particularly passenger engines, were polished by hand (wiped down) by labourers called Wipers every day when they were prepared for a run. Photo Courtesy Canadian Museum of Science and Innovation

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## WHEATLAND EXPRESS FAQ'S

What wildlife will I see aboard the Wheatland Express? **Black bears, Cougars, Deer, Birds, Foxes, Gophers, Rabbits.**

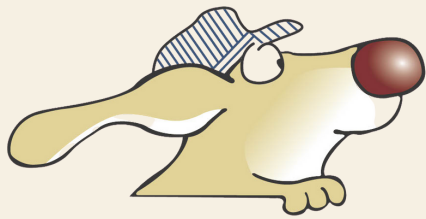
What is the maximum speed the Excursion Train Travels at? **15mph**

Who owns the train tracks the Wheatland Express rolls on? **Wheatland Rail**

Does the rail line get used for anything other than train excursions? **Yes, it is used to service grain elevators and to store rail cars.**

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# SPIKES SAFETY SCOOP

Hello kids, my name is Spike, the safety dog! If there is one thing I love more than treats, it's getting to go play on my farm. The best part is getting to run around in the fields and take rides on all the fun farm vehicles. I love riding quads on the farm! I always wear a helmet and never ride on or close to railway tracks. If I have to cross the tracks, I only use designated crossings. Did you know that most farm railway crossings do not have any lights, bells, whistles, signs, or gates? That is why it is so important that you stay alert around railway crossings, no matter what kind of farm machinery you are on. Don't forget to listen and look both ways before crossing. If your vehicle ever gets stuck on the tracks, make sure you get off right away and stand a safe distance away from the tracks. Call the railway company (you can find their number on the back of the crossbuck) and let them know your vehicle is stuck. Now that you know a few tips for staying safe while having fun on the farm, I am going to go for a ride on my big tractor! Happy farming!



-Spike the safety dog





# OPERATIONS UPDATE

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## Wheatland Express Safety Train

For the month of April, The Canadian Safety Train Express is celebrating 4 years of our program's success. In April of 2017, the Canadian Safety Train Express received a 2-year grant from Transport Canada to develop and operate a safety train. Since then, we were also approved for a 2019-2022 term to continue with our program. This program educates members of our target audience on railway safety awareness using hands-on materials, a locomotive simulator, and the train itself. As of April 2021, the Canadian Safety Train Express has educated over 4,200 members of our target audience and distributed over 13,000 activity books. We are excited to continue, and we genuinely believe that our program is making a difference to decrease the amount of preventable crossing and trespassing incidents. See tracks? Think train.



## Wheatland Express Learning Centre

"Do You Hear It?" is an exhibit that we developed to teach members of our target audience exactly how dangerous distracted driving can be. The participant will be sitting in a demo car in the driver's seat. We will have an iPad mini mounted on the right by the radio just like many do in their vehicles. The person will be driving on a road that will eventually come to a passive railway crossing with an oncoming train. While driving, we will ask them to "send a text", "send an email" or "find a song". While doing this, they will become distracted and not notice the oncoming train which will lead to an accident simulation. With this exhibit, we hope to encourage people not to use distractions while driving and for them to realize how quickly one can become distracted while driving.







## Great Sandhills Railway

The storage car business continues to hold its own and is keeping us busy. We are planning our track work around the first two weeks of June, where we will be changing ties and will have the tamper come in and do some surfacing.

We had issues with our baggage car despite the fact it says on the waybill "Do not Hump" CN rail humped the car in Chicago breaking the end coupler. Couplers that old are hard to find but we did find one in Texas and are in the process of shipping it North. It's like Ground Hog Day, as you may recall when we shipped our diner car on CN from Buffalo, they lost it for several weeks.

We are making steady progress on what we call the "Stettler car." This car will be able to handle both students and folks with mobility issues. It will also be the home of our new onboard store and what might be the largest washroom on any rail system. We are hoping to hire one if not two more people to help with the repairs to the excursion cars.



## Wheatland Charities Inc.

Karen has a new foster dog in her home. Flash is a 7mth old puppy that has had a few bad shakes in his young life. He was brought into the shelter with his littermates when he was a few months old. He was adopted briefly, but it wasn't meant to be, and he was returned. He's had some bad experiences with people, so he is working hard on rebuilding his trust. Once he trusts you though, he's a very cuddly lap dog and will melt your heart with his playful puppy cuteness.

Flash loves going on walks, chasing leaves, playing with other dogs, and of course, treats. He's slowly working up the courage to meeting new people and has settled in nicely to his foster home.

Karen is well on her way to completing the PACE (Positive Approach Canine Education) training course and will soon be a certified dog trainer.



## Wheatland Express Excursion Train

April has been a very exciting and busy month at Wheatland Express. We have completed a few of our ongoing projects with great results that we can't wait to share with you. We are also preparing for our return to tours. Though our opening dates are uncertain, we are optimistic and ready to roll. Haley is having a fantastic time receiving calls from our valued guests and can't wait to meet them in person.

Rendez-vous Canada, the premier Canadian Tourism show, is just around the corner from May 15 to 17. Our amazing executive director Ashlyn can't wait to showcase Saskatchewan to the domestic and international markets. Stay safe, and we can't wait to see you on board.

Did you know America's first  
steam locomotive lost a race  
to a horse?

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# EMPLOYEE PROFILE

**Name:** Merv Cleaveley

**Born:** Tisdale, SK

**Currently Reside:** Cudworth, Sk

**Work History:** Has worked as a carpenter all over Canada

**Favorite Movie:** The Quick and the Dead

**Favorite Sports Team:** Edmonton Oilers

**Favorite Wheatland railcar:** The new Budd Rail Cars

**Did you know:** Merv is Little Big Town's resident Mortician! Look for him this summer in character.



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## STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

### HOW TIMBIT SEE'S IT

Neigh there. I am Timbit, a reporter for the Wheatland Round-Up my job is to keep the folks of Little Big Town updated to the goings-on on all things four-legged. It has been an exciting few weeks here at the farm. Spring clean-up is well on its way. Not only is the farm getting spruced up, so are we! The fur is literally flying around here as the humans are getting us all cleaned up. Tommy and Jerry finally got put to work. Let's see how they liked it.

Hey Tommy and Jerry, see you guys got put to work finally. How did it go?

"I couldn't believe it, and here I thought I was just here to be the farm greeter. I didn't know I was going to have to work?" says Tommy.



"Now Tommy, it wasn't that bad. Actually, I was surprised you pulled half your weight. I was a little worried being hooked up with you for the first time that I would have to do all the work, but you pulled through. Next time when we are getting harnessed though, can you not chew on my harness? I like to look my best." States Jerry.

"Well, I was hungry, and there was no food around the hitching post. They could at least give us a snack while we are there." Tommy says.

Do you really think you need a snack? I was watching them harness you two, and they had to let your harness out quite a few notches. Jamie could hardly get the collar over your fat head.

"Never mind Timbit. Why were you not having to work?" asks Tommy.

"Because you guys are the muscle, I am the brains and looks. I don't hear people looking at you two and saying, "Awe there so cute," it is more like, "Wholly smokes, those guys are big."

"I take offense to that. I am more than just muscle." Says Jerry.

Okay, maybe you are Jerry. I'm not sure about this one though. I do have to admit you guys looked pretty good hitched up and pulling that wagon, and I was almost impressed. I hear you guys are getting baths next.

"You've got to be kidding me? If that's true that Jamie is in for a surprise, I hope she wears a bathing suit because she will be wearing more water than I will be." Tommy says.

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# 2021 WHEATLAND EXPRESS SCHEDULE

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Wheatland Express is committed to re-opening as soon as conditions permit us to do so. Here's a glimpse of what we have planned for you so far in 2021! Had tickets for 2020? Your tickets are valid for rescheduled tour dates. Ticket holders can expect to receive an e-mail from us with event updates and options if they cannot make the 2021 date.



## JULY

- 03 - Prairie Train Heist Excursion
- 10 - Cowboy Showdown & Country Cookout  
Excursion
- 11 - Murder on the Wheatland Express Excursion
- 17 - Eagles Tribute Excursion & Dinner Show
- 18 - Prairie Train Heist Excursion
- 25 - Family Summer Express Excursion

## AUGUST

- 08 - Prairie Train Heist Excursion
- 22 - Murder on the Wheatland Express Excursion
- 28 - CCR Reprisal - CCR Tribute Excursion &  
Dinner Show
- 29 - Family Summer Express Excursion



STAY TUNED FOR ADDED DATES, TOURS  
AND TRAVEL OFFERS!

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[www.wheatlandexpresstrain.ca](http://www.wheatlandexpresstrain.ca)