

# THE WHEATLAND ROUNDUP

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## EXPANSIONS IN LITTLE BIG TOWN

It has been a slow start to the year for Little Big Town. The Wheatland Express has been parked for the season and will be started up again for the next season in June. As a fellow town's person the uneventful start to January has been nice, especially after the crazy election season we just had! As a reporter for the Wheatland round-up, this is not ideal.

Although, the bustle of Little Big Town has slowed down, the gossip has not. Many recall the promises of changes and expansions to the town made by the re-elected mayor and can't wait to find out what the plans are. Areas of the town have been blocked and construction can be heard behind the walls.

I asked a few folks who were out and about enjoying the weather if they had any ideas of what new businesses they thought the new expansion of the town could bring.

"I don't know about the rest of y'all but I do hope a barber shop opens up sometime soon! This beard is gettin' long and I really don't want to have to drive to the nearest city to get it cut no more." Said one man of the town.

"Me and my friend have been talkin', her husband is a construction man you know, and he is almost certain that there will



be a flower shop opening up. I certainly do hope he's right! Nothin' makes me happier than decorating my front porch with beautiful flowers in the springtime!" another lady added.

I also made a trip down to the sheriff's office to ask the sheriff, who ran for mayor in the summer, what he thought about the construction.

"One of the promises that both me and the mayor made during the election season was that the crime would slow down in this small town. Now at this time, the criminal activity has been minimal, but if the mayor was a smart man he would make renovations to this jail we got. We need to be ready for the worst at all times and these small jail cells won't keep no one in for long, especially none of those blackjack gang members!"

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# NOBLE NOTATION

## WHEAT IN A BOX

Written by Bill Noble

A while back, we took a look at the classic wood grain elevator in “Giants On The Horizon”. This time let’s continue the story and follow the grain as it journeys from the elevator to market. It is important to note that, until the advent of grain hopper cars in the 1970s, Canadian grain moved in ordinary railway boxcars - the freight train’s “maid of all work”.

In 1883, the first western grain shipment was wheat from Manitoba that was shipped on the CPR from Winnipeg through Port Arthur to Toronto or Montreal over what would become known as the “National Grain Route”. At first, the wheat was carried in 100-pound sacks in boxcars. Along the journey, the sacks were manhandled from train to boat, barge and finally train again. Moving increasing quantities of grain in sacks was obviously a non-starter. However, the railways were unwilling to invest in specialized cars to carry grain. The solution was to load unbagged grain in a standard boxcar. The issue was how to “fix” the car so the grain wouldn’t be contaminated or leak from the rough wooden structure or push out past the simple sliding doors.

As we left the story, the grain had been delivered by the farmer to the elevator and was sitting in one of the tall narrow bins in an elevator, probably one of several along “Elevator Row” in a typical small Saskatchewan town. As the harvest continued, the elevator filled and it became time to move the grain. For my Dad, an



elevator agent for the Searle Grain Company, the next step was a short walk across the tracks to the railway station to speak with Mr. Wood, the Canadian National Railways Station Agent in our small town of Girvin and order some cars. Very shortly, the requested cars would be dropped off on the elevator track and the loading process would begin.

Elevator tracks were built with a slight slope and each elevator had an arrow painted on it pointing downhill. The freight train crew parked the delivered cars on the uphill side of the slope. Individual cars were then moved to the loading spout by the elevator agent using a car mover as shown in Figure 1. The car mover combined a stout wooden pole and a pry bar base with a moveable shoe that gripped the rail as the car was levered forward. The car’s own hand brake kept the car under control.



The next step was to inspect and clean the car. The car was shoveled and swept to remove any dirt or material such as spilled grain or spoiled produce that could contaminate the grain. Any old packing or dunnage material was removed.

Next, the car was "coopered". In this important step any holes or gaps in the wooden interior were covered using boards nailed over the holes or heavy brown craft paper stapled in place. Then heavy wooden "car doors" were nailed over the boxcar's sliding door openings from the inside to prevent the dense cargo from bursting out. These car doors were built and supplied by the railway. These car doors were simple rough wood structures that were stacked from floor to about two feet from the ceiling. Figure 2 shows a "coopered" boxcar with its car doors in place. The two-foot gap at the top permitted the grain to be loaded. The origin of the term "cooper" is a bit murky, but it is thought to have a connection with wooden barrel makers - coopers.



Now came the step we have been anticipating - loading the car. Using a combination of gravity, elevating the grain and some shoveling, the grain was dropped into the loading hopper where it was weighed, lifted to the top of the building and dropped into the loading pipe which shot it into the car. The shoveling came

when the agent crawled into the car to level the load - a dusty job.

This sequence was repeated about twenty times to fill each boxcar. As a guide, boxcars had marks stenciled on their interior walls to indicate a safe load for each type of grain. Denser grain such as wheat or flax had lower loading limits while lighter oats had the highest load marks. When the load was at the proper level and leveled, the boxcar doors were rolled shut and latched and a metal seal with a unique serial number was applied to both doors. The seals, which could only be removed by breaking them, ensured the integrity of the load until it reached its destination. Finally, the loaded car was moved downstream of the elevator and parked to await pickup by a freight train. The cycle was then repeated for all the cars. A prairie elevator would load about 150 cars per year.

The cars were collected by a way-freight and pulled, in ever increasing numbers down the branch line to the main line. Along the way, the cars were routinely inspected to check for any problems with their running gear as well as to detect any grain that might be leaking. Leaky cars were repaired rapidly. Ultimately, the loaded cars, by now part of a long manifest train, would reach a large terminal elevator at Vancouver or Fort William/Port Arthur. At the terminal, the grain in each car was sampled and tested to confirm its variety, grade and moisture. At the unloading pit, the boxcar doors were rolled open and the grain doors removed. Care was taken to limit damage to the doors. Rough wood or not, the doors cost money and were recycled as much as possible. A solution at many terminals was a large hydraulic ram that pushed the doors in with

its nails. As the door was pushed in, grain spilled out until there was enough space for workers to enter the car and clean it out. A later development permitted the car

to be picked and tilted in all directions to spill out all the grain. The grain was now ready for the next phase of its journey along the National Grain Route.



## SPIKES SAFETY SCOOP

Hi there everyone! It's me, Spike the safety dog! I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and a very happy new year! Can you believe it's already 2022? I sure can't! I can still remember my first round-up feature where I taught you all about train safety. Speaking of which, that's what we should do now! Did you know there are over 24,000 railway crossings in Canada? That's why it is soooo important that we stay safe around every railway crossing we see! Only cross the tracks at crossings, always STOP, LOOK and LISTEN, and remember, trains can come at any time and from any direction! Oh look, here comes one of the locomotive engineers now! I'm going to see if he has any treats to give me. Bye for now!



-Spike the safety dog



Help Spike get  
some new  
coveralls!

Colour Spike as best  
as you can

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

# OPERATIONS UPDATE

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## Wheatland Express Safety Train

As we are now a month into the new year, we have been spending some time reflecting on last year. We are proud to report that even through the difficulties of the pandemic we were able to educate 1561 members of our target audience through live in-person learning as well as live Zoom presentations. We were also able to hand out over 12,000 of our safety activity books which we offer in both English and French.

Looking back at the last year we are also extremely proud to announce that we had our largest group of people out for our on-board train safety class which consisted of 94 students. Another major highlight was adding the language of Cree to our Activity Books. In both the English and the French books, we added a word search in which the children can learn what the railway term are in all 3 languages, and from what we have heard it was a big hit among the students. We are looking forward now to 2022 and making plans to make it our best year yet.



## Great Sandhills Railway

Snow and cold caused it's usual problems this month. We have completed the install of locomotive hot starts in each of the locomotives, a system very similar to the block heater in your vehicle! This will allow us to shut down the locomotives when not in use, reducing idling time .

The group is working on the western town in Cudworth and have just completed the blacksmith shop and the barber shop and are now working on the water tower. We have 12 full time people working at Cudworth in January .

Issues are developing that may be putting the Wakaw project in jeopardy. It is unfortunate but the coming week will determine if it has a chance to continue.

We are gathering material to begin work on the 2nd baggage car. We hope to see the sleeper car on it's way from Florida soon.



## Wheatland Express Learning Centre

The Learning Centre also did some reflecting this month of 2021. We got a lot done in 2021 even though Covid-19 tried its best to slow us down. We were able to utilize the green screen with all our live in person safety train presentations and it was a big hit among our students. Having a picture with Spike to take home was a great reminder of all the safety tips they learned. We also were able to test out All Aboard with our audience at Agribition as well as our interactive map which gets you to point out all the dangers you can recognize in a town with railway track within it. We are just about ready with Train Trivia exhibit and cannot wait for you guys to play it.

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## Wheatland Express Excursion Train

Wheatland Express is off to a busy start for 2022 with new projects and exciting new adventures to offer to our valued customers. We have already seen a fair number of bookings for this upcoming 2022 excursion season. Even though we are not running the trains in the winter months we are excited to be planning great adventures and one-of-a-kind memory excursions for the whole family to enjoy. Can't wait to see everyone on board starting June 4 with our Johnny Cash dinner show. Stay tuned for more updates.



## EMPLOYEE PROFILE

**Name:** Mélissa Gagnon

**Born:** Roberval (Lac-Saint-Jean), Québec

**Currently Reside:** Saskatoon, SK

**Work History:** Before working for the Wheatland Express, Mélissa was a coordinator at l'Association Jeunesse Fransaskoise

**Favorite Show:** New Girl

**Favorite Athlete:** Skateboarder Nyjah Huston

**Favorite Wheatland Railcar:** Safety Car – GSR 2018

**Did you know:** Mélissa studied leisure management in Montreal and joined the Wheatland Express team in October 2021!



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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's finally warming up around the farm so I thought it would be the perfect day to leave my warm, cozy shelter and go visit Choo!

Hi there, Choo! What a funny name... Why do they call you that?

"Hey Timbit! Actually, my full name is Takinthenitetrain but they nicknamed me Choo because that's the sound a train makes. Choo chooooo!"

Well that makes more sense! What have you been up to around the farm?

"Right now I haven't been doing all too much. I did a lot of racing in the summer and fall but now, since the racing season is finished for the winter, I get a few months to relax and eat all the hay I can fit in my belly! I've also been having a lot of fun with my pen mates, Shannon and



Flower. We like to do a lot of running around so that all the hay and grain we eat doesn't go straight to our hindquarters!"

That's a very good idea. I might need to start doing that too! I've been asking the other four-legged animals on the farm how they have been keeping warm during the winter. Do you have any tips?

"Like all of us, I try and grow a thick fluffy coat to protect me from the wind and snow. It's also important that I eat a lot of hay. Did you know that when we digest hay it actually produces heat? That helps a lot on the cold winter days. And even though the girls don't like it much because it wastes hay, I lay down in my round-bale to block the wind. "

Good idea! Thanks for your time today Choo! I better get back to my pasture. I can hear Sven and Shrimp calling for me! See you around!

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# 2022 WHEATLAND EXPRESS SCHEDULE

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## JUNE

04- Johnny Cash Dinner Show  
11- Prairie Train Heist  
12- Murder Mystery  
19- Prairie Train Heist  
26- Family Summer Express

## JULY

03- Murder Mystery  
10- Prairie Train Heist  
16- Dinner Show  
17- Murder Mystery  
24- Family Summer Express  
31- Prairie Train Heist

## AUGUST

14- Murder Mystery  
21- Murder Mystery  
28- Prairie Train Heist

## SEPTEMBER

10- Prairie Train Heist  
17- Prairie Train Heist  
24- On-board Dining

## OCTOBER

28- Halloween Ghost Train  
29- Halloween Ghost Train  
30- Halloween Ghost Train

## NOVEMBER

20- Christmas Express  
26- Christmas Express  
27- Christmas Express



STAY TUNED FOR ADDED DATES, TOURS  
AND TRAVEL OFFERS!

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