

## "Wapella Jubilee"

by Douglas R. Phillips

For me, July 1955 was to be the last great summer for watching passenger trains on the Canadian Pacific mainline on the prairies. What I did not know then was that I was watching what was to be a slow beginning of an end to a way of life that would in a generation end forever. The time is 08:35, a summer's day at Wapella, Saskatchewan, mile 102.4 on the CPR's Broadview Subdivision. The train is eastbound No 54, the "Broadview-Brandon Local" - see painting on Page 4.

In 1882 on the new Canadian Pacific Railway, the track laying season began just west of Oak Lake, NWT, now Manitoba. Those same rails would pass through this location on June 29, 1882, and the site would be first named 'siding number 7'.

The name Wapella has been found to have various meanings, "water underground" and "gently falling snow". It would appear that "gently falling snow" is more likely as "wape" means "to snow" in the Dakota language group, as this would seem to be consistent with the dominant Indian dialects in the Wapella district.

The station structure, the second for the town, opened in 1905, replacing a Van Horne designed type structure, built in 1883. CPR records indicate 1905 was the date of construction, and plans for the station were drawn-up in 1904 at the office of Chief Engineer, Western Lines, Winnipeg. The building is very similar to the 1899 field stone structure at Virden, Manitoba, designed by the famous Canadian railroad architect William Pratt. The station would be improved upon again in 1940. In July of 1955 the station was 50 years old, and it was in its 'Jubilee' year.

Station Agents over the years were: Mr. Benoit (1883), Mr. Chas. Williams, Mr. S.W. Hooper, Mr. F. Mc Alpine, Mr. Mc Laren, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Don Black, Mr. Jack Corbett and Mr. E. Gatey. The station telegraph call signal was "WA".

In 1907, my great uncle, Robert Winters started work here as a caretaker and would later retire as station agent at Provost, Alberta, in the mid-1950s.

The milk and cream cans were regulars on the trip to Brandon and return on Train Nos. 53 and 54, as many of the farms in the area were mixed farms, including my uncles' located seven miles south of town. My grandmother's house was located a few blocks east of the station on South Railway Street. Many other express items would come by way of this train, usually ordered through the catalogue and of all the trains passing through town this one was my favourite. Another counterpart ran west of Broadview to Regina and a third Regina to Moose Jaw.

The empty cans standing on the platform are from the previous evening, waiting for the various owners to retrieve them. The agent loads the last of the loaded milk cans into the express car. A postal employee from the mail car walks down the far end of the platform to retrieve mail from one of the two post boxes located on the front wall of the station. One was lettered 'For the West' the other was lettered 'For the East'. Later, after the train had departed, the train courier from the post office would arrive to pick up any mail left for the town and district. It was an important part of the mail service, and he could be seen going back and forth twice a day, six days a week between the post office and train, pushing his mail cart.

In 1905 Saskatchewan became a province. Wapella was no longer in the District of Assiniboia, North West Territories, but in the new Province of Saskatchewan. 1955 was the province's 'Jubilee' year and the town's population at this time was approximately 675 and would have reached its zenith.

The locomotive 2911 was built by the Canadian Locomotive Company, Kingston, Ontario, the second in an order of 20 (2910-2929) 4-4-4 type steam locomotives named "Jubilee" in honour of the 50<sup>th</sup> year (1936) of the inauguration of Canadian Pacific Railway transcontinental service. Designated class F1a, these small engines were designed by H.B. Bowen and built in 1937. The fast, local intercity services for which they were designed for never materialized and 15 were assigned to secondary local passenger service on the prairies. However, one assignment, to the west of Wapella, the Regina-Moose Jaw 'local' train, called for the 16.4 km (10.2 miles) between Pasqua and Bella Plaine, Saskatchewan, to be effected in ten minutes, an average start-to-stop speed in excess of 98 km (61 mph). This was, for some time in the late-1940s and early-1950s, the fastest scheduled speed attained by a Canadian passenger train. The trip on No. 54 to Brandon would have similar fast starts and stops.

Engine Number 2911 was retired from service and scrapped at Winnipeg in May 1957. It and engine 2910 were of the last locomotives assigned to this train.

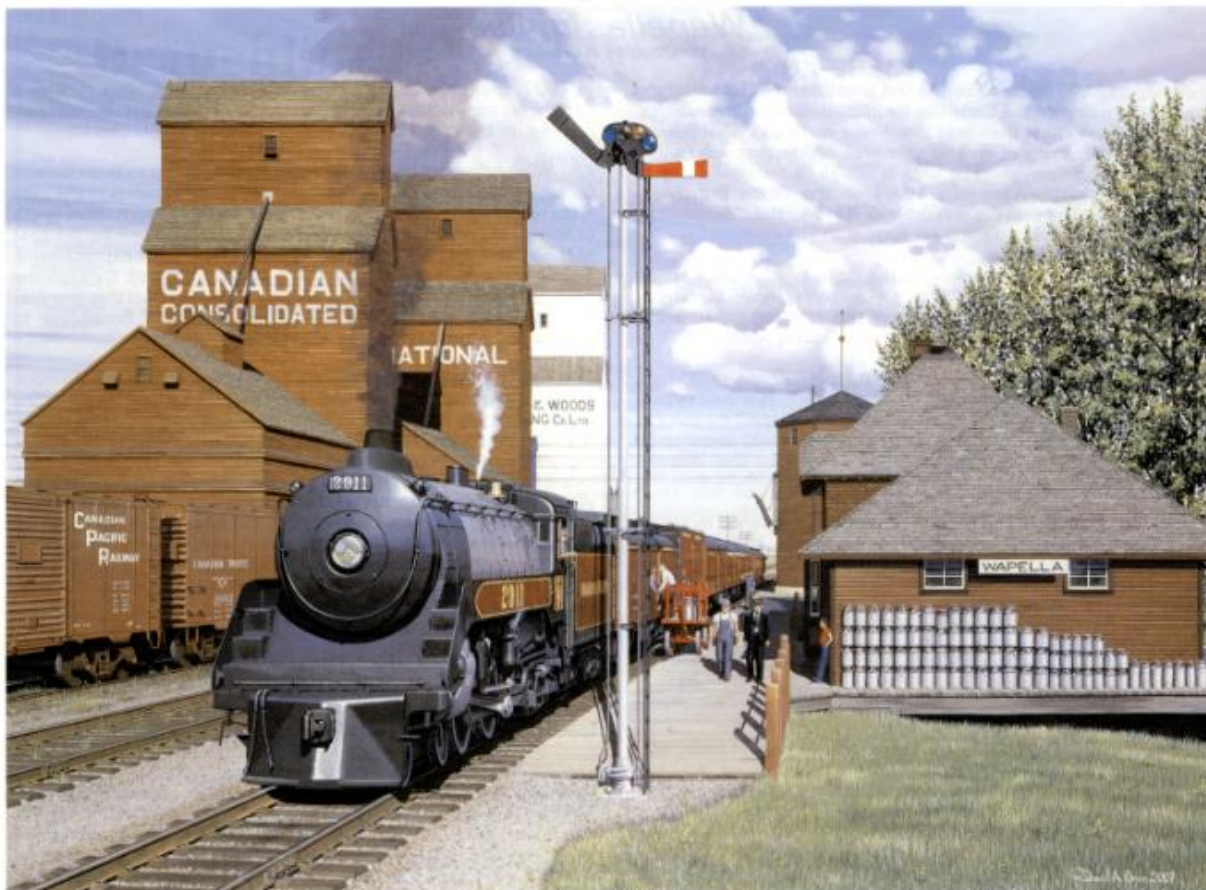
In the summer of 1955, ten passenger trains passed through Wapella during a week day, five trains in either direction, but only three, in each direction would stop.

02:29 eastbound - No 18 carrying express and mail (old No 2).



A westbound freight passing through Wapella, Saskatchewan in summer of 1954. Photo by W.R. Hooper, Revelstoke, B.C.





"Wapella Jubilee", painted by David Oram of Newmarket, Ontario, in February 2007.

03:00 westbound - No 1 "The Canadian", no stop  
 03:51 westbound - No 17 carrying express and mail (old No 1).  
 06:55 eastbound - No 2 "The Canadian", no stop  
 08:32 eastbound - No 54 The Broadview-Brandon "Local", daily except Sunday  
 12:35 eastbound - No 6 (known locally as "The Advanced Dominion"), no stop  
 13:18 eastbound - No 8 "The Dominion" stops to detrain from Regina and west and entrain for Winnipeg and east  
 15:00 westbound - No 5 (known locally as "The Advanced Dominion"), no stop  
 15:52 westbound - No 7 "The Dominion" stops to entrain revenue passengers for Regina and west and to detrain revenue passengers from Winnipeg and east  
 19:34 westbound - No 53 The Brandon-Broadview "Local", daily except Sunday

The train order signal displays rule 401A 'Stop for Orders' (form 19 R train order) for westbound trains, indicating a restriction order is in place to the next train for the west. The other signal, for eastbound trains, displays a caution signal for 19 Y orders, already delivered to Train 54, Engine 2911, on its arrival at the station.

The "Local", No 54, was discontinued on February 4, 1956. It was considered by most to be an institution on the main line west of Brandon going back to the 1890s. The last train crew members were: conductor Maurice Long, engineer Park, trainman

G. Farrar and fireman G. Wylie. The express messenger was Mr. M. J. McKinnon. Another fireman who would have worked this train from time to time would be none other than Lawrence Stuckey, western Canadian rail photographer from Brandon, Manitoba.

Mail and express service on the subdivision was replaced by Trains 17-18 and 5-6. Trains 5-6 were Toronto-Vancouver in summer months and Toronto-Calgary in winter. This train would be discontinued September 1960. Trains 17 and 18 would be replaced in the fall of 1956 with Moose Jaw -Winnipeg overnight Trains 43 and 44, only to be discontinued in June of 1960.

The water tank and pump house, built just prior to the completion of construction of the station, were both removed in the summer of 1962. The position of the ball on top of the tank indicates the amount of water in the tank.

Wapella had what was called in railway terms lap sidings. Here two sidings existed, one on the south side of the main track (68 cars) and one on the north side (82 cars), but the west and east ends of the two sidings overlapped each other allowing for three way train meets. This unusual arrangement was necessary due to the amount of freight and passenger train traffic on the single track portion of the Broadview Subdivision between Virden, Manitoba (mile 47.2) and Whitewood, Saskatchewan (mile 116.5). Initially the only other such siding arrangement like this was at Elkhorn, Manitoba (mile 64.1). Later Red Jacket,



Moosomin, Fleming and Hargrave would have the sidings as well on this 69 mile stretch.

The CPR main line between Port Arthur (Current River, Ontario) and Swift Current, Saskatchewan (Java) was all two main tracks, except for these 69.3 miles on the Broadview Subdivision. Signal protection between Virden and Whitewood was with absolute permissive block signals (A.P.B.) more commonly referred to in the rule book as Automatic Block Signals (ABS). This system was put in place in the summer of 1927 and remained until replaced in the late summer of 1966 by Centralized Traffic Control (CTC). This would mark the end of the semaphore block signals on this portion of the main line. CTC would see the remaining two main tracks reduced to single track and elimination of the unique lap sidings.

CTC would also be the end to train orders on this subdivision, and the train order board, as well as the north siding were removed as new longer sidings with powered switches were constructed outside of town. However, the station agency would remain until 1971 with the introduction of a customer service centre in Brandon, Manitoba. By now the role the railways had once played within the small prairie towns and centres had been greatly changed. As passengers, mail and express traffic were all diverted and disappearing to the road systems developed and paid for by the governments, the railway now looked to its new role of moving grain and coal in single or solid bulk commodities and other types of traffic through inter-modal and containerization, all being handled in dedicated trains.

Mergers and centralization of grain elevators would parallel this new vogue in transportation on the prairies. The Lake of the Woods grain elevator would be sold to Saskatchewan Pool as No. 872 and in 1966 the structure was relocated to the east end of the station grounds as an annex to the Saskatchewan Pool No. 104. Both would be torn down in the late-1980s. The National Elevator, formerly the Northern Elevator, was sold to Cargill and the Consolidated, acquired by United Grain Growers (UGG), would also be removed. Only the Cargill structure would remain,

but under private ownership. Today large high-through-put style grain elevators stand at Moosomin and Whitewood replacing all the smaller facilities now closed or removed.

Until the late-1950s, each Monday a stock car was spotted by the way freight at the small stock yard located just west of the Lake of the Woods elevator. All cars billed to and from this station would be given station number 5630. Periodically a tank car would be spotted at the Esso agency for bulk fuel oil and a car of coal at one of the coal storage shed locations until a natural gas pipe line was constructed in town in the 1960s.

The last regular passenger train, VIA Rail No 2, "Canadian" passed through the town of Wapella in January of 1990. The last scheduled passenger train to have stopped was CP's "The Dominion", discontinued in January of 1966.

In 1972 the station building was sold and removed and the 100 lb. jointed rail was replaced with 115 lb. Continuous Welded Rail (CWR). With the removal of the station structure a station name sign was placed at mile 102.5, the half way point between switches and 102 and a half miles west of Brandon.

In the summer of 1999 the two main track switches to the siding and elevator tracks at either end of Wapella were removed as the last rail customer, Cargill Grain, had stopped shipping its products by rail and the structure was sold. With the issue of employee time table number 21 on Friday, November 1, 2002, the name Wapella was removed as a station name forever.

The kid, in red shirt, on the platform would later work almost 36 years with the railway, retiring in 2006.

Today – gone are the passenger trains, gone is the water tank, gone is the station and gone are the grain elevators. Pretty much everything in this picture has disappeared some 50 years later, except the main track, the young lad, now much older, and 'one' of those cream cans! The memory remains, in David Oram's painting "Wapella Jubilee". ■



On August 19, 2007, CPR 4-6-4 2816 stops at Wapella to rekindle the pose in the painting some 52 years prior. The modernized and former Cargill elevator now closed stands tall over the tender of the "Empress". Photo by James A Brown, Tottenham, Ontario.