

# *A Short History of The Grand Trunk Pacific*



A component of...



*The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway in Rivers,  
Manitoba*

*A Project of The Rivers Train Station Restoration Committee*

2014

## The Grand Trunk Pacific – A Short History

The busy Canadian National Railway line, which passes through the Municipality of Daly carries both freight and passengers from coast to coast. The re-introduction / or relocation of the passenger depot from Brandon North to the Town of Rivers has put that town back on the map of important railway towns. The line has its origins with the Grand Trunk Pacific, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Grand Trunk Railway, which established the Town of Rivers as a divisional point on its new line in 1908.

At that point The Grand Trunk Railway was a well-established successful company, it had completed a line between Montréal and Toronto in 1856, then expanded rapidly through takeovers and new construction. It built the Victoria Bridge over the St. Lawrence River at Montréal, a bridge over the Niagara River and a tunnel under the St. Clair River at Sarnia. By the 1880s it had lines from Chicago to the Atlantic coast, and ranked among the largest railway systems in the world.

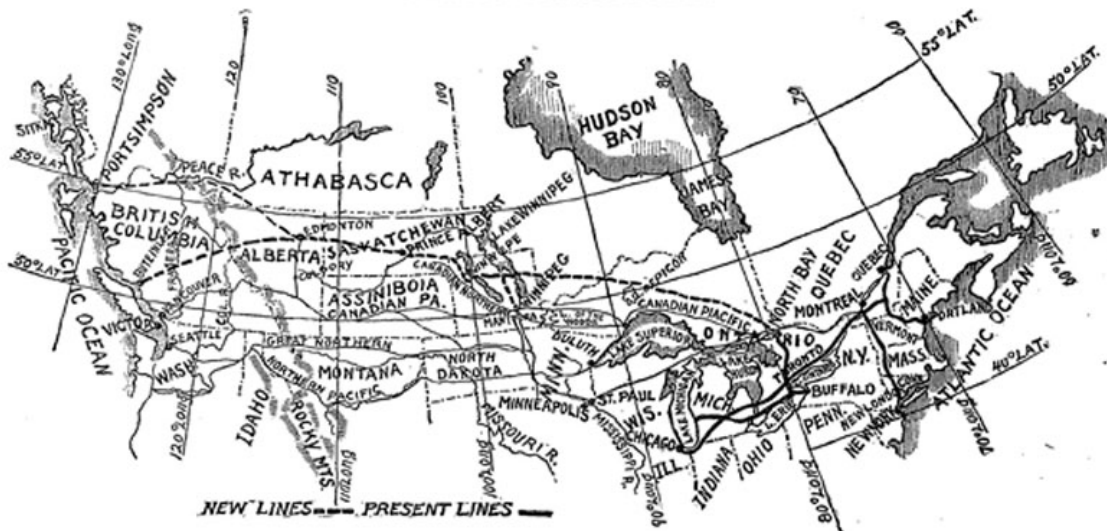
As the twentieth century approached railway operations in western Canada were under the control of the Canadian Pacific, which in 1885 had completed its cross-country line, and by the Canadian Northern which had begun the start of a second transcontinental. The Grand Trunk had missed an opportunity to expand westward in the 1880's when the Canadian Government was actively seeking bid for the construction of a transcontinental line.

The R.M. of Daly was without any rail connection until, 1902 when the Great Northwest Central Railway built a line from Forrest to Lenore. The new villages of Bradwardine, Wheatland, Pendennis and Carnegie were established on that line. All of these names except Carnegie were already on the map as Post Offices but locations were changed.

In 1903 the Grand Trunk established a subsidiary, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, to build a line from Winnipeg to the Pacific. This Canadian company was incorporated by act of the Dominion Parliament, 24 Oct. 1903 (The National Transcontinental Railway Act). It was a time of seemingly endless prosperity and growth, and its creation was encouraged by the newly-elected Liberal government of Sir Wilfred Laurier at the urging of Sir Charles Rivers-Wilson, Chairman of the Grand Trunk Railway.

The line was constructed using loans provided by the Government of Canada. The company had a mandate to build west from Winnipeg, Manitoba to the Pacific coast at Prince Rupert, British Columbia. East of Winnipeg, the federal government would build the National Transcontinental Railway (NTR) across Northern Ontario and Quebec,

## GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY TO REACH FROM MAINE TO THE PACIFIC



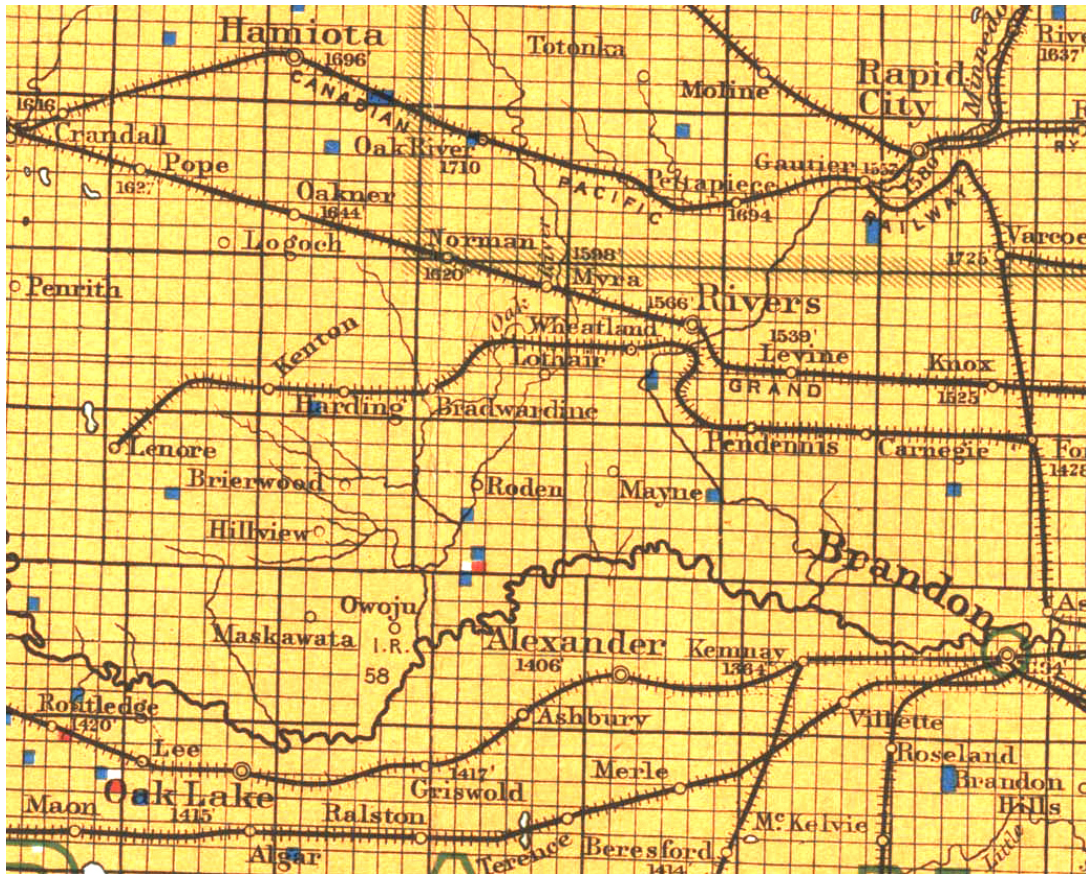
**New York Times, Dec. 7, 1902**

crossing the St. Lawrence River at Quebec City and ending at Moncton, New Brunswick. The conceptual plan was to have GTR operate both GTPR and NTR as a single transcontinental railway, competing with the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) and Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).

This second Canadian transcontinental rail route would feature a terminal on the Pacific that would actually be nearer to Asia than was the existing terminus of the C.P.R. at Vancouver. It was to follow one of the routes surveyed by Sandford Fleming much earlier for the first transcontinental line and rejected. The original survey ran from Winnipeg to Port Simpson at the end of the Portland Canal, which formed part of the boundary between British Columbia and Alaska.

Under Charles M. Hays, the Grand Trunk's energetic general manager who also became Grand Trunk Pacific's president, the new company pushed its line west.

Construction began on the Canadian Prairies in 1905, the year that the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were established with the first sod turned near Carberry, Manitoba on August 29. Construction proceeded west to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in 1907, Edmonton, Alberta in 1909, and through Jasper, Alberta into Yellowhead Pass crossing the Continental Divide in 1910-1911. The last spike ceremony heralding completion of the rail line across the prairies, and through the Rocky Mountains to the newly constructed seaport at Prince Rupert, British Columbia was held one mile east of Fort Fraser, British Columbia on April 7, 1914.



**The Rivers/Daly area in 1915**

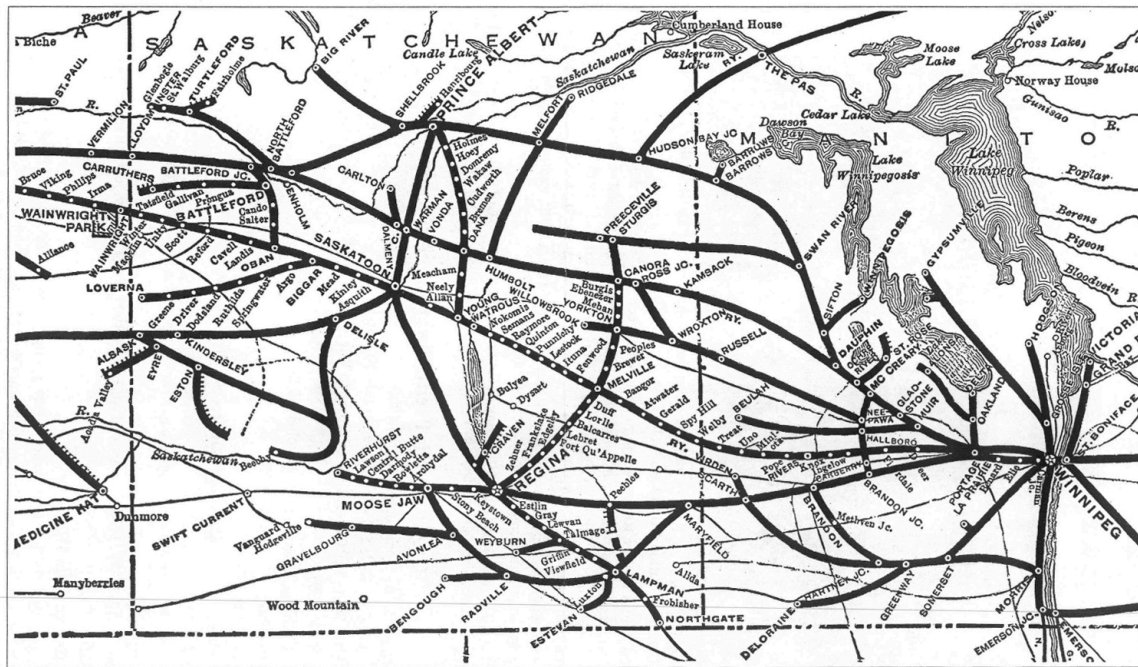
In 1907 the Grand Trunk Pacific entered the municipality from the east with stations at Levine and Myra, and most importantly, a divisional point and major town at Rivers.

The above map, from 1915, shows the two lines crossed the municipality at the height of railway development.

In 1910, the company also built a dock in Seattle, the Grand Trunk Pacific dock, which was the largest dock on the west coast at the time it was built. On July 30, 1914, the dock was destroyed by fire.

Passenger service was inaugurated in 1910.

In Manitoba villages with either sidings or stations were created in alphabetical order, starting just west of Portage la Prairie with the siding known as Arona and continues with Bloom, Caye, Deer, Exira, Firdale, Gregg, Harte, Ingelow, Justice, Knox, Levine, Myra, Norman, Oakner, Pope, Quadra, Rea and Stenberg. The next two letters are reversed, so Uno comes before Treat, while Victor concludes the sequence in Manitoba.



Map derived from 1924 Canadian National Railways Public Timetable showing the combined Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Canadian Northern Railway lines.

The Grand Trunk Pacific was a widely anticipated and vigorously debated attempt to create a new trans-continental rail line. It was optimistically pursued and for a relatively short time a very influential factor in the development of Western Canada. This vital connection to the rest of the country forever changed life in Rivers and area.

Rivers was just the right distance from Winnipeg to be designated as a divisional point. It would require a large station, a roundhouse and a host of storage, maintenance and house facilities.



**Rivers Roundhouse and Yards**

The GTP proved to be controversial for Hays as he was criticized for various decisions, such as choosing Prince Rupert as the Pacific terminus, underestimating Mackenzie and Mann's competing CNR system, and committing the entire Grand Trunk company to the GTP project. Hays's zeal to pursue construction of a well-engineered mainline in lieu of developing a network of branch lines for feeding local traffic proved to be a considerable hurdle as well.

The railway, although located in a more northerly latitude than any of the existing transcontinental lines, passes through elevated territory in a lower altitude, considerably lessening the cost of operation. The line crosses the extensive region of the Canadian northwest, which is enormously rich in agricultural and mineral products.

As president of the Grand Trunk, Hays committed to competing with the CPR in a number of other areas, namely shipping and hotels. In fact Hays died while returning from a visit to England to Canada where he was scheduled to attend the 26 April 1912, grand opening of the Château Laurier Hotel in Ottawa, Ontario. Hays had chosen to return from England on the maiden voyage of the ocean liner RMS Titanic, which struck an iceberg south of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland the night of 14 April and sank.

Not long after Hays' death, the Grand Trunk reneged on its agreement to operate the federally owned National Transcontinental system east of Winnipeg, and the Grand Trunk soon faced financial ruin over its decision to build and operate the GTP west of Winnipeg, particularly after the First World War caused traffic on the prairies to decline precipitously.

Despite some advantages the GTPR had not immediately realized the traffic potential they had predicted. The CPR occupied the more populous southern route in the prairies through Regina, Saskatchewan and Calgary, Alberta to Vancouver, British Columbia and was using land grants provided by the federal government as well as government incentives to draw immigrants and businesses to settle along its route. GTR did not have a coordinated marketing plan, and efforts at further settlement were disrupted by the First World War.

By 1919 it was obvious that the GTPR was not paying its way. The financial strain broke on March 7 when GTR defaulted on repayment of construction loans to the federal government, whereby the GTPR was nationalized and taken over by a Board of Management operating under the Department of Railways and Canals while legalities were resolved. On July 12, 1920 the GTPR was placed under the management of Crown corporation Canadian National Railways (CNR) and in 1923 was completely absorbed into the CNR.

While the Grand Trunk Pacific may not have been successful as a National enterprise, locally it was an important stimulus to the economy, a convenience to the citizens, and an influential factor in the lifestyle of the region. The Town of Rivers owes not only its very existence to the railway, but as great deal its character and success came directly down those rails.