

Railway Transportation in Argyle, Manitoba

by: Shayne Campbell



**Settlers,
Rails
& Trails**

the Argyle museum experience!

Early Transportation (1870-1911)

When Manitoba first became a province, the government decided to encourage settlement of its lands. The Scottish settlers that arrived in the Argyle and Brant districts beginning in the mid 1870's claimed their 160 acres of free land given to them by the government.

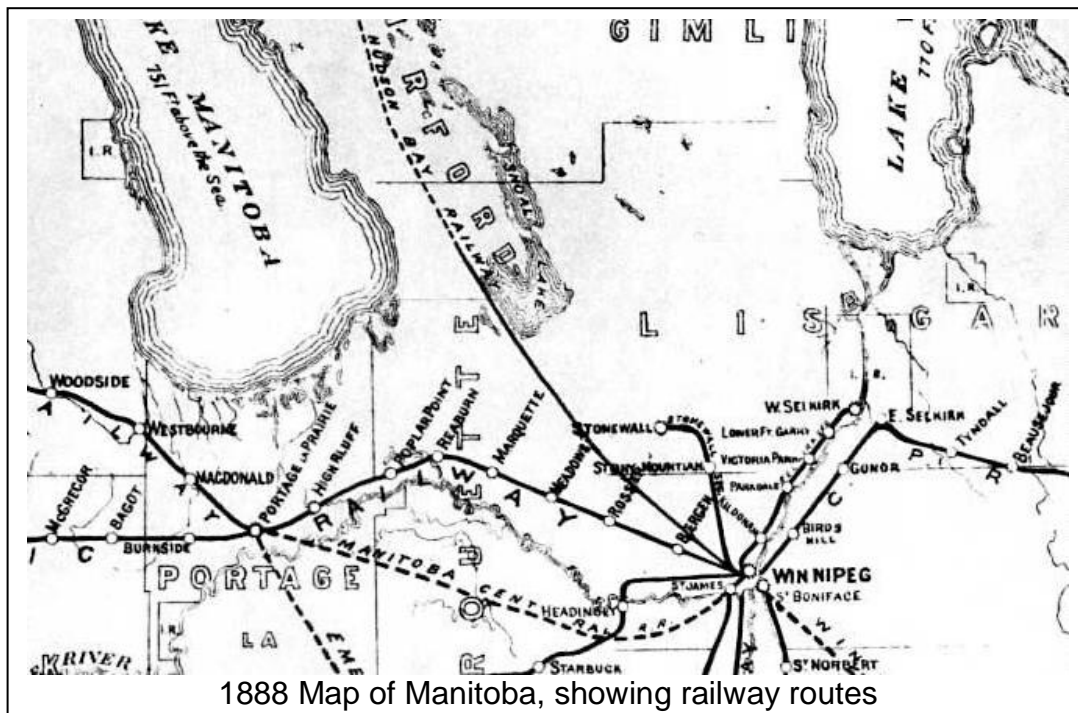
The earliest settlers would have departed from Winnipeg, traveling by wagon to the district. The mail, groceries and farm supplies would have to travel in the same manner, so it was important for these settlers to be as self sufficient as possible.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1880 the original CPR main line ran from Winnipeg to Stonewall through Drake (Later Ekhart, 3 miles south of Argyle) and to Portage la Prairie. In 1882 this rails and ties were removed, but the rail bed is still used as a road today and locally called the "Warren Road".

In 1880 the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) built a rail line from Winnipeg to Stonewall and then west to Portage la Prairie. With Stonewall only 10 miles from the Argyle settlement, it was now more convenient than traveling to Winnipeg for supplies. The Argyle region saw construction of three churches and four schools, suggesting that it was now feasible to ship the needed materials via the Stonewall CPR line. The local postmaster was responsible for picking up the mail in Stonewall and in later years, from Woodlands. Often traveling on foot, he received \$12.00 a month, in addition to his \$50.00 a year, for this pick-up service.

In 1886 the Winnipeg and Hudson Bay Railway built 40 miles of track north from Winnipeg through the Argyle region. It came within a few miles of the Post Office (and about 4 miles from the present day hamlet). With big aspirations to build a railway all the way to Hudson's Bay, this rail company went bankrupt. The locals called it "Sutherland's 40" after the principle backer of the railway Hugh McKay Sutherland. The only train to travel the line had to stop and backup all the way back to Winnipeg! Unfortunately, this railway wasn't around long enough to service the Argyle area.



DID YOU KNOW?

The only train that ran on the Winnipeg and Hudson's Bay Railway line was for an 1886 election rally of Hugh Sutherland, principle owner of the railway that was running for office in the Manitoba government. This bankrupt "Sutherland's 40" railway disappeared during the winter when local residents used the ties to build their homes and the rails to level their newly plowed land.

As less than fifty miles were constructed, Sutherland was not granted his railway charter from the provincial government and the railway went bankrupt. The \$80,000 cost to build the line was never paid to contractors Holt and Mann, who later went on to create the Canadian Northern Railway – the Manitoba born company that ran a branch line passing through the Argyle area.



CnoR Locomotive at Fisher Branch 1914 Locomotive #116, A-6-a (type), 4-4-0 Built by Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1887, retired in 1922

The Canadian Northern Railway Story (1910-1915)

With the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1885, Canada was finally united with a national railway. In the years following this celebration, there was a general dislike for the CPR as it held a monopoly over the railway business and didn't appear to serve all of the population.

In 1899 a small Manitoba railway called the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) was formed to help compete with the CPR. The company was headed by William Mackenzie and Donald Mann, two men from Ontario that connected Winnipeg to Lake Superior, and Portage la Prairie to Dauphin with their new railway lines. They also specialized in bringing rail lines to areas that were previously ignored by the CPR. Farmers and settlers gained respect for this company and dubbed it "the farmer's railway".

The CNoR branch that is discussed here would eventually extend 81 miles, serving the communities of Drake (later Ekhart), Argyle, Woodroyd, Erinview, Inwood, Sandridge, Narcisse, Chatfield, Poplarfield, Broad Valley, Fisher Branch and Hodgson.

Rockwood Echoes history book mentions a branch line was built north from Grosse-Isle in 1903 to tap the gravel pit at Echart (sic, Ekhart).

In 1910, a delegation of locals, including James Douglas of Woodlands (Argyle) met with the Minister of Railways to ask for an extension of the railroad from Grosse Isle to Inwood, and eventually further north. They felt that the five mile spur line could be extended to serve the farmers and residents as a branch line.

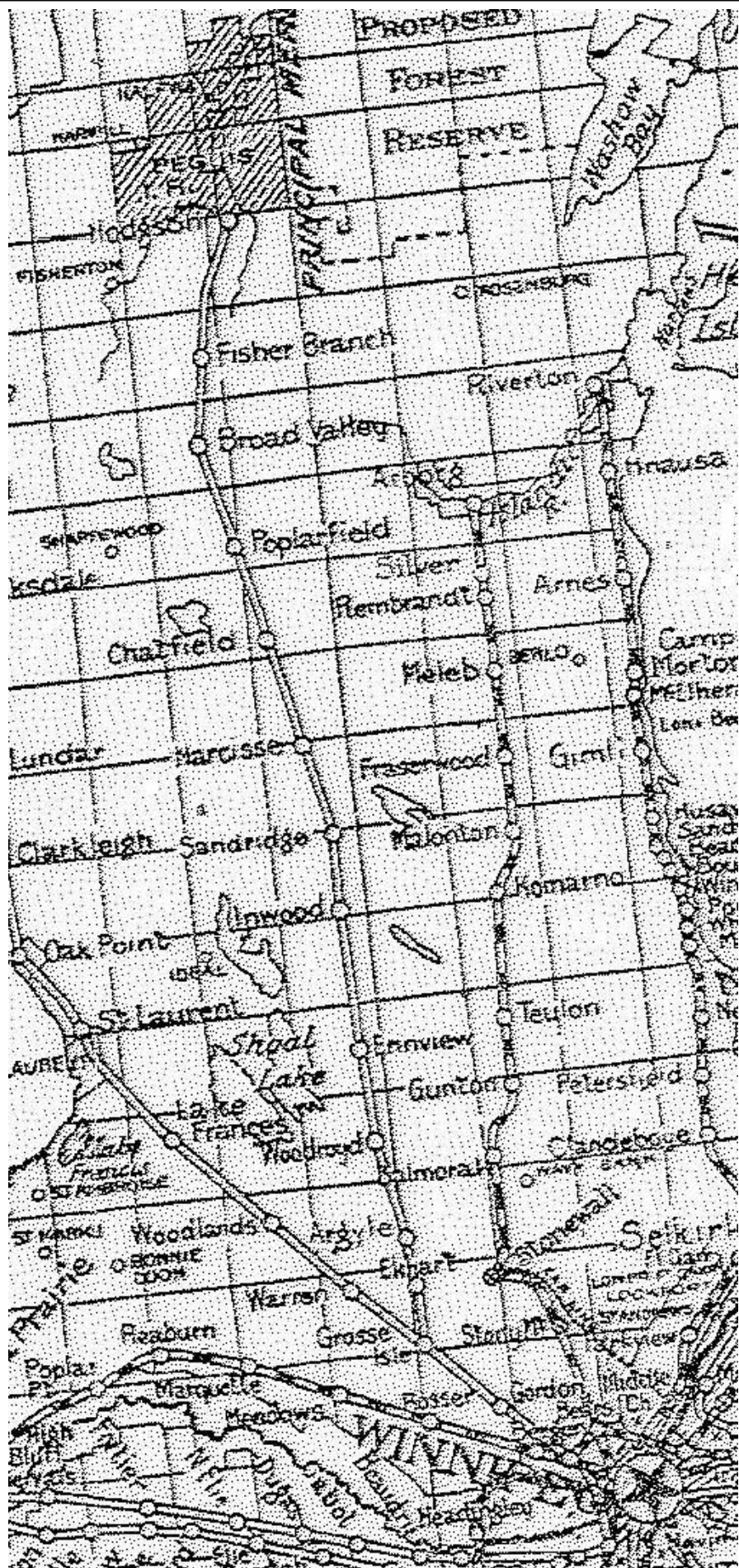
As early as January 1910 the Stonewall Gazette newspaper was reporting that the CNoR would extend their line north from Warren. The closest actual rails however were a small branch that ended at a gravel pit on 30-13-1E. This was a preferred site where the railway company found the materials to continue building its roadbed as it proceeded north. Local newspaper reports refer to this spur as the Sandpit Extension, it ran directly north from Grosse Isle (and the Oak Point Subdivision) to a gravel pit one mile north of Ekhart. Locals were most likely hopeful of this line serving their area, even though it was cheaply built and only originally intended for hauling gravel Southward.

Scandal

A series of letters were published regarding political corruption and the reasons behind the construction of the Sandpit Extension. In the Stonewall Gazette, local Argyle landowner Andrew Kirk criticized the editor of the Stonewall Argus regarding sources of information.

It seems that Manitoba Premier Duff Roblin somehow convinced the Canadian Northern Railway to run a spur, 5 miles north from Grosse Isle to service a gravel pit. Apparently, there are rumors that Roblin had some interest in this gravel pit, whether he owned it outright or was receiving income from the gravel sales is unclear.

To convince the public of their good intentions, a decision was made to extend the rail line north from the gravel pit, making it look like the railway had been planned all along to serve the northern Interlake settlements.



Waghorn's Guide Map (1941)

By April of 1910, surveyors were at work making a route north of the Sandpit Extension, stirring excitement with the locals. The line they chose ran diagonal (northwest) crossing the meridian. Local resident Tom Reid met the surveyors at Grosse Isle with his team and sleigh. With all of the equipment in the wagon box, Tom was hired to help the surveyors with their work, all the way north to Fisher Branch.

In June of 1910 Jas Walton took up the contract brushing along the extension with thirty-five men, working up to Inwood. Scrub oak and poplar needed to be cleared out of the way so the graded rail bed could be built. At the end of the month a railway agent was out to select a location for the station, causing much excitement and anticipation among the settlers of the area. By October, the roadbed was done and awaited rails and ties.

In the spring/early summer of 1911 the CNoR started laying track on the branch line which connected the Sandpit Extension and ran up to Inwood, Manitoba. A map illustrating the proposed subdivision of the Argyle town site lots shows rails (main line & siding). The Stonewall Argus (Nov. 15, 1911) reported that the track laying gang on the Sandpit Extension is now pretty near Inwood.

In August 1912 CNoR decided to extend the railway further yet, forty miles more. (most likely stopping at Fisher Branch) In the Aug. 9th edition of the Stonewall Gazette, a derailment was reported to have happened in "Brant" when a few cars containing horses and mules came off the tracks. They were enroute to the construction happening north of Inwood.

On January 3, 1912 the Stonewall Argus wrote that James Douglas of Brant reported the first train to bear passengers passed north over the pit extension. However it wasn't until June 8, 1913 that Waghorns railway schedule printed a timetable including rail stops from Argyle to Inwood. The November 2nd edition of Waghorns included a stop called Drake, three miles south of Argyle, which would later be named Ekhart with the arrival of a post office. In 1880 the Canadian Pacific Railway main line passed through Drake. This short-lived part of the CPR only lasted two years. When the rails and ties were pulled out, the area's first road was made from the existing rail bed.

In the CNoR tradition the Inwood branch line (as it was now called) was built quickly and made with lesser standards than other railways. Infact, this branch line was made with rail that was 60 lbs/yard, the same size as was being used back in the 1850's! It was the intention that an increase of traffic in the future would warrant upgrades to the rail line. However, the upgrades never came and those rails were still there until their dismantling in the 1990's.

When the railway was built through the region, local newspapers (Gazette & Stonewall Argus) would criticize of the building quality of the CNoR. When a CPR train derailed north of Stonewall, the Argus compared the poor quality of the tracks with the nearby CNoR tracks.

They even criticized the slow rate and irregularities in service of the CPR train that ran from Winnipeg to Arborg and back. The Argus commented that this "must surely be a CNR train which has got astray."



Locomotive #133, July 1914, laying tracks north of Fisher Branch, Manitoba



Family and employees outside a bunk car during construction of Fisher Branch Station
1916-1917

DID YOU KNOW?

Railways would place a station about every 12km (7 miles). Back in the days of horse-drawn wagons, this ensured a reasonable distance for hauling grains from the field to market.

Station Names	Distance in Miles	Station Names	Distance in Miles
Grosse Isle – Drake	5	Sandridge – Narcisse	7
Drake – Argyle	3	Narcisse – Chatfield	8
Argyle – Woodroyd	7	Chatfield – Poplarfield	6
Woodroyd – Erinview	6	Poplarfield – Broad Valley	8
Erinview – Inwood	10	Broad Valley – Fisher Branch	7
Inwood – Sandridge	5	Fisher Branch – Hodgson	9

Average distance between all stations – 6.75 miles!

Attempting to reach the most populous areas, and avoid the swamps, the Inwood Branch zigged and zagged north to Hodgson. During the summer of 1914, the construction crews were photographed at Fisher Branch; possibly making this the last summer the CNoR spent building the branch line. It is also believed that the CNoR attempted to reach Lake Winnipeg at Fisher Bay. Maps from 1914 show a proposed extension north from Hodgson, through the Indian reserve. This extension was never built.

In August 1915, the CNoR wrote to the Premier Norris to request the inspection of the last leg of the railway from Inwood to Hodgson. The Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department, Mr. Dancer, was sent out to do the inspection. This is possibly the formality marking the end of construction on this railway branch line.

DID YOU KNOW?

When the Canadian Northern built the Oak Point Branch it caused changes in place names. *For example:*

- The rail stop called **Argyle Station** (1911-1917) was to distinguish its location from **Little Argyle**, which had a post office 4 miles west of the present hamlet since 1880.
- **Drake** was later renamed **Ekhart** in 1921 when a post office was opened.
- The post office at **Cossette** became **Inwood** in 1906 and later moved into town to be closer to the railway. (1912)
- A post office was established just before the railway arrived at **Hodgson** and was named after the first postmaster.



Ekhart Railway Station (seen here in 1996) at the SR&T Museum



Argyle Station c.1914

The Railway arrives in Argyle

As the first regular stop on the branch line, the CNoR placed a station on the North West section of 7-14-1E (8 miles north of Grosse Isle) naming it "Argyle Station". The name was to distinguish this rail stop from the small assortment of houses and a post office 4 miles west that were in the Argyle District.

The station itself was a small building with two rooms, the first had a big sliding door for freight, and the other had benches, windows and a stove for the waiting passengers. Proudly displayed on the roof facing the stopped trains was the signboard proclaiming this stop as Argyle. The station was built to Canadian Northern 100-41 style portable station.

Next to be constructed was the Arthur Lobb Elevator (1914) that would buy, store twenty thousand bushels of local cereal grains for shipping on the railway. In August 1923, the Wylie, Low & Co. Elevator assumed business, and eventually the Federal Elevator Company would take over the grain business.

A small stockyard was assembled near the tracks to allow various kinds of livestock to be penned while waiting to be sold and loaded onto the train. The loading platform was reported nearly completed (Stonewall Argus, April 3, 1912) as well as the basement of Mr. J. Douglas Jr.'s store being finished.

Near the station a section master's house was also built at the expense of the railway. The Section Forman was the custodian of the station, keeping the stove lit and the building maintained. In addition to this he was in charge of the local gang that would maintain the tracks north and south of Argyle.

Passenger fares from Argyle to Westside (Later St. James) Manitoba

<u>Year</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Travel Time</u>
1913	\$0.05	2 hrs
1915	\$0.05	1hr 45 min
1920	\$0.90	58 min
1930	\$0.90	1hr 55 min
1940	\$0.80	1hr 30 min (Switch trains at Gross Isle)
1951	\$0.90	1hr 20 min

* Most people chose to arrive at Westside "St. James" and take the trolley into Winnipeg. If they remained on the train, it would be another hour before arriving at Union Station on Broadway & Main.



Argyle Railway Station (1955)

223 AM	Mls	Table No. 550 Central Time	224 PM
27.10	...	Lv.. Winnipeg	Ar 12.40
29.45	0	..Grosse Isle, Man,...	10.45
10.05	5	.....Ekhardt.....	10.22
10.20	8	.....Argyle.....	10.10
10.45	15	.....Woodroyd....	9.45
11.15	21	.....Erinview.....	9.15
12.35	31	.....Inwood.....	8.45
12.55	36	.....Sandridge....	8.24
1.25	43	.....Narcisse.....	8.02
2.00	51	.....Chatfield....	7.40
2.35	57	.....Poplarfield...	7.15
3.05	65	...Broad Valley...	6.52
3.45	72	..Fisher Branch..	6.30
4.25 PM	81	Ar. Hodgson, Man. Lv	6.00 AM

Waghorn's Guide 1921

Canadian Northern Railway town proposal for Argyle (1911)

Trains and Railway Business (1913-1970)

The railway created the hamlet of Argyle. Once the station was placed, an elevator (1914), section master's house, stockyards, store (1912), school (1914), and blacksmith shop (1913) soon followed. The construction materials and supplies for these new businesses could now be shipped directly to Argyle with a fast and inexpensive mode of travel. Even the post office (1913) moved to town so it could be closer to the railway, which now brought mail twice a week.



Train derailment north of Argyle - 1928



Railway lantern found 2010 along tracks in Argyle



Arthur Lobb, MPP, built the Lobb's Store (Argyle General) and the first grain elevator (1914)

The trains that served the Inwood Subdivision were called mixed trains. This meant that the steam locomotive would pull a variety of freight cars followed by several passenger coaches. It was more efficient to run one train that could handle a huge variety of shipments to and from this branch line. Passengers, out going mail, cream cans and egg crates would be shipped south to Winnipeg. Returning trains would bring back the empty cream cans and egg crates, as well as new mail, fresh groceries, farm supplies and passengers from their trip to the city and beyond.

As demands rose and fell over the years, the railway schedule changed too. In June 1913 trains ran Monday and Friday to Inwood, the end of the track at that time, and returned to Grosse Isle the same day. By November of that year, Drake (later Ekhart) was included in the schedules. Beginning April 1915, a Wednesday train ran all the way to Hodgson in addition to the Monday and Friday runs ending at Inwood.

The Canadian Northern Railway Company came to an end when increasing debt caused the Canadian Government to purchase and merge the company with several other failing railways. In 1918 under this new ownership the name was changed to Canadian National Railway Company. Back in Argyle scheduled runs continued using older, lighter CNR locomotives and rail cars that were more suitable for the smaller tracks of a less demanding service of a branch line.

Rd Up OAK POINT BRANCH, C.N.R. Rd Dn										
Mxd		Psgr.		Coach Fares	Jan. 1, 1951		Mile	Psgr. Mxd		Exp. Rate
T Th & Sa	M W & Fr	Central Time			T Th & Sa	M W & Fr				
s11 30	s13 30	\$.00	ar	Winnipeg	lv	0	s12 10	s10 40	\$.00	
s10 50	s13 04	.25		St. James		7	s12 36	s11 30		
f10 32	f12 51	.45		Moore		13	f12 49	f11 44	.28	
				Lilyfield		15			.28	
f10 15	s12 40	.65		Gordon		18	s13 01	f11 58	.26	
s10 00	s12 28	.85	lv	Grosse Isle	ar	25	s13 15	s12 14	.31	
s 9 40		1.00	ar	Ekhart	lv	30		s12 29	.35	
s 9 30		1.15		Argyle		33		s12 39	.35	
s 9 14		1.35		Woodroyd		39		s12 55	.40	
s 8 58		1.60		Erinview		43		s13 15	.45	
s 8 30		1.95	lv	Inwood	ar	50		s13 40	.48	
s 7 50		2.15		Sandridge		61		s14 00	.52	
s 7 30		2.35		Narolisse		68		s14 15	.54	
s 7 10		2.65		Chatfield		75		s14 32	.58	
s 6 50		2.90		Poplarfield		82		s14 52	.61	
s 6 30		3.10		Broad Valley		89		s15 15	.64	
s 6 10		3.35		Fisher Branch		90		s15 50	.69	
s 5 45		3.70	lv	Hodgson	ar	100		s16 20	.69	

Waghorn's Guide, Oakpoint Subdivision 1951

Waghorn's Guide, Oakpoint Subdivision 1951

The 1920s saw a peak of passenger travel with daily rail service to the entire branch line, with the exception of Sunday. From 1930 to the 1950s, trains ran north to Hodgson on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Crews would spend the night there and return Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, still not making trips on Sundays. This alternating schedule would be in operation until rail traffic ceased completely.

1930s

Several families arrived to their new homes, with all their belongings, via the train. The David & May Craig Family arrived in April 1931, from Neepawa, MB, with their animals, two horses, five cows, and other belongings loaded into a boxcar. David accompanied the items, riding the whole way in the boxcar as well. The rest of the family went by train to Winnipeg and was driven to Argyle by relatives.

During the 1930's and the Great Depression, men would ride the tops of rail cars searching for work. The Lamecka Family farm (NE 24-14-1W) saw lots of homeless men coming by for a meal, as the railway cut through their property.

In 1936, when Annie Reid was expecting her baby (Rena), Dr. Evelyn was driven to Argyle, where Robert Reid met him with the railway hand car, taking him and his nurse north to Woodrode to deliver the baby.



Checking the Railway line, around Hodgson, 1916-17

1940s

Jesse Parsonage accepted the position of teaching at Brant Argyle School in August 1943. She left Winnipeg by train and been told it was about one hour trip from Winnipeg to Argyle. She began wondering if it was the wrong train when they shunted around Winnipeg for an hour or two. Later as she neared Argyle, Aneita Snyder spoke to her and told her that she could have gotten on the train at St. James Station, saving her a lot of time.

Tom Snell was known to play checkers at the stores. Occasionally they went to other towns to challenger other players. They would sometimes ride the “jigger” down to Ekhart or Grosse Isle to do so.



Section Forman and men with tools north of Fisher Branch – Summer 1922-23 at Mile 77



Argyle Village in 1950, taken from the 2nd storey window of Brant Argyle School

Types of equipment used on the Inwood Subdivision

When the CNoR built the railway subdivision from Grosse Isle north, it used light gage rail, most of it around 65lbs per yard. Therefore, the locomotives and rail cars needed to be lighter as well. The speed limit too had to be reduced to account for the lighter rail.

Steam Era:

Construction trains:

1. Canadian Northern #116, A-6-a(type), 4-4-0 Built by Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1887, retired in 1922
2. Canadian Northern #133, 2-6-0 pictured in Fisher Branch 1914 with James Bay Railway equipment #23083.

Regular Service trains:

In the early years, CNoR and later CNR were using H-6 or H-10 4-6-0 locomotives.

Mixed trains were expected along the route, which would have consisted of a locomotive, tender, mail car, reefer car, box cars a passenger car or two. There may have been a flat car once in a while with farm equipment, vehicles and large items to be delivered along the railway.

(<http://www.angelfire.com/ca/TORONTO/CNRsteam.html>)

Diesel Era:

According to the CNR employee time tables (1970s), the railway used the 1000-1076 series locomotives, also known as the CN GMD1. The GMD1 is a Canadian-only engine designed for light branch lines like the Inwood subdivision. Some are still in operation today. All of the 1000-1076 series have been renumbered, some are in the 1400 series and are still operating (c2013) in places like Regina and Saskatoon and Winnipeg.

The GMD GMD1 was a diesel locomotive produced by General Motors Diesel (GMD), the Canadian subsidiary of General Motors Electro-Motive Division, between August 1958 and April 1960. This switcher locomotive was powered by a 12-cylinder EMD 567C diesel engine, capable of producing 1,200 horsepower. The GMD1 was built on either Flexicoil A1A-A1A (for light rail prairie branchlines) or Flexicoil B-B trucks. 101 examples of this locomotive were built for Canadian railways, 96 went to the Canadian National Railway. CN upgraded a number of their GMD1's in the 1980s, as 1400-series units (B-B) and 1600-series (A-1-A). A number of 1600's were later retrucked with B-B's and renumbered as 1400's.

1950s

In 1950, the Argyle area had a flood. One school van almost tipped into the water when travelling to school. The roads were staked, but it was difficult to tell where it was. As a result the Ross family children (N 25-14-1W) walked down the railroad track to school, 3.5 miles until the water receded.

Gravel Pit Spurs:

The Canadian Northern and Canadian National alike used the various gravel pits along the right-of-way to build their rail beds. On 1-15-1E (running to 8-15-1E) near Woodroyd, the Winnipeg Shipping Company built a small spur line where they collected gravel to supply demands in the growing city. There was a “Y” built at this junction, and Ed Copland spent his summers (1930s) clearing land and loading the cord wood onto railway cars at the “Y”.

Maintenance:

The maintenance of the railway was in the hands of a small local gang and their boss, the section master. Each railway was broken into several sections where the gangs would make sure the tracks were repaired, replaced, inspected and kept free of over growth. Using a “pump car” the gang would carry their tools up and down the section. Eventually these modes of transportation were replaced by the gas powered “Jigger”.

DID YOU KNOW?

There have been two reported derailments; the first in 1913 saw a few cars of horses and mules dumped. They were on their way north for the Railways extension north to Inwood. The second one was in 1928 when derailment caused the train to come off its tracks and boxcars turned upside down. A picture exists of this wreck, it happened one mile north of town.

One mile south of Argyle, a pile of steam locomotive fire bricks were found along the rail line. They are all broken up, and strewn 35' along the right of way. They appear to have been used, as there is melted coal residue coating their surfaces. Locomotive firebricks and assorted/crushed oil cans were found along the west side of the line in 1991 and 2013.



End of an Era (1970-1991)

As the years went on, the railway faced heavy competition with the ever-popular automobile. In 1953 Argyle Transfer started hauling livestock and general freight. The Argyle station was moved to St. James rail yards in the 1950s and the Federal Grain elevator was torn down in 1972-73. The scales are currently (2012) on the Don & Shirley Campbell farm.

In 1980, Opal Langrel of "Yesteryears" History book reported a 25 mile per hour speed limit on the Inwood Subdivision. This "indicated that the trackage is not in good condition, as there is a minimum of maintenance and there are periods of suspended service"

Some branch lines in Manitoba were to be protected by government legislation until December 31, 1974 and others were to be protected until the year 2000.

When the *Hall Commission Report* was released in 1977, it was revealed that the Inwood subdivision would be abandoned. A strong protest was launched by the farmers at the northern end of the line in March 1978, as they had one million or more bushels of grain in storage, waiting to be hauled.

In the early 1980's Shayne Campbell remembers seeing a small diesel locomotive moving very slowly through Argyle, as he and other students were out in the school yard for recess. A self propelled crane on rails was also seen by him and his father Bill Campbell Jr. three miles south of Argyle on the line.

When the rail was being dismantled in 1991, Shayne watched the crews working in the area, and asked permission to remove local railway signs for the Argyle Prairie Museum. The crews also offered him the north switch device from Argyle, even offering to load the switch up and deliver it to the museum property. Rails from the crossing of the rail line at Highway 67 were collected for the museum at this time as well.



Argyle, the Federal Grain Elevator (1959)