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Forward


Winnipeg Free Press

Disastrous Train Crash At

On Labour Day, September 1, 1947, two passenger trains driven by steam locomotives crashed in the town of Dugald, just east of Winnipeg. The #6046 east bound Continental passenger train was stopped in Dugald to let the #6001 Minaki Camper Special pass. The Minaki train did not take the siding and collided head on into the waiting Continental. Of more than 300 passengers, reportedly 31 died and 81 were injured. All deaths were on the Winnipeg bound Minaki Special.

On the last long weekend of the summer, cottagers had closed their summer residences and were heading home to Winnipeg.

When the trains collided, many of the old gas-lit wooden cars immediately burst into flames. The locomotives were "welded" together but remained on the track. The engineer and two others on the Continental jumped to safety; the engine crew on the Camper Special did not survive the crash.

Many Dugald residents risked their own safety to help at the scene. Several received commendations for their efforts.

Unable to be individually identified, 25 people were buried in a mass grave at Brookside Cemetery in Winnipeg, and most of the remaining were buried privately at Elmwood Cemetery.

As in many tragedies, the event itself often overshadows the human impact. Springfield Women's Institute members have collected the personal memories of some of those involved in the Dugald Train wreck.

This book is dedicated to those who did not survive the crash, their families and all those connected in some way to the tragic events of September 1, 1947. Special thanks to those who so willingly shared their memories.

The site at Brookside, a cairn on Memorial Island near Malachi, and a marker to be dedicated on September 1, 2007 in Dugald will respectfully remind us of the human toll of the Dugald Minaki Train Disaster.

Story of Fraser McInnis

I was returning from McInnis Camp, near PALA Camp, on the Minaki Special. Sitting in the second last coach, I had my luggage with me plus my toolbox that I used at the camp. I remember strolling up to the front to visit with friends, Hugh and Catherine (Kitty) MacKay, and stayed to smoke a cigar with Hugh. Hugh, looking out the window and using his stop watch to clock the poles whizzing by commented that we were going "mighty fast" rattling around curves.

Fraser's wife Harvelyn was not on the train that fateful day, but also had a story to tell.

I knew one of the young girls who died in the Minaki crash. When I returned to Kelvin High School, I sat in the empty desk of Jane Jamieson, who was killed in the train wreck and whose initials carved in the school desk were now the only reminders of my young schoolmate.

Fraser McInnis, now 83, was 25 years old when the train wreck happened. This is his recollection of the Dugald train wreck.

Not feeling well after smoking the cigar, I returned to my seat.

Then "crash!" When the collision happened, the coach I was in was not damaged, but I worried about my friends up front. All the people on my coach got off with their possessions. The flames were already coming half way back, but I was unable to help anyone due to the intense heat. They were able to unhook the last two coaches. Russell Bell, a local resident, hooked his truck to the last two coaches and pulled them away from the fire.

As we walked in the stubble from the wheat fields, we could see the flames engulf the train and the elevator. Women were tip toeing through the field in their high heels. I returned to the station on the Continental, where my father, Rev. John L. McInnis, met me.



Story by Roy Pennington

On a late summer day in 1947, Roy Pennington, along with his friend and friend's brother, left Pistol Lake, near Minaki, Ontario. They travelled by boat down the Winnipeg River to the Minaki train station to catch the first of two Camper Specials home to Winnipeg. This is his recollection of that historic September day.

As we rounded Holst Point into Gunn Lake we ran out of gas. By the time we put gas in the tank and got the motor going again our train was just pulling out. We had to take the second train, an hour later - the last camper train for the summer.

We sat in the first seat by the door in the 5th or 6th coach from the front of the train. I sat in the aisle seat facing Winnipeg. As the conductor called "all aboard" a lady showed up with her dog and pleaded with the conductor to let her take the dog in the coach; it was too late to put the dog in the forward baggage car. He let her put the dog in between the seats. That dog was the only dog that survived the crash in Dugald.

Each time we took the camper special we knew that our train had to go onto sidings to allow the two transcontinental trains to pass.

Approximately 3/4 of the way to Winnipeg, we noticed, a few times, that it was odd that we had not gone onto a siding for the second transcontinental train. No more than a few minutes later, I looked out the window and peered into the darkness to catch a mileage sign that meant we were almost at Dugald, thinking the second transcontinental train must be late, otherwise we would have met it by now. Within a few seconds, the train brakes were applied with a force and loud screech that had to be experienced to be believed. Our train came to an enormous crash; a split second later, we took a second large hit from the rear as the heavy steel coaches at the rear of our train rammed forward.

Within a few seconds, the train brakes were applied with a force and loud screech that had to be experienced to be believed.

Upon impact I flew over the seat in front of me and landed half way down the aisle. The horizon lit up red, just like a sunset, as I was flying over the seats. I was the first person to reach the exit door, which would not open because the coach had twisted due to the crash. Yelling over people's screams, we got the fire axe and smashed the window in the door and used the spiked head of the axe to pull the door open. Our entire coach emptied in less than a minute.

Once outside, we saw a sight that will stay with all of us for a lifetime. A couple of coaches were at right angles to the track, and all of the front coaches were on fire, including the one we had just escaped from.An enormous cloud of steam and smoke was coming from the engines.

The grain elevator was on fire, and looked spectacular as the grain burned and fell the great distance to the ground.

Confusion and chaos was everywhere. Eventually, all the survivors of the camper special were put in the coaches of the transcontinental train, which was pulled back to Union Station in Winnipeg by an engine sent out from Transcona.

With all the sirens heading east, many people in Winnipeg figured out there had been some sort of tragedy. By the time our train pulled into the Union Station, a huge crowd of anxious friends and relatives awaited their loved ones. My family was there, and my mother cried with tears of joy to see me coming down the stairs into the rotunda.

In the many articles that I have read over the years, two significant items have never been mentioned that added to the death toll. Our camper special was traveling at a fast speed, probably about 75 MPH; the public was told that it was traveling at 45 MPH. And the doors in between the wooden coaches were left open all the time. Therefore, at the moment of the crash I saw flames from the gaslight rolling through the coaches like a fireball. Most of the people that I knew on the train escaped with bumps or bruises, as I did.

However, every time we drive out to Oakbank to visit my daughter or pass through Dugald, without fail, I look to the east, for an extra second, as we pass over the railway track and I can see the wreck in my mind's eye to this day.

Story of Gerald Shields



Many Dugald residents came to the aid of the passengers on the Minaki Camper Special when it hit the standing Continental and burst into flames. One such hero was Gerald Shields.

CN employee Gerald Shields' house was about 200 yards from the crash site. He was used to the trains in his "backyard" and he heard the approaching Special ... then the ear-splitting crash! Close to the scene, Gerald was one of the first to rush to the aid of the passengers.

He was credited with saving five people from the burning wreck. Two years later, in 1949, Gerald was presented with the DOW AWARD for heroism. His family remember Gerald as a quiet, soft spoken man, who did not talk of his part in the rescue efforts of the famous train wreck. However, in his later years, he spoke to classes at the local elementary school as part of their history lessons. Gerald passed away in 1994, and lived on the property alongside the track in Dugald until his death.

Story by
John E. White

In one's lifetime there are memories that we cherish, and some we would like to forget. A tragedy that affected me, my brother and my friend, Roy Pennington, is the latter.

One evening while watching TV, I turned to the History Channel.

Here is how I recall the events that evening leading up to the crash.

It was showing "Disasters of the Century," including a documentary about the train wreck of the Minaki Camper Special at Dugald, Manitoba, September 1, 1947, at approximately 9:45 p.m. I remember that night, vividly, even after 58 years have passed.

The documentary had some discrepancies. They did not switch the two steel coaches from the front to the rear of the train at Minaki, as the documentary said. This would have taken too much time. Both the documentary and the Board of Transport Commissions for Canada stated that the speed of the Minaki Special was 30 MPH. If this was the actual speed upon impact, the crash would not have caused such severe damage.

Upon impact, the Minaki Special drove the standing Continental train one coach length backward, resulting in the baggage car landing on top of the coal tender of the Continental locomotive and breaking several windows on some of the Continental coaches. The Continental Limited Number 4 train consisted of 12 coaches, two baggage cars and one mail car, all constructed of steel. The Minaki Special had one steel baggage car, one steel under-frame baggage car with wooden superstructure, nine wooden coaches and two steel parlour cars.

When the trains collided, one baggage car stayed on the tracks, behind the locomotive. The second baggage car went to the south side of the tracks. Three coaches were thrown clear of the track on the north side. The fourth and fifth coaches remained upright on the track but soon became engulfed in flames. The sixth coach lay on its side close to the track. The remaining five coaches were upright on the track.

The Minaki Special did not stop at Vivian, Manitoba but slowed down to receive messages from the station operator via the wooden hoop method. The distance between Vivian and Dugald, on the railway, is 16.9 miles. Allowing about 22 minutes to cover this distance, I estimate that the Minaki Special was traveling at about 85 MPH. Therefore, with various and conflicting train orders issued to train crews, noted by the late engineer, Mr. Lewis, plus station operators who operated the green light signals at Dugald, it is no wonder this tragedy occurred.

The engineer of the Minaki Special would have seen the green light before he entered the "S" curve over 300 yards in advance and presumed, as per procedures, that he had a clear track to Winnipeg. I asked the conductor after leaving Vivian where the eastbound Continental was. He replied it was on the siding at Transcona, waiting for our train to pass. The train orders were misinterpreted. So now, upon coming through the "S" curve, the Minaki Special Engineer sees the Continental and applies the brakes, only slowing the Minaki Special down to about 70 to 75 MPH before impact with the Continental.

This explains the severe damage to both trains.

In the era of steam locomotives, the locomotives had no speedometers. To estimate speed, engineers had to rely on mileage post signs and their own watches to calculate the speed of travel. Train crews for schedules also used watches.

In its inquiry, the Board of Transport Commissioners for Canada stated: "About an hour before the accident, another train, under similar circumstances also violated the rule requiring it to take the siding at Dugald. This train would have been the first Minaki Special. They are lucky not to have run into the first Continental going east that night" The Engineer, who perished, had formally complained about the signal system at Dugald some time before, stating "the system was too subject to human error". The C.N. Railway paid no heed.

I recall the events that evening leading up to the crash. My brother, myself and friend Roy Pennington were on that train. We left my grandparent's cottage on Pistol Lake intending to catch the first Minaki Special. Due to some water in the gas tank of the outboard engine, we missed the train. When we arrived at the dock in Minaki, I told my brother to take the luggage up to the station and when the train arrived to be sure to pick the center coach. I had never done this before, and I had taken many trains between Winnipeg and Minaki. Roy Pennington and I took the boat back to the Minaki Lodge and returned to the station just before the train pulled out.

My brother did not put the luggage on the center coach like I requested – and that decision may have saved our lives. In the wreck the centre coach was the one behind our coach; it was turned on its side and lost the most people. When the conductor was gathering tickets I asked him where the Number 4 eastbound Continental was that we would have to pass. He told me that it was four hours late west of Winnipeg and we would be in Winnipeg before it arrived. With few stops, flat terrain and the ability to reach a high speed, it managed to gain back a considerable amount of time. Why was I so worried about that Continental train that night?

Meeting other trains had never bothered me before. I went to sleep for a while, and when the Minaki Special slowed down at Vivian I woke up in time to see the station operator give a message via the hoop system to our conductor. Again, I asked where the Continental was now. The conductor's said it was in Transcona waiting on a sidetrack for us, the Minaki Special, to pass. So with a clear track and no other stops to hold the Continental up, we would be in Winnipeg shortly. With the last train orders received at Vivian by the Minaki Special, their misinterpretation and the misunderstanding due to the conflicting green light and block system, the Minaki Special sped on to impending doom and disaster.

After leaving Vivian, watching the mileage posts go by extremely fast, I laid down for a moment when three jolts happened – the brakes, the impact, and the rear coaches hitting our coach. This threw me over the heads of my brother and friend into the vacant seat behind us. Dust and coal dust rained down on us. I saw a man coming down the aisle,

swinging two extra large boxes from side to side and knocking over other passengers. He was screaming "let the women and children out first," but when he reached the exit door it was jammed.

My friend and I took the pickaxe hanging there and opened the door. The man pushed by us and was the first person off our coach. My brother, my friend and I followed. It was then that I saw the massive destruction surrounding us. I looked up to see clearly the green signal light, which remained green for about half an hour, before being changed to red.

This is what I remember about that September evening - the east Dugald Station signboard was torn down and was being used as a stretcher to carry victims away from the flames. I was unable to re-enter our coach due to the advancing flames. Explosions erupted from the gas tanks under the coaches. Ambulances arrived behind the Dugald Station to pick up survivors, except (notably) the CN's own ambulance, which stayed on the highway and survivors had to be carried across a field to reach it.

The surviving conductor wandered in the midst of this holocaust asking for help to push the steel parlour cars out of the way of the advancing flames. He finally found a farmer with a tractor to remove them.

The grain elevator and Imperial Oil buildings and storage area were ablaze. Flames descended upon an overturned wooden coach before many survivors could be rescued.

Just before sunrise, with the fires almost out, survivors - many with just the clothes on their backs - were starting to feel the cool morning. The CN railway hooked up to the Continental rear, and with some survivors aboard, left for Winnipeg.

The remaining survivors, including myself, arrived a little later and emerged from the two box cars supplied by the CN Railway. Only upon arriving at the CN Station in Winnipeg, tired, cold and hungry, did the CN offer anyone a cup of coffee.

There was not one CN Railway official there to meet survivors or offer help of any kind.

I returned to work the following day at the CN shops in Fort Rouge, Winnipeg, where I was a blacksmith apprentice. The Superintendent stopped by to tell me he was glad that I was not one of the casualties. I mentioned that I saw the Dugald Station display board showing clearly the green light, which to me indicated that the Minaki Special had a clear track. About a week later two CNR officials came to the shops to see me. They informed me that I could not have seen a green light displayed for the light was red. I told them I was not colour blind, had passed their own doctor's medical for colour blindness, and did not need glasses.

Shortly after this accident I had severe pain in my lower back, due to a pinched nerve. I asked the superintendent to change my position from a blacksmith to an electrician apprenticeship. My request was denied and the CN Railway terminated my job in February 1948. I obtained legal advice and was awarded $2,000 for the injury.

Story by
Mabel Webb

Mabel and Stanley Webb were married in 1944, and moved into an old house in the centre of Dugald, purchased by Stan's parents. It became a happy home for their family, including their children Gloria and Danny, for 10 years. Mabel was home that night in September 1947, and had a friend visiting.

My friend Mertle Coey was visiting September 1, 1947, and we were listening to records that evening. "Across the Alley from the Alamo" was playing; and it ends with a bang as the Navajo and Pinto pony are struck by a train. That bang occurred simultaneously with the bang of the Dugald train crash. For a moment we thought it was the record, then realized it was too loud. We went outside and discovered the westbound "Camper Special" had smashed head on into the standing, eastbound transcontinental train – completely unaware of the impending danger.

September long weekend 1947 rocked our little village - with fire, death and devastation. Late in the evening the CNR eastbound Continental waited on the main line at the Dugald Station for the westbound Minaki Special to arrive and take the siding. Something went terribly wrong with the communications between the crew members. The Minaki Special arrived at full speed on the main line and smashed head on into the waiting Continental, driving it back several yards.

The Minaki Special was made up of wooden coaches and lit with gas lamps. It was used mainly on weekends to take people from Winnipeg out to the lakes and back. The ensuing impact caused many coaches to derail and pile on top of one another. Flames immediately engulfed the wreckage.

We lived on the lane leading to the station only half a block away. Very quickly the villagers were running to the scene to help in pulling people to safety, men came with cutting torches in an attempt to cut some free of the wreckage. Farmers came with trucks to take the injured to hospital, 15 miles away. As I stood by my gate in awe of this terrible scene, a neighbour called out to me: "Go to the telephone office." The telephone office was just across the road from my house; I ran there as fast as I could. The young operator on duty, had only one month's experience. Together we got the overloaded switchboard under control; it had been more than a year since I'd worked as an operator, but I knew we had to call in off-duty operators to activate the second switchboard. It took several hours for the first one to arrive; most of them had some distance to travel.

Once news of the train wreck reached Winnipeg, chaos broke loose as people piled into their cars and drove out to the scene, many in search of relatives, other just on-lookers. The main road leading into the village was clogged with vehicles; masses of people abandoned their vehicles and approached the scene on foot, further impeding the movement of emergency vehicles.

The grain elevator was ablaze. Next, the Imperial Oil storage warehouse was on fire, with gasoline drums exploding and sending their tops spinning into the night sky. Sparks rained down on the village.

Morning came, calm and warm. Smoke hung over the scene as rescue workers quietly moved about with their task of removing bodies and searching for more. In the end, about 30 people perished and many more were injured.

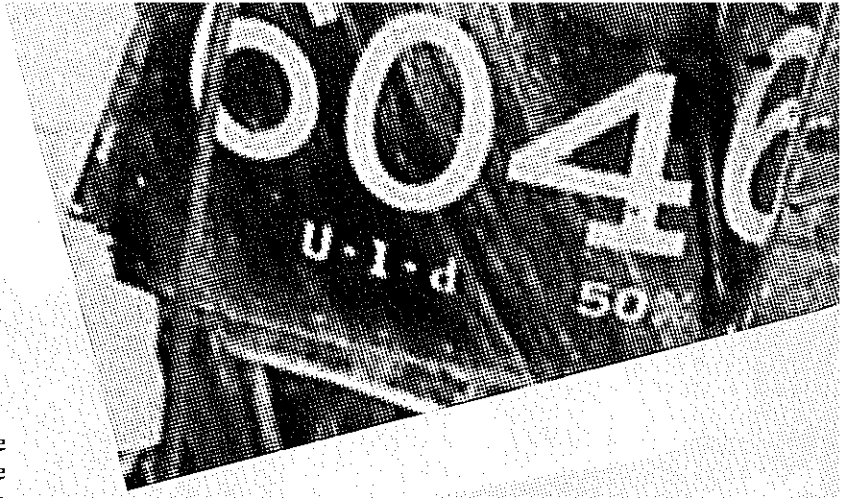
It is remarkable how ordinary people of a tiny village, along with area farmers, could respond to such an incredible situation and apply talents few people knew they had. Everyone tackled the task at hand swiftly and proficiently. There were many unsung heroes that night.

Story by Ken Black

On the night of the Dugald train wreck, two young Winnipeg Free Press reporters, Doug Pollard and Ken Black, were passengers in a Free Press car driven by staff photographer Jack 'Socko' Ablett. This is Ken Black's recollection of events.

We were cruising around the outskirts of the city, tuned into the police radio frequency 'looking for action'. A message came over reporting "some kind of fire east of the city." From our vantage point, we noted a red glow in the sky and persuaded Socko to drive in that direction. By the time we reached the outskirts of Dugald we saw several rail carriages ablaze near the Dugald elevator.

At this point, police and ambulances from Winnipeg had not yet arrived, so we were first on the scene. In the adjoining field several dozen passengers, obviously dazed, wandered about. They were in shock and gave a jumbled description of what had happened.



The Minaki Special, which was returning to Winnipeg with passengers from a weekend at the resorts, had collided with another train. The carriage was made of wood and was lit by kerosene lamps – an explosive combination.

The morning Free Press carried eyewitness accounts of the disaster and details of the number of casualties and fatalities. The cause of the crash became the subject of a lengthy inquiry.

As a result of the Dugald train wreck, wooden carriages and kerosene lamps were no longer used on the Minaki Special.

Story by

Gerald Alexander

Camp PALA was a YMCA sponsored summer camp. To get there required a boat trip from Minaki. I was an employee at the camp during the summer of 1947; I met my future wife there.

At the end of the camp season, eight to 10 camp employees, including me, were to board the Minaki Special that would take us to Winnipeg on September 1st. The west bound train left Minaki at either 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. Our camp group boarded the 7th or 8th coach, unlike previous years when the PALA group settled into the 1st or 2nd coach. I went through the first six coaches, twice, to buy refreshments, and noticed two or three veterans in uniform in the first two coaches. I especially remember a young navy man and his girlfriend who were laughing away and enjoying each other's company.

Shortly after my second visit to the sandwich man, and as the train was nearing Dugald, our coach began to vibrate and shudder - the violent vibrations were caused by the engineer forcefully applying the emergency brakes.

When the two trains collided violently some of my friends were thrown from their seats into the aisle. Luggage flew from the racks and injured some of my fellow camp workers. I remember getting off our coach and walking up to where the two train engines were locked together. Still in shock, I walked by the first and second coaches, which were consumed by flames. The newspaper reports said almost all the people who were killed were in the first two coaches.

The newspaper reports said almost all the people who were killed were in the first two coaches.

Four or five of us were taken to Winnipeg by car. Arriving at the C.N.R. station, we were met by a crowd of anxious friends and relatives, who had been informed about a serious accident. Included in the large group waiting at the station was my girlfriend, Shirley Cook.

I arrived home about midnight and found my parents fast asleep. They first learned of the accident (I didn't mention it at breakfast) by reading the headlines in the morning paper, and I learned of the gravity of the accident - 31 people perished and 81 were injured.

Story by Shirley Alexander

Here is the story of the Dugald train wreck from another angle – that of someone waiting at the station. Sept. 1, 1947, I was eagerly awaiting my boyfriend's return to Winnipeg. We had met at PALA, a young adult summer camp on an island reached by boat from Minaki. The arrival board listed the train as "late" for some time with no explanation from the station agent.

After an hour and a half, a group of doctors, all with their little black bags, ran down the rotunda and up the stairs to the track. Something was very wrong.

Eventually, they announced that there had been an accident and that the people from PALA Camp car were not injured, but all would be arriving very late, at about 11:30 p.m. Gerry was very quiet and said only that two trains had collided. The next morning, the radio reports confirmed just how dreadful an accident it had been.

Story of William Kwasnycia

In 1947, William Kwasnycia was 18 years-old and worked at PALA Camp in Minaki, Ontario for the summer. He was a boat boy, and played drums with the piano player for the nightly dances.

The camp closed on Labour Day, but many people who had been at the camp earlier in the summer came for the final weekend. When they arrived there was a banner on the two coaches "PALA Minaki Special".

When I got off the boat, from the camp, with my drums, I asked the train conductor where the coaches were for PALA people. He thought the two coaches assigned to us, which were just behind the engine, should be moved to the back of the train, as we were a young, noisy bunch. That move probably saved our lives; most of the deaths happened in the coaches just behind the engine.

During the trip back to Winnipeg, I returned from the baggage car, right behind the engine, with chocolate bars for some of my friends. I forgot the drinks and I was ready to go back for them but was told not to bother. Within 5 to 10 minutes from that moment the trains collided. Most of the people on our coaches were young and able to get out of the train. Everyone immediately began to help. A fellow named Chuck grabbed an axe and started chopping the doors, which were all jammed, enabling some people to get out. A nurse, Margaret Breckman, assisted the injured. Another nurse, Mrs. Lou Driscoll, also helped the injured.

The fire spread quickly through the wooden coaches, with lamps lit with gas. The grain elevator at Dugald was on fire and timbers were collapsing on the coaches, hampering the rescue. We returned to Winnipeg by bus. In 1979 my wife and I bought a cottage in Minaki.

Story by
Pearl Carroll (Rougeau)

At about 10:00 p.m. Sunday, Sept.1, 1947, Pearl Carroll's three-year-old twins, Murray and Joan, were asleep for the night. Every train whistle she heard suggested that her husband Gil's "Minaki Special" train had arrived in Transcona and he would be home soon.

Throughout the rest of this night I'd hear many more train whistles but Gil would never arrive home.

I was first alerted to the news of an accident when Gil's cousins dropped in. They had heard of the train wreck at Dugald, and knew I didn't have a phone. Throughout the night many people dropped in with bits of information, that added to the radio reports.

Gil always managed to come out a winner in any situation. The news reports said the injured were being taken to Winnipeg hospitals, and we naturally assumed he would be among that group. We clung to this hope.

Morning came, without any news. My dad and Gil's brother drove to Dugald to investigate further. They returned with devastating news. There was no trace of Gil. For days, everything was a blur of confusion. Our family was left out of any arrangements for the mass burial, and Gil's name was even left off the monument. It was only a day or so before the memorial service that it was recognized we, too, suffered in that tragedy.

The CNR assumed no responsibility for us, and in 1947 we received a small amount from Workman's Compensation. It was not until a few years later, through the efforts and petitions of the widows, that we received an increase.

Yet no amount of money could soften the blow of this tragedy. Arthur and Alma Rougeau lost a beloved son, we lost a loving father and husband, and my parents, who should have been enjoying a carefree retirement, moved in to help us survive. This was not the life Gil and I had planned for our children.



Story by
Harry Craig

Monday, September 1, 1947 was not just another day at the lake. It was the day that almost all campers along the CNR Redditt subdivision were closing their cottages for the season and heading home. Harry Craig was 11 years old, and starting Grade 6 the next day at Transcona Central School.

Back in those days, CN ran two trains picking up passengers along the rail line. The first train, originating at Sioux Lookout, Ontario was about one hour ahead of ours, stopping at some but not all stations. It did not stop at Ena, Ontario, so we all boarded the second Campers' train. An 11-year-old guest, Edwin Matheson, was also at the cottage that weekend.

We sat in the third coach and had our pick of seats. At Minaki we watched canoes, luggage and dogs being loaded into the baggage car. As we proceeded west, the Campers' train picked up many passengers from various stations.

Between Anola and Dugald, my Dad came back to his seat from the baggage car and told us that we would be in Transcona before long. He was a CNR locomotive engineer and knew all of the train crew. Ed Matheson, myself and another young person were all sitting in the same seat, riding backwards, at the time of the crash. The brakes went on, seemed to release and then went on again. I remember saying to Ed that we must have passed a station.

My next recollection was standing in the aisle of the coach holding onto the seat armrest. I do not recall the impact. I could see a red glow above the upper windows while thinking about how to get out. Our coach had uncoupled, derailed, gone into the north ditch and was on about a 45 degree angle. I tried to go forward but the door was jammed so I lowered myself to the lower windows and found enough room to get out of the coach. Fortunately, the gas lit lamps in the coach went out and no fire was burning in our cabin.

My next recollection was standing in the aisle of the coach holding onto the seat armrest. I do not recall the impact.

Once outside, I made contact with my parents who were frantic for our safety. Ed also found his way out through the lower windows and we were all together. My Mom had a minor injury but we all escaped the coach intact; we were very lucky.

The scene outside was chaos – fire was burning in the baggage car and the first coach. Our locomotive met head on with passenger train number 4, which was stopped on the main line at the Dugald station

while waiting for the campers' train to take the siding track. The noise of steam escaping from the locomotives was intense, and as the fire from the campers' train escalated it set the nearby elevator on fire, completely destroying it.

We were at the scene of the wreck for what seemed like hours, but eventually got a ride home to Transcona with Dr. Murdoch MacKay. On the road home, I remember seeing many people going to Dugald, including someone on a bicycle. Tuesday morning, I returned to Dugald with my folks. By then all the wooden coaches were burned to ashes and all that was left were the steel frames of the carriages. At the end of the train were two steel coaches - still intact.

Since September 1, 1947 I have traveled hundreds of miles back and forth along that same track. I still go to Ena Lake but no longer by rail; I prefer highway access.

Story by
Beth Cook (nee Gillespie)

Monday, September 1, 1947, Jack Cook and I went to a movie in Transcona. I was starting Normal School (Teacher's College) the next day and was to move into residence while getting my teaching qualification. The school was a long way from Dugald, across Winnipeg in Tuxedo, near Assiniboine Park.

Jack and I left Transcona, crossed the CN track on what was then known as Claey's Road (Ravenhurst) and turned east toward Dugald on Hwy #15 (Dugald Road). Here we became aware of "something going on", fire trucks and ambulances were rushing past us.

A huge red orange glow could be seen ahead. We thought it was the Cordite Plant on fire, but no, as we passed the munitions plant we realized the trouble was ahead ... in Dugald.

Arriving in Dugald, Jack parked near the store, while I stayed in the car. He walked up the road to investigate, and see if he could be of some assistance. As I sat in the car, I watched barrels of fuel from the oil storage shed, blow high in the air and land far down the road. The police had arrived but wouldn't let Jack through. The only way he could be of help, they thought, was if he had a station wagon to transport injured people to Winnipeg.

When we spoke to one of the rescuers, he expressed how difficult it was for him. He helped people out and away from the train, and set them down safely on the grass, only to have them - in their shocked and dazed state - get up and return to search for family and friends.

I can now smile at the memory of my first day at Normal School. A young, shy country girl, I was asked to stand in front of the class and describe what happened the evening before in my hometown of Dugald.

While Jack and I were among the confusion in Dugald, my sister, was at home on the family farm 1 1/2 miles south. She recalls the sound of the crash, and later, the barrels of fuel blowing high in the sky, flames trailing behind. It was quite a spectacular sight from the back porch.

Another sister, Lola, was one of the telephone operators who spent so much time relaying information during the disaster.

Jack and I were married in 1950, another eventful year in Manitoba history – the year of the great Red River flood that swept through Winnipeg.

Story by Peter Penton

Peter Penton was a 17- year-old "call boy" hitching a ride in the engine of the eastbound CN Continental passenger train stopped at Dugald the evening of September 1, 1947.

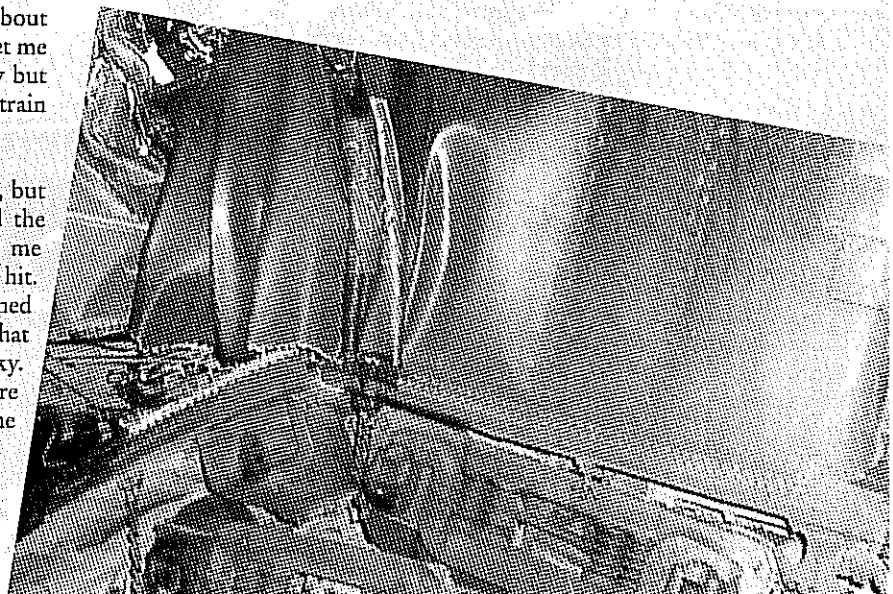
Along with the engineer and fireman, I jumped from the huge locomotive just before the Minaki Campers' Special collided with it. My job was to go to the homes of the crew and inform them that they were required to take a train out shortly. I was "called out" as not many people had phones and the crew had to be located and told of their schedules. I had the night off, and since I was so crazy about trains and engines, I got the engineer of the eastbound #6046 to let me go "firing" as far as Redditt, Ontario. I was not part of the crew but knew I would be able to get back to Transcona on a westbound train later.

I was behind the boiler and did not have a view down the track, but I heard the fireman comment "that guy's not heading in" and the engineer's reply "By golly we'd better get off". They called to me to jump! I had just cleared the engine when the Minaki train hit. Fortunately, the locomotives though "welded together" remained upright on the tracks. When I saw that cab punched down on that boiler head like tissue paper, I realized that I was pretty lucky. With the steam from the engine hissing high in the air and the fire spreading quickly along the wooden cars of the Camper Special, the scene was horrific.

Since I wasn't suppose to be on the train, I decided to get back to Winnipeg as quickly as possible. I got a ride in a panel truck, along with a lady survivor who was lying on a door in the truck.

When we got to the St. Boniface Hospital we warned them to expect many more injured people. I phoned my mother to tell her that I was all right but she hadn't heard the news yet. Since I was concerned that someone could place me at the accident site, a friend and I rode our bikes back to Dugald. By that time the search for injured, the dead and the survivors was well underway.

Now retired and living in Winnipeg, I've spent my working life as a CN engineer. The railroad is in my blood!



Story of Hugh and Catherine (Kitty) MacKay (as recalled by their daughter Louise Rosins)

Hugh and Kitty MacKay were returning to Winnipeg on the second Camper Special after having spent the Labour Day weekend, Sept. 1947, at Kitty's family cabin.

Many warm times were spent growing up at my mother's family cottage. The cottage, built in 1907 on an island about a mile north of the Minaki Lodge, still belongs to the family. It was "heaven" growing up there - lots of swimming, treasure hunts and the people even produced their own newspaper, the Minaki Herald. During the Second World War there was no recreational gasoline available, so sailboats and canoes were used to go to Minaki Lodge and to pick up supplies. Today, the island is an official bald eagle sanctuary due to the stand of ancient white pines.

With no road into the area until 1959, the train was the only way to get to and from the lake cottages. The train was known as the Camper Special. Two trains took campers out from Winnipeg on Friday and back at the end of the weekend.

Girls often met the Saturday train at Minaki, the one the young men came out on, hoping to get invited to the dance at the lodge on Saturday evening. At the end of the weekend, the first train left at 6:30 p.m. and the second one, the one Hugh and Kitty took, left about an hour later.

On September 1st, Hugh and Kitty left her parents' cabin on the island, said good-bye, and got on the third or fourth coach. It was an "absolutely perfect day", Kitty said. They packed bag lunches and got seated for the ol' boring run to Winnipeg; but it was only 'boring' until the train got closer to Dugald. Hugh had a stopwatch and was timing the poles as the train sped along. They seemed to be going awfully fast. Then there was a terrible noise. The train was dropping sand in an effort to slow down. Hugh pushed my head down on his knees – he knew a crash was coming. We collided, and stopped with a loud bang. There was no coasting. Hugh yelled "gotta go", and he and another man tried to get out but the doors were jammed. We could hear things blowing up. The men kicked out the windows and Hugh made me jump. A man outside was catching people. The coaches were blowing up and burning. Someone yelled "get into the ditch". The noise and screaming was continuous. I said my prayers. We were in the car behind the one where so many people died.

We later decided we had to get to the road. I was planning to walk the 14 miles to Winnipeg but I was told to wait as a train would be sent out. It was dark but there was a huge glow from the fire. Hugh, with the war behind him, seemed to remain calm, knowing how to help people. We started walking to Winnipeg and were well past the crash site when a car came screeching up. "Help me," someone yelled, "I'm trying to take someone to the hospital." Hugh got in the back and I got in the front. When we arrived at the St. Boniface Hospital we told them about the wreck. Ambulances left for Dugald. Even from there, looking east, you could see the glow of the fire.

We took a taxi to Hugh's parents' home and, still shaking, told them of the disaster we had just survived. Hugh phoned the telegraph office to let my parents know we were safe. We went home to Selkirk the next day and the quiet, lovely grounds of our home on River Road seemed like a sanctuary.

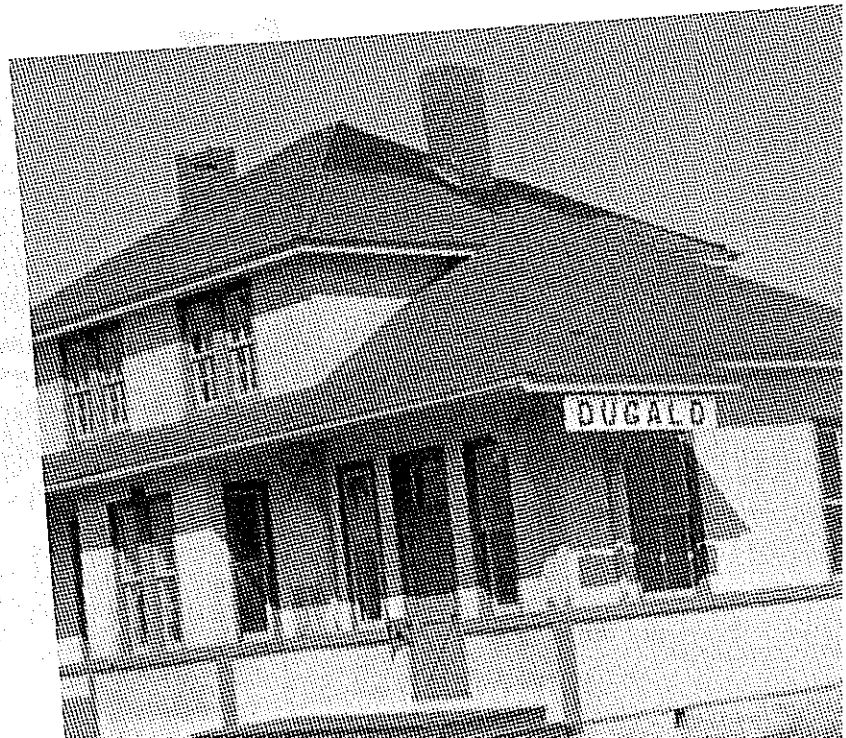
Hugh loved trains. He was part of the inquiry that followed, and stated how impressed he was with the local people helping those in need - how they got survivors to safety and how some even transported the injured to the hospital on the grain in the back of trucks and wagons. Hugh and Kitty were on the camper special many times over the years following the crash but never again treated it as "that boring run."

Story by Wilma Pullin

For many years, campers heading for cottage country in Manitoba and Ontario travelled on the C.N.R.'s popular "Camper Special." About six miles north of Minaki on Harbour Island, there was a church camp called P.A.L.A. (Presbyterian Athletic and Literary Association). On the September long weekend 1947, Wilma Pullin and her husband Howard were part of a group headed to PALA Camp.

When the weekend ended we returned to Minaki station to board the train for Winnipeg. Our group was assigned to the last two coaches; we were originally supposed to be forward on the train – that no doubt would have caused us more injury or even death. With the scheduled stops completed, we were travelling at a good speed as we approached Winnipeg. Our first indication that something was wrong was the sudden braking, followed by the brakes again and a sudden stop. The seats attached to the wooden floor by metal brackets ripped off the floor. We had no knowledge of the problem but we gathered up our belongings and proceeded to leave the train. We could hear the moan of the engines. Due to the gas lighting used in the coaches, the fires were quick to break out in the coaches up front – many had derailed.

Some of the men in our group went up front to see if they could help. The people of Dugald arrived quickly and were doing their best to help. Some of our group walked over to the town to wait while others waited in the grassy ditches. Finally, some boxcars sent from Winnipeg arrived to take us back to the city. We didn't know the details about the accident until the next day, and how severe and tragic it was. We were grateful to be okay. We learned a lesson – life is precious.



Story by Violet (Brown) McLeod

Violet Brown was a telephone operator in Dugald at the time of the terrible train wreck. On September 1st, 1947, shortly after 10:00 p.m., the Minaki Special ran head on into a CNR train headed east. I got off work at 10:00 p.m. and my father picked me up to drive me home. We just got in the yard. As I opened the car door I heard a terrible crash. I ran into the house and called Lola, the operator who had come to work for 10:00, who said there had been a train wreck in Dugald across from the C.N. station house and the elevator.

My father drove me back to Dugald, and after a brief look at the wreckage I went to the telephone office to help Lola. She was swamped with phone calls, every light on the switchboard was lit up. We were busy. People were lined up outside to use the pay phone. The RCMP came in to make reports so we let them use the chief operator's phone. We kept things going the best we could. We never collected any money for the phone calls - that wasn't important - this was a real emergency!



When things settled down after a few days we wondered if we would still have our jobs. Other girls came to work as soon as they heard about the wreck. We didn't leave the office for at least three days. My mother and Lola's mother brought us our meals and other Dugald women also brought us food and drink. We later learned that my father had taken injured people to the hospital.

Later that year, we, the telephone operators, Violet Brown, Lola Gillespie, Helen Ptak and Marie Roberts, received a commendation from the managers of Manitoba Telephone System, a framed certificate, a silver compact engraved with our initials, and a bouquet of roses.

Story by Linda Paterson

Linda Paterson's family connection to the 1947 Dugald train wreck is unique in that, by some twist of fate, they were NOT involved in the wreckage.

My grandparents, Jim and Stella Ketchin, had been invited to spend the September long weekend at the lake with their good friends Grenville and Betty Dixon. I was two years-old at the time and was to accompany Grandma and Grandpa.

At the last minute, Grandpa decided to stay home to work on the furnace before the cold weather set in. That decision may have saved our lives, as we escaped the terrible tragedy that befell the Dixon family and many others.

Such dramatic events make one stop and realize that there must be a greater being who controls our destiny and performs miracles. My Grandma and Grandpa lived to be 87 and 96, respectively. I am now 60, with my own grandchildren.

Story by
Evelyn Ralston

Evelyn Ralston, her husband, George, and young son, Ronald, lived only yards from the railroad track, near one of the two elevators in Dugald - the one that burned as a result of the crash and fire that followed. I was alone that evening. George was at work in Winnipeg. By 10:00 p.m. Ronald was asleep and, being pregnant at the time, I had retired for the night, too. I remember the loud crash - a sound that remained with me for years – which made me think I had been blown out of the bed by the collision. I found myself at the window trying to see what happened. I grabbed Ronald and got out of the house. People were running everywhere, while the police tried to maintain order.

George arrived home amid the chaos. He was on his way home, crossing the track in Transcona on Ravenhurst Road, when the collision happened. Dugald is about five miles east from that crossing. When he realized that Ronald and I were safe he turned his attention to the fuel shed near the track. He was involved in an oil business and knew the potential of added danger.

Barrels were already blowing up and being propelled high in the night sky. I screamed at him to "be careful" amid all the noise and confusion. George, his father and local residents got much of the fuel out and loaded onto trucks. I took Ronald to a friend's house where he stayed the night. The elevator next to our house was burning, grain and debris was falling all around.

My father and brothers came from Glass, a hamlet just a few miles east of Dugald, where the train had passed just minutes before the collision. Fearful that my house would be lost to the fire, they carried much of my furniture out and across the road to safety. By some miracle, my home survived the flaming debris that rained down upon it.

I screamed at him to "be careful" amidall the noise and confusion.

To this day, I remember the sound of the impact that literally welded the two locomotives together, and being propelled out of bed, screaming, people everywhere, the police and the fire, oh yes, the fire!

People arrived from all over to help with the rescue and the fire. The police tried to keep the crowd away from the scene. In the aftermath, George and I took a long walk by the track. I will never forget the devastation. The old wooden passenger cars used gas for lighting so when the train buckled, the gas lines broke and cars quickly burned.

I have lived by railroad tracks most of my life. When I left Dugald, I went only as far as the 'railway town' of Transcona.

Story by
William Reynolds

Here is how William Reynolds, then an 11-year-old boy, remembers that fateful night in September 1947.

Our family lived on Oakbank Road (Hwy 206) just north of the railway tracks, alongside the road that led to the Dugald railroad station. On the evening of September 1, 1947, my mother was sitting quietly in her kitchen, dimly lit with a coal oil lamp. In the window of the Toronto bound Continental train, she could see a lady changing her baby.

One of eight children, I was climbing up to my top bunk when a loud bang shook the house; I jumped to the floor and ran downstairs to the kitchen. The lights were out on the Continental train. Within 10 minutes the house filled with people wanting to use the phone. It was a wall phone with a crank – phone number – "line nine". I can still visualize all the people, 20 to 25 at a time coming in, going out, - panicking, then quiet, confused ... drained.

There was a tub of ice in the kitchen with 24 bottles of cold beer, kept on hand for the men working the harvest to come in and have a cold one. With the crowds of people in and out, it wasn't long until the beer was gone.

The fire started immediately, spreading and increasing rapidly. The fires kept people back from the burning wooden cars. Though only 11 years old, I was able to beat down the grass fire with wet burlap sacks. I noticed a larger patch burning and ran to beat it out too, only to discover it was a body. I spent a lot of time running back and forth with reports to my mother.

At some point, the Continental train was split at the crossing. The west portion of the train had been pulled back to allow emergency vehicles through. Ambulances crossed the track and proceeded in the darkness through our yard, working their way east towards the collision site. I ran ahead of them, cutting the wire fencing with an old pair of pliers and knocking down fence posts so the ambulances could get closer. My father, along with many Dugald residents, helped in the rescue effort and aided in clean-up for days after.

School started on Tuesday, the day after the accident. After school, I went to the accident site to help out. It was expected that anyone who could work, would. I remember shoveling grain – it was burnt and smelling of fuel. We used one of our trucks to haul it away; I wondered why they were removing the grain. My clean-up efforts were put to a stop when my Dad told me to leave; I had uncovered a leg.

The Winnipeg newspapers were full of coverage about the accident. Our house can be seen in many of the aerial photographs.

My parents, like many others, believed that more than 31 people (the official count) died in the accident.

I have lived in Dugald my entire life, where I was married, raised a family and am now retired. My former family home belongs to someone else now, and stands across the road from the famous Dugald Costume Museum. An event like this is a lifelong memory. For years an unexpected noise would bring it all back.

Story by
Joyce Verner

Joyce and Gordon Rutherford, her sister-in-law and brother-in-law, and two other couples, boarded the 5:00 p.m. Minaki Special on Friday evening for the last long weekend of the year. They were spending the weekend at Mr. and Mrs. Dave Rutherford's island cottage at Minaki. Closing the cottage for the season, they were loaded down with duffel bags filled with items they were bringing back to Winnipeg.

We boarded the third coach and settled down for our trip back to Winnipeg. We were having a good time with our friends and didn't realize there was any problem until the accident occurred.When the trains hit, the backs of the seats snapped off, the lamps burst and windows cracked. Realizing the fire was coming towards our coach, Gordon threw the duffel bags out and started helping the people out the windows. He went out the bottom of the door that he had managed to pry open.

I was a nurse and worked at the Winnipeg Clinic. There were two doctors from the Winnipeg Clinic aboard the train, in the parlour car. They sent a runner to fetch me so I could help them with the injured at the rear of the train. On my way to the back of the train I tripped over two bodies, but soon realized more help was needed at the front of the train where most of the damage had occurred.

Not much could be done without medicine, supplies or equipment. I applied a few tourniquets and tried to comfort the survivors. I also suggested they use all the signs around as stretchers.

He went out the bottom of the door
that he had managed to pry open.

Gordon called his brother to pick them up in Dugald. Only then did the shock of what had happened set in - it took me a long time to get over this tragedy. That said, I continue to spend my summers at Minaki and have been going there for more than 60 years now.

Story of George Steel submitted by his nephew Ragnar Erlendson

George Steel was born in Scotland, in 1905, and shortly after came to Canada with his parents to settle in Winnipeg. He had two sisters, Christina and Margaret. He was educated and worked in Winnipeg, where he married and had a son, Ronnie.

The cottage at Malachi provided a long, pleasant summer vacation from the city during George's childhood years. He traveled on the train many times.

In 1947, after serving four years in the Second World War, the cottage at Malachi provided a peaceful place to be with his family and put memories of war behind him. Labour Day weekend was the last visit to the cottage that year as Ronnie was going back to school. They boarded the fateful train to return to Winnipeg. In July, the family came to our farm to visit my mother. That was the last time we saw them.

My mother heard about the train wreck on the radio and was concerned that her brother and his family were on it. She knew that they planned to visit Malachi during the last two weeks of August. She didn't have a telephone and the nearest telegraph office was 45 miles away, it was difficult to confirm her fears.

Finally, she received the devastating news. Her brother, George Steel, and his family were casualties in the train disaster. She later read about a local rescuer who recalled someone saying "Help me Mac." My mother was sure it was George, who called everyone "Mac" if he didn't know the person's name. When George and his son Ronnie died, the "Steel" family name died with them.

Story of Jane Elizabeth Jamieson as recalled by her sister Margaret Jamieson



On Sept. 1, 1947, Jane Jamieson lost her life in Dugald coming home from Malachi with her friend, Barbara Hebert, on the Camper Special. She was just days short of her 17th birthday, had graduated from Kelvin High School and was about to enter university.

Jane's remains were never identified, but her name is listed with many others on the large marker that stands alongside the mass grave at Brookside Cemetery in Winnipeg.

Jane and Barbara had left their seats and gone to the car ahead to say goodbye to friends when the collision occurred. Jane was killed, but Barbara was blown out of the car and landed in the ditch. Barbara recovered to lead a full life, and passed away on Sept. 1, 2003.

As a result of the train disaster many families became close. The Wynn family, who lost their only child, Alma, a musically gifted daughter, and the Jamiesons remained in close contact over the years.

Interview with Rosie Rogers

In 1947, Rosie and Mervin Rogers owned and operated Rosie's Snack Shop and B.A. Gas Bar in Dugald. Rosie ran the restaurant and sold a few groceries from the store, as well as gasoline, spark plugs, filters and other automobile items. Rosie, now 87, lives in Evergreen Lodge in Dugald, across the highway from the site of the wreck. Here's how Rosie remembers the night of Sept. 1, 1947.

While electricity was coming to rural Manitoba, at the time of the crash the snack shop had no power. I remember the evening of September 1st as lovely and quiet. I was in the kitchen cutting cucumbers for pickles. I don't remember hearing any sound prior to the crash – then WHAM. I crossed to the door, about 12 feet from where I had been working, to look out. The tracks were just out my back door. The three wooden cars behind the engine were up in a V shape and were already burning. The concussion from the impact was felt miles away.

So much happened in just a few hours. Everybody was involved in the rescue effort. I stayed in the kitchen pumping water and kept pots boiling. The water was taken away as fast as it was boiled; people kept coming for hot water. We had to close the store because there were too many people trying to push their way in to use the phone - and the lines were already loaded.

We filled the 10-gallon glass bulbs on top of the gas pumps to keep them from being full of fumes and possibly exploding from the heat. The gasoline was hand pumped, as there was no electricity at that time. There was no fire fighting equipment available at the site until trucks with pumps arrived. Water from the ditch was also used.

I will never forget that night. There were so many people, and dozens who were dazed, carrying their luggage and walking towards Transcona and Winnipeg. Cars and people were coming from the city – bumper to bumper - looking for friends and family. There was a steady stream all night long.

It was frightening to see the huge grain elevator burn and see men trying to get oil drums out of the storage shed nearby. At the time of the wreck, Station Road (just east of the present day curling club) was the only access road to the wreck. The road is still there but now goes to a private home and does not cross the track. Dugald station was dismantled years ago.

I remember a stranger who sat quietly in his car at the edge of the field and took in the scene; he had 'felt drawn to come' and had driven all the way from Texas. The site was still smoldering when he arrived. An engineer, he had been in a train wreck but said this was the worst he had ever seen.

I fed a lot of men over the hours and days following the accident. They would come in, have a quick sandwich then go back to work. I heard a lot of sadness in their stories about what they were encountering.

Interview with Neil "Chick" Edie

Chick Edie lived three miles east of Dugald on a farm alongside the CN tracks. These are his memories of Sept. 1, 1947.

The train had just passed and rounded the curve approaching Dugald. We got a call from our neighbors, Maggie and Gord Hudson, telling us about the accident. Their son, Murray, and I headed for Dugald - we were 17, big shots and ready for anything. "Anything" proved to be a night never to be forgotten.

The heat from the fires was keeping rescue efforts back but Murray and I were able to move a woman's body from the track. By 11:00 p.m. it had cooled off considerably. People were bringing injured people out to the highway. I remember my mother, Jenny, laying her fur coat on an injured couple who had been moved from the wreck on car doors. It was later learned that they were husband and wife. They were taken into Winnipeg in the back of a loaded grain truck. I believe they both died. My mother's coat never came back.

A one-ton truck was backed up to Stanley Webb's fuel shed and men were loading it with barrels of fuel. I remember throwing burning shingles off the truck; they were falling from the elevator that was now burning. Empty fuel drums were blowing up and shooting high in the air like rockets – they landed all over town. Stan Webb's hand was crushed between drums. The loaded truck was then driven to a field away from the fires and left.

Empty fuel drums were blowing up and shooting high in the air like rockets – they landed all over town.

I heard that the concussion from the impact knocked dishes off shelves in houses 1 1/2 miles out of town. There were so many fire trucks, so many ambulances and police cars. I don't know where so many came from so quickly, but many private vehicles were used as well.

Chick, now in his 70's, lives in Evergreen Lodge across the highway from the site of the accident.

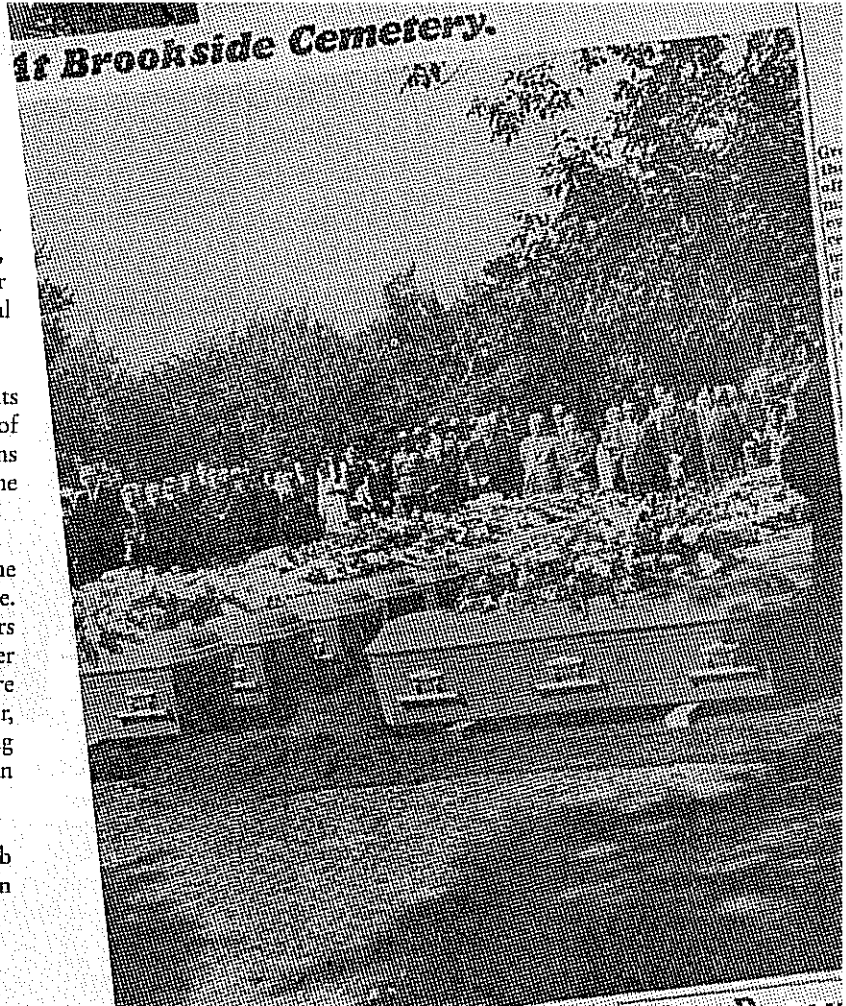
Story by
Mabel McKnight

In 1947, Mabel McKnight and her husband Harry were newly married and farming in Homewood, Manitoba. She was a Transcona girl, and grew up in that railroad community. Her father, Ross Cook, a CN engineer, had owned Cooks funeral home in Transcona for about a year when the Minaki "Camper Special" hit the Continental train in Dugald.

Early Tuesday morning, September 2, 1947, the phone rang. My parents asked us to come in and help with the suddenly overwhelming job of coping with the aftermath of the accident. Bodies, remains and items from the wreck site were brought into the funeral home. That phone call was the first we had heard of the wreck.

Long tables covered with oilcloth had been set up in the garage of the funeral home, to hold the personal items recovered from the scene. Some remains were kept in dry ice. Crowds of anxious family members came to try to identify something belonging to their loved ones. I never went into the garage area where my husband, father and brother were working. My mother and I remained in the office, hour after hour, answering phone calls and coping with the inquiries from those seeking information about their friends and family members that had been on the train.

Funeral directors throughout Manitoba helped Dad with the huge job of providing approximately 32 hearses needed for the funeral procession to Brookside Cemetery.



Interview with Marguerite McKenzie (Sawers)

Marguerite McKenzie and her sister, Ella, survived the 1947 Dugald train wreck. Seated further back on the train, they escaped the devastation that befell the first cars.

We were returning from PALA (Presbyterian, Athletic and Literary Association Camp) about seven miles by launch from Minaki on the Winnipeg River. There were a lot of young people from PALA on another coach toward the back of the train. The conductor, fearing they would be too noisy for the rest of the passengers, had them moved to the back.

I recall having spent some time with an ex-navy man and when the crash happened was violently thrown onto him. Ella was tossed into the aisle among all the dust that filled the coach.

"Ella" I called, "come here and take a look" – the grain elevator was burning making the scene as bright as day. There was a full moon shining down from above.

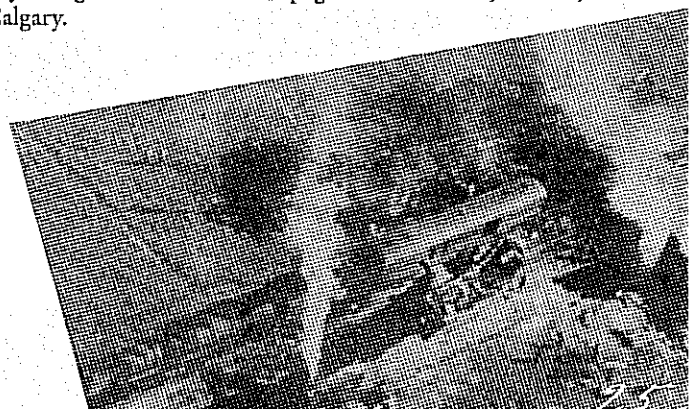
A brakeman called for everyone to get out. We grabbed our luggage and made it to a field. We sat down on the edge of a ditch. Ella sat with her head bowed on my lap. Eventually we rose and joined people down at a crossing. We were taken to Winnipeg, along with others; some injured, in a railway coal car. It was so very black. At the time we had no idea of the vastness of it all. There had been no warning, only the sound of braking, the crash, the sudden quiet, and the dust. Then the fire, it spread quickly from coach to coach.

I was boarding at the time at a home on Spence Street. The owner's daughter played the piano for the dances at PALA Camp. When we told them our news, no one would believe we had been in a train wreck.

My sister and I grew up on a farm in Woodside, Manitoba, and attended Westburn Consolidated School. I worked in Winnipeg, and was a young, dedicated employee; I went to work the very next day. I remember being nervous taking shorthand from my boss. I told him I was fine but he kindly made sure a doctor examined me. I kept insisting I was fine. The doctor made out his report and I returned to work. Several days later, an official looking man carrying a briefcase came into the office and questioned me. "What would you consider a settlement, would $25 be satisfactory?" he asked. "Oh, yes", I agreed and signed a release. My boss was quite upset that I had done such a thing.

I called my sister, Ella, who was working in Pine Falls. "How would you like to make $25?" I asked. Ella came in and signed a release, too.

Today, Marguerite lives in Winnipeg and Ella Sawers, now 91, resides in Calgary.



Story by Lola Lindholm (Gillespie)

I was the telephone operator on duty that night (10:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.) and Mabel Webb, a former operator, was the first person to come to my assistance. When the crash occurred I did not realize it was the trains, thinking someone was pounding on the telephone office. It wasn't long before some of the survivors made their way to the telephone office to phone family and friends. It was bedlam. The fires lit up the sky and moved on to the elevator and oil shed where drums of oil exploded, adding to the noise and destruction.

Marie Roberts, Helen Ptak, Violet McLeod (the other operators) and I received awards from the MTS for acts of courage and devotion, along with sterling silver compacts, for initiative and faithful service.

Story by Marie Meurrens (Roberts)

Marie Meurrens was the chief operator at the Dugald telephone office.

Following the crash, the traffic on Dugald Road (Hwy. 15) was bumper to bumper - people came from far and near to see the accident scene. The telephone operators were extremely busy connecting calls to authorized personnel, who were directly involved with the accident.

The telephone company officials acknowledged the dedication and effort put forth by all four operators at the Dugald exchange. We each received a certificate and an engraved silver compact, presented by the Commissioner of Manitoba Telephone System and the Reeve of Springfield Municipality. Pictures and details of the disaster were printed in the MTS paper called the "Telephone Echo".

Dugald Operators Honoured



At a ceremony held in the Dugald Exchange on March 8th, tribute was paid four operators who exhibited "de- to duty and exceptional initiative"

Story by Laura Gardner

Laura Gardner and her newlywed husband, Bill, were passengers on the "Camper Special" the evening of September 1, 1947. This is her story.

Having spent the last long weekend of the summer with a group of friends at the family cottage in the Minaki area, my husband and I were on the "Camper Special." Many Minaki campers waited on the long platform at the station, the "Special's" first stop on the run to Winnipeg. Our group of young friends boarded the club car at the back of the train. The individual swivel seats in the bar car were like barbers' chairs, on pedestals with a round base bolted to the floor.

When the collision happened, these chairs snapped off their bases, spilling people into the aisle. There were a few minor injuries; a friend cut her forehead on the mirror in the ladies room. With everyone out safely, Bill and others ran ahead to help; they were confronted with horrific injuries to the people in the forward cars.

I recall people trapped in the burning cars. Others were already helping with the rescue. Someone handed Bill a little girl, about three years old, and he gave her to me. I kept her with me, trying to comfort her amid the confusion. It was so dark. When help arrived from Winnipeg I gave her to an ambulance attendant; she was taken to the St. Boniface Hospital.

My father-in-law, Dr. William Gardner, an orthopedic surgeon, was the 'on-line doctor' for the CNR. He was sent immediately to the accident scene, and travelled from Winnipeg to Dugald on a flat car. He knew his son and I were likely on that train, but his anxiety turned to relief when he found out we were uninjured.

Bill came upon a man whose foot and leg had become caught between cars when the train buckled. People were trying desperately to help, and someone called out: "Is there a doctor"? Bill knew that Dr. Jack Kilgour was a passenger and set out to find him. The scene was chaotic. A hysterical man, who found an axe on the coach, believed the only way to save the trapped man was to chop off his foot. When Dr. Kilgour arrived on the scene, the man thrust the axe at him and said: "You're a doctor, do it." Dr. Kilgour calmly bent down, untied the man's bootlaces and pulled him to safety. Dr. Kilgour continued to practice medicine in Winnipeg long after the wreck, but rarely talked about it.

The next day, I went to the St. Boniface Hospital to inquire about the little girl that I had comforted the night before. The little one had spent the weekend with her grandparents at Malachi while her parents remained in Winnipeg. I believe both of her grandparents died in the wreck.

Several years later, Laura Gardner was approached by a woman in the local store, who asked: "Are you Mrs. Gardner?" When she replied that she was, the woman said: "Well, I am the baby you saved in the Dugald train wreck".

The Gardner family still vacations at the Minaki cottage that Laura's father established in 1908. To this day, she does not remember how she got to Winnipeg from Dugald that September night.

Story of Melina Perron
(as told to Jean Hanson)

This is what Melina Perron remembers about the Dugald train wreck.

Uncle Wilfred, Wilf and Paul had gone to Ena to visit Memmere and Peppere (grandparents) for the last long weekend before starting school. I was home with Raymond, who was sick. It was getting late so I called the CNR to inquire about the delay. And then I waited.

When they got home I found they had been very lucky. Their car was near the end of the train and was on its side. Uncle Wilfred broke the window and they got out safely with only cuts and bruises. They ran out into a farmer's field with their pack sacks and were told to stay there since the engine might blow up from the fire. Wilfred ran back to help the others. There was a lot of screaming, fire and smoke. He tried to rescue a man unsuccessfully.

Uncle Wilfred returned to the boys, very shaken, and walked to Dugald Station to wait for a way home. A special train came from Winnipeg to transport the survivors to the station where Uncle Wilfred had his car parked. He drove home quickly, arriving about midnight.

Two days later there was a surprise visit from Memmere and Peppere, who had heard about the train wreck and were very worried. They had seen the threesome get on the train at Ena into the first coach, and had heard that this coach had been totally destroyed in the wreck.

With no phone, they caught the next train to Winnipeg to be with the family. Uncle Wilfred was very affected by the event and never talked about it again.

Story by Wilf Perron

On Labour Day weekend Wilf Perron, his father, and his brother Paul were returning from his grandfather's place in Ena, Ontario to Winnipeg, to start school. Everything seemed to be going well. They were seated in the second last car on the train. The 'Camper Special' stopped at almost all the stations as a lot of people were returning from their cottages.

I was snoozing a little when all of a sudden there was a huge impact - our car tipped over leaning onto a telegraph pole near a farmer's fence. We all landed on the floor near the windows. My father had a mean looking cut on his forearm and Paul got a nose bleed and scraped knees. I suffered only a small cut on my back, probably from the flying glass, which was everywhere. The car behind us was engulfed in flames so we wasted no time sliding through the windows and onto the ground, where our father brought us to safety in a farmer's field. There were hay stookes for us to lay on. People in pain were screaming from all over. Our father went back to see if he could help someone. He then spotted a fellow that was in our car who was jammed in between the cars and couldn't get his legs free. He proceeded to cut his legs but the man had lost too much blood and died. Dad, visibly upset, returned to gather us up and go towards the Dugald Station, where a lot of injured people were waiting to be picked up. It wasn't too long before we were all loaded onto the train waiting to take us to our destination.

Story of Alma Wynn

Evelyn Thorne's husband's cousin, Alma Wynn, died in the Dugald train wreck. This is Evelyn's recollection of that tragic event.

Alma Wynn and a friend were on the Camper Special returning from Alma's grandparent's (Jack and Cecile Thorne) cottage at Malachi. My husband, Roy Thorne, was Alma's cousin. He and I, along with our baby, had spent the Labour Day Weekend at Victoria Beach when we heard the radio report of the train crash. Roy became concerned. If any of the family had gone to Uncle Jack's and Aunt Cecile's cottage for the weekend they were likely on that train.

Yes, Alma lost her young life that evening. The family gathered in Dugald to search for anything personal that could be identified; they found Alma's ring. A young crowd combed through the wreckage; Roy was among them. Alma's remains are interned with the many other unidentified bodies in the mass gravesite in Brookside Cemetery in Winnipeg.

Alma came from a very musical family and her father, Ed, played English hall music throughout Winnipeg. She was a successful competitor in the Manitoba School Music Festival and won all junior vocal classes in the 1946 festival. In 1947, she won two senior classes for female voice.

In 1947, the St. David's Society donated the Alma Wynn Memorial Trophy to the Winnipeg Music Festival, an award that is still being presented today.

Story of Barbara (McPherson) McGregor

I was at home, asleep, when the phone rang in the middle of the night. I was the nurse in charge of orthopedic surgery at St. Boniface Hospital, and was asked to return to work as the event was too much for the "on call" night staff to handle. St. Boniface was the closest hospital and so most patients were brought there first.

My father drove me back to the hospital and I reported to the operating room. There was a flurry of activity. Patients were arriving all night with broken bones, injuries and burns. We treated each one as best we could, where we could - we put casts on in the halls, spare rooms and even at bedsides. The most seriously injured were admitted and given immediate attention; others waited for hours for relief. I remember going down to a ward to measure someone for a full body cast.

I'm not sure how long the treatment of patients in Emergency lasted, but I know several patients spent months in hospital recuperating. Perhaps those involved directly in the accident never fully recovered emotionally. I still feel the effects of the tragedy when the Dugald train wreck is mentioned.

Story by
Edith Smith

Edith Smith and her friends boarded the Camper Special at Minaki, and were seated several coaches back from the engine.

The familiar ride home to Winnipeg from the lake country was no different from any other time – although we seemed to be going very fast from Vivian on and through the S curve on the approach to Dugald. I don't recall anything to indicate a problem, just the sudden bang. I was thrown forward and before I could recover there was smoke and flames in the cars ahead. A man came from the back and tried to open the doors on the south side but they were jammed shut. We quickly got out the north side where there was quite a steep drop.

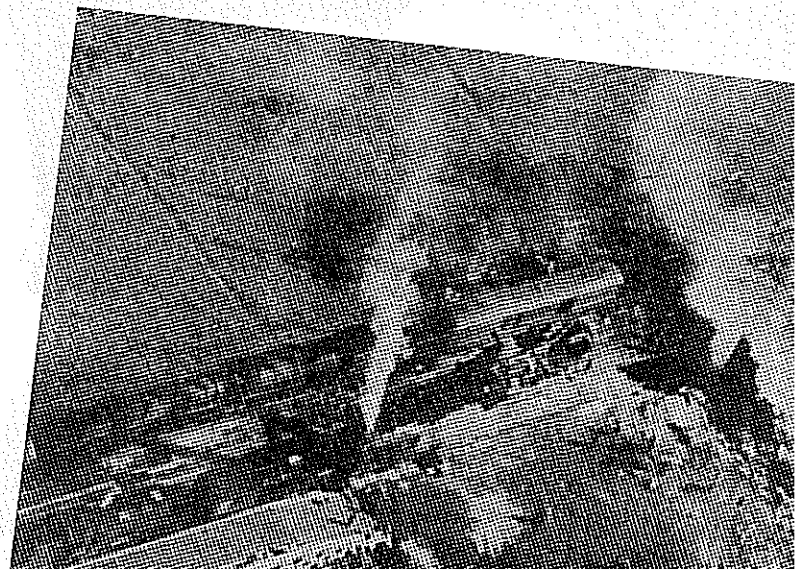
The accident happened a little east of the Dugald Station. We had to go around it, through the ditches and the tall weeds in the dark as we walked past the burning cars towards Oakbank Road (Hwy. 206). There we crossed the tracks to the south side and walked several cars down before boarding the Continental passenger train. (This was the train that was hit in the collision) The train must have been split at the crossing as we didn't go under or between any cars. The women were seated, while most men stood, and we were pulled to Winnipeg. I was separated from my companions and didn't see them again that evening. By the time we got to Winnipeg, an anxious crowd was waiting at the station.

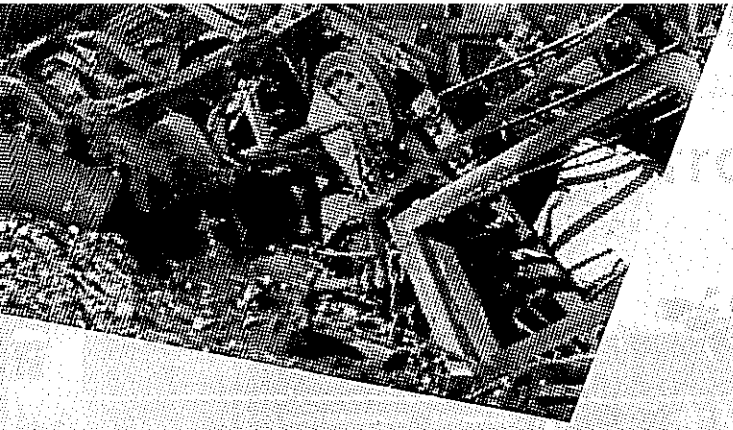
My lasting impression of the scene in Dugald was how quiet it was! Almost eerie. People were just walking about - the fire crackling, no voices. We were all in shock.

Before we were pulled away from Dugald the elevator was burning. I saw people lifted onto grain trucks and driven to Winnipeg. We realized the gravity of the tragedy as we watched the coaches burn fiercely and the rapid spread of fire and smoke.

As soon as I got home I called my family on the farm, seven miles east of Dugald, to let them know I was okay. It was harvest time. My father and brother had called it a day and were heading toward the house when they heard the bang. Both wondered what it was and decided "it couldn't be thunder, the sky was clear." It wasn't until the next morning that people got the news by radio and phone.

Edith still lives in Transcona, the railway town that has become part of Winnipeg.





Story of Alex Taylor (as told by his grandson, Bill Braikie)

My Mom, Kay Taylor, came home to Transcona that night from a bus trip to Detroit Lakes that she had taken with her friend Edna Michalski. She had just celebrated her 23rd birthday.

They noticed that there were many lights on in people's houses, more than usual. There was something in the air. Something had happened.

My mother's father was Alex Taylor, who in 1947 was the Police and Fire Chief in Transcona. When she got home, her mother explained that her father had been called to a train disaster in Dugald and wasn't expected back that night. There had been a head on collision between a lake train and a passenger train.

Transcona was the nearest urban police and fire detachment available to help the R.C.M.P. in Oakbank. And help they did. My Grandpa Taylor claimed for months afterward that he could not get the smell of burning human flesh out of his nostrils. The horrible event had left a mark on him.

Four months after the wreck, my grandfather, only 48 at the time, had a serious heart attack. He retired from the force in 1953 after a second attack, and died of a third in 1961. Ever since I made the connection between the proximity in time between his involvement in the aftermath of the train crash, the reported effect it had on him, and the first heart attack of this otherwise fit and healthy man, I cannot help but wonder whether Alex Taylor, and perhaps others, who were traumatized by what they experienced as first responders, are also, in their own way, victims of that terrible collision.