

NATIONAL

I.S.S.N. 0382 - 9057

TRANS CONTINENTAL

# *Rail and Transit*

*Canada's Railway Magazine*

January - February 1979

\$3.00



# PRAIRIE DOG CENTRAL

MARY F. LAYTON

The Prairie Dog Central was born in the summer of 1970 when the Winnipeg based Vintage Locomotive Society commenced regular weekend operation of their turn of the century steam train. The route chosen originated at Searle in part of Winnipeg's western suburbs to Cabot, some fifteen miles to the west. The route covered part of the old Grand Trunk Pacific main line which, on the upgrading of the present main line (ex Canadian Northern) was reduced to a secondary branch. Originally, the line ran to Portage La Prairie as the Harte Subdivision, but was cut back to service the elevators as far as Cabot and was renamed the Cabot Subdivision.

The Prairie Dog Central left Searle at 10.00, 12.30 and 15.00 each Saturday and Sunday, passengers paying a \$2.00 adult fare. The Cabot operation involved a conventional westbound run from Searle. At Cabot, the locomotive was run around the train and hauled it backwards into Winnipeg. The lack of a turntable or wye at Cabot Siding necessitated this arrangement.

Highlight of the opening year was on Dominion Day when the P.D.C. hauled Prime Minister Trudeau, erstwhile Manitoba Premier Schreyer together with various Federal and Provincial politicians over the CP Rail line from Winnipeg to Selkirk in connection with Manitoba's Centennial celebrations.



ABOVE: Prairie Dog Central 4-4-0 #3 and train on the run back to St. James from Grosse Isle. (D.W. Smith) LEFT: The front end of Number 3 on the run around track at Grosse Isle. (R.W. Layton)

The routine operation went well until CN decided that they had no further use for the Cabot Subdivision and allowed CP to lift the diamond on its Souris Branch, so cutting the Prairie Dog's run in half. During the winter of 1974-75, the Vintage Locomotive Society searched for a new home for operations, Canadian National finally agreeing to the use of their Oak Point Subdivision. This line was an old Canadian Northern branch leading to some small mines north of Winnipeg. It leaves the mainline in the west end of the city at St. James Jct., and proceeds north to Gypsumville with a branch to Hodgson from Grosse Isle.

The Prairie Dog's relocated passenger operation now runs from St. James Station (on Portage Ave., not far from the Blue Bombers' Stadium) to Grosse Isle. Originally operating on both Saturday and Sunday, the activities have been reduced to a Sunday only operation mainly due to a lack of volunteer labour.

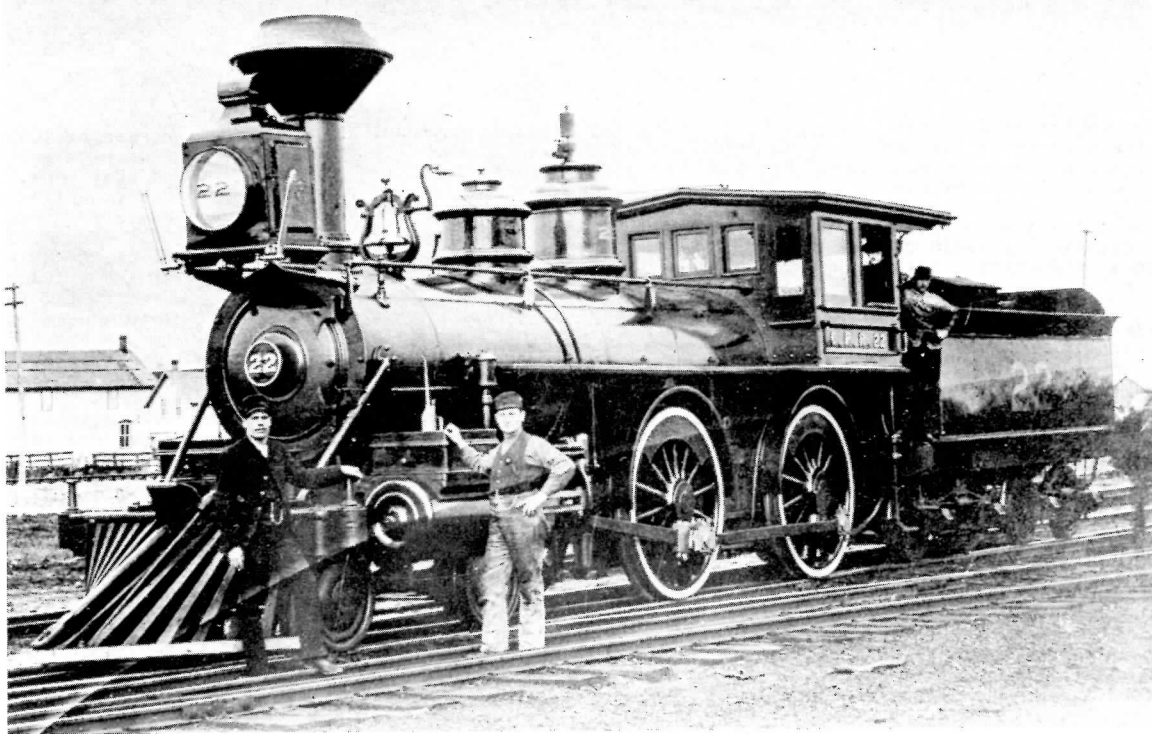
The P.D.C.'s day starts in the yards below Winnipeg's (CN) station, where the locomotive is readied for the day's activities and the combine car is stocked with pop, chips and candies. "We only carry junk food" according to one V.L.S. volunteer. After coupling onto the passenger cars, the train negotiates the curves and reverses necessary to move into Union Station proper. After obtaining the clearance from the dispatcher, #3 heads west on the main line to St. James Jct. Not normally open to passen-

gers, this is the fastest part of the operation, showing that with the light train, there is "plenty left in the old girl yet." At St. James Jct., a right turn unto the Oak Point Sub., points the engine north and adhering to the posted 25mph limit, the train passes brick yards and industrial areas.

On arrival at St. James, the travelling ticket seller or more precisely, the member of the crew who also sells tickets, unlocks the station and opens the ticket window. Tickets are on a first come, first served basis. Advance booking is not allowed and no advance rates are available, but the V.L.S. will charter the train to interested groups.

Departure is at 10.00 hrs with the train heading north through an industrial area. After a while, the train parallels the CPR mainline before crossing it at grade. There was an interlocking tower at this point until it burnt in 1976. Train movements are now flagged across the CPR main. Then on to Grosse Isle over open prairie at a statley 25 mph. Later in the season, this area is a sea of wheat with the land as a pool table as far as the eye can see.





ABOVE: Canadian Pacific Railway number 22 as built by Dubbs and Company of Glasgow in April 1882, serial number 1572. The engine was renumbered to 133 in November 1907, 63 in Sept 1912, and 86 in October 1913. The engine was sold in November 1918 to the Winnipeg' Ever Railway, (City of Winnipeg Hydro ) as their number 3. Taken at Rat Portage (now Kenora). (CP Archives). BELOW: One of the volunteers active in operating the Prairie Dog Central, Jack Sine, who is a weekday banker and a weekend railroader. The V.L.S. is dependent on volunteer labour for much of their efforts. (R.W.Layton)



| MILES FROM<br>WINNIPEG | SWITCHING<br>ZONES | RIVERS<br>SUBDIVISION    |      | OFFICE SIGNALS | SIGNAL CAPACITY<br>IN FEET |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------|----------------|----------------------------|
|                        |                    | STATIONS                 |      |                |                            |
| 0.0                    |                    | WINNIPEG                 | KPX  | WI             |                            |
| 1.2                    |                    | SUBWAY                   | PX   |                |                            |
| 1.7                    |                    | WOODWARD AVE.            | PX   |                |                            |
| 2.6                    |                    | PORTAGE JCT.             | PXY  |                |                            |
| 3.8                    |                    | JCT. WITH LETELLIER SUB. |      |                |                            |
| 4.8                    |                    | JCT. WITH B.N. RLY.      |      |                |                            |
| 7.0                    |                    | ST. JAMES JCT.           | PX   |                |                            |
| 8.3                    |                    | JCT. WITH OAK POINT SUB. |      |                |                            |
|                        |                    | CARMAN JCT.              | P    |                |                            |
|                        |                    | JCT. WITH CARMAN SUB.    |      |                |                            |
| 14.3                   |                    | DIAMOND                  | PX   |                |                            |
| 33.2                   |                    | WEST ELIE                | P    |                | 6970                       |
| 50.4                   |                    | NATTRESS                 | P    |                |                            |
| 54.1                   |                    | EAST TOWER               | PXY  |                |                            |
| 55.3                   |                    | P. LA PRAIRIE            | KPWX | BR             | YARD                       |
| 55.7                   |                    | JCT. WITH GLADSTONE SUB. |      |                |                            |
|                        |                    | EIGHTH STREET            | X    |                |                            |

Grosse Isle is no more than a junction and a run around track, any station building having been long removed. There is however, a small community alongside the tracks making it more than just a switch in a cornfield. On arrival, the engine is cut off and runs forward approximately 1/4 mile to the junction with the branch to Hodgson, where it is turned on the wye. Returning to the siding, the engine makes use of the run around track and is coupled onto the other end of the train. This passing track is a throw back to earlier days, being laid with second CPR 60lb rail dating from the 1880's, which may be remnants of the original construction.

| MILES FROM<br>ST. JAMES JCT. | YARD LIMITS         | SWITCHING<br>ZONES | OAK POINT<br>SUBDIVISION                                     |  | OFFICE SIGNALS | SIGNAL CAPACITY<br>IN FEET |
|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--|--|----------------|----------------------------|
|                              |                     |                    | STATIONS   |  |                |                            |
| 0.0                          |                     | 0.0<br>↑<br>2.4    | {<br>c/c   | ST. JAMES JCT. .... *V...PR<br>JCT. WITH RIVERS SUB<br>2.4 |                |                            |
| 2.4                          | 2.4<br>↑<br>9.0     |                    |  | ST. JAMES PYZ  | YARD           |                            |
| 8.1                          |                     |                    | MOORE Z  |  |                |                            |
| 11.0                         |                     |                    | LILYFIELD 2.8  |  | 2200           |                            |
| 13.8                         |                     |                    | GORDON 6.4   |  | 1170           |                            |
| 20.2                         |                     | 19.5<br>↑<br>20.4  | GROSSE ISLE RYZ<br>JCT. WITH INWOOD SUB Z                    | 990  |                |                            |
| 26.6                         |                     | 21.3               | 5.4<br>WARREN  |  | 1340           |                            |
| 33.8                         |                     |                    | 7.2<br>WOODLANDS   |  | 930            |                            |
| 43.2                         |                     |                    | 9.4<br>LAKE FRANCIS  |  | 1130           |                            |
| 53.2                         |                     |                    | 10.0<br>ST. LAURENT  |  | 1190           |                            |
| 60.7                         |                     |                    | 7.5<br>OAK POINT   |  | 830            |                            |
| 73.9                         |                     |                    | 13.2<br>LUNDAR   |  | 1670           |                            |
| 79.8                         |                     |                    | DEERHORN   |  | 1480           |                            |
| 86.2                         |                     |                    | 6.4<br>ERIKSDALE   |  | 1480           |                            |
| 94.4                         |                     |                    | 8.2<br>MULVIHILL   |  | 1030           |                            |
| 102.4                        |                     |                    | 8.0<br>CAMPER  |  | 1970           |                            |
| 111.0                        |                     |                    | 8.5<br>ASHERN  |  | 1060           |                            |
| 119.3                        | 117.8<br>120.5      |                    | 8.3<br>MOOSEHORN RZ  | MN   | 3880           |                            |
| 126.9                        |                     |                    | 7.6<br>GRAHAMDALE  |  | 970            |                            |
| 129.7                        | 129.1<br>↑<br>130.5 |                    | 2.4<br>STEEP ROCK JCT. .... RYZ<br>JCT. WITH STEEP ROCK SUB. |  |                |                            |
| 135.7                        |                     |                    | 6.0<br>HILBRE  |  | 1010           |                            |
| 152.5                        |                     |                    | 16.8<br>ST. MARTIN   |  | 1050           |                            |
| 156.7                        | 155.9<br>↑          |                    | 4.2<br>GYPSONVILLE YZ  | YARD   |                |                            |

CTC BETWEEN ST. JAMES JCT. AND ST. JAMES CONTROLLED  
BY TRAIN MOVEMENT DIRECTOR WINNEPEG

RULES 41 AND 44 APPLICABLE  
BETWEEN MILEAGES 2.4 AND 156.7  
RULE 105A NOT APPLICABLE

CTC BETWEEN ST. JAMES JCT. AND ST. JAMES CONTROLLED BY TRAIN MOVEMENT DIRECTOR WINNIPEG  
RULES 41 AND 44 APPLICABLE BETWEEN MILEAGES 2.4 AND 156.7  
RULE 105A NOT APPLICABLE

The return to St. James is by early afternoon where the engine is watered from a hydrant and made ready for the second trip of the day. To turn the train here, the consist is backed up for a distance of 1/2 mile and the locomotive is again cut off and wyeed on an industrial spur, recoupled onto the train and its off again to Grosse Isle. After the second trip, passengers are detrained at St. James and the train is run back downtown as a dead-head move. During this move, the crew take the opportunity to clean the interiors of the cars and make ready for the next weeks trips. Finally approaching Union Station, the fire is dropped and the engine runs into its "parking spot" on the remaining boiler pressure. The engine then has certain "trophies" such as the bell removed before being left for the week.

The operating crew on the Prairie Dog Central are all qualified CNR active or retired personnel who come along on a volunteer basis. Vintage Locomotive Society members act as safety crew, food, ticket and souvenir sellers.

Star of the Prairie Dog Central operation is without doubt Engine number 3. The 4-4-0 American type locomotive was built by Dubs and Company of Glasgow Scotland in 1882 for the Canadian Pacific Railway. She was active on the CPR as number 22, being assigned to the Rat Portage (now Kenora) area and was used on the run to Fort William (now Thunder Bay). After WW1, she became too small for the CPR's requirements, so in 1918 was sold to the City of Winnipeg Hydro Department. It was used until the late 1950's on the Hydro line from Lac du Bonnet to Pointe du Bois north east of the City. At this point, #3 was discovered by the railfan fraternity and was saved from the extinction that would have resulted when the line was closed and torn up.

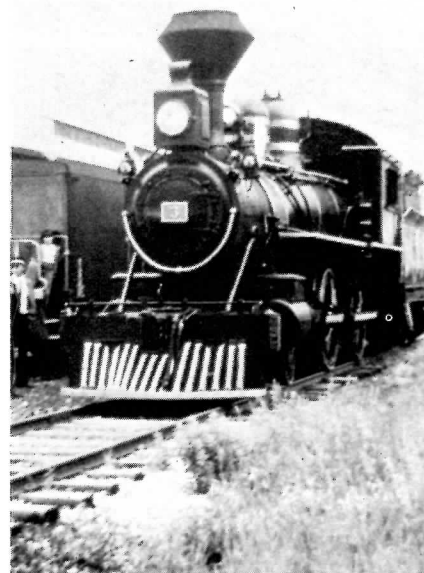
She was given an overhaul and a new lease on life by the City of Winnipeg as a Centennial project in 1967 and after very protracted negotiations with CNR became Prairie Dog Central #3 in 1970. Since the start of P.D.C. service, she has seen some cosmetic changes. First, the word "Hydro" was replaced on the tender with "Prairie Dog Central" and a false diamond stack has been added. Nevertheless, she still has Stevenson link motion and slide valves. This engine was first on the list for starring in the "Last Spike" TV series, based on Pierre Berton's book, but summer commitments meant that the second choice of CVR #136 was used.



As well as the venerable #3, the V.L.S. uses four wooden passenger cars, one of CPR origin, two of Canadian Northern and a double platform combine which was built by Pullman and saw service on various U.S. Roads, before being purchased by the Winnipeg Hydro Railway. Presently unservicable and used as a stores car, is an ex CNR wooden caboose. The car's exterior paint is green with gold lettering. The interiors range from early upholstered to rattan seats with either cream paint or varnished walls and ceilings; lighting is electric but heating is provided by pot bellied stoves in each car. It is this heating problem that prevents serious consideration of winter excursions. The wash-rooms are a thing to behold. They are quite literally a hole in a raised bench, no water being needed. However, they give a rather drafty appreciation of turn of the century railroading.

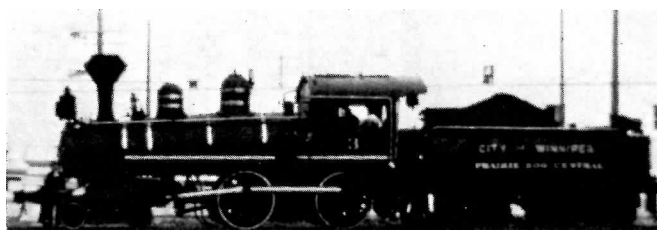
Passenger loadings on the Prairie Dog Central are excellent, people being turned away are the rule rather than the odd exception. The VLS safety crew do a great job keeping the mostly tourist (i.e. Non railfan) passenger load out of harms way, especially during the run around at Grosse Isle. The good loadings lead to the funds being available to keep the locomotive in top shape. For instance, a major boiler overhaul was completed in the winter of 1975-76, Society funds paying the bill.

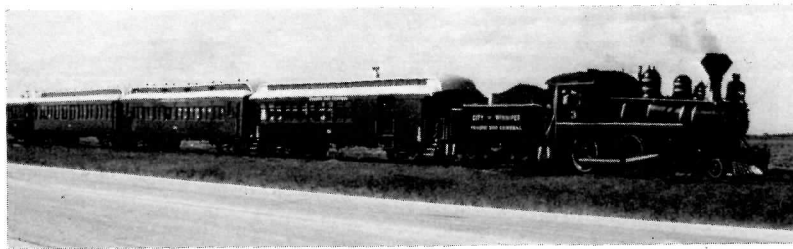
If you travel to Winnipeg at any time from June to September, you owe it to yourself to set aside a Sunday to ride the Prairie Dog Central, you won't be disappointed.



BELOW: Used as a Stores Car, P.D.C. van 100 is an exCN car is painted in the P.D.C. yellow and green. (R.W. Layton)

RIGHT: Number 3 at the runaround track at Grosse Isle. (R.W. Layton)  
 BELWO RIGHT: Number 3 on the wye near Blue Bomber Stadium. The tail of the wye crosses a public road and requires flag protection. (M.F. Layton)  
 BOTWOM RIGHT: Number 3 and her train in the storage track of Winnipeg Coach-Yard. (R.W. Layton)





above; Number three and her train on the run back to St. James from Grosse Isle. The run is through dead flat prairie and hits a magnificent top speed of 25-30 mph. (D.W. Smith) LEFT: A classic scene that could have been taken nearly anytime—a black engine with gold trim pulling a train of pullman green cars with silver roofs and gold lettering. (D.W. Smith)



RIGHT: Number 3 and her train arriving at the station in St. James on the outskirts of Winnipeg. The train makes two trips Sundays only. (R.W. Layton) BELOW: Number 3 on a grass covered right of way and only a slight embankment heading back to St. James. (D.W. Smith)





It was in June 1959 that Omer Lavallee, now Corporate Archivist of Canadian Pacific Ltd., heard some second hand information that a locomotive "sister engine to the 'Countess of Dufferin'", was working on the Winnipeg Hydro's private railway which ran from Lac du Bonnet to Pointe du Bois in the Whiteshell Forest Reserve, north east of the Manitoba capital.

Mr. Lavallee had already arranged to make a journey west that summer, so he arranged for a stop-over in Winnipeg before returning to Montreal. On arrival in Winnipeg, some inquiries with local CPR personnel revealed that Winnipeg Hydro did own a small four coupled locomotive, but the impression was given that it was probably an 0-4-0 saddle tank of some description. After an automobile ride to Lac du Bonnet, the CPR/Hydro interchange was found but it was devoid of any equipment. The finding of a small engine house about a mile from the junction heightened the impression that the engine was indeed an 0-4-0ST.

In spite of this evidence, Mr. Lavallee and his companions pressed on to Pointe du Bois on the gravel road. The road followed the railway tracks for part of the way, sharing bridges at some points. This led to a near-miss when a maintenance of way crew dynamited some track bed right in front of them. When the dust had cleared, a flagman appeared (a little too late) to stop traffic.

Arriving at Pointe du Bois, smoke could be seen above the trees and as they rounded a curve, anticipating an 0-4-0ST, they found the rumoured 4-4-0 under steam sitting beside the engine house. The words "City of Winnipeg" and "Hydro" were painted on the tender and she carried the number 3. Despite the large wedge plow mounted on the front end, she was unmistakably of CPR origin.

According to the crew, #3 was under steam very occasionally. Regular service on the line was carried by a Ford rail-bus and a Mack rail-truck.

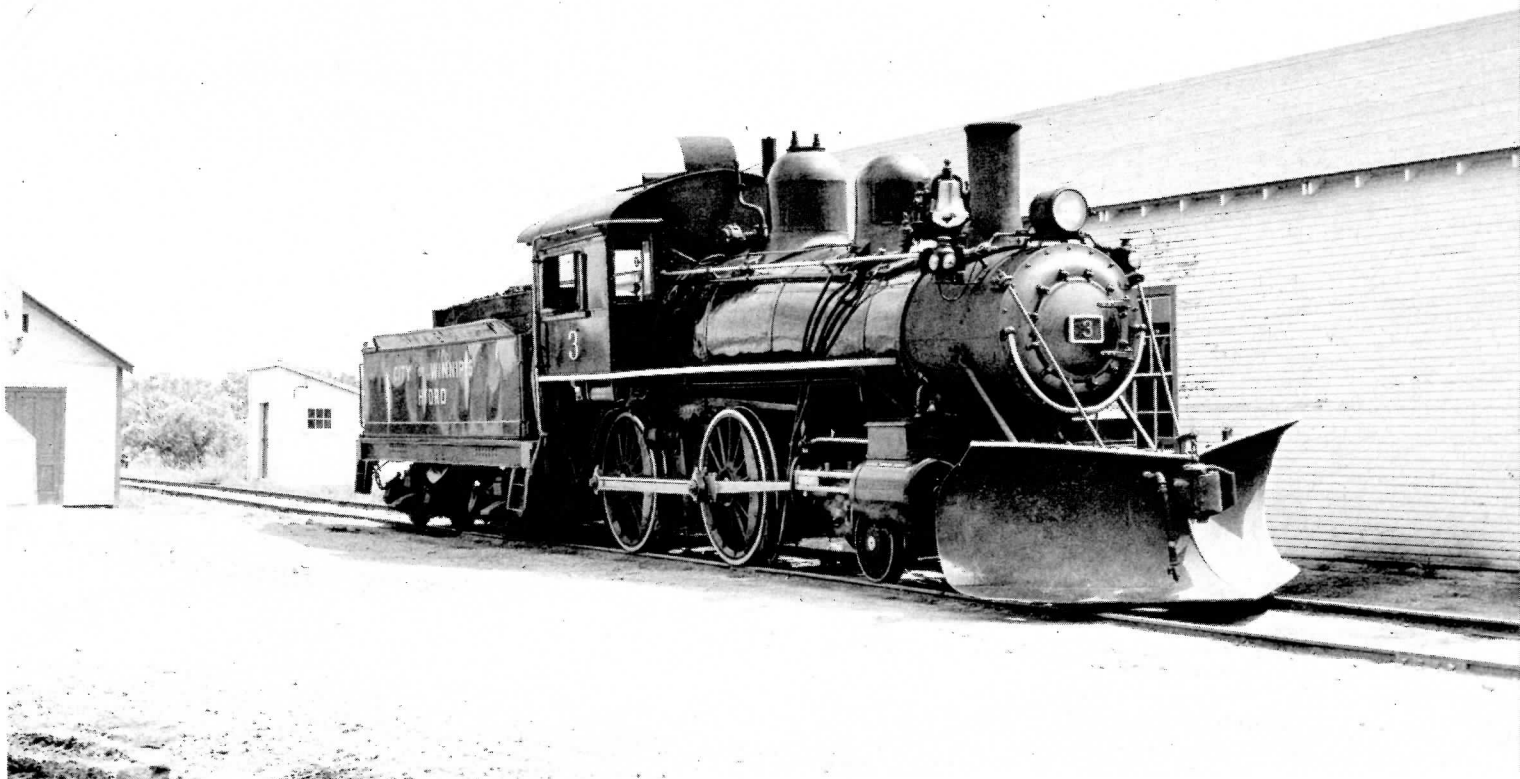
It was lucky that due to the good quality of water in the area, the infrequency of use and the high maintenance standards of the Winnipeg Hydro mechanical staff, this locomotive had been able to survive as Canada's oldest operating steam locomotive.

The editors would like to thank Mr. Omer S.A. Lavallee for his assistance in supplying information and photographs for this article.

# DISCOVERING A PRAIRIE DOG

PHOTOS BY OMER LAVALLEE





ABOVE LEFT

A rare shot of Winnipeg Hydro #3 in active freight service. Seen here at Pointe-du-Bois switching flat cars of untreated railway ties.

BELOW LEFT

A dirt road followed the Winnipeg Hydro Railway for part of the way. Here is an example of a shared bridge.

ABOVE

#3 poses for the camera alongside the engine house at Pointe-du-Bois. The wedge-plow was a permanent fixture until removed before she entered "Prairie Dog Central" service.

BELOW

Pointe-du-Bois station with #3 on the left. On the right is Winnipeg Hydro's Mack rail-truck. In this June 1959 shot, the truck was the regular train to Lac-du-Bonnet.

