

In 1883 the Canadian Pacific Railway completed its main line through Manitoba and within a couple of years, branch lines were needed to serve the growing farming communities.

The CPR, like other railway companies, located their stations at key points along the line, typically at 7-mile intervals, or 12 kilometres between them.

This was the distance a farmer could be expected to haul a wagonload of grain with a team of oxen or horses in a single-day trip. In 1898, a rail line was constructed into the Pembina Hills and a station was built at La Riviere.

Lena resident, Charlie Baldock, recently shared a story with me of when he and his wife were attending a tractor show in Minnesota. Recognizing Manitoba license plates on each other's motor home, they got to talking and the gentleman shared his story of when he and his buddies got on the train in Morden, Manitoba, in search of adventure out west.

It was right during the Second World War and the men were of German descent. The three friends weren't old enough to join the army yet, so they decided to go out on a harvest excursion.

They got on the train in Morden and got as far as La Riviere in the Pembina Valley. They didn't realize how much money it would take to travel, and so they ran out of money and couldn't go any further than La Riviere. What a dilemma!

The engineer on the locomotive was very apprehensive about the three travelers, and felt uneasy about their German accents. But the train fireman did like them and said they could stay on the train if they agreed to shovel the coal to him at the firebox. This would, at least, take them to Killarney.

When they arrived in Killarney they were met by the police! One can assume the engineer contacted the police to meet them at the Killarney train station. Well, the war was on, and they were of German descent - and they had no registration papers with them.

The police were ready to take them into custody when the three men asked the constable if they could go into town, get cleaned up and have supper and then return back to the police station.

The constable agreed, and when the fellows returned the policeman told them they were free to go. He could see they were not bad people, just three young men looking for adventure on a harvest crew!

Charlie learned that the men worked for farmers in the Lena and Wakopa area. On a regular basis they were taken by horse and buggy by the lady of the house to the Wakopa General Store to mail their letters back to their families in Morden.

This was the same General Store that Charlie Baldock's parents owned for about 3 years!



*Many artifacts from the Wakopa General Store are on display at the Wakopa General Store Museum in Lena.*

Who would have guessed that these two men from Manitoba, both lovers of history and artifacts, would meet at a tractor show in Minnesota and share stories of bygone days in the little towns of La Riviere, Killarney and Wakopa - some 50 years later!

"Railway Rendezvous" was shared by Charlie Baldock, resident of Lena, and caretaker of the Wakopa General Store Museum.

*Vantage Points Flashbacks were written by David Neufeld with help from Betty Sawatzky. They were originally aired on CJRB Radio out of Boissevain, Manitoba in the early 2020s.*