



“The Millionaire’s Special”

My father, Joe Guarino (Papa Joe) was one of the first locomotive firemen who worked on the construction of the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) rail line to Grand Beach and Victoria Beach. In 1917, the CNoR was amalgamated into the Canadian Government owned Canadian National Railways (CNR). The railway line was named “The Victoria Beach Sub-division. Later, in the 1940- 50 era, he became one of the regular locomotive engineers on the sub-division.

As a young boy, I recall his humourously referring to one of the special trains that the railroaders called “the Millionaire’s Special”.

Normally, all trains stopped at East Transcona, Grand Marais and Grand Beach. Consequently, passengers destined for Victoria Beach had long and frustrating stops at Grand Beach. Many of these passengers were from the “upper class” or “elite” of Winnipeg, and regarded Grand Beach and Grand Marais as the “bourgeoisese”.

Finally, through subtle negotiations with Sir Henry Thornton, the newly appointed first President of the Canadian National Railways, a special train was created and named “The Victoria Beach Special”.

The special train ran on Friday evenings, leaving Winnipeg at 6:00 pm, and ran directly to Victoria Beach with only a momentary stop at Grand Marais, to turn a railway switch allowing the train to proceed to Victoria Beach, without going into Grand Beach.

Chuck Guarino



What was it like, Papa?

The Victoria Beach Special returned to Winnipeg on Sunday evenings, leaving around 6:00 pm and arriving in Winnipeg about 8:00 pm. Again, on the return trip, the only stop it made was at Grand Marais, to turn a railway switch to enter the Grand Beach line towards Winnipeg.

Because its patrons from Victoria Beach were from the affluent and influential “elite” from Winnipeg, the CNR attached an observation car on the rear of the train so some of the very wealthy passengers could enjoy viewing the rail line from the rear of the train.

The plush observation car had private bedroom suites, and was staffed by several black porters who meticulously cared for them. Patrons in the observation coach could “order” their favorite “beverages” and food specialities as they travelled to their cottages at Victoria beach.

Because this special train and its observation car contained many of the wealthy and influential Winnipeggers of the time, the train crew jokingly referred to it as

“THE MILLIONAIRE’S SPECIAL”

Yours, until the next issue of the “Grand Beach Realty News”!

Chuck Guarino