Darin Barney

To Hear the Whistle Blow: Technology and Politics on the Battle River Branch Line

ABSTRACT

This article studies an attempt to establish a cooperative short-line railroad in central Alberta farm country, and examines the manner in which struggles over technological change establish key sites for political judgment and action, the formation of political subjectivity and the re-imagination of citizenship and community in the Canadian countryside. Drawing on extensive interviews with farmers, the case is situated in the context of the history of grain-handling on the Prairies, the recent closure of country elevators and railway branch lines, and the struggle to maintain community-based alternatives to centralized grain-handling. The technologies of grain-handling are treated as unconventional media that structure temporal and spatial experience—and political possibility—on the Prairies.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit la tentative d'établissement d'une petite ligne de train sous la forme d'une coopérative dans la région agricole du centre de l'Alberta et met en lumière comment les difficultés rencontrées avec les changements technologiques comprennent des espaces clés pour le jugement politique et l'action, la création d'une subjectivité politique et une nouvelle conception de la citoyenneté et de la communauté dans le Canada rural. Partant d'un large éventail d'entrevues auprès des agriculteurs, l'étude se situe dans le contexte de l'histoire des élévateurs à grain dans les prairies, la récente fermeture tant des élévateurs que des lignes de train dans les campagnes, ainsi que la bataille pour préserver des solutions de remplacement communautaires face à la centralisation de la gestion du grain. Les technologies de gestion du grain sont abordées comme des médias non conventionnels structurant l'expérience dans le temps et l'espace, ainsi que les possibilités politiques dans les prairies.

¤

The wheat cannot be understood separately from the train, and vice-versa.
—Jody Berland, *North of Empire* (2009)

In many ways, there was nothing unusual about the events of January 24, 2009. The farmers of the Battle River Producer Car Group had grown accustomed to erratic service from CN Railway. After all, the volume of grain they typically shipped in producer cars loaded along branch line 43.03 in central Alberta was minimal compared to the massive tonnage CN routinely retrieved from the high-throughput terminals just south of the mainline at Camrose. The group was at best a nuisance, a mere fly on the great ass of progress. As Matt Enright, a group member who farms near Rosalind, put it in his submission to Transport Canada's 2010 Rail Freight Service Review: "The service we receive could at best be described as random. […] I personally cannot remember one time when the train came on the day that CN first said it would" (2010b: 1). Howard Vincett, a group member who farms near Galahad, pointed out in his submission that the costs of inconsistent service and delay—additional wages and equipment time, lost interest on crop sale proceeds and opportunities lost due to unanticipated waiting—are borne entirely by the farmers (2010: 1). The railway made for a space over which CN could exert a certain degree of control, and this bias meant that time was always on the company's side. In turn, the railway operator's seemingly arbitrary hold on time—its ability to enforce randomness, unpredictability and urgency—extended its power and influence over much of the space of the Canadian Prairies.

Thus, as was often the case, these farmers had already been waiting several days for cars that had not come, when CN announced that the train was on its way. On January 24, 2009, the day the cars finally arrived, the forecast was bleak. The morning brought a brutal Prairie wind that dropped temperatures to -40 degrees Celsius. Conditions were not optimal for standing outside all day loading grain into hopper cars. The farmers called the CN operations desk to ask if CN would grant them an extension on account of the unexpectedly harsh weather. CN's answer went something like this: "The engine will be there to haul those cars at eight p.m. Under no circumstances will there be a delay—if there is a single latch left open, those cars will sit there until April." And so, by seven-thirty that night, the members of the Battle River Producer Car Group, fingers and faces frozen, had loaded sixty-four grain cars. CN's engine arrived to pull them away at two o'clock the next morning.

What happened that day? J. K. Gibson-Graham has written that "the process of becoming a different economic subject is not an easy or a sudden one. It is not so much about seeing and knowing as it is about feeling and doing" (2006: 152). What were the members of the Battle River Producer Car Group "feeling"

(besides cold) and "doing" (besides shivering) on January 24, 2009? This article is an extended answer to that question, in which the events of that day serve as a punctuation mark in a broader story of social change on the Canadian Prairies, an as-yet incomplete story with a long history and an uncertain ending, a story of the way in which struggles over and around technological change become key sites for the distribution of power and resources, for the formation of political subjectivity, and for the unfolding of social and economic possibility. Lately, we have grown accustomed to rhetoric in which technology occupies a privileged position in accounts of social upheaval; those who take this line, however, are typically thinking either of digital networks or of some sort of emerging bio-genetic technology that is about to "change everything." Such accounts rarely, if ever, contemplate the politics of things like grain-handling technology and railway branch lines—a symptom, perhaps, of the systematic forgetting of the rural that characterizes most contemporary discussions of technology and politics, with the possible exception of those that press to extend the purported benefits of technological innovation to rural and remote areas. This article—in which, to quote Jonathan Sterne (2006), transportation and communication are "together as you've always wanted them"—is motivated by a contrary impulse. In what amounts to an attempt at critical *agri*cultural studies, I will treat railway branch lines and grain elevators as unconventional media that not only illuminate the politics of technological change in rural settings, but also shed light on the complex ways in which infrastructural technologies mediate the organization of social and political life more generally.

Grain-handling Technologies in the Canadian Prairies

In 1938, there were approximately 5,700 licensed country grain elevators in western Canada, most of them in the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba (Silversides 1997: 11). Along with their status as icons of the Canadian Prairies, these wooden country elevators and railway branch lines constituted more than just an infrastructure for the storage and movement of grain. For more than a century, they served as the media through which Prairie social, political and economic life was organized and carried out. As I will discuss below, struggles over the elaboration of this infrastructure were themselves key sites in the formation and exertion of political subjectivity and agency in the Prairies. Elevators and branch lines also served as material focal points for the rural public sphere, structuring its spatiality and—as with any storage medium—its distinctive temporal rhythms. Country elevators were located to serve a radius of about fifteen kilometres (the distance a horse-drawn wagon loaded with grain could travel in a day and still make the return trip) and designed to work with container and transportation technologies that themselves had specific capacities and properties; country grain elevators thus supported a spatial and temporal order with distinctive pacing, cycles of repetition, punctuation, reach and coordination. A variety of

institutions—schools, churches, cafes, beer parlours, supply and equipment stores, and postal and other service buildings—cropped up in close proximity to country elevators. Places came into being in the form of small towns, and locals spent time there for a variety of social purposes. As Greg McDonnell puts it, describing the mediating function of the country elevator at Fairlight, Saskatchewan: "Like almost every other elevator on the face of the Prairie, Fairlight has been a place to hear the news—news of births and deaths and war and peace. It's been a place to debate politics, wheat prices, wheat boards and hockey; a place to shake the loneliness of life on the land" (1998: 85).

Something like this situation appears to have happened at the country elevators that once stood along the Battle River branch line. One farmer in the region described it to me this way:

> You went into the elevator, and often you would see three or four—maybe five—farmers in there, hauling, grading or coming in just to do a little business or just to have coffee. I guess it was that social part that helped keep the community together, and you developed those relationships, whereas at the high-throughputs you don't have very much of that at all. (Anonymous, personal interview, March 3, 2010)

Finally, the elevators and branch lines were also materially related to the emergence of innovative forms of cooperative enterprise in the Canadian Prairies, and to political movements that went on to advance a variety of social-democratic and populist causes in Canada through the middle part of the 20th century. Thousands of country elevators were owned and operated by one or another of the Prairie wheat-pools; along with serving as competition for the private elevators, these wheat-pool elevators provided producers with a direct experience of cooperation and democratic participation in the organization of their economic lives, which in many cases fertilized a range of subsequent social and political projects (Laycock 1990).

A generous estimate might put the number of remaining country elevators in Canada at somewhere between 250 and 300.[1] Literally thousands of elevators have been demolished in recent decades by the grain companies that own them; typically, these demolitions are either preceded or followed closely by the abandonment of the adjacent railway branch line. Of the country elevators that remain, few are operational: some have been recuperated as local galleries, museums and tourist attraction; some have been moved to farms (far away from rail lines), where they are used as storage facilities or simply preserved; and many stand in various states of ruin, awaiting the wrecker. In most cases, after the elevators and branch lines were shut down, much of the adjacent and associated economic and civic infrastructure could no longer be sustained, due to a lack of traffic and the disappearance of the municipal tax revenue associated with the elevator and related operations. Like many country elevators across the Prairies,

the towns in which they stood have either disappeared or fallen into disuse (McDonnell 1998: 11).

A relatively new technology (the first appeared around 1980) is now used to handle and store grain in the Prairies. These facilities are called "high-throughput terminals" (or sometimes "inland terminals"); they are operated by an increasingly concentrated number of consolidated grain companies, which are highly integrated components of the massive agribusiness conglomerates that now dominate the Prairie agricultural economy (firms like Cargill, Viterra and Richardson-Pioneer). A single high-throughput can store many times the volume of a country elevator, and can also receive and ship grain simultaneously, in some cases loading more than one hundred rail cars in a single shift. (While country-elevator bins usually held from 50 to 2,000 tonnes of grain; a high-throughput can hold upwards of 40,000 tonnes.) High-throughputs are technologically advanced facilities that feature automated operating and accounting systems, and carry out just-in-time coordination of input and output with major, transnational supply and shipping networks. Designed to serve a radius of at least one hundred kilometres, and to accommodate transport and container technologies with much higher capacities than the small trucks that delivered grain to country elevators, high-throughputs are typically located beyond municipal boundaries, where land prices and taxation levels are more favourable than those in town. Prairie-town sites are rarely able to provide the facilities upon which the high-throughput systems' claims to efficiency depend: huge driveways for tractor-trailers; adjacency to a railroad mainline with room for hundred-car rail-spots; and, especially, proximity to a major highway.

The social experience of hauling grain to a high-throughput terminal differs markedly from that of hauling grain to a country elevator. As Dennis Freadrich, who farms near Forestburg, Alberta, described it to me: "At the terminal you get in line and you sit there for two or three hours and you might not know one other guy in the line; they're all strangers, and the next time you go in line they're all different again. You just go sit in your truck, and you dump your grain, and you're out of there" (2010a). Ken Eshpeter, who farms at Daysland, characterized the experience as:

> a very impersonal thing. Often you can sit on the driveway for significant periods of time. You just sit there waiting, hoping you get in. Eventually you get there and they do a sampling of your load. You don't see the grader. Nobody really says hello or interacts. It's more clinical than going to see the dentist. [...] You can't even begin to describe how different it is. It's nowhere on the same planet. (2010)

Reg Enright, who farms near Rosalind, added: "Whenever I haul to a terminal, when I'm done, after a lot of displeasure with line-ups and stuff, I always have an abused feeling" (2010).

Farmers who are fortunate enough to be positioned near a terminal may deliver their grain themselves; more often, however, grain is delivered in large "Super B" tandem tractor-trailers, usually by licensed commercial truckers. Operations at the terminal are depersonalized, automated and remotely controlled. This configuration almost seems designed to discourage the sort of communication between producers that routinely took place at country elevators, including the sharing of information about elevation charges, grading, hauling incentives and other elements related to the terms individual producers reach with terminal operators—information that might assist other (especially small-scale) producers settle on equitable terms. As Gerald Kuefler, the reeve of Flagstaff County and a farmer near Galahad suggested to me:

> Maybe from their points of view they don't want a lot of communication. Because they're cutting deals with this guy. This guy, because he's bigger, he may get a hell of a deal. But then what about the other guys who are a little bit smaller? They don't want you to communicate and to see what's going on. I've seen that happen at terminals. (2010)

If, like the country elevator that preceded it, the high-throughput terminal can be said to mediate an experience of the rural public sphere, it is an attenuated experience that resonates with the highly privatized, transactional, competitive, depoliticized and instrumental sociality that is increasingly typical of the neoliberal public sphere more generally.

High-throughput terminals have been a crucial technology in the centralization and consolidation of grain handling in the Prairies. The Canadian Wheat Board reports that in 2009 there were 135.5 million total acres farmed across the three Prairies provinces, up from 59.7 million acres in the mid-1930s (2010: 7). Over the same period, the number of farms decreased from 288,403 to 112,814 and the number of licensed primary elevators dropped from 5,498 to just 341—the vast majority of which are high-throughput inland terminals. The average distance over which grain is hauled to an elevator rose from about fourteen kilometres to more than sixty kilometres. Since the mid-1970s, more than 9,300 kilometres of railway branch line have been discontinued or abandoned across the Prairies.[2] Combined, the result is fewer farms (and fewer farmers) cultivating more land, hauling their grain greater distances to fewer, more centralized elevators located on railway mainlines. These dynamics are consistent with broader trends in the industrialization of farming in North America, a process that—as decades of social-science research has shown—consistently produces adverse socio-economic, political and environmental impacts on rural communities (Lobao and Stofferahn 2008; Epp and Whitson 2001).

The impact of this transformation on Prairie communities is not easy to quantify, but those closely affected by it have no trouble understanding its trajectory. Lisa Eshpeter, a young woman who grew up on her family's farm near Daysland, went

off to university, and now works on behalf of the effort to recuperate the Battle River branch line, expressed the stakes to me quite clearly:

> If we were to continue to go along the path of allowing the multinationals to determine how everything were to be marketed and how much things cost, you would lose every individual owner and you would end up just having workers and employees of these companies come out and do the actual work. There would be no residents of these communities. There would be no need to have a community. One of the larger implications is that we would lose the culture of the Prairies but also that the actual physical infrastructure of all these communities would no longer be relevant because there would be no need for them. (2010)

Earlier in the day, her father Ken Eshpeter was more blunt: "If you were charged with the responsibility of helping to kill the rural at as fast a pace as you could, what's one of the first things you would do? You'd get rid of all the infrastructure, and part of the infrastructure is trains" (2010a).

The Politics of Technology

It is tempting to respond to this situation with one of the two dominant frameworks our culture makes available for thinking about technological change: either the discourse of progress or the discourse of nostalgia. On one hand, major technological shifts are often couched in the rhetoric of irresistible, linear, essentially positive technological progress from one more efficient, powerful or convenient device or system to the next. This discourse accompanied both the arrival of country elevators in the late-19th century and the arrival of high-throughputs in the late-20th. On the other hand, technological changes often provoke nostalgic, anti-modern accounts of loss and decline, in which outgoing practices are romantically cast as somehow simpler, less technological and more innocent than what succeeds them; this situation has been particularly true of the laments for the demise of the country elevator that have appeared in the press and popular literature, iconography and images. The progressive and the nostalgic accounts of this transformation are both inadequate, however, as each in its own way effaces the actual history and politics of the transition from the country-elevator-and-branch-line system to the system organized around high-throughput terminals located on mainlines.

On one hand, nostalgia for the good old days of the country elevator entails forgetting that this technology, and the railroads and agricultural system with which it was integrated, were all part of a material complex of westward colonization through which the Aboriginal peoples of the Canadian Prairies were effectively dispossessed and brutalized (Epp 2008: 81, 121-42; Friesen 1987: 129-61). Furthermore, while the disappearance of the country elevator inclines us to

associate it with the passing of a simpler agrarian past, the fact remains that it was a central technology in the elaboration of the highly modernist project of industrial agriculture in Canada, the social and environmental costs of which have rightly come under increasing critical scrutiny (Flaman 2008: 27; Pollan 2006). In other words, the country-elevator-and-branch-line system was one of the first steps in the very technological rationalization of Prairie agriculture that would eventually bring about that system's own obsolescence.

On the other hand, just as there is nothing innocent about country elevators and railway branch lines, there is nothing inherently or objectively progressive about the high-throughput system. Efficiency is a standard that is situated within social and historical relationships, not outside of them. While it is true that high-throughputs move larger volumes of grain at greater speeds and from fewer locations than country elevators, this development can only be characterized as a move in the direction of greater efficiency if it is viewed from the perspective of the grain conglomerates, consolidated corporate farms and major rail-carriers who have been able to realize the value of rationalizing the grain-handling system in this way. A study published in 1999 measuring the impact of branch line abandonment in west-central Saskatchewan found that marginal savings from system rationalization accrued disproportionately to rail companies, and were derived from the off-loading of additional costs to producers, who had little choice but to scale up to meet the demands of the new regime (Gray, Khakbazan and Nolan 1999). Added to this inequity are the social costs attached to the loss of town sites that have disappeared due to the abandonment of branch lines and their replacement by high-volume highways. "In the rural area," Ken Eshpeter wryly observed, "most of the time roads don't lead into the community, they only lead out" (2010a). As the National Farmers' Union put it in a submission to Transport Canada's 1998 *Grain Transportation Review*:

> The bargain that the railways and elevator companies propose is this: farmers agree to higher trucking and storage costs, higher taxes to maintain roads, the loss of local services and, eventually, local towns. In return, the railways receive an additional 5 cents per bushel for moving grain. (1998)

From the perspective of small producers, the "rationalization" of the grain-handling system has been anything but more efficient, rational and progressive.

The development of the country elevator and branch line system in the late-19th and early-20th century is itself a good example of the political character of technological change. In the late-19th century, as the export grain trade began to pick up, the demand for bulk shipping began to outpace the rate at which farmers could fill rail cars with grain by hand-shovelling it from open wagons directly into rail cars (Vance 2006: 229-35). (The average rail car could hold 2,000 bushels; the average wagon carried 100 bushels—filling a car meant several trips and could sometimes take up to a week.) Meeting demand, and growing the

grain economy, seemed to require a system of bulk storage and shipping. But which system? Resolving the problem of bulk storage and shipping was not a straightforward question of convenience and efficiency. Grain growers at the time did not want to elevate their grain; they preferred a system of smaller, simpler, flat warehouses that they could build and maintain themselves, for their own grain, at locations of their own choosing, preferably contiguous with their farms and fields (Silversides 1997: 7). This option, while efficient and convenient for the farmers, did not look attractive to the railway companies. In an early example of the conflation of central-Canadian capitalists' interests with a "national" interest that was prejudicial to western farmers, William van Horne of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) called the plan for flat warehouses "a curse to the country as well as the railway" (qtd. in Vance 2006: 229). The railway's interest was in bigger structures that could aggregate larger quantities of grain from several farmers in a central location that was optimal for shipping, and that could be mechanized for greater speed in loading and unloading. This size and speed is what efficiency and convenience meant (and continue to mean) for the railway companies and their clients. Accordingly, the CPR entered into deals with private companies, which were given land along rail lines from the CPR's federal grant so they could build high-capacity facilities (capable of storing 25,000 bushels) with mechanized loading and unloading systems. As added incentive, in exchange for agreeing to build according to specifications, the elevator companies were also granted effective monopolies, as the CPR guaranteed that its cars would accept grain only from elevator operators, and not directly from producers. And so the wooden country grain elevator was born on the Canadian Prairies, the first erected at Gretna, Manitoba, in 1881.

The country elevator thus originated in efforts by railway companies and their clients to impose a particular organizational structure on the grain economy, and to enforce a particular relationship between these companies and the grain growers. In other words, it was a political development, through and through. The enforcement of this relationship was never perfectly achieved, however. The country elevator system remained the technology it was for most of the 20th century not by design alone, but also as a result of political struggle on the part of producers. Once the technology of the wooden elevator arrived, grain growers quickly mobilized to assert their interests. Producers organized in opposition to the CPR monopoly, demanding and winning (in fits and starts by 1910) regulation of the handling, inspection and transportation of grain; these protests were aimed at mitigating the abusive monopolistic practices of the rail and elevator companies (Fowke 1957: 153-60; Moorhouse 1918; Wilson 1978). This mobilization was the beginning of a history of political organization that culminated in the establishment of a range of collectivized and co-operative institutions—the United Grain Growers, the Saskatchewan and Alberta Wheat Pools, the Canadian Wheat Board—that defined the Prairie grain economy

and the social life that arose around it (Colquette 1957; Fairbairn 1985; Morris 1987). This history is a complicated one, but the point is: the country elevator system became what it ultimately was—namely, the central technology behind a way of organizing economic and political life that was radically different from the future imagined by the central-Canadian capitalists who ran the railways—only *after* it was appropriated by the very social actors and communities against whose interests the technology was initially imposed. Indeed, the country elevator system was a crucial site of politicization, whose implications for the organization of social and economic life stretched far beyond the elevators themselves.

The prospect of massive branch line abandonment was raised first in the 1930s, when the president of the CPR, appearing before the Royal Commission to Inquire into Railways and Transportation in Canada (also known as the Duff Commission) held up the abandonment of nearly 5,000 miles of redundant branch lines as a potential benefit of amalgamating CN and the CPR (Fournier 1981: 297). By the 1960s, railway companies eager to abandon low-traffic branch lines and grain companies looking to consolidate low-volume elevators started to recognize their common interest in "rationalizing" the grain-handling system (Beingessner 2007; Tyrchniewicz and Tosterud 1973: 805). In 1961, the Royal Commission on Transportation identified 8,000 miles of unprofitable branch lines in Canada and recommended that the government no longer require railway companies to maintain them without subsidy (Vance 2006: 243). In 1977, the Grain-handling and Transportation Commission (Government of Canada 1977), also known as the Hall Commission, recommended the closure of 2,165 miles of branch line in the Prairies, along with the retention of a permanent basic network (Mason 1978). The replacement of the historic Crow Rate structure with the Crow Benefit in 1984, and the latter's eventual elimination in 1995, increased market pressure on the perceived inefficiencies of low-volume branch lines and elevators, and a succession of statutory and regulatory changes—beginning with the *Canada Transportation Act* of 1996—streamlined the process of branch line abandonment (Vance 2006: 244; Doan, Paddock and Dyer 2003). Centralization of grain-handling would serve the railways and the big grain companies alike. In 1998, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, by then a publicly-traded corporation (itself taken by the idea that "rationalization" of the grain-handling system was good for the grain economy as a whole), decided to close 235 country elevators and replace them with 22 high-throughputs, a decision that could be characterized as the final severing of the pools' historic relationship to cooperative agriculture in the Prairies. All this history is to say that branch line abandonment and the replacement of country elevators by high-throughput terminals has proceeded not because the high-throughput terminals are a technological necessity, but rather because powerful actors have managed to secure their advantage by identifying centralization and consolidation with efficiency. The reorganization of grain-handling in the Canadian Prairies is thus as much a political project as it is a

technological one, a fact which means that the storage and movement of grain in places like the Battle River region remains what it always has been: a site of political struggle.

Producer Cars and the Battle River Branch Line

Standing atop a hopper car he was filling with #1 hard red wheat at the country elevator in Forestburg, AB, John Oberg told me, "It feels a bit like we are back in the 1920s" (2010). I take him to mean that the recent liberalization of the grain economy has—as in the time before the wheat pools, single-desk marketing and the regulation of rail service and grain elevation—left small producers vulnerable to railway and grain company oligopolies; he also implied that these producers now find themselves having to fight battles that they thought had been won decades ago. With the wheat pools gone, country elevators all-but-disappeared, branch line service abandoned across the countryside, freight-service regulation in retreat, grain-handling consolidated in the hands of six massive corporations, and even the Canadian Wheat Board under siege, it is no wonder that "progress" leaves producers like Oberg feeling as though the clock has started to run backwards. "We are," he observed, "re-inventing the wheel" (2010).

Branch line 43.03, operated until recently by CN, runs for ninety kilometres south from Camrose through the towns of Kelsey (population 14), Rosalind (population 190), Heisler (population 153), Forestburg (population 895) and Galahad (population 134) to its terminus at Alliance (population 158). With the closure (mostly in the 1990s) of the country elevators in these towns (two remain standing: one at Alliance, which is owned by Viterra Inc. and not operated as a primary elevator; a second at Forestburg, whose fate will be discussed below), area producers were left to bear the additional costs of hauling grain to one of three locations: to the Cargill or Richardson-Pioneer high-throughput terminals near the junction of the branch line and the CN mainline at Camrose, or (less likely) to the independent Great Northern Grain terminal on the CPR mainline at Killam. The costs of these trips include: increased fuel for repeated long-distance hauls; the purchase or contracting of Super B tractor-trailers able to carry volumes sizeable enough to make long-distance hauling economically feasible; maintenance charges for these vehicles; farm-road upgrades; and increased elevation charges due to a lack of competition. As in other areas, these conditions have contributed to farm consolidation, as small producers unable to absorb escalating costs sell out to larger operations seeking to achieve economies of scale at which long-distance hauling can be sustained. For the remaining small producers, options have been few. Among them has been producer-car shipping, whereby farmers—taking advantage of century-old provisions of the *Canada Grain Act*—order hopper cars directly from the Canadian Grain Commission, which, in turn, orders the railway companies to deliver them to producer-car loading sites.[3] There, producers

proceed to fill the cars with grain, either directly from their trucks using an augur, or from a trackside storage bin. The grain is then hauled to a terminal position at the coast, where it is weighed and graded by the Commission, entirely bypassing grain-company elevation and mediation. In 2008, 2,800 Canadian farmers loaded a record 12,447 producer cars with Canadian Wheat Board grains (Canadian Wheat Board 2009).

The Battle River Producer Car Group was established as a non-profit organization in 2003 in an effort to organize and support producer-car loading along branch line 43.03. The group has approximately 200 members, almost all single-proprietor owner-operators whose farms range in size from 1,000 to 7,500 acres. The group operates small loading facilities at six communities on the line—typically at spots where country elevators once stood—where cars are loaded directly from trucks or from small, hopper-bottomed, trackside bins. In addition to these facilities, the group now operates a country elevator at Forestburg. The elevator was purchased in 2008 by Prairie Hall Farms—whose proprietors are directors of the Battle River Producer Car Group—for $45,000 from Viterra, Inc.[4] The story of this sale is instructive. Viterra was very reluctant to sell the Forestburg elevator. The company intended to demolish it (typically, grain companies refuse even to sell the used equipment from a defunct elevator), ideally with as little notice as possible. However, because most country elevators stand *within* town limits, demolition requires a permit from town authorities. In this case, the Battle River group learned from a sympathetic local official that Viterra had applied for a permit to demolish the elevator at Forestburg. Over time, the group and its supporters persuaded Viterra to sell the elevator to local interests on the (probably unenforceable) condition that the elevator would not be used to store or move grain for commercial purposes. The purchasers speculated that they might turn the elevator into a museum or gallery. Within a few weeks of the sale, the group commenced shipping grain from the elevator.

Since 2002, the Battle River Producer Car Group has loaded more than 3,100 rail cars, with a current annual volume of about 600 cars. It is clear that most of the farmers who opt to ship their grain by producer cars, including those of the Battle River group, are motivated by the individual economic benefit they derive from doing so. These benefits include avoiding elevation charges that typically run from $11 to $14 per tonne, which translates to roughly $800-$1200 of savings for every rail car a producer loads him or herself. Added to this total are considerable savings on costs associated with hauling grain long distances to a high-throughput terminal: the purchase and maintenance of tractor-trailers; fuel costs; time waiting in line; and contracts with commercial truckers at about $7 per tonne (or roughly $20,000 for 100,000 bushels of wheat). Producers with whom I have spoken also consistently report that grain shipped by producer cars directly to port terminals (where the grain is graded by the Canadian Grain Commission) receives more favourable grades, protein counts and dockage reductions than

the grain assessed by the companies that operate the inland high-throughput terminals. This grading results in both higher revenues and reduced costs for grain cleaning. The Battle River Producer Car Group has also begun to offer composite grading, whereby—using software they have developed themselves—grain from several farmers is blended to maximize the grade for all. At a time when farm input costs continue to escalate and farmers bear considerable additional freight costs due to the elimination of the Crow Rate and the subsidy that succeeded it, such savings can make the difference between a viable operation and a defunct one.

It is also clear, however, that there is more at stake in the producer-car option than simply individual economic advantage. Producer-car shippers consistently characterize their approach to shipping as an attempt to resist the concentration and consolidation of the grain industry, by which small producers have been systematically disadvantaged, and in relation to which they have had little voice. To these farmers, the right and choice to ship producer cars represents a recovery of some of the agency they have lost in this transition. When asked why he is committed to producer-car loading, Dennis Freadrich responded:

> There's a centralization that's been happening in the grain industry for a number of years, and this is just a reaction to that centralization. […] We got kind of pushed into it when they shut down all the elevators on the line. And then we just said as a group, "No, we don't have to do that—we have other options," and we exercised them. (2010)

Further, producer-car shippers appear to appreciate that cooperation and solidarity are essential conditions for recuperating some measure of control over the conditions under which they pursue their livelihoods. "What I've found with this group," Howard Vincett told me,

> is that it's brought a lot of the farmers closer together, whereas if you're hauling to the big elevator, you're just kind of doing your own thing; you're running your own business, and piss on the neighbours. It's kind of made more of a sense of community in the area again, and let the farmers work together again, instead of against each other. (2010)

Interestingly, the experience of producer-car loading is itself conducive to encouraging this sort of solidarity, in a manner that recalls the role country elevators once played as media of cooperative socialization. According to farmer Gerald Kuefler:

> Today, when we're loading cars here at Galahad, at dinner time everybody quits. We step across the tracks and across the boulevard and we all go over to the local hotel for lunch, and she [the proprietor] plans lunch for us. And we all sit down, have lunch and coffee and then go back to work. It's a social gathering for us—we didn't do that before, when we were all sitting

[in line at the terminal] in Killam. Here, we know everybody, everybody stops, we go in and it's "How are things going?" and tell a few jokes, have a little fun. It becomes a social thing. […] In producer-car loading, we are recreating that whole [dynamic] where everybody would meet at the elevator, discuss grain. You'd go around, you'd talk. [The elevator was] sort of a focal point where you could get around. Guys got around, they visited and discussed what they are doing and what was going on, and we're recreating that. (2010)

Ken Eshpeter, the group's chairman, portrayed a similar scene: "I would describe it in many ways as a kind of carnival atmosphere, compared to a work atmosphere. It's kind of a work-bee atmosphere that existed years and years ago when rural people would get together" (2010a). A story told to me by another farmer illuminates the significance of this milieu:

I was at a meeting and there was a fellow there that I know fairly well. I hadn't seen him for a long time, but at the tracks I'd seen him a little bit. And they were having trouble with their car, getting the doors closed on the bottom. I'd had some experience with that, so I went and I got a big crowbar and some different things, and I was able to give them a hand and get that thing shut for [him]. He didn't say nothing, just "see you later" or whatever, but he did mention it at that meeting. He didn't use any names, but he said: "You know, I haven't loaded many cars. It was nice to come to the tracks and meet some of the people you haven't seen for years. You're in trouble and there are people there to help you out and get things done, sort of like we used to do in the old days." […] And that's what I kind of felt, but I didn't know how many other people felt that as well. He's continued to load cars too, now, because of that. (Anonymous, personal interview March 3, 2010)

While cooperative producer-car loading seems to recover something of the quality of social experience that nurtured solidarity at old country elevator sites, it would be a mistake to characterize the contemporary practice as simply nostalgic. Instead, producer-car loading reflects an implicit understanding that cooperation is crucial to the survival of independent producers under conditions that are not otherwise favourable to them, and that certain modes and scales of productive organization are more supportive of cooperative subjectivity than others. It is about the future, not the past: "It's kind of controlling our destiny in a lot of ways. If we didn't all get together, we would lose that control. This way, we've got some control and we can have an input in the direction that things are going to go in twenty or thirty years from now" (Freadrich 2010).

Not surprisingly, the railway and the major grain companies are not fans of producer cars. In 2001, the Western Grain Elevators Association (WGEA), which represents the major grain companies, argued before the Canadian

Grain Commission that producer-car loading facilities and groups should be subjected to the same licensing conditions that primary elevators are subjected to (Beingessner 2002). The WGEA argued that exemption gave producer-car groups an unfair advantage over the major companies, and undermined these companies' investment in developing the system of high-throughput terminals for the benefit of all farmers; regulation, the WGEA suggested, might be used to limit the number of producer cars that could be shipped in a given year. Notwithstanding these predatory claims, the commission decided to exempt producer-car groups from licensing requirements provided they adhered to conditions whereby they would refrain from acting like grain companies (i.e., so long as they continue merely to coordinate shipping, rather than *buying* grain from producers) (*Grain News* 2002). Similarly, from the perspective of the major railways, producer-car shipping represents the return of the "inefficiency" they had hoped to eliminate through branch line abandonment and country elevator closures. Despite continued support for producer-car shipping (by Transport Canada, the Canadian Wheat Board and the Canadian Grain Commission), CN initiated a policy in 2006 whereby it would allow advanced booking only for units of one hundred cars or more, slated for a single destination and ordered for forty-two consecutive weeks—a policy that would have effectively eliminated producer-car shipping by limiting delivery to high-throughput terminals with hundred-car spots and sufficient stored volume to maintain continuous shipping. A group of small grain companies and an array of producers' associations (including the Battle River group) immediately brought action against CN. In 2008, the Canadian Transportation Agency found the policy to be in violation of CN's service obligations, and ordered the railway to resume delivering producer cars. More recently, in September 2009, CN announced plans to "delist" fifty-three producer-car loading sites on sidings across the Prairies.[5] The move elicited considerable protest from producer organizations, prompting the federal government to intervene in order to persuade CN to delay the delisting, pending consultation with farmers—underway as part of Transport Canada's 2010 Rail Freight Service Review. According to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food Gerry Ritz: "Farmers have always had the choice to load their crops onto train via an elevator, or via a producer car loading site. Our Government is committed to maintaining that choice." The Rail Freight Service Review's interim report, issued in October 2010, was conspicuously non-committal on the issue of producer-car loading, and suggested that the matter of branch line abandonment was beyond its mandate (Transport Canada 2010: 53-56). Whether the government will ultimately resist the railway companies' apparent desire to abandon producer cars remains to be seen.

Branch line 43.03 was not on CN's "de-listing" block because, as the Battle River Producer Car Group learned via an advertisement in the November 27, 2008, edition of the *Camrose Canadian* newspaper, CN had elected to discontinue a

seventy-five-kilometre section of the line from Kiron to Alliance. CN would retain the fifteen-kilometre stretch that runs from its mainline to the high-throughput terminal operated by Cargill just south of Camrose. Beyond that, the line running through the six communities where the Battle River Producer Car Group loads grain would be abandoned. The announcement was not entirely a surprise, as the line had been on CN's discontinuance list for years, the railway having long claimed that producers were unable to generate volumes sufficient to allow the line to be operated profitably.[6] The *Canada Transportation Act* (1996) obliges rail companies considering abandonment of grain-dependent branch lines to entertain reasonable expressions of interest from any local concern seeking to acquire the line. The Battle River Producer Car Group promptly filed a letter with CN indicating its interest in the line. After several months of assessment and negotiation, a purchase price of $4.85 million was agreed on. Faced with the prospect of a technological change that would undermine their agency as producers, and would also likely entail the final demise of their communities, the men and women of the Battle River Producer Car Group had made a decision: they would buy and operate a short-line railroad. It was at this point that the elements of another, alternative political possibility began to emerge.

In many respects, the situation was not unique. There are currently ten short-line railroads in Saskatchewan, operating about 1,700 kilometres of track. All but one of these railroads are operated by co-operative or community-based initiatives on grain-dependent branch lines that were slated for abandonment. Most of the railroads persist on grain shipped by producer-car groups, and have benefitted from a well-developed provincial policy infrastructure supporting short-line-railroad acquisition and sustainability that includes grants for feasibility studies, interest-free capital loans, flexible payment schedules, assistance in negotiations with the railways and grants for infrastructure upgrades and maintenance (Saskatchewan Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure 2009). Recently, a thirty-seven-kilometre grain-dependent branch line slated for abandonment by the CPR in southern Manitoba was purchased by the Boundary Trail Rail Company, which thus became that province's first (mostly) producer-owned short-line railroad (White 2009). This project also benefitted from provincial support in the form of a $615,000 forgivable loan, as well as a substantial investment from a local philanthropist. Significantly, the Boundary Trail short-line is to be operated on contract by a third party, Central Canadian Railway (Beingessner 2009). In Alberta, an outfit called Alberta Prairie Railway Excursions received $2.6-million in funding from Western Economic Diversification Canada to lay rails for a tourist steam-train—complete with reenacted train robberies and rescues by the Métis hero Gabriel Dumont—from Stettler to Big Valley, along with an additional $732,000 contributed by the agency's Community Adjustment Fund to support the building of parks adjacent to the line (Cowley 2010). By contrast with these ventures, the Battle River Producer Car Group was setting

out to establish Alberta's first producer-owned-and-operated, cooperative, grain-dependent short-line railroad, in a province where no policy framework existed for such a venture, where the group could expect minimal government support, and where philanthropic largesse was nowhere to be seen on the horizon.[7]

Under these conditions, the Battle River producers pursued the only line of action available to them: they assumed the burden of organization. Petitions were drafted, circulated and signed. Meetings were held in community halls. Letters were written to newspapers. Most importantly, visits were paid to farmhouse kitchens, barns, coffee shops and curling rinks around the countryside—visits where people looked each other in the eye. Volunteers were recruited to sell shares in a co-operative that would finance the purchase of the branch line. Paul Schorak was one such volunteer; born and raised in Forestburg, Schorak is a retired supervisor with the Alberta Liquor Control Board whose second career as a political activist has seen him occupy elected office and work for several political parties. "We have six towns that are along this branch line. […] Six communities that are mainly there because of the railroad being here," he told me, adding, "And communities develop that are meaningful communities. Once the railroad is gone, it's just a matter of time and they'll be gone too" (2010).

While retaining the economic benefits of producer-car shipping—both the direct benefit to those who load cars and the indirect benefits of maintaining a competitive alternative to the high-throughput terminals—was central to the pitch for share sales, it is clear that something bigger was also on the table. As Ken Eshpeter confided to me, it would have been far easier simply to form a corporation of private investors—but this action alone would not suffice to "tie people to the enterprise" (2010b). The commitment to establish the railroad as a cooperative was central to the motivation of the project from the outset, as was the sense that the stakes of the venture's success or failure extended beyond a competitive alternative for producers to encompass the very possibility of sustainable rural communities. Indeed, at a certain point, the immediate economic benefit to producer-car shippers became secondary. "That's a big deal for us," Eshpeter admitted, "but we're a community. So what if we're saving a couple dollars with grain and the whole community has died, if all the beautiful little towns along the line have died? Small accomplishment, really" (2010a).

It may even be that organization as a cooperative, community-based venture is a necessary condition of success for short-line railroads in the Prairies. As the major rail companies have insisted, profitability is difficult—if not impossible—to achieve on these low-volume lines. This fact, however, does not rule out the possibility of sustaining the lines on a break-even basis for other reasons altogether. As Paul Beingessner points out, "Saskatchewan's successful short-lines are all community based. None are seen as investment vehicles. All are rather a means to an end—the end being the continuation of rail service for the benefit

of the farmers and communities involved" (2009: 1). This recipe would appear to bode well for the future of branch line 43.03. In the end, volunteers raised nearly \$3.5-million through share sales. The bulk of these shares were sold to individual producer car shippers, a significant number went to local business and community organizations, a few were sold to the municipalities, and nearly 200 went to "people who want to hear the whistle blow" (Eshpeter 2010a).[8] The co-operative took possession of the line on June 18, 2010, and the Battle River Railway was born. A locomotive was purchased, a local man (a retired CN engineer) was hired to run it, and farmers were certified to conduct the trains safely. On December 14, 2010, the railway pulled fifty cars loaded with barley to the junction at Camrose.

The Beginning

In his groundbreaking essay "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" Langdon Winner (1986) describes the manner in which large-scale technological systems seem to enforce the centralization of control and authority as a sort of moral imperative necessitated by the demands of technical and economic efficiency. While other, more decentralized and more democratic arrangements for managing our technologies and economies remain possible, the culture of contemporary technological capitalism often succeeds in casting these alternatives as prohibitively impractical. "It is a characteristic of societies based on large, complex technological systems," Winner writes:

> that moral reasons other than those of practical necessity appear increasingly obsolete, idealistic, and irrelevant. Whatever claims one may wish to make on behalf of liberty, justice or equality can be immediately neutralized when confronted with arguments to the effect, "*Fine, but that's no way to run a railroad*." (1986: 36)

This argument is one that the men and women of the Battle River Railway simply refused to accept, and it is in this refusal, and the affirmation that it implies ("Yes, actually, this *is* the way to run a railroad!") that the real possibility of an Alberta—and a rurality—that departs from conservative stereotypes lies. At the high-throughput terminals, these producers are merely inputs to be manipulated, on a screen, in the service of systemic interests over which they have little influence and no control; yet at the producer-car loading sites along the Battle River branch line, and in their struggle to sustain the line and the communities that rely upon it, these same producers enact a complex blend of agency, resistance and survival, in which they strive to make their economy rather than submit to it. Reg Enright called it "growing a backbone":

> There's really an attitude out in the rural now that people are willing to see things go because "Aw shucks, everything else is gone and we're not putting

up another fight." […] You just get worn down after a while. Your elevators go, your churches go, your businesses go, your school goes. But this group, this one, we're not going to let go. (2010)

There is no need to put words into these farmers' mouths on the issue of what has been gained here:

I think one of the biggest things that we've learned by doing this is we've learned the power of cooperation among everybody. Individually, we could not have done this. If we didn't think cooperatively to pull this thing off, this line would be long gone. And now we know that if we cooperate and get a common view, we can actually have real power; we can actually do things and change things and make things happen. That's one of the most rewarding things about being part of this, the fact that it shows us what we can do if we get everybody together and think on the same page. (Freadrich 2010)

In this respect, the Battle River producers are exemplars of what Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham have named the "post-capitalist politics" of the "intentional community economy" (2006: 111). Here "the Economy," as an unassailable structural force to which we can only adapt, is destabilized and revealed as a contingent space of political judgment and action in which a community can try to make its economy work for itself. In a context where technology tends to close down the economy as a space of politics, the struggle of the Battle River producers "opens up the economy as a field of responsibility and decision" (Gibson-Graham 2006: 103). Those are social scientists talking. This comment is a young farmer:

Farmers are starting to feel their power in the area, that if we push something we can actually do it, rather than just letting the system play out or letting the big corporations and government dictate the rules of the game. Our opinion does matter. We have not had great success in evoking any change, but at least for us to speak up and to have our voices heard is a change in and of itself, whether or not anyone's listening. (Enright 2010)

Beyond the junction lies a massive transnational agricultural system in which whatever agency these farmers may have recovered locally is massively hedged. Still, you have to start somewhere.

All genuinely political moments are moments of beginning, and to begin takes courage. French philosopher Jacques Rancière has written that we live in consensual times, with consensus referring not to an agreement between people but rather to a resignation to the sense that "what is, is all there is" (2010: viii). Rancière contrasts this resignation with another way of being in the world, a way of being that "lays claim to one present against another and affirms that the visible, thinkable and possible can be described in many ways. This other way has a name. It is called politics" (x). He goes on to write that "politics is the way of concerning

oneself with human affairs based on the mad presupposition that anyone is as intelligent as anyone else and that at least one more thing can always be done other than what is being done" (2). Becoming political means refusing to take the present state of things as given. It means refusing to accept the consensus that what there is, is all there is, and that nothing can be done. It means, as Rancière puts it, claiming "the right to attend to the future" (3). Or, in the words of Matt Enright, spoken at his kitchen table in Rosalind, it means allowing oneself "to actually do something, rather than just going with the flow." Confronted with the consensus that a technological "rationalization" of the grain-handling system—the disappearance of the country elevators, the abandonment of railway branch lines and the evacuation of Prairie communities—was necessarily the only future available to them, the Battle River producers and their supporters simply refused, and got down to work. In this refusal, they made a beginning, a beginning that expressed the courage typical of generations of Prairie citizen-producers before them (Epp 2008: 73-94). They became political. As Roger Epp has described them, these citizen-producers:

> defy all of those caricatures through which the rural is now most likely to be encountered. They know that what is at stake in the countryside touches on the most basic questions of our time, questions about the future of technology, work, food, the environment and democracy. (8)

That the future is unwritten is a condition of politics, and courage in the face of this uncertainty is what distinguishes politics from mere government, and from technology. Branch line 43.03 runs south from Camrose and terminates at Alliance. Where the Battle River Railway will lead is an open question.

Notes

1. To my knowledge, there exists no definitive inventory of remaining country elevators in Canada. The Canadian Grain Commission keeps annual records of licenced primary elevators in Canada, but does not distinguish between country elevators and high-throughput terminals—a rough count can be deduced based on volumes stored at a particular site, but even this does into take into account country elevators that remain standing but are not licenced. Local inventories are being attempted by various heritage organizations, but none have as yet achieved a comprehensive count. See, for example,

the PixelGrain mapping project at http://www.year01.com/pixelgrain/.

2. These figures were provided to me in August 2010 by the Engineering and Rail Complaints Division of the Canadian Transportation Agency.

3. The 1998 Final Report of Transport Canada's *Grain-handling and Transportation Review* (also known as the Estey Report) recommended that the right to ship producer cars be retained in law, as it has been in subsequent statutory amendments reflecting the report. Interestingly, Recommendation 4 of the Report suggested that future legislative action may be required to ensure access to railway sidings for producer-car shippers, and added that "this idea should not be discouraged, as it is, at the least, a defensive protection for the farmer."

4. Viterra Inc. was born in 2007 from the privatization of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and its merger with Agricore United, itself the creation of a privatization and merger between Agricore (formerly the Alberta Wheat Pool) and the United Grain Growers.

5. "Delisting" simply means that while the line would remain under the ownership of CN Railway and may be used for other purposes, the carrier would no longer pull producer cars to or from those sidings. In contrast to discontinuance, which requires three years notice, delisting requires only sixty days notice.

6. This number appeared to fluctuate in response to the likelihood that producers might actually meet it. Initially, CN Railway indicated that 800 cars per year would make the line profitable, but just as it began to look as though producers might be getting near this volume, the figure changed to 1,200 cars.

7. The Battle River group received a $45,000 grant from Alberta's Rural Community Adaptation program to formulate a business plan. Beyond this, the group has received no other direct government funding toward the purchase of the line. Battle River-Wainwright Member of the Legislative Assembly Doug Griffiths indicated that, while he supported the venture, in the absence of a policy framework—which itself demanded additional study of the sector, further provincial contributions could not be justified (2010). The group did receive a $5-million line of credit from the Alberta Financial Services Corporation, from which they ultimately drew a loan of $1.5 million. Later, the group received grants from the Rural Alberta Development Fund ($235,000) and the Canadian Cooperative Development Initiative ($60,000) to develop a composite-grading program for blending grain.

8. The co-op sold approximately 450 B-class shares to producers at $5,000 each, allocated at one share per car of anticipated loading. B-class shareholders were also eligible for A-class voting shares at $1.000 each, of which 180 were sold. Seventy D-class shares were sold to local business and community interests at $10,000 apiece. Two hundred supportive individuals purchased C-class shares for $1,000 each. One municipality purchased an E-class share for $25,000. The reminder of the purchase price was drawn from the Alberta Financial Services Corporation line of credit mentioned above.

References

Beingessner, Paul. 2002. *Elevator companies try to impede producer cars*. STATpub.com . http://www.statpub.com/open/10737.html.

———. 2007. Rail Line Abandonment. In *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*. Regina, SK: University of Regina and Canadian Plains Research Centre.

———. 2009. Raining on the railway. *The Western Producer*. 11 March, online edition.

Berland, Jody. 2009. *North of Empire: Essays on the Cultural Technologies of Space*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Canadian Wheat Board. 2009. Farmers load record number of producer cars, Press release, 27 July.

———. 2010. Prairie Farmers Then & Now. *Grain Matters* June/July.

Colquette, R. D. 1957. *The First Fifty Years: A History of United Grain Growers Limited*. Winnipeg, MB: Public Press.

Cowley, Paul. 2010. Rail being laid for heritage line. *Red Deer Advocate*, 2 September, online edition.

Doan, Darcie, Brian Paddock and Jan Dyer. 2003. Grain Transportation Policy and Transformation in Western Canadian Agriculture. *International Agricultural Policy Reform and Adjustment Project*. Policy Reform and Adjustment Workshop, Imperial College London. October 23-25. http://purl.umn.edu/15748.

Enright, Matt. 2010a. Personal interview, Rosalind, Alberta, 3 March.

———. 2010b. Comment. *Rail Freight Service Review*. Transport Canada. www.tc.gc.ca/media/documents/policy/008-matt-enright-eng.pdf.

———. 2010c. Single car freight rates too high, *Grain News.* 15 February. www.agcanada.com/Article.aspx?ID=18020.

Enright Reg. 2010. Personal interview, Forestburg, Alberta, 3 March.

Epp, Roger. 2008. *We Are All Treaty People*: *Prairie Essays*. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

Epp, Roger and Dave Whitson, eds. 2001. *Writing Off the Rural West: Globalization, Governments and the Transformation of Rural Communities*. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

Eshpeter, Ken. 2010a. Personal interview, Daysland, Alberta, 5 March.

———. 2010b. Telephone interview. Daysland, Alberta, 11 June.

Eshpeter, Lisa. 2010. Personal interview, Edmonton, Alberta, 5 March.

Estey, Willard Z. 1998. *Grain-handling and Transportation Review: Final Report*. Ottawa, ON: Transport Canada.

Fairbairn, Garry. 1984. *From Prairie Roots: The Remarkable Story of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool*. Saskatoon, SK: Western Producer Prairie Books.

Flaman, Bernard. 2008. Grain Elevators on the Canadian Prairies: Nomadism to Settlement. *Docomo.mo* 38:26-32.

Fournier, Leslie Thomas. 1981. *Railway Nationalization in Canada: The Problem of the Canadian National Railways.* Princeton, NJ: Ayer Publishing.

Fowke, Vernon C. 1957. *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Freadrich, Dennis. 2010. Personal interview, Forestburg, Alberta, 3 March.

Friesen, Gerald. 1987. *The Canadian Prairies: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. 2006. *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Government of Canada. 1977. The Grain-handling and Transportation Commission. *Grain and Rail in Western Canada*. Ottawa, ON: The Commission.

Grain News. 2002. Canadian Grain Commission to Exempt Producer Car Loading Facilities from Primary Elevator Licensing Provisions. GrainNet. 7 May. www.grainnet.com.

Gray, Richard, Mohammad Khakbazan and James Nolan. 1999. Measuring the Impact of Branch line Abandonment. *Proceedings of the Canadian Transportation Research Forum*. Montreal, QC. 470-84.

Griffiths, Doug. 2010 Personal interview, Wainwright, Alberta, 5 March.

Kuefler, Gerald. 2010. Personal interview, Galahad, Alberta, 4 March.

Laycock, David. 1990. *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies 1910-1945*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Lobao, Linda and Curtis W. Stofferahn. 2008. The Community Effects of Industrialized Farming: Social Science Research and Challenges to Corporate Farming Laws. *Agriculture and Human Values* 25:219-40.

Mason, Greg. 1978. The Grain-handling and Transportation Commission. *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques* 4(2) Spring: 235-45.

McDonnell, Greg. 1998. *Wheat Kings: Vanishing Landmarks of the Canadian Prairies*. Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press.

Moorhouse, Herbert Joseph. 1918. *Deep Furrows: Which Tells of Pioneer Trails Along Which the Farmers of Western Canada Fought Their Way to Great Achievements in Co-Operation*. Toronto and Winnipeg: McLeod.

Morris, William E. 1987. *Chosen Instrument: The Canadian Wheat Board*. Winnipeg: Canadian Wheat Board.

National Farmers' Union. 1998. Western Canadian Branch line Abandonment and Retention: Seeking a Least-cost System for All Participants. *Third Submission to the Second Phase of the Grain Transportation Review*. www.nfu.ca/wescan.htm.

Oberg, John. 2010. Personal interviews, Forestburg, Alberta, 3 and 5 March.

Pollan, Michael. 2006. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin.

Producer Car Shippers of Canada. 2010. Railways overcharge producers $100 million annually. www.pcsofcan.ca/railways_overcharge_producers_100_million.html.

Rancière, Jacques. 2010. *Chronicles of Consensual Times*. London: Continuum.

Saskatchewan Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure. 2009. Saskatchewan short-line innovation leads nation. Press release, 10 June.

Schorak, Paul. 2010. Personal interview. Forestburg, Alberta, 4 March.

Silversides, Brock. 1997. *Prairie Sentinel: The Story of the Canadian Grain Elevator*. Calgary, AB: Fifth House.

Sterne, Jonathan. 2006. Transportation and Communication: Together as You've Always Wanted Them. In *Thinking with James Carey: Essays on Communications, Transportation, History*, edited by Jeremy Packer and Craig Robertson. New York: Peter Lang.

Transport Canada. 2010. Rail Freight Service Review. *Interim Report*. Ottawa, ON: Ministry of Transport, October.

Tyrchniewicz, Edward W. and Robert J. Tosterud. 1973. A Model for Rationalizing the Canadian Grain Transportation and Handling System on a Regional Basis. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 55(5): 805-13.

Vance, Jonathan. 2006. *Building Canada: People and Projects that Shaped the Nation*. Toronto: Penguin.

Vincett, Howard. 2010. Comment. *Rail Freight Service Review*. Transport Canada. www.tc.gc.ca/media/documents/policy/008-howard-vincett-eng.pdf.

White, Patrick. 2009. The little railway that could. *The Globe and Mail*, 30 June, Online edition.

Wilson, C. F. 1978. *A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951*. Saskatoon, SK: Western Producer Prairie Books.

Winner, Langdon. 1986. *The Whale and the Reactor: The Search for Limits in the Age of High Technology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.