

# KING GEORGE VI COMES TO RIVERS, MANITOBA



BY ROBIN TIVY

In the months leading up to the declaration of war with Germany in 1939, their majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth made the first visit in history of a ruling monarch to Canada. They came across the ocean on the Empress of Australia, and then by CPR across Canada to Vancouver, and back on the CNR. The train was scheduled to pass through Rivers, Manitoba on June 4th, 1939.

Since Rivers was the last division point before Winnipeg, the locomotives would be serviced there. The town had petitioned for an official stop, and it was granted.

Due to a change in plans, the arrival time was set back an hour. But that didn't dampen the enthusiasm of some fifteen thousand persons, many of whom had begun gathering at the station before dawn. Long before 6:00AM, truckloads of children and hundreds of automobiles poured into Rivers, most having travelled throughout the night from northern Manitoba and points in Saskatchewan. In Rivers, they joined up with thousands of other people who had been temporarily put up in church halls, the hockey arena, public halls, backyards -- anywhere you could sleep.

A brass band to play God Save the King waited silently in the crowds of thousands. When the pilot train arrived, my Dad walked around the head end to get to the south side of the track, and planned where he would take pictures. (The town and station were entirely on the north side of the tracks, and it was there that the crowd was confined by the marshalls and police). No one was allowed on the south side.

My Dad's journal says:

"I had to sneak around past the ice house and through the roundhouse. I waited in the roundhouse until the train arrived at 7:55AM. I moved to the snow fence where I stood for five minutes admiring the beauty of the silver and blue train with the resplendent 6047 at the head end. The engine was in more than all her anticipated glory. The Canadian National emblem was proudly displayed as well as the Royal coat of arms. The beautiful deep blue colour of the special running board aprons took my eye as much as anything. I also liked the particular cross hatched shadowing which appeared similar to galvanizing on the silver portion of the coaches. However, even the dull olive green of the trucks appealed to me. When I got up sufficient nerve after admiring the train, I dodged out and snapped a view of the train, and one of the engine, before Henry Trudell of the special veterans' police force came over to lead me to the crowd."

Meanwhile, back at the station, the crowd was informed that the King was still asleep, and a great silence fell over the crowd, in respect for the sleeping King. But as the train was slowly leaving, someone awakened the King, telling him there were crowds of thousands outside. The King got up, and appeared on the back platform of the observation car in his dressing gown, and a mighty roar went up from the crowd.

"When the train eased out gently I took a snapshot by the east switch just as the sun in all its resplendent glory burst in full upon the most historic train in Canadian history. As the last car drew near, I held my camera in readiness, should the King and Queen appear. But they had already gone inside."

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