

My name? I don't think I have one. I'm just one of thousands - living in the Cranmer elevator - on the CPR branch to Lyleton. We rats eat by night, mostly. By day - we stay away from humans and their contraptions. Because we're a unified group, we're way smarter than humans - in some ways. Humans! They're sure good at building stuff - which we're thankful for - but they're not good at hearing those still, small voices. Let me explain.

This rail line was built to get wheat out of this area. First the grain is stored in elevators and then it's loaded onto rail cars. Elevators were built every 8 miles - so farmers didn't need to haul too far. Then, as competition grew, more elevators were added. That's when the United Grain Growers company built here, smack between Waskada and Goodlands. Business was good, so we eventually got two elevators to live in.

Late one September evening in 1928, the weather was fair and grain was coming in steady. We rats, though, could hear trouble brewing. The workers heard creaks and groans from the bowels of the building at supper. They filled two rail cars, and then left at 11 pm that night.

We rats? We were out of there by 9 pm. Humans noticed our great migration scurrying down the loading ramp and away from the elevator. It's said rats will abandon a sinking ship. We sure do. If the vessel tells us it's going down, we listen. Fortunately for our humans, the elevator's foundation held on till they were asleep with their families. Then the first boards began to buckle under the shifting weight.

Oh, what a sight! The elevator collapsed with a deafening crash! We heard from miles away as it crumpled in a cloud of dust! The top of the building was thrown 200 feet, crushing telephone and telegraph lines! 30,000 bushels of grain mixed with rafters, pullies and cables piled twelve feet high along the tracks!

Thankfully the next summer, 1929, they rebuilt - and we moved right back in. The elevator soon became a depot for coal and cream too.

But that didn't impress us much. All we ever ask for is cozy places - beside, above and below humans and their sloppy ways.



Alas, like so many sidings and whistle stops, villages and hamlets, Cranmer siding is scheduled to be abandoned. Bigger trucks and bigger grain companies make our little elevators obsolete. We had a good run here.

Now, you just go ahead and ponder. Did we, the rats of Cranmer, have a collective sixth sense - that warned us of imminent disaster? Us? We're too busy to ponder. We're moving on. Eating grain and making babies.

Betty Sawatzky and David Neufeld adapted 'Rats of Cranmer' from a story written for Vantage Points 4.