

# New train disaster memorial set for spring completion

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After more than a decade in the planning stages, a memorial to commemorate the 1986 train disaster and renovations on the Hinton Historical Society museum are set for completion this year, says the society president.

The old Grand Trunk Pacific train station was moved from its original location by the current Canadian National Railway tracks to the new location across Highway 16 in 2003. The heritage building was constructed in 1911, the oldest in Hinton to remain standing. Set to be demolished, it was saved by the historical society. Renovations have been underway since it was moved and a main floor was added. Local artifacts have been collected and will be arranged for museum display.

Plans for a memorial of the catastrophic train collision in 1986 have been on the books for more than a decade.

"When we moved the railway station in 2003 the town council at the time put it in one of their action items that they wanted to see a memorial put at the site," said Lorraine Johnston-MacKay, president of the Hinton Historical Society. "To commemorate the lives lost and for remembering those that were there to assist, like the Hinton fire department, the hospital and other workers." This would be a second memorial in town, in addition to the existing cairn monument built at the site of the collision near Carldale Road east of Hinton.

Twenty-three people were killed in the Feb. 8, 1986 disaster when a CN freight train collided with a Via Rail passenger train, the deadliest train accident in Albertan history.

The memorial will be located outside and in front of the old train station, visible from the highway, said Don Engerdahl, the town's arts and culture coordinator. The design isn't finalized but a concept has been drawn up.

"It basically looks like a set of [train] tracks coming out of the ground," said Engerdahl, adding it will probably be made out of aluminum, about four feet tall and three feet wide, with inscriptions on the railway ties. The inscriptions would tell the story of Alberta's worst railway accident.

"I'm waiting for the ground to thaw," Engerdahl said, adding he's expecting the memorial will be put in place this spring. The town has set aside about \$1,000 for the item, he noted.

The Hinton Historical Society is funded by donations, fundraisers and grants, both provincial and municipal. There have been five phases of funding for the museum over the past decade, said Johnston-MacKay.

"We're in the final phase now, we have the funding in the bank," she said. "Then we'll be putting a call out to get the renovations done...and then we'll be able to utilize it for a museum." A total of about \$350,000 has been collected over the years for the project.

Renovations on the museum building should be completed this spring, said Johnston-Mackay. But a grand opening is not guaranteed this year.

"I hope so but I've been saying that for a couple of years," she chuckled. "We are volunteers." Further support is sought to fund \$15,000 worth of landscaping.