

HISTORY

For thousands of years, the ridge between Grosse Isle and Rosser has served as a transit corridor because it lies on high, dry ground above prairie that floods every spring. That ridge is an old beach of glacial Lake Agassiz, an inland sea that covered most of southern Manitoba until roughly 8,000 years ago. When the lake drained, it left the flat, stone-free clay that makes this area such good farmland. Indigenous peoples travelled that ridge route for millennia. Fur traders and voyageurs followed, then came Métis Red River carts, whose ruts can still be found at the railway wye just north of the site. Those oxcart trails were later followed by a steam-powered railway, and more recently Highway 6 was laid parallel to the rail line. The routes we still travel echo those used for millennia.

Origin of the name Grosse Isle

In 1852, the Red River flooded, and Métis families and settlers from Fort Garry camped on the ridge for six weeks with their livestock, surrounded by water. They called it the big island, or “Grosse Isle.” When the Canadian Northern Railway came through in 1904, it named the station in recognition of the area’s role as a refuge, and the name stuck. A community grew around the station.

Principal Meridian and Settlement

Just North of the wye runs the First Principal Meridian. Surveyed in 1869, before Métis river-lot titles were confirmed, helping to spark the Red River Resistance. The line is still marked as Meridian Road in some places, including where it links to Highway 6. Every quarter-section from Manitoba to British Columbia is numbered from it, and the square fields you passed to get here are a visible result. That survey turned prairie into farms, and farms into a community. Homes, a school, a church, and a station followed. Some of those buildings, or ones like them, are gathered here at the Grosse Isle Heritage Site.



GROSSE ISLE

Heritage Site EST. 1975

The Grosse Isle Heritage Site is a charitable, volunteer-run, historical tourism organization. We serve over 14,000 visitors from May to October in partnership with Prairie Dog Central, operators of Canada’s oldest-running steam locomotive.

Based in the tiny hamlet of Grosse Isle, our mandate is to offer a community market, family fun, and historical education to visitors from Manitoba and beyond. Located next to one of Manitoba’s last tall-grass prairie habitats, our organization is infused with a sense of stewardship, determined to take stories of our past into the future.

**So explore, grab a bite to eat and learn
what prairie life was like 100 years ago.**



THINGS TO DO

Every day from May to October, you'll find a lovingly restored historical village, a playground, portapotty, ample picnic spots, plenty of trees and access points to a tall-grass prairie preserve and the Prime Meridian Trail.

From 11:30 am to 1:30 pm on most in-season weekends, you'll discover even more to do. Historical buildings and museums will be open, the mini-train will be running, and a variety of volunteer and community-driven vendors will be on-site to serve you. Proceeds support the maintenance and preservation of the site.

A Emerson Station - Built in 1923 near the U.S. border, handling passengers, freight and mail between Manitoba and Minnesota. Sold in the 1980s and used as a cottage, which saved it from demolition. The station moved here in 2013.

B Jessie's Canteen and Washroom - Serves sandwiches, snacks and beverages. Named for a beloved volunteer. Open on weekends and weekday train runs.



C Ice Cream Shoppe - Frozen treats, served by locals.



D Picnic shelter - Large covered shelter with picnic tables.

E Gunton Station - Built around 1944 as a warm-up shelter for people waiting on the Arborg line. The original Gunton sign hangs inside. Still used as a warm-up shack in bad weather.

F Bake Shop, Gift Shop and Prairie Dogz - The Bake and Gift Shops are located in the only building original to this site. CN stored "jiggers" here (the small cars track crews used to patrol the line). Beside the Jigger Shack is Prairie Dogz, selling hot dogs and smokies. All three vendors are community-run, with proceeds going to maintain the site. The Gift Shop includes many items on consignment from locally sourced artisans, artists and authors.

G Grandpa Jim's Playground - Built by locals for the enjoyment of all. Named for our founding volunteer and past president Jim Harris.



H Mini-train - Volunteer-run, weekends only. Departs from Little Gopher Station. Rides are free; donations welcome.

I Natural History Museum - A retired CP Rail caboose holding furs, mounted birds including a snowy owl, and a Métis oxcart model. Many of the animal species shown still live in the field behind our site.

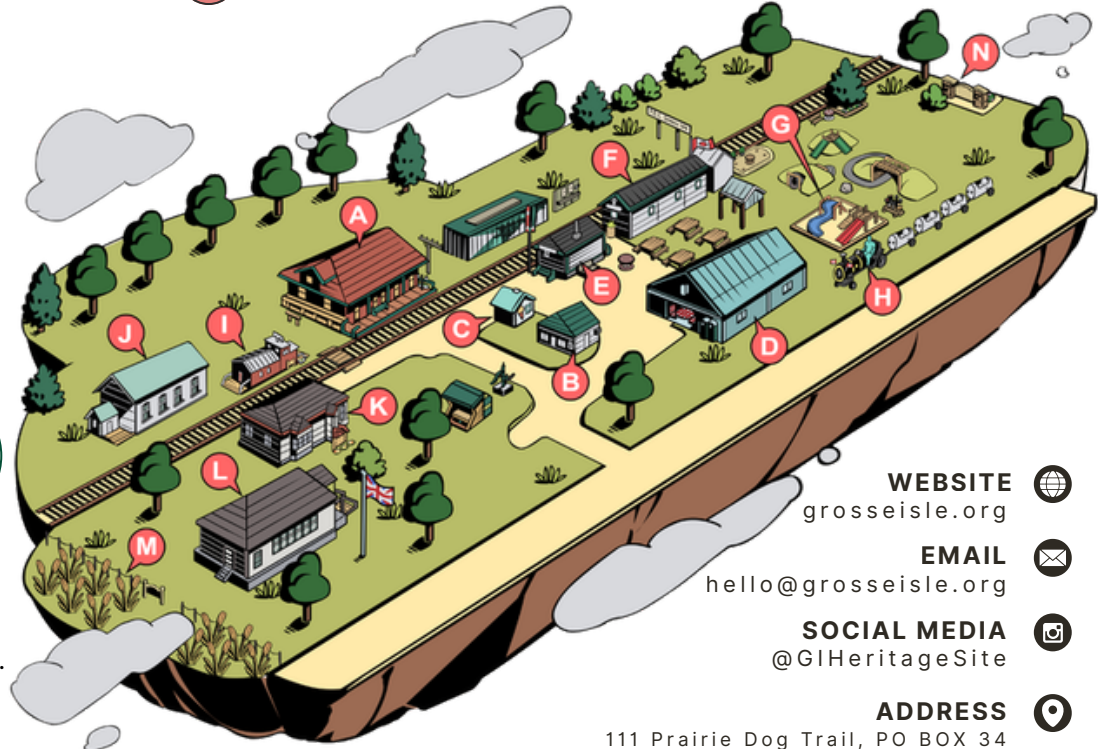
J United Church - Built in 1901, moved twice, and bought by the Grosse Isle community for \$1,000 in 1953. Prairie churches were built to be jacked up and hauled.

K Ridgeway House - Built in 1886 and home to three generations of one family for over 110 years. Nearly every object was donated by a neighbour.

L East Rosser School - A one-room schoolhouse from 1912. Look at the windows, all on one side: even light before electricity, and less heat lost through a Manitoba winter.

M Tall Grass Prairie - Endangered ecosystem. Community maintained with controlled burns. Provides access to the Prime Meridian Trail.

N Town Sign - Beautiful sign, great for pictures.



WEBSITE 
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Check Website to Verify Weekend Activities