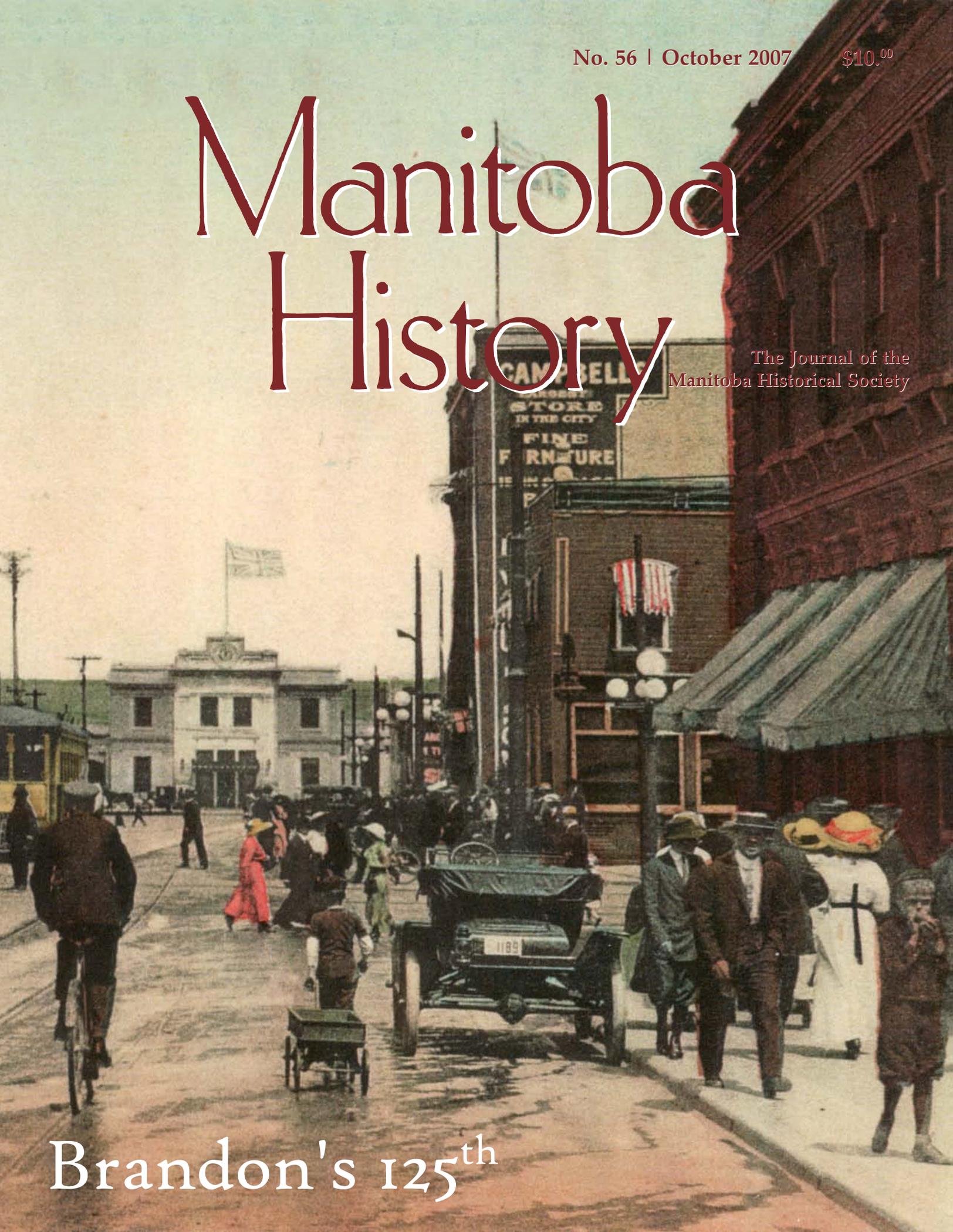


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Brandon's 125<sup>th</sup>



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# Manitoba History

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The intersection of Brandon's Tenth Street and Rosser Avenue, just south of the CPR station, bustles with activity in this postcard scene from 1913.

Source: Jack Stothard.

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# Brandon's Quasiquicentennial

by Tom Mitchell

S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University

The past just won't go away. It shows up in many places—street names, old letters, unpublished autobiographies, historical postcards, and formal historical writing. We just know the past is important, now. It can be a source of inspiration and pride, regret and shame. It cannot be ignored. Unresolved historical trauma—personal or collective—troubles our present, demanding attention, demanding resolution and closure. Historical accomplishments, unfinished business, can inspire our present. Individual lives, collective struggles may serve as moral exemplars to those searching for a compass in the disorder of the present. So a history that embraces all human possibility and seeks a full and satisfying account of the past is fundamental to healthy societies. We hope you find this edition of *Manitoba History* as bracing as a brisk fall walk and as good for you.

This 56<sup>th</sup> edition of *Manitoba History* contains an extended mediation on aspects of the history of Brandon, Manitoba on the occasion of the city's 125<sup>th</sup> birthday: born, legally at least, on 30 May 1882. Ken Storie shares the remarkable story of General Thomas Lafayette Rosser, founder of the city in his capacity as Chief Engineer for the Canadian Pacific Railway Syndicate. Tommy McLeod, who graduated from Brandon College in 1940, convinced to come here from Weyburn, Saskatchewan by his Baptist minister and Brandon College grad Tommy Douglas, relates the Victorian Baptist origins of that most important of Brandon institutions: Brandon University. Doug Ramsey and John Everitt canvas the sites of historical social drinking—and hard drinking—preferred by the city's imbibers. George Buri takes us to the Great War in this prairie city and the story of the Alien Detention Camp established at the Winter Fair Building and Wheat City Arena at Tenth Street and Victoria Avenue. Martin Kavanagh came to the "Wheat City" in 1929 and lived in Brandon the rest of his life until his death in 1987. In his inimitable style, he recalls his first encounter with streets and people of the city. Pat Forkin was an "East Ender" who died in the Soviet Union in 1939, having gone there in 1937 as the correspondent for the Communist Party of Canada newspaper *The Clarion*. His letters to the "folks" back home in Brandon give us a glimpse into the life of Soviet Russia in the 1930s. Scott Kukurudz tells the unusual and complex story of three

*Tom Mitchell is the guest editor for this special commemorative issue of Manitoba History. He works at the S. J. McKee Archives at Brandon University. Tom is Brandon-born, a "south-ender" and proud of it. His current project, in collaboration with Reinhold Kramer, a colleague at Brandon University, is a book on Winnipeg's Citizens' Committee of 1000.*

## Brandonography

Numerous articles on the MHS web site relate to Brandon history. A list of the articles, with links to their full text, is available here:

[www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/features/brandonography](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/features/brandonography)

Brandon women who were instrumental in the founding of the Indian and Métis Friendship Center in Brandon in the 1960s. Jack Stothard, local historian and dedicated collector of Brandon postcards, adds words, colour, and images to our account of the city.

Finally, many people have helped to compile this edition. Without the initiative and persistence of Gordon Goldsborough, a member of Brandon University's faculty in the early 1990s, this edition simply would not have happened. Thanks to Errol Black and Jim Blanchard for their introductions to articles. James Naylor of the BU History Department offered important suggestions and provided vital editorial assistance with several of the articles. Christy Henry read through the entire edition and tidied it up from start to finish. All but a few of the images come from Brandon, from the formal collections at the Daly House Museum (1882 home of Thomas Mayne Daly, first mayor of Brandon) and the S. J. McKee Archives at Brandon University, or from family photos of Gerry Beaubier and Audrey Silvius. We thank Thomas Rosser Cochran Jr. and his daughter Ann Cochran Culley for providing a copy of an old daguerreotype of General Rosser, their ancestor. We are very pleased to thank the Whitehead Foundation for a grant that made possible the color reproduction of Jack Stothard's Brandon postcards. 🍷



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University, Lawrence Stuckey Fonds, C2.

**Commerce was well developed** by the time of this photograph of the 600 block of Brandon's Rosser Avenue, circa 1883.

# “Enemies Within Our Gates:” Brandon’s Alien Detention Centre During the Great War

by George Buri  
Department of History, Brandon University

**M**itro Mahoumnuk reacted to the outbreak of World War One in the same way as thousands of other young men across Canada and Europe. He volunteered to join the army and fight on behalf of his country of residence. Like thousands of others who displayed a sudden, enthusiastic patriotism and an extreme naivety about what modern warfare entailed, this twenty year old was perhaps enthusiastic to experience the adventure and heroism that recruiters promised to those who joined up. Mahoumnuk, however, would never get the chance to see the Great War at the front lines. Instead he experienced the effects that war can have on the home front, bringing latent prejudices to the surface and amplifying the coercive power of the state.

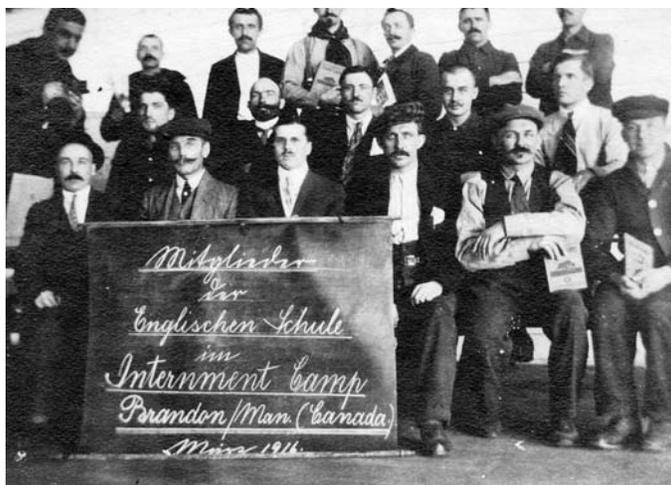
Mitro Mahoumnuk, having immigrated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1910, was classified as an “enemy alien,” and interned at the alien detention centre in Brandon Manitoba. Once there, he was, along with over nine hundred other men, imprisoned for almost two years and later sent to a work camp in Banff, Alberta after the Brandon internment camp closed in 1916. Mitro’s experiences are known today only because he managed to escape from the Brandon alien detention centre, only to be recaptured over six months later.<sup>1</sup> Due to the destruction

of all official government records dealing with internment operations in the 1950s, the names of most of the internees at the Brandon camp remain unknown today.<sup>2</sup> However, the experiences of those interned and those who supported internment can be partially reconstructed with the help of civic records, oral history and newspaper articles. In all,

over 8,579 “enemy aliens” were interned in Canada from 1914 to 1920. Of these, 5,441 were civilians and five thousand were Ukrainians who, like Mahoumnuk, had lived under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before emigrating to Canada.<sup>3</sup> Brandon itself was home to up to nine hundred of these people at any one time from 27 November 1914 to 19 July 1916.

The alien detention centre in Brandon was used to hold any “enemy aliens” from the province of Manitoba whom the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNMP) or Canadian armed forces decided to intern. Its location in Brandon was more than simply coincidental or practical. For a number of reasons, city leaders and middle class Brandonites

who felt a strong attachment to the British Empire lobbied for the creation of an alien detention centre in their city. Although the war served as a convenient pretext for the imprisonment of thousands of mostly young, urban working class men, the detention of “enemy aliens” had less to do with the security concerns, real or imagined, of a nation at war than it did with the class and ethnic (at that time termed racial) tensions within Brandon and indeed all of English Canada. Brandon in the early 1910s was a rapidly growing, yet divided, city in which the middle class Anglo-Protestant elite held the levers of political



Guenther Salzmann

**‘Aliens’ learn English.** Reinhold Salzmann, bearded in the second row, was born in Bodeschwingh, Germany in 1876. He immigrated to a farm near Punnichy, Saskatchewan in June 1913. The next year, he was arrested and interned at Brandon, leaving his wife and three young children to mind the farm. In this photo from March 1916, he joined other internees in an English language class. When the Brandon Internment Centre closed later that year, Salzmann was moved to one at Morrissey, BC where he remained until the end of the war. He returned to his farm, moving to Winnipeg in 1932. He died there in 1969, never having expressed any hard feelings over his internment.

*George Buri is a sessional lecturer at Brandon University and a doctoral candidate at the University of Manitoba. He is currently finishing his dissertation entitled “Between Education and Catastrophe: Education and the Project of Post-World War II Reconstruction in Manitoba.”*



Magnacca Research Centre, Daly House Museum, 80-153-1

A vast prairie lay just beyond Brandon's city limits in this panoramic scene of Manitoba's "Wheat City", on the eve of World War I.

power and sought to impose a cultural hegemony defined by unregulated capitalism, curtailment of the power of labour and a Canadian nationalism concerned with racial purity and a close attachment to the British Empire. The implementation of this middle class vision was threatened by working class Brandonites, a large portion of whom were of Eastern European descent, and who made up an increasingly large proportion of the city's population. Internment camps represented an attempt by the Canadian state, supported by the local Brandon elite, to address the threat that unemployed, foreign-born working class men potentially presented to the Anglo-Canadian middle class vision of Canada.

When the federal government passed the War Measures Act in August 1914, it became possible to approve Orders in Council under which it was possible to arrest and detain any resident of Canada without charging him or her with a crime or providing access to a court of law. One of the government's first actions during the war was to provide for the registration and possible internment of aliens. An order-in-council was issued on 28 October 1914, stating that unnaturalized immigrants from Germany or Austria-Hungary were to be classified as "enemy aliens" and would be required to register with federal authorities.<sup>4</sup> Those who registered at their local NWMP office were given identity papers and required to have them with them at all times.<sup>5</sup> They were also forbidden to leave the country and expected to return to their local registration office at designated intervals to have their papers stamped. Failure to comply with these restrictions was to result in immediate internment.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the costs associated with registration were to be paid by the aliens themselves.<sup>7</sup>

The legal status of these internees remained somewhat sketchy. Minister of Justice Charles Doherty told parliament that the question of appropriate treatment of the "enemy alien" was complicated by the fact that the Hague Convention governing the treatment of prisoners of war did not make mention of proper treatment of civilians

whose place of origin was an enemy country. Of course, one possible conclusion to draw from this situation was that civilians were not subject to the laws of war and thus depriving them of their freedom during times of war was illegal under international law. Doherty, however, made the opposite conclusion, arguing that the absence of any mention of civilians in the Hague Convention meant that, "it did not deprive us of our right to intern them."<sup>8</sup> In other words, in the absence of law or precedent Canada was free to either expel or intern enemy aliens as it pleased.

Officially, "enemy aliens" interned in Brandon and elsewhere were individuals who posed an immediate danger to Canada by virtue of engaging in subversive activity such as sabotage.<sup>9</sup> In reality, the authorities seldom maintained the pretext that those interned were any real threat to the physical security of Canada. The Canadian government officially declared that only aliens who committed acts of "sedition" against Canada or those who attempted to return home in order to join enemy militaries had been interned.<sup>10</sup> The *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* stated that the population of aliens within Canada was problematic for several reasons including, "reservists trying to join their armies in Europe. A Press which had natural inclinations toward the German-Austrian side of the struggle. Settlers in the West who did not yet speak English ... German Canadians who had relatives and friends in the German Forces."<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of language, out of place alongside the other three problems, indicates that even official sources did not bother to maintain the argument that military issues alone made enemy aliens "problematic."

Moreover, the frequently touted possibility of aliens trying to join enemy armies in Europe was preposterous when it came to most of the Manitoba immigrant population. Of the approximately 30,000 people of Austro-Hungarian citizenship identified as immigrating to Manitoba between 1901 and 1911,<sup>12</sup> almost all would have been Ukrainians.

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They were generally rural labourers who came from regions of th Ukraine that had been annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire; primarily Galicia and Bukovina.<sup>13</sup> These immigrants, who were officially identified as either "Galicians" or "Ruthenians" by immigration authorities, had very little, if any, sympathy with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, having experienced economic dislocation and ethnic persecution that prompted their decision to emigrate

in the first place. Unlike many other immigrant groups, Ukrainians seldom were sojourners attempting to earn enough money in Canada to return home and better their financial position in their home country. Instead, they were predominantly permanent migrants hoping to continue a life of peasant agriculture that had become untenable in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus their political ties to the old country were limited.<sup>14</sup> For the vast majority, the notion of returning home to fight in the Great War would have been unthinkable. Ironically, immigrants from Russian-occupied areas of the Ukraine were ignored by the government and some even registered for service in the Canadian armed forces.

Although Canadian authorities may not have been knowledgeable enough about the immigrants who flooded into their cities to ascertain their loyalty, British authorities were and recommended in January of 1915 that Canada treat all "Ruthenians", the official term at the time for Ukrainians, as friendly rather than hostile aliens. General Otter, the man put in charge of internment operations declined to carry out this recommendation, however, providing a clear indication that there were reasons for interning Ukrainians other than a perceived threat to national security. Indeed, the Ukrainian community made every effort to demonstrate their loyalty publicly. After an Austrian Bishop was quoted in the media calling for, "All the Austrian subjects to be at home in a position to defend our native country,"<sup>15</sup> his call was met with a rally of "3000 Ruthenians" in Winnipeg on 9 August 1914 who "vigorously expressed their support of Britain and their opposition to the Bishop."<sup>16</sup> Despite these protestations, however, the federal government would arrest and intern thousands of Ukrainian Canadians during the course of the war.

In Brandon, the federal government's actions were met with great enthusiasm by the city council who, according to minutes of their meetings, "without discussion and with not a dissenting voice raised,"<sup>17</sup> passed a motion on 2 November stating, "with respect to the registration of Austrians and Germans ... There are a large number of these aliens in Brandon" and requesting, "to have the City of Brandon fixed as a registration centre."<sup>18</sup> A concerted effort was made by city council and Conservative MP J. A. M. Aikins to ensure that Brandon was used both as a centre of registration and the location for an internment camp.<sup>19</sup> Letters were sent petitioning both the federal government and the military to locate an internment camp in Brandon. The eventual creation of a camp in the recently constructed Winter Fair buildings adjoining the Wheat City Arena on the corner of Tenth Street and Victoria Avenue was the result of a coordinated campaign on the part of city council.<sup>20</sup> When this campaign was successful the council passed another unanimous motion declaring, "the Citizens of Brandon desire to place on record their appreciation of the services of Sir J. A. M Aikins, relative to the arrangements for the interning of prisoners of war at Brandon."<sup>21</sup> In the minds of Anglo-middle class Brandonites, the internment camp was not merely a necessary arrangement in time of war but

was regarded as potentially beneficial to the development of Brandon along acceptable lines both in the short and long term.

The reasons for the enthusiasm of civic leaders for an internment camp for Ukrainian immigrants can be partially understood by examining the economic situation in Manitoba at the time. In the early decades of industrial capitalism in Canada dramatic cycles of boom and bust coinciding with world economic trends had been quite common. Decades of prosperity between 1896 and early 1914 had brought a sudden surge in immigration to the Canadian West and turned what was initially a failed attempt at massive white settlement on the prairies into one of the largest grain-producing regions in the world. Urban centres sprung up to meet the demands of the expanding farm economy and brought jobs to more of the immigrants who flooded into the region. In the first half of 1914, however, a worldwide recession brought a slowdown in industrial production and therefore a lack of jobs in the resource extraction industries that had been the backbone of the western Canadian economy. The year 1914 also brought a particularly poor harvest to farmers, many of whom were recent immigrants. Ukrainians who could not make a living in agriculture were forced to travel to cities such as Brandon in order to find whatever low-skilled, low paying jobs were available.<sup>22</sup> The combination of an influx of workers from the agricultural sector and a decrease in the total number of available waged jobs meant that urban centres such as Brandon experienced a sudden acute problem with unemployment. The issues of unemployment and poor wages among recent immigrants had been on the minds of many in Brandon before the war. The harvest, combined with a lack of available jobs in industries such as railroading, logging and mining, put a great stress on municipal governments to provide either work or relief to the unemployed who travelled to cities. In winter, relief was particularly necessary for many of Brandon's working class residents, a large percentage of whom were Eastern European immigrants.<sup>23</sup>

Numerous articles appeared in the *Brandon Daily Sun*, a representative of Anglo middle-class opinion, concerning the increasing number of non-English speaking people living in the North End of the growing city and the cost of providing them with services.<sup>24</sup> It was not just the cost of providing infrastructure for these residents that was of concern but the cost of providing poor relief, a responsibility that at this time fell solely on the municipal, rather than provincial or federal levels of government. The city of Brandon was, like most other Canadian cities at the time, committed to a *laissez-faire* economic policy and had few monetary resources upon which to draw other than increased local taxation to pay for increases in spending on poor relief. Thus the increased number of unemployed Brandonites was a serious concern for the middle-class, as represented by the City Council. Any measure that would allow the City to eliminate the problem of unemployment would have been welcomed.



Manitobans As We See 'Em, 1908 and 1909. Newspaper Cartoonists' Association of Manitoba

**James A. M. Aikins** (1851-1929), a keen duck hunter, lobbied on behalf of an Alien Internment Centre for Brandon in his capacity as the city's MP in 1914. Two years later, he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba.

Locating an internment camp in Brandon was one solution to the problem of poverty during economic downturns that city leaders found particularly appealing. Providing relief work to the unemployed was ineffective in the long term and forced the City to spend money by paying workers the meagre wage of twenty cents per hour.<sup>25</sup> Despite the efforts of some to lower these wages even further, the Mayor acknowledged the necessity of paying at least this wage, stating, "I fail to see how any man can live on less than two dollars per day."<sup>26</sup> Direct relief money provided by the City was unacceptable as a solution from the point of view of city leaders, as it contradicted the principles of *laissez-faire* and meant spending money without reaping any tangible rewards in the form of infrastructure. By maintaining an internment camp in Brandon, the City could not only pass the costs of sheltering and feeding a number of unemployed aliens to the federal government and the military, but could also create a market for local retailers and tradesmen.

Local tradesmen were employed installing heating and plumbing in the Winter Fair Arena that was to house the interned aliens and the *Labour Gazette* of September 1915 reported that the alien detention camp was one of the few new industries in Brandon that year and provided work for a large number of men as guards.<sup>27</sup> Alien detention

had the same economic effect as large numbers of young men enlisting in the military. Both decreased the total active work force, while at the same time stimulating a demand for food, clothing, and other support services. Internment camps were a growth industry that provided many economic benefits and brought money to local businessmen. Indeed, the Auditor General's Report of 1916 to 1917 indicates that over \$50,000 was paid to local Brandon businesses for providing various support services related to the internment camp ranging from bedding, food and coal to translators and psychologists.<sup>28</sup> This money represented a significant subsidy and no doubt provided a boost to the local economy which had just two years previous been suffering from a recession. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *Daily Sun* reported on 13 November 1914 that, "other cities in the West are making every effort to secure the location of these prisoners."<sup>29</sup> Once a camp was located in a city, one could intern unemployed local aliens on the pretence of these aliens being a threat to national security and in doing so give one's local economy a jump start.

It was not simply the direct monetary benefits for the city of Brandon that led city council to campaign for an internment camp, however, but the fear that large numbers of young, single, unemployed men represented a potentially radical or even revolutionary force. If these men could not find work in a reasonable amount of time, it was thought they might very well turn to socialism and revolutionary action. A quest for immediate employment might easily turn into a quest for broader social justice and more radical social change if the unemployed became angry and alienated enough.

An editorial from the 11 April 1916 *Brandon Daily Sun*, in reference to the men interned at the Brandon camp stated, "these men were not interned just because they had no work. They were interned after trial and because they had committed disloyal acts or given utterance to disloyal sentiments."<sup>30</sup> This statement was not only factually inaccurate, as there was no formal legal action taken against enemy aliens, but it also demonstrates that the (correct) perception that internment was related to unemployment was widespread enough to warrant vociferous denial. Indeed, the connection between unemployment and internment was so widespread as to even have been made explicit by Major Coleman, the commandant of the Brandon Alien Detention Centre who stated, "the large majority of the men were at the Arena (the site used for the internment camp) because they could not get work on account of their nationality."<sup>31</sup> This statement was prompted by a controversy over whether or not to release some internees for work on local farms in 1916. On 13 April 1916, Major Coleman attempted to reassure a worried public that releasing aliens would present no physical dangers, saying, "I have yet to learn of one case where a parolled (sic) man failed to keep his promise (not to leave Canada or commit sedition) or was interned again."<sup>32</sup> Even the Minister of Justice, in the same breath that he argued that the interned

aliens were guilty of showing, "a spirit of hostility to this country" admitted that most had been interned because they were, "starving in some of our cities" due to lack of work.<sup>33</sup>

The true reasons for the internment of Ukrainians during the Great War can also be discovered by examining the few surviving first-hand accounts from internees themselves. Nick Lypko, a former internee at Brandon, tells a story which is likely very similar to the experiences of the vast majority of the men who ended up in internment camps. He states that he attended a meeting of approximately five hundred unemployed Ukrainians in Winnipeg. Having heard that there was work to be found in the United States, they set out immediately on foot toward the border. When they arrived at the border town of Emerson, however, they were stopped by the Mounted Police who not only prevented them from crossing the border, but arrested them instead, giving them a meal and transporting them immediately to the Brandon internment camp.<sup>34</sup> This story is confirmed and presented from another angle by the *Brandon Daily Sun*, which chronicled the arrival of 175 aliens from Emerson on 19 May 1915. These men were described as a "tired lot" with "blistered feet," no doubt a result of their long walk from Winnipeg to Emerson. The *Sun* stated that the men were given nothing to eat after Emerson and arrived very hungry. An unusually accurate picture of who these men were was also presented by the *Sun*, which described them as former workers on railway construction gangs who "openly declare that they have no interest whatever in the war except that it has thrown them into the ranks of the unemployed and to the verge of starvation."<sup>35</sup> Many Ukrainians were thrown out of work first during times of economic depression because of their ethnicity. These men arrested in Emerson were evidently in that category.

Newspapers were also quick to report on stories of aliens actually asking to be interned upon outbreak of the war.<sup>36</sup> Although these accounts somewhat strain believability, the situation faced by unemployed Ukrainian workers at the time was so dire that internment may have been appealing because it at least promised one the ability to obtain food and shelter. The *Annual Review of Public Affairs* speaks in passing of Austrian citizens who were, "discharged by employers owing to a patriotic preference for Canadian labour."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, it was common practice once the war broke out for English-speaking employers to lay off foreign workers if possible and replace them with workers of British origin. Class and ethnicity combined and reinforced each other to act against Ukrainian immigrants. Not only did they, like all workers, face dismissal from their jobs without warning or compensation, but their ethnicity ensured that they would be given the most undesirable jobs and would be the first laid off in times of difficulty. A *Daily Sun* editorial gives an indication of the pressure put upon all employers to avoid hiring aliens stating, "Although regrettable, it is a fact that there are employers of labour in Canada who would at least as readily give employment to

an alien enemy as to a loyal citizen. They too ought to be in the internment camps."<sup>38</sup> Attitudes such as these were likely quite widespread, judging by stories such as that of Mike Ukracintz, an "Austrian labourer" who showed up at the provincial jail asking to be treated as a prisoner of war because he could not find enough work to feed himself.<sup>39</sup> The judge who heard his plea told the *Sun* that, "it was one of those peculiar cases which are arising every day. The man was willing to work but could not obtain any employment because of his nationality."<sup>40</sup> This statement reveals that the inability to get work because of ethnicity was a daily fact of life for Ukrainians in Brandon.

Ironically, men who were in internment camps because they could not find work were used as a source of cheap labour by the Canadian government. Across Canada, internees were employed on infrastructure and public works projects for which the federal government was unwilling to pay people a living wage. By interning someone who was unemployed, the local government could not only avoid paying him poor relief and pass the cost of keeping him alive onto the federal government, but could profit from the use of that person's labour once they were interned. General Otter stated that internment "provided

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**Class and ethnicity combined and reinforced each other to act against Ukrainian immigrants. Not only did they, like all workers, face dismissal from their jobs without warning or compensation, but their ethnicity ensured that they would be given the most undesirable jobs and would be the first laid off in times of difficulty.**

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a great advantage to the organizations short of labour."<sup>41</sup> In Castle Mountain internment camp at Banff, Alberta, where Brandon's inmates were sent after the camp closed in July 1916, internees were paid 12.5 cents per day (free workers would receive around \$2) to build roads, clear trees and make general improvements to the national parks in the area. Although the Canadian Government officially insisted that the interned aliens were not being forced to work, testimony from the internees themselves reveals that conditions in the camp were such that refusal to work was unwise.<sup>42</sup> Brandon's aliens were not compelled to work on road building for pragmatic reasons. The Brandon camp, located in the Winter Fair Arena in the middle of the city, was unusual in that it was inside of an urban centre. All other camps were set up in remote areas or old forts where possible work was in closer proximity and the chance of escape when working was low. There were, however, frequent calls from Brandon citizens and city councillors for the interned aliens to be put to work.

Although there is one brief mention of interned aliens being employed to clean up the summer exhibition

grounds,<sup>43</sup> on the whole the federal authorities did not seek to put the Brandon inmates to work en masse as was done throughout the rest of the country. The decision to disband the Brandon camp and relocate its inmates was likely motivated by the government's desire to get more free labour from the interned aliens. The *Sun* reported in July 1916 that there was a "strong possibility" that internees would be used to "make a good road between Brandon and Carberry"<sup>44</sup>, an idea that was promoted by Brandon's civic leaders with great enthusiasm. A council resolution was passed in 1915 petitioning the federal government to use the internees on gravel roads leading into Brandon.<sup>45</sup> The next year Alderman Fisher again requested that the federal Government use internees for labour and asked the Manitoba legislature to build a "prison farm" in Brandon.<sup>46</sup> The military and federal government remained unconvinced, however, as General Otter declared that there were no public works projects in either Manitoba or Saskatchewan upon which the inmates could be made to work<sup>47</sup>. Eventually, some of the inmates were also released from the camp for harvest time if farmers in the surrounding area needed extra labour and the prisoners were willing to go. Most, however, remained locked in the Winter Fair Arena until their transfer to Banff in 1916.<sup>48</sup>

Conditions in the Brandon camp, while perhaps better than those elsewhere, were physically and psychologically trying. Escape attempts were common, as many inmates were willing to risk death rather than remain interned. Although it is difficult to reconstruct exactly what conditions were like inside the walls of the camp due to military secrecy at the time and a lack of sources left by the inmates themselves, some basic facts about life inside the camp can be discerned. The Arena and Winter Fair Building were overcrowded, holding 942 men at their peak in August 1915.<sup>49</sup> The arena, of course, was never intended to house so many people and overcrowding was acknowledged by those in charge of operating the camp.<sup>50</sup> Inside the building itself, prisoners slept on cots in a single room and passed the time playing card, telling stories or singing.<sup>51</sup> Twice a day the prisoners were taken outside by the guards to get exercise, although this practice was temporarily suspended after a series of escape attempts took place while inmates were on their walk.<sup>52</sup> Throughout Canada, prisoners were denied access to news of the outside world and had their correspondence censored.<sup>53</sup> Incidents of brutality and abuse on the part of

the guards were reported across Canada, with Brandon being no exception. Lights were kept on all night in the Arena in order to prevent escapes, and the "black hole," a type of solitary confinement, was used as punishment by the guards. Nick Lypka, one of the internees, tells the story of an officer getting drunk and shooting at the floor in order to scare the inmates.<sup>54</sup> One can only imagine the loneliness, isolation from family and friends, boredom and lack of control over life that must have been psychologically devastating for many. Above all the uncertainty of not knowing when, if ever, they were to be released took a psychological toll upon the inmates among who psychological illness was common and escape or rioting even more so.<sup>55</sup> In all of Canada, 107 people died while interned, including Andrew Graphko, an eighteen year old Ukrainian who was shot during one of many attempted escapes from the Brandon camp.<sup>56</sup>

If one were to only read the *Brandon Daily Sun* in regard to internment, it would seem very strange that so many escapes were attempted. The paper wrote only of content, well-behaved prisoners who were treated well, with one even being allowed to visit his sick daughter.<sup>57</sup> The 13 February 1915 *Sun* stated, "their food is of the best and ... a goodly number have gained a good home for themselves and judging by their appearance are not unduly melancholy at being held in durance vile."<sup>58</sup> This was either wishful thinking on the part of the paper or overt propaganda. In any case, a statement given by one of the recaptured escapees

demonstrates their sense of despair at being locked up. Simon Konrat, described by the *Sun* as "determined to get his liberty or die in the attempt", stated, "I will try again because I will go crazy if I stay there much longer. I will take the chance on getting shot."<sup>59</sup>

On 3 May 1915, the first reported escape from Brandon's alien detention centre took place when Dimytro Kowalchuk, a twenty two year old who had been in Canada for over five years, pretended to be ill and then climbed out of the skylight of the room to which he was transferred as a patient.<sup>60</sup> Kowalchuk, like most of the escapees, was soon captured and returned to the camp.<sup>61</sup> The frequency of escape attempts grew greater in May and June of that year. Considering the general lack of success of the attempts, this would seem to demonstrate worsening conditions and increasing desperation on the part of the internees. Escapes of varied levels of sophistication took



Christie's Bookstore, Brandon, Manitoba: *The Wheat City*, no date, G. Goldsborough.

**The Brandon Winter Fair building**, shown here circa 1912, housed the city's Alien Internment Centre from November 1914 to July 1916.

place almost every Saturday night in late May and early June. Some waited for the changing of the guard and simply jumped out a window, while others used a table knife as a saw and cut a hole in the floor.<sup>62</sup> This later attempt was the largest attempted and most sophisticated, involving fifteen men. The escape created panic and excitement in Brandon and warranted a front page headline in the *Daily Sun* that stated, "Fifteen Desperate Aliens Attempt Escape: One May Die, One Escapes, Others in Custody."<sup>63</sup> In total, only two people were ever able to permanently escape the camp, and it is possible that they may have been found and interned elsewhere later in the war, although their names do not reappear in the registers of those interned.

As the miserable conditions in the camps themselves demonstrate, the internment of Ukrainian Canadians during the Great War cannot be explained without an understanding of the widespread racism that made the presence of such conditions acceptable in the minds of those who imposed them. To interpret the creation of internment camps as the result of cold, economic calculus as a solution to the problem of poverty would be only partially correct. Although it was unemployment that prompted the creation of the camps, unemployment and poverty themselves were inextricably connected to ethnicity in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Brandon. Furthermore, without a pervasive and virulent racism on the part of the Anglo-Canadian elite, it is difficult to imagine such widespread support for the creation of prison and labour camps for those unable to find work. Such racism did not originate with the Great War nor did it stem from the fear that Ukrainian immigrants represented a military threat. The War did, however, enhance a pre-existing culture of militarism, patriotism and racism associated with British imperialism.

Far from being sympathetic to the plights of internees, middle-class Brandonites of British origin called for even more severe measures to be taken against enemy aliens. A *Brandon Daily Sun* editorial from 12 May 1915 expressed these sentiments, stating that the singing of songs in foreign languages by the internees "must be stopped" at all costs by "going as far as necessary."<sup>64</sup> After a series of escapes, the *Sun* called for further escapes to be prevented by the use of brutal physical force stating, "It is the duty of the authorities to punish these men so severely that others contemplating a dash for liberty will be deterred from doing so."<sup>65</sup> *Sun* editorials urged more extreme anti-alien measures than the government was willing to carry out, not only calling for forced work for all aliens but the entire removal of rights from those of non-British descent living in Brandon.

The gulf between the more affluent, English speaking Brandonites who lived in the South End of town and the poor, mostly Ukrainian or Eastern European immigrants who inhabited the North End was very wide indeed in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Brandon. This gulf was reflected in the opinions expressed in the *Daily Sun*, the official organ of middle class, Anglo Brandonites. In an article entitled "Enemy Within Our Gates" the *Sun* wrote, "Internment even on a wholesale scale and at the risk of individual cases of injustice, is

preferable to a single, loyal Canadian suffering in person or property."<sup>66</sup> The idea of who constituted a "loyal Canadian" is further explained when the author stated, "Canada, The British Empire, is fighting for its life; in self-defence it should overlook no precaution or fail in any measure for the safety of itself or its people."<sup>67</sup> In other words, the only people entitled to rights or recognition as full citizens were those who were racially and ideologically suitable for the British Empire of which Canada and Brandon were loyal parts. The North End, therefore, was seen as an aberration, an unwanted intrusion of second-class people into a sphere that was rightfully part of the Empire. The internment of Ukrainians, then, was just another incident in an ongoing battle for control over physical and intellectual space within

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**Such racism did not originate with the Great War nor did it stem from the fear that Ukrainian immigrants represented a military threat. The War did, however, enhance a pre-existing culture of militarism, patriotism, and racism associated with British imperialism.**

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Brandon. At stake was not simply the issue of who would physically occupy the city but whether the discourse of western Canada as a bastion of "civilization" represented by the British "race" amidst a sea of inferior people in need of uplift would be preserved. Articles discussing "Galiciatown" in the North End express the anxiety felt by those who saw their British imperialist vision of Brandon as threatened by the intrusion of "inferior" peoples.<sup>68</sup>

A news story from May 1915 described several soldiers burning a house on the north side of the CPR track to the ground because they believed one of their friends and fellow soldiers was being held there. Apparently, the only evidence they had that this was the case was the fact that their friend had not been seen for over two days and that he was "roughly handled by foreigners" some time previously. The repeated use of the term "foreigner" to describe those who lived in the North End, rather than using actual names, ages, or even nationalities as descriptive terms indicates a generalized dehumanization of those who came to Brandon from anywhere other than Great Britain. Furthermore, the tone of the story and several subsequent editorials was that of understanding and justification for the actions of the soldiers. The article stated, "They and all citizens have been annoyed of late by numbers of foreigners making seditious remarks and behaving in an attitude extremely offensive." The most telling sign of how Anglo-Brandonites reacted to this situation was a statement that, "the crowd was cheering for the soldiers and "Tipperary" was sung with gusto as the men were marched away."<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the singing of war songs indicates that many people in the crowd felt as if the present war, which was supposedly being fought to preserve the British Empire and thus "civilization" itself,

## Brandon's Alien Detention Centre

was not only being fought on the western front, but in the streets of Brandon itself. The war for them was with the “foreigners” in the area who they saw as connected with those at the front on the enemy side. The intrusion of these less “civilized” individuals into Brandon represented as much of a threat to the British Empire and all that it stood for as the demonized “Hun” overseas. World War One has been called the first “total war” because citizens of countries mobilized and fought each other rather than armies simply fighting. This theory seems to be supported by this incident the anti-foreigner hysteria that was present in Brandon during the First World War.

When war broke out on 4 August 1914, there were crowds cheering in the streets downtown and speeches in favour of the war, including one from the Mayor. The *Sun* wrote that he “said that they (the crowd) were all part of the greatest nation of Earth and reminded his hearers of all they owed to Great Britain.”<sup>70</sup> It is important to note that the “nation” of which he spoke was not a geographic but rather a racial one. To be a true Canadian, to the Mayor and most middle-class Brandonites, meant to be a loyal subject of the British Empire. The Mayor also, “reminded the foreign element of Brandon of all that Britain had done for them in the past.” A concern with the loyalty of the “foreign element” was a recurring theme in articles written before, during and after the war. An 8 June 1914 article discussing Ukrainians or “Ruthenians” optimistically reported that perhaps they could become loyal imperial subjects stating, “They are eager to have their children learn English and are swift to Canadianize themselves.” It was this apparent willingness to assimilate that prompted the remark, “there are no more intelligent and labourious immigrants in the Dominion.”<sup>71</sup> This attitude is extremely ironic considering what would be written about the very same people in the years to follow. Assimilation became an even more pressing concern once the war broke out. Initial articles optimistically portrayed the chances of immigrants, “men with moustaches,” as they were referred to, adopting British language and customs, stating “their eagerness to learn English is most commendable and almost pathetic.”<sup>72</sup> Paternalistic infantilization of immigrants, however, quickly gave way to more menacing portrayals. In the discourse presented by the popular media, immigrants who were originally seen as naive children who were naturally inferior to British Canadians but who posed no threat and could be temporarily useful, turned quickly into potential revolutionaries who showed no desire to conform and retained their old and backward ideas, customs, and languages.

In October 1915, Brandon Collegiate, the local high school, decided that the “enemy tongue” of German would no longer be taught to its students. This measure is indicative of a public hysteria about the influence of foreigners and its perceived destructive effect upon society. Hatred and scorn were suddenly directed toward anything associated with Austria or Germany. Across Canada, anti-immigrant sentiment boiled over, especially



Magnacca Research Centre, Daly House Museum, 86-28-5

**Military might on Brandon streets.** The First Depot Battalion marching on Rosser Avenue, 4 June 1918.

after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, an event that was used extensively by the government and media as a propaganda tool. In Victoria, hysteria about alien terrorism resulted in riots and the destruction of businesses belonging to non-English merchants.<sup>73</sup> The War Time Elections Act of 1917 disenfranchised both unnaturalized *and* naturalized Ukrainians because Prime Minister Borden was concerned about how immigrants would vote in upcoming elections.<sup>74</sup> Tensions within Brandon also became very high and manifested themselves in incidents such as the house burning described earlier and in editorials that called the interned men, “a race that as a people celebrated ... the deaths of hundreds of babes on the *Lusitania*.” The internees, it was said, “should be put to work in gangs on public work that is both arduous and distasteful to English speaking people.”<sup>75</sup> This last statement again expressed the pervasive racism used to justify British world domination and the denial of full legal rights to people not of British origin.

Not only was certain work viewed as being fit for foreigners rather than British men, but British men were seen as naturally superior to recent immigrants in every way. The ranking of “races” can be observed in articles concerning aliens in the *Daily Sun*. The leaders of escape attempts from the internment camp are described as “much superior to the average Austrian labourer in intellect” but obviously not as intelligent as the “Britishers” who had not only caught the aliens but had set up, “the undying traditions which had made the name of Britain a beacon of light to all in the world.”<sup>76</sup> In many of the articles concerning aliens, the shape of their heads, (described as “pointed”) their dress and other physical features are described and used to classify them as either the “labouring type” of foreigner or belonging to a more “respectable” class.<sup>77</sup> The racist pseudo-sciences of phrenology and eugenics which at that time remained popular and retained reputable adherents within academic institutions, were fully on display in popular form in discussions of the Ukrainian

internees.<sup>78</sup> Such ideas regarding the superiority of the British race were reflected in a statement by University of Saskatchewan professor Bateman:

War should be the supreme test both of the nation and the individual. Biologically, struggle and self-sacrifice by one generation of behalf of the next, are the conditions of the perpetuation of the species. A similar law of competition seems to hold for those aggregates of men which we call nations.<sup>79</sup>

War was portrayed by many as a way for members of the British nation to assert and prove their superiority over all others in a Darwinist battle for survival. In the minds of many people in society, "A new era in Canadian history had opened"<sup>80</sup> in which "inferior" peoples would have to assimilate into the British Empire. Those who did not, such as the internees who continued to sing "offensive" "national airs" were seen as a menace to British society that would undermine British institutions and prevent progress.<sup>81</sup> The *Daily Sun* concluded, "One lesson which this war has surely taught is the necessity for excluding every alien immigrant who does not give reasonable assurance of willingness to renounce his foreign allegiance and embrace British citizenship to which he can be admitted after due probation."<sup>82</sup>

Brandon's internment camp was shut down on 30 July 1916 after the remaining inmates were transferred to Castle Mountain, Alberta to be put to work on improvements to Banff National Park.<sup>83</sup> On 7 August 1917, this camp was shut down as well and, in 1920, almost two years after the end of the war itself, the internment operations of the federal government officially ended with the closing of the Kapuskasing, Ontario camp.<sup>84</sup> Anti-Alien sentiments and calls for renewed internment, however, did not end across Canada or in Brandon itself. In 1917, the *Brandon Sun* wrote, "Britishers are looking forward to the time when the foreigner's labour will be conscripted."<sup>85</sup> Near the end of the war the *Daily Sun* called for "all the enemy aliens and able-bodied slackers from neutral and allied countries" to be "set to work on the land or making roads."<sup>86</sup> Reports that foreigners were attempting to garner higher wages from their employers led to renewed calls for internment and forced labour by local businessmen and a statement from Mayor Cater stating, "I don't intend to put up with any nonsense."<sup>87</sup> A long and bloody war had further exasperated nativism within Brandon. The Russian Bolshevik Revolution, the Winnipeg General Strike and the growing popularity of socialism struck further fear into the hearts of middle-class Brandonites that immigrant workers represented a potentially revolutionary force. While immigrant poverty was thought to lead to revolutionary socialism, immigrant prosperity was equally worrisome for the social elite. Paranoia about immigrants gaining control of the economic prosperity and political power that British middle class Brandonites had monopolized led to fears that aliens were "earning bigger wages than ever ... putting nearly all of it away" and not "depositing it in a

bank so that the country might get some good out of it." A growing fear of the entire working class and a desire to strip them of their rights was developing and building upon a fear of foreigners. Throughout the remainder of the war, and leading up to the General Strike of 1919 in Winnipeg, there would be calls for internment of aliens, and the suppression of newspapers in foreign languages. During the strike itself, many of the labour leaders arrested under the new legislation passed by the federal government were transported to Kapuskasing internment camp and some deported to their countries of origin.

The story of the Alien Detention Centre in Brandon is not a story simply about the Great War or of a "mistake" made by the government as a result of wartime hysteria. Rather it is a story that illustrates the deep fissures that existed in Canadian society at this time along the lines of class and ethnicity. Internment of "enemy aliens" was primarily a response to the threat of an ever-increasing group of unemployed eastern European men in cities across Western Canada. Long standing prejudices and ideas about the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon "race" coincided with a problem of lack of jobs for the large numbers of immigrants who were arriving in cities and towns across the prairies. Internment was a pragmatic solution to a perceived social threat that was posed by unemployed, immigrant workers who, it was feared, might turn to radical political solutions or perhaps even revolutionary action in order to solve their immediate economic problems. The internment of mostly Ukrainian men in Brandon from 1914 to 1916 was not a reaction to physical threats, real or imagined, to the physical security of Canada during the Great War, nor was it the result of a nativistic hysteria drummed up among the general population as a result of wartime propaganda and a climate of fear. Rather it was a practical solution to the problem of poverty made possible by a pervasive racist ideology of British imperialism that predated and outlived the Great War in Canada. Unfortunately, amid a sea of nationalist self-congratulation surrounding the commemoration of World War I battles such as Vimy Ridge this shameful incident in Canadian history has largely been forgotten. Few people in Brandon today are aware of the Alien Detention Centre that once occupied a central location in their city or understand what sort of forces within Canadian society led to the arrest and imprisonment of over 900 innocent people there. In the era of Maher Arar and Omar Khadr, when governments can once again arrest and indefinitely detain Canadians without due process, this chapter in Canada's history seems more important than ever. ☞



Notes for this article  
are available on the MHS web site:  
[www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb\\_history/56](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/56)

# Called to the Bar: An Historical Geography of Beverage Rooms in Brandon, 1881 - 1966

by Doug Ramsey<sup>1</sup> and John Everitt<sup>2</sup>

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## Introduction

**I**n his text entitled *Interpreting the City* Truman Hartshorn discusses “the city’s role as a veritable hotbed of the production and exchange of information” and attempts to “examine the rich tradition of growth and change that weaves the urban fabric as we know it today.”<sup>1</sup> Although urban geography is itself a relatively new sub-discipline this concern for interpreting the urban fabric dates back at least to the times of Carl Sauer who (although not himself particularly urban-oriented) discussed in 1925 the definition of cultural landscapes and the meaning behind these “land shapes” which are social and cultural in nature but firmly rooted in their physical environments.<sup>2</sup> As Sauer went on to point out, geographers should see cultural landscapes, as transformed by people, as a central theme of the discipline: “This contact of man with his changeable home, as expressed through the cultural landscape, is our field of work.”<sup>3</sup>

In this article we propose to interpret selected aspects of the historical urban geography of Brandon, and in particular its bars,<sup>4</sup> and we will thus show how one segment of this urban landscape has been shaped by Brandonites over time. We have chosen bars (most often located in hotels) because

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they were important locations within the city for a number of reasons. First, they were (and are) “veritable hotbeds of the production and exchange of information”—that is to say they were important social/recreational places—especially for unattached males.<sup>5</sup> Second, they were important economic-urban nodes where people came together, stayed

(in rooms overnight or for lengthier periods of time), and consumed a variety of products including food and drink. In addition, a range of other economic functions could be found in many hotels, including news stands, cigar stands, and barber shops. Third, they were significant landscape features. They were usually among the first structures constructed; in some case they were the first structures people saw when they arrived in town (by train, at least); and in many instances they were imposing architectural edifices, often with even more imposing names, that dominated their locations



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University, Lawrence Stuckey Fonds, L3

**Carts pulled by oxen** were already historic by the time of this 1904 photo, taken as a publicity stunt for the newly renovated and renamed Pacific Hotel.

within the central business district of the city. As such we are looking at one example of the “landscape heritage” of prairie settlements.<sup>6</sup> Fourth, they have been an index of changes—social, economic, and landscape—in the city’s role as a central place and a service centre. Bars in Brandon, and elsewhere in the Great Plains/Prairies have been neglected by academics, but are deserving of greater attention.<sup>7</sup> We propose to pay them some of this heed. Although our remarks will concentrate upon the Brandon case study, we feel confident that they largely apply to other prairie centres, both large and small—including the small town hostelries recently discussed by Radenbaugh.<sup>8</sup>

Our article will discuss the time period from 1881 when Brandon was laid out by CPR surveyors after being chosen

as a town site (in May), and when the first passenger train arrived (in October). At this time the “Central Business District” (CBD) was relatively small and compact and was geared for a walking population. Although we will concentrate on Brandon’s first fifty years, we will end our study in the late 1960s, by which time the bars of Downtown Brandon were about to begin to succumb to the growth of suburban hostelries, and the city’s future was firmly tied to the automobile. In fact, 1964 marked the opening of the first “motor hotel” in Brandon’s CBD. Although the suburban malls, the new-style suburban hotel/motels, and curvilinear street patterns of the new suburbs, which were to contrast strongly with the grid of the core area, were just over the Brandon horizon, they were by this time well-established elsewhere in Anglo America. Despite the fact that Downtown Brandon had been able, into the 1960s, to retain its retail function to a greater degree than some urban centres,<sup>9</sup> and thus a large proportion of its early architecture, the writing was clearly “on the wall” as far as “traditional” bars were concerned.

**The Establishment of Brandon**

Brandon was chosen as a town site by General Rosser in May 1881, was soon surveyed by the CPR, and received its first passenger train later that year.<sup>10</sup> Brandon’s first “pioneer store” was located (in July 1881) at Pacific Avenue and Fourth Street, but the centre of the CBD soon migrated south and west as the city grew. With the establishment of the CPR station at Tenth and Pacific, and the entrenchment of Tenth Street as the “vertical” of Brandon’s commercial “T”,<sup>11</sup> the centre of the CBD became Tenth and Rosser Avenue—a situation that has persisted to the present day. When people arrived in Brandon in its early days, they invariably came by train, and if they needed somewhere to stay, they looked for a hostelry nearby the station—which meant Pacific Avenue, Rosser Avenue, or one of the connecting streets. Not surprisingly, hotels and boarding houses were soon constructed, and by January 1882 there were six hotels in operation mostly, as was characteristic of the prairies, near the station; by 1883 there were ten (Table 1).<sup>12</sup> Interestingly there was no such structure on Tenth Street, reflecting the rapid rise in its land values for “higher and better uses.” But Pacific Avenue, a major commercial and industrial street, had many hostelries.

Boarding houses were just that, buildings where people could spend the night. Hotels were usually more substantial and included rooms for rent, restaurants where meals could be purchased, and bars (“saloons”) where a libation could be enjoyed after a hard day’s work, or after a long journey on the train. In fact, a beer parlour/bar/saloon had to be in a “hotel”, as rooms had to be provided in structures serving alcohol. There were also regulations regarding the number of rooms required to be designated as a hotel. This correlation between function and location meant that “hotels” were often synonymous with saloons to many “drys” during the times preceding prohibition, and thus were landscape targets of their attacks upon “demon

Table 1.  
Hotels, boarding houses, and alcohol retail in Brandon, 1883. Source: *Brandon Sun*, 7 November 1912.

Hotels	Boarding Houses (# rooms)	Alcohol Retail Stores
Albion City	American (31)	McIvor & McIntyre (wine & spirits)
Central	A. MacDonald (6)	
Grand Central	Beaubier (31)	
Grand View	Brandon	
Queen’s	Brunswick (8)	Henley & Co. (brewer’s agents)
Royal	Chester	
Royal Arms	Douglas	
Star and Garter	Edie (15)	Mulligans Wine & Spirit Emporium
Windsor	Harris (21)	
	Kelly (29)	
	Lambton (30)	Brandon Vegetable Cellars and Wine Vaults
	Ontario (9)	
	Ottawa (9)	
	Simpsons (7)	
	Thomas Lockhart	I. B. Murdoch (wine & spirits)
	Transit	
	Wiggins	
	Yorkshire (3)	

drink.” Central Brandon has had many hostelries over its short lifetime with at least seventeen hotels in addition to the boarding houses being documented at one time. Many suffered from the prairie disease of fire or prohibition, others were razed for successive functions, and still others could not make it as bars and went bankrupt. However, a few have persisted and four remain today in locations that have contained a bar/hotel/boarding house for most of Brandon’s history.

The users of pubs in Brandon are hard to discern even today, as house rules (“no photos”) and house etiquette (“no questions”) have always made information gathering something of a difficulty, but some insights gleaned from personal observations as well as from “key observers” and the popular literature that remains in libraries and archives, can be made. The “no photos” rule apparently dates back to post-prohibition days when newspapers published pictures of bar patrons (e.g., “husbands”), which were used against them by their peers (e.g., “spouses”). Given this background, what were some of the social and locational characteristics of the bar scene in Brandon?

**Social Characteristics of Bars**

First, the bar was until recently predominantly the haunt for males—in fact they were often, and especially in the city’s early days the only, recreational opportunities for single men.<sup>13</sup> Men outnumbered women in Brandon at this time, by perhaps a factor of two to one. Women were discouraged/not allowed, in large part because of a perceived (and probable) correlation between bars and prostitution. As Gray indicates, these early years were part

of an “era in which the forces of self-righteousness collided head-on with the entrenched forces of prostitution” and the venue was often the bar/saloon.<sup>14</sup> Bars were also associated with crime and this reinforced their doubtful reputations. When women-in-general were eventually allowed into bars (and the date of this change in Manitoba is uncertain, although it was 1961 in Saskatchewan<sup>15</sup>), they were segregated into hastily constructed “Women and Escorts” sections that often had separate entrances to the outside world. It is instructive to note that in Elizabeth Mitchell’s classic study of *Western Canada Before the War* (first published in 1915) there are detailed discussions of an extremely wide range of topics but no mention of life in the bars—which were not the “sphere” of women, and certainly not those of the social stature of Oxford graduate Ms. Mitchell.<sup>16</sup> In fact, perhaps reflecting her own social orbit, Mitchell states that she “heard of no drinking among women” in her travels.<sup>17</sup>

Within the same building, single men were not allowed inside the “women and escorts” sections. This was to discourage the practice of the “world’s oldest profession”, to reduce the number of fights over the few available damsels, as well as to allow the females some hassle-free down-time away from inebriated males. But women were never “allowed” in all bars, and in fact it is only quite recently that the last all-male bar in Manitoba, the Roblin in Winnipeg, closed its doors.

Second, the pub/saloon was until recently literally a “beer parlour”—still often its vernacular name. Radenbaugh reports that many beverage rooms at one time served whiskey with free beer as a “chaser”, but it is uncertain how widespread this practice was.<sup>18</sup> It is probable that a greater variety of drinks (but not “mixed-drinks” as they are served today) was the case in the early years of bar development, until the temperance movement was successful in bringing about Prohibition (1915 - 1924 in Saskatchewan, 1915 - 1922 in Alberta, and 1916 - 1922 in Manitoba). After Prohibition, other forms of alcoholic libation could be obtained elsewhere, but not in the beer parlour. There were other distinguishing characteristics of bars. In some parts of the west the beer might be mixed with tomato juice, but that was about as experimental as people could get. Some pubs may have had separate lounge bars where “liquor” was served, but this may have been a drink which “higher classes” most commonly consumed at home. In fact, as early as 1883, there were no less than five retail outlets in Brandon that sold liquors and wines. Alcohol (“whisky”) was only allowed in beer parlours again at a later date.

Third, pubs can still be classified in some cities by the “kinds” of beer they serve—just try buying “light beer” on North Main Street in Winnipeg, or until recently, anything other than your basic brews anywhere. Imported

beers are still rare in beer parlours, and non-national beers are unusual. Asking for these esoteric brews can be dangerous to one’s health in some instances (like North Main). Curiously, perhaps, some parts of western Canada are characterised by “bottled beer drinkers” and some by draught beer consumers. There are also regional variations in the kinds of beer preferred, although some of these distinctions have been masked or obliterated by the takeover/amalgamation of breweries, and national ad campaigns.

Fourth, bars were the haunts of, or designed for, the working class. To some extent this explains their location, their selection of beverages, and some of the associated behaviour patterns such as lack of dress code, spittoons, and sawdust on the floors. More recently, and reflecting the changing residential and functional nature of today’s “downtowns,” the clientele of many pubs has aged, and is perhaps poorer and more ethnically distinguishable. However, it is rarely even middle class. Even if middle

class patrons do imbibe in downtown pubs they usually “dress down” for the occasion.

Fifth, the present-day architecture of the downtown (and some more suburban) beer-parlours reflects (it seems) the times of early post-prohibition in that they have no windows. This apparently

evolved as a way of preventing people from being corrupted by the sight of drink and drinkers. At the same time, it provided sanctuary for those not wanting others to know their whereabouts. Some of the older structures that have not been seriously rebuilt still show the locations of ex-windows, but never a pane of glass. Windows that do exist expose restaurants and lobbies, not beverage rooms. This affects the streetscape, but also the interior ambience which is often darker and more gloomy than need be. This characteristic reflects, once again, the degree of control exercised over bars by government control and peer pressure, ranging from clientele to architecture, from beverage selection to operating hours, and from licensing to behaviour patterns within the bar (e.g., no standing or walking with a drink in one’s hand). The hours of operation in the early days are unclear, and have varied over time, but they have long been restricted, and changed at the whim of government.<sup>19</sup>

Sixth, in order to survive pubs have always had to be adaptable. In the past this meant providing a variety of services including offering a “well-stocked bar”, cigars, cigarettes a billiards room and other attractions. Nowadays, women are allowed in, and sometimes encouraged by “Ladies’ Nights”; strippers are sometimes featured (male strippers on Ladies’ Nights); themes (“Rock,” “Country”) are sometimes used to entice the patrons, or particular segments of the populace; even redecoration occasionally takes place—although interior decorating is rarely a

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**The users of pubs in Brandon are hard to discern even today, as house rules (“no photos”) and house etiquette (“no questions”) have always made information gathering something of a difficulty.**

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## The Breweries of Brandon

Imagine a booming frontier town like Brandon in the 1880s—men and beer are sure to be part of the picture. Winnipeg collector of brewery paraphernalia Dave Craig compiled these notes on the breweries that quenched the thirsts of early Brandonites.

### Brandon Brewing Company: 1885 to 1891

Built at the foot of First Street by the Assiniboine River in late 1885, the Brandon Brewing Company had a capacity of 100 gallons per day. Partners William Ferguson, S. H. Munroe, A. J. Boisseau, and W. J. James hired Albert Jones of Milwaukee, Wisconsin as their brewmaster. In 1887, the plant's water supply failed so it was sold to Joseph Neumeyer, an experienced manufacturer, and J. F. Woodley. They renamed it The Spring Brewery. The new owners soon took on another partner, William Pares. Using up to 100 bushels of barley a week (leftover grain was consumed by hogs kept on site), the partners brewed eight barrels a day of India Pale Ale, Imperial Stout, and Porter in casks and bottles, which they sold at "rock bottom prices." In the fall of 1888, Woodley left the firm to join The Crown Brewery. The next year, the remaining partners changed the name to The Brandon Brewery. The Neumeyer and Pares partnership ended in 1891 by mutual consent.

### Crown Brewery: 1888 to 1931

J. F. Woodley initially managed the Crown Brewery, located on the north side of the First Street Bridge along the Assiniboine River. He became its owner in 1890. Soon afterwards, the brewery closed then re-opened with new partners in November 1890. They were Charles Munroe and two Brandon city aldermen, John McKelvie and Charles Pilling. Brewmaster Arthur Brain turned out a Pale Ale and a Porter. Joseph Neumeyer purchased the brewery in 1891 after his partnership with Pares ended. Three years later, Neumeyer took on Wolfgang Kohler as a partner until 1895 when the brewery closed. (Kohler ran the Lion Brewery on Dennis Street from 1895 to 1898.) The plant sat unused for four years until Isaac Alvin Robinson, a local real estate developer, purchased it and changed the name to The Empire Brewing Company. Robinson decided the brewing equipment was inadequate so he replaced it with a modern vacuum plant, cooler, and malt plant. Two boilers produced steam to run a pasteurization plant. This doubled the brewing capacity, with the flagship brand

called Empire Ale. They also handled local distribution for Winnipeg brewer Edward L. Drewry. Located on Rosser Avenue, the brewery employed 35 people. In 1903, a new plant was built at the corner of Pacific Avenue and First Street. New partners replaced Robinson. They included Peter Payne (owner of the Beaubier Hotel and president of the Brandon Summer Fair), miller Andrew Kelly, and lumber manufacturer John Hanbury, along with judge David Marr Walker. In the early 1920s, Coca-Cola was bottled there. In late 1928, the brewery was purchased by The Canadian Brewing Corporation. When it closed in September 1931, employees were offered a deal. For every keg they purchased, they would get a second keg free.

### Brandon Brewing Company: 1902 to 1925

Located on Fourth Avenue North, near the Assiniboine River, this brewery was run by Alexander Ferguson, Henry F. Maley, and Edward M. Maley. Construction started in 1902 and brewing commenced in early 1903, with William Schwartz as brewmaster. With a fifty-barrel brew house and annual capacity of 5,000 barrels of ale, porter and lager, the facility was considered state of the art. However, a disastrous fire on Christmas Day 1905 completely destroyed it. A new, larger brewery was constructed on

the south side of the river, on Assiniboine Avenue.

It used spring water piped over a mile and a half from the old site. The brewery operated until a referendum in March 1916 came down in favor of Prohibition. From 1916 to 1919, a loophole in the Prohibition Act allowed full strength beer to be sold and shipped out of Manitoba. Subsequently, the brewery was charged with selling beer to a customer in Moosomin, Saskatchewan who immediately shipped it back to an address in Brandon just a block from the brewery. After Prohibition was repealed, the company was purchased by a Winnipeg syndicate and re-organized with new owners Andrew Kelly, John Stoddart, George Montagu Black (father of disgraced millionaire Conrad Black), Elbert W. Kneeland, G. H. Balfour, J. Thordarson, Arthur Sullivan, and A. Strang. In 1925, the name was changed to The Premier Brewing Company. In 1928, Black formed Western Breweries as a holding company for the assets of Drewrys, Premier Brewing, Moose Jaw Brewing, and Hub City Brewing of Saskatoon. This marked the beginning of the end for many small breweries in the West. Western Breweries eventually became Carling Breweries. ☛



Dave Craig

notable feature of beer parlours. One end product of this adaptability is spatial change, which will be treated in more detail in the next section, but which has recently led to a relative increase in the number of bars outside of the downtown area, with a requisite decrease in the core.

Seventh, and flowing from the above, beer parlours can be seen as aspects of “folk culture” to a large extent. It is possible to visualise being “dropped down” in any central city pub, and being able to recognise one’s location because of the type of clientele (old, young, ethnic, etc.), and the overall ambience or interior decor, both of which

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**The present-day architecture of the downtown (and some more suburban) beer parlours reflects (it seems) the times of early post-prohibition in that they have no windows. This apparently evolved as a way of preventing people from being corrupted by the sight of drink and drinkers.**

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may have changed rarely if at all. As such they contrast to the “popular cultural palaces” that are the suburban pubs, which have little “place base,” being rebuilt to fit with the latest in popular culture every few years. Another reflection of the impact of popular culture upon the folk culture of the bar has been the banning of smoking in Brandon (in 2002) and in Winnipeg (in 2003) from bars, even when the majority of the bar patrons may have been smokers. In fact, the owners of some Brandon bars have suggested that the smoking ban could put them out of business.<sup>20</sup> Although no bar has succumbed since the ban was imposed, it is likely that this imposition of what might be seen as middle class values of the more youthful generations upon poorer and older echelons of society will indeed lead to the closure of at least one of Brandon’s few remaining central city bars.

#### Locational Characteristics of Bars

As mentioned earlier, Brandon’s original saloons, like those in most western Canadian settlements, were located close to the railway station—the *raison d’être* of the settlement. The City was founded in 1881, and by 1883 there were ten hotels, as well as eighteen boarding houses (some would later be “upgraded” to hotels) and five alcohol retailers (Table 1).<sup>21</sup> Although tents and shacks were initially more common than substantial buildings, these were boom times for Brandon, as the CPR expanded westward. Interestingly, in 1881 when future mayor James Smart arrived in town, the Royal Hotel, a “good hotel” according to Smart, in contrast to the two “canvas” hotels further east, was being constructed on Rosser Avenue at Thirteenth Street.<sup>22</sup> It would prove to be one of only two hostelries west of Tenth Street (the other was the Langham, about which little is known). It was later succeeded in this location by the

Reno Hotel, which eventually became an apartment block in 1917 after Prohibition before being demolished in 2000. By 1882, W. J. White wrote that there was enough “hotel accommodation for 1000 transient people”, but that only six hotels were listed suggests that the boarding houses were taking up much of this transient load.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from their location, the hotels were also notable for their names. Grandiose, or at least respectable names were characteristic of these hostelries. Similar naming practices characterised other businesses such as the early railways (e.g., The Great North West Central Railway) and grain elevator companies (e.g., The Golden West Grain Co.). Thus we find the “Grand Central,” the “Grand View” (which looked across Pacific Avenue at the CPR and its associated industrial uses), along with the “Royal,” the “Royal Arms,” the “Queen’s,” and the “Windsor” among others. Boarding house names tended to be more modest, often commemorating the owners, such as “Wiggins,” “Edie,” “Simpsons,” “Kelly,” “Douglas” and “Beaubier” or place names such as the “Brandon,” “Ottawa” or “Ontario” (Table 1). The Beaubier family was to become an important one in Brandon, continuing in the hotel and bar business for many years. Their name remains today on one of four functioning “beer parlours” in contemporary central Brandon. The present structure is on the site of the original Beaubier Boarding House, although a fire in 1893 has meant that the original structure is long gone. The rebuilt 1893 structure has also been changed considerably.



Gerry Beaubier

**Thomas Jefferous Beaubier** (1830-1915) operated a hotel in Ontario for six years before arriving in the Brandon area in 1880, as the CPR was conducting its surveys for a transcontinental railway. In 1882, he built and operated the original Beaubier House, which was destroyed by fire in 1893, and replaced by the Beaubier Hotel.

In 1884, perhaps recognising the difficulty of keeping the drinking scene in order from afar, there came the Dominion Liquor License Act. This gave hotel permit-control to local authorities and “insomnia to various inn-keepers who were refused further bar-operating privileges” by the local government.<sup>24</sup> Brandon decided that eight licenses would be enough for its population, and some bars closed, although it would appear that some later gained permission to re-open, as there were once again ten bars operating in Brandon by 1894.<sup>25</sup> This was not the first government intervention that would affect the bar scene in Brandon and it would prove not to be the last. In part because of this legislation and its implementation, there was a change in ownership of several hotels. Such ownership changes (as were establishment-name changes) were to prove common in this business, which has always appeared to be characterised by transient (and sometimes absentee) owners as well as transient clients.<sup>26</sup>

By the late 1880s when the initial boom was beginning to slacken, the City was characterised by better quality buildings, no doubt including hotels and two breweries. A “disastrous fire” in 1889 was a setback, but by the early 1890s Brandon was “rapidly rounding into shape as a commercial, manufacturing, and jobbing centre,”<sup>27</sup> although, in 1894 there were still only ten hotels (Table 2). It is likely, however, that many of these were larger and better built than a decade before, although the extension of the “head of steel” to far west of Brandon (the first Montreal-Vancouver train ran in 1886), and the construction of other rail lines in the region, meant that Brandon had lost some of its earlier competitive advantage. Consequently the hotel trade in Brandon steadied off, and became “established.”

Table 2.  
Number of hotels in Brandon, 1883-1966.  
Sources: Henderson Directories\*, Statistics Canada,  
Census of Population\*\*.

Year	Hotels*	Population**	People/Hotel
1882	6	1,500	250
1883	10	3,824	382
1894	10	4,030	403
1903	10	5,620	562
1911	15	13,839	923
1914	16	14,940	934
1917	12	15,251	1,271
1919	9	15,761	1,751
1921	7	15,397	2,200
1926	7	16,443	2,349
1936	6	16,500	2,750
1941	6 (1937)	17,383	2,897
1946	6	17,551	2,925
1951	6	20,598	3,433
1956	6	24,796	4,133
1961	6	28,166	4,686
1966	7 (1964)	29,981	4,283

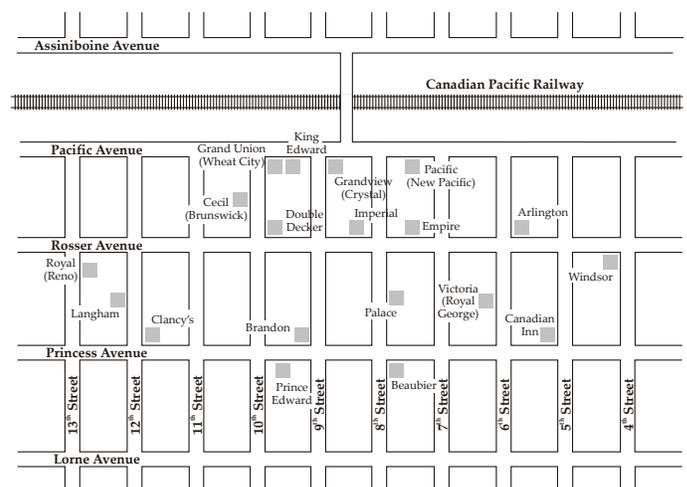
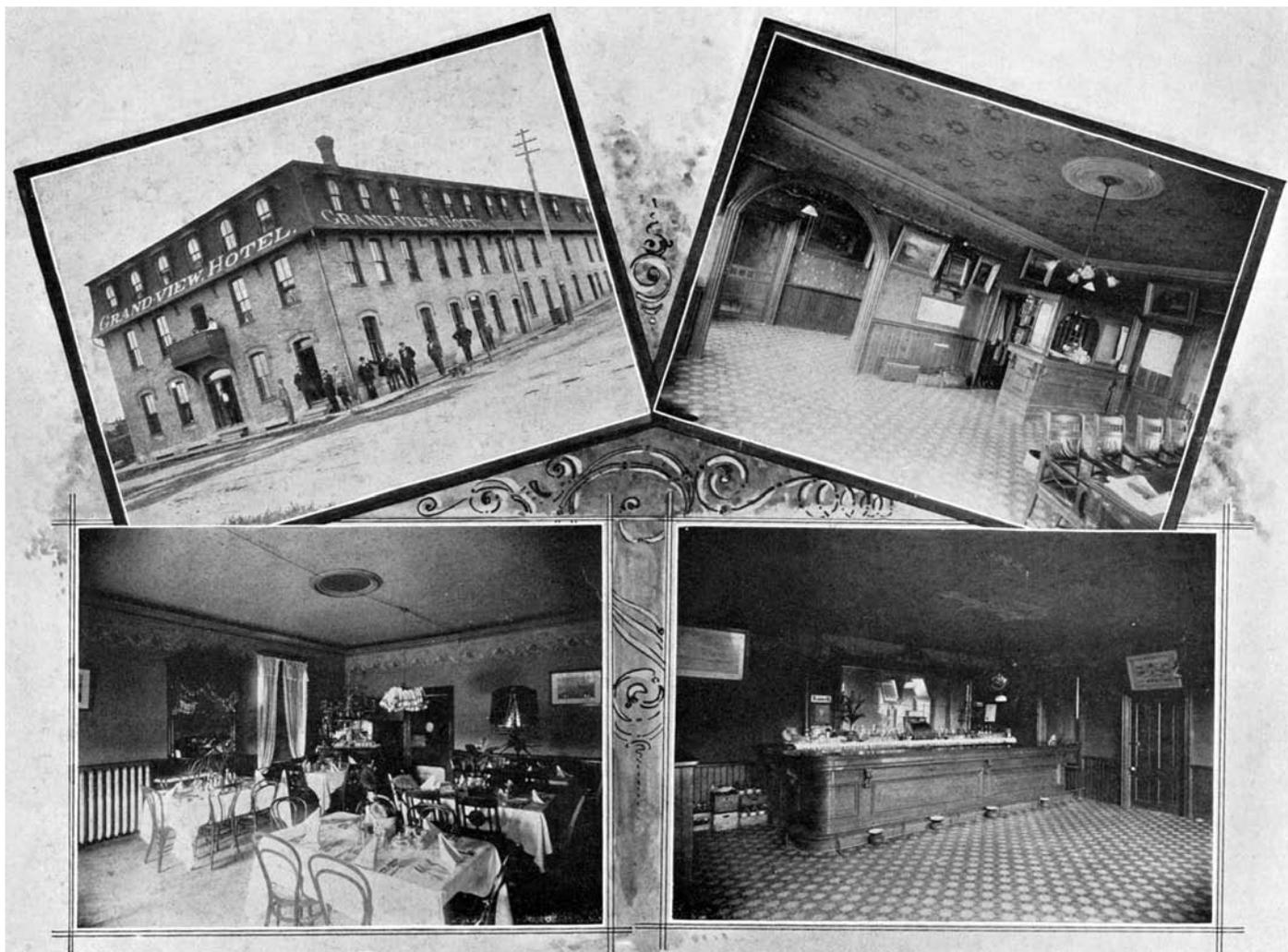


Figure 1. Brandon’s hotel and beverage room landscape.

The 1890s were a time of consolidation for Brandon, with economic ups and downs contrasting with the boom of the early 1880s. Population was over 4,000 in 1894 and over 5,600 in 1903 (Table 2). But the first decade of the twentieth century, and arguably extending up to the First World War, was the greatest period of growth in Brandon’s history. Population rose to nearly 14,000 in 1911. This boom was represented by a growth in hotel numbers from ten in 1903 to fifteen in 1911 and sixteen by the outbreak of the Great War (Table 2). One of these was the elegant Empire Hotel, opened in 1904 by David W. Beaubier on Rosser Avenue in the heart of Downtown. The name may be a reflection of the fact that old the Beaubier Boarding House on Eighth and Princess was, by this time, owned by somebody else.

In practice there was also a greater variability in drinking establishments than these numbers show—in large part because of fire—the scourge of wood-built prairie settlements. Two people died in a fire at the Albion in 1885, and in 1895 the Royal Hotel experienced two fires within twenty-four hours. The first left the hotel in repairable state. The latter “only left the bar-room and its contents intact!”<sup>28</sup> In 1901 the Queen’s Hotel was destroyed in a conflagration. The owner quickly purchased the Merchants’ Hotel, and maintaining a theme, renamed it the King Edward Hotel.<sup>29</sup> In 1902 there was a fire at the Kelly House.<sup>30</sup>

Although Brandon’s spatial growth roughly followed a semi-circular pattern around the downtown core, the distribution of its hotels—and thus its bars—was much more restricted. Most bars over time have been located between Tenth and Fourth Streets, and Pacific and Princess Avenues (Figure 1). The Royal and the Langham were still the only hostelries west of Tenth Street excluding the Cecil (which replaced the Brunswick) which stood on the west side of this street near the CPR station. Both the Royal and the Langham tried to appeal to a higher class of resident. The Langham (“First Class in Every Respect”) even offered a “Free Bus” to meet its clients from “All Trains,” perhaps “oneupmanship” over the hotels (such as the Imperial and



*Brandon Illustrated Souvenir*, William A. Martel, Publisher, p. 112.

Exterior and interior views of Brandon's Grandview Hotel, circa 1901.

the Palace) that only had their porters meet the trains.<sup>31</sup> This spatial circumstance almost certainly reflected the growth and development of social areas in Brandon.

The western sector of the city had become, probably by the turn of the century, the highest social status area peopled by the middle class.<sup>32</sup> The eastern sector, despite some early "mansion-building", had become (or was becoming) an area characterised by the working class. This trend was emphasised after 1903 when the CPR yards were relocated east of First Street. The area to the north of the CPR tracks, although mostly working class "British" in its initial years, was increasingly "invaded" by "unskilled" Eastern European migrants after the turn of the century. This local area, characterised as a "ghetto" by a local newspaper reporter,<sup>33</sup> never developed its own bars, with the mostly CPR-worker population crossing the tracks (literally until the Eighth Street Bridge was built) to watering holes such as the Grandview on Pacific Avenue. The area to the south of the CBD became more working class over time, and particularly after the Canadian Northern came into town from the south in 1906—despite the opposition to this "progress" by the remaining middle class residents of this

part of the City. These changes helped to reinforce the growth of the western middle-class wedge, and to prevent the entry of more hotels into this local area.

In 1912, eleven hotels were featured in an issue of the *Brandon Sun* newspaper.<sup>34</sup> The selection process (from perhaps fifteen then in existence) is unclear. It may have included just the larger ones that had the money to use the newspaper to promote themselves (Table 3). Unfortunately equivalent data are not given for all eleven hostelries, but the overall picture is quite clear (Table 4). The average hotel had just under fifty rooms, dining areas of a similar capacity, and a variety of associated services, such as barber shops, news stands, "parlours", and pool (billiard) rooms. They had something for everybody: one stop shopping for the travelling male. It cost between \$1.50 and \$2.50 for a night's lodging. All eleven appear to have served alcoholic beverages. In fact, several highlight their "well-stocked" bar as their major feature.

Thus by the outbreak of World War I all of Brandon's hotels (and bars) were on or east of Tenth Street except the Royal and the Langham, neither of which was to maintain this economic function for much longer. To the

## Called to the Bar

Table 3.  
Hotels and Alcohol in Brandon, 1912.  
Source: *Brandon Sun*, 7 November 1912.

Hotel	Description
Arlington	"a bar is maintained where all kinds of malt spirits and refreshments may be obtained. Skilled men in this department give service in plain or fancy concoctions, and an orderly and desirable trade is catered to"
Brandon	"a bar that is stocked with all kinds of beer, wines and liquors, is conducted and attention is given to patrons of this department, sufficient to attract a most desirable and high class trade"
Brunswick	"the Brunswick is an establishment that a gentleman may patronize and which [sic] he is willing his son shall patronize also"
Grandview	"the bar is one of the well-stocked ones in this neighbourhood and a variety of malt and fermented liquors are carried so as to meet the demands of a local trade and of the people who come in from different parts of this country and other countries outside of Canada"
King Edward	"the bar is adjacent to the office, but a desirable and most orderly class of customers are patrons here, so that people who are seeking refreshment may enter and be served without annoyance from any one; and those who only desire food and lodgings are not disturbed by the partakers of the liquid refreshments"
Langham	"a pool and billiard room is conducted on the ground floor and the bar is neatly fitted and is supplied with all kinds of wines, beers, and liquors"
Palace	"a large and well-stocked bar is entered from the side"
Reno	"on the ground floor there is a spacious lobby and office, a large and well supplied bar, a dining room, and a well-equipped kitchen"
Royal George	"cigars and tobaccos are kept on sale, and the bar is stocked with the beers and malt and fermented liquors that give satisfaction to the orderly trade that is catered to here"
Windsor	"a well stocked bar is conducted"

Table 4.  
Hotels in Brandon, 1912.  
Source: *Brandon Sun*, 7 November 1912.

Hotel	No. Rooms (cost)	Dining Capacity	Bar with alcohol	Other
Arlington	48 (\$1.50)	38	yes	barbershop, baths
Brandon	50 (\$2-2.50)	48	yes	parlours, writing rooms
Brunswick	?	?	?	pool/ billiards
Empire	? (\$2.50)	70	?	rotunda, cigars, news stand
Grandview	50 (\$2.00)	36	yes	barbershop, parlour
King Edward	34 (?)	40-50	yes	parlour
Langham	42 (\$1.50)	45	yes	pool/ billiards, parlours
Palace	54 (\$1.50)	54	yes	none listed
Reno	40 (\$1.50)	36	yes	none listed
Royal George	52 (\$1.50)	44	yes	tobacco/ cigars
Windsor	53	40-50	yes	none listed

south, Princess Avenue, which was about the edge of the commercial district, was also the boundary for hotels. This is not surprising as the source of customers was still overwhelmingly the CPR and the physical slope up from the station along Tenth Street, coupled with the social slope up to the west, meant that the path of least resistance -- and thus of greatest growth, was likely to be towards the east. The Canadian Northern terminated on Princess (at Ninth) but built its own fine hotel, the Prince Edward, at this location to accommodate its better customers, and other visitors to Brandon. Even the development of Brandon's ill-fated and money-losing streetcar system that opened in 1913 failed to alter this basic pattern.

The Great War was a watershed for Brandon in many ways. Brandon's population had climbed to just over 15,000 by 1916 but was virtually unchanged in 1921 (Table 2). Although the "wets" outvoted the "drys" in 1914—causing many nervous bar owners to hastily replenish their bar room supplies,<sup>35</sup> the forces of temperance were not to be denied. Thus for Brandon's bars, like those elsewhere in the west, this time of economic and political stress was further reinforced (in 1916) by prohibition.<sup>36</sup> Several hotels, including the Langham and the Royal, soon went out of business, and by 1919, nine remained in the catering

business and as hostelrys, but bereft of alcohol (Table 2). The landscape of bars had changed and would never return to its old form. It is interesting to note that the spatial growth of Brandon's bars up to 1914 was followed by a

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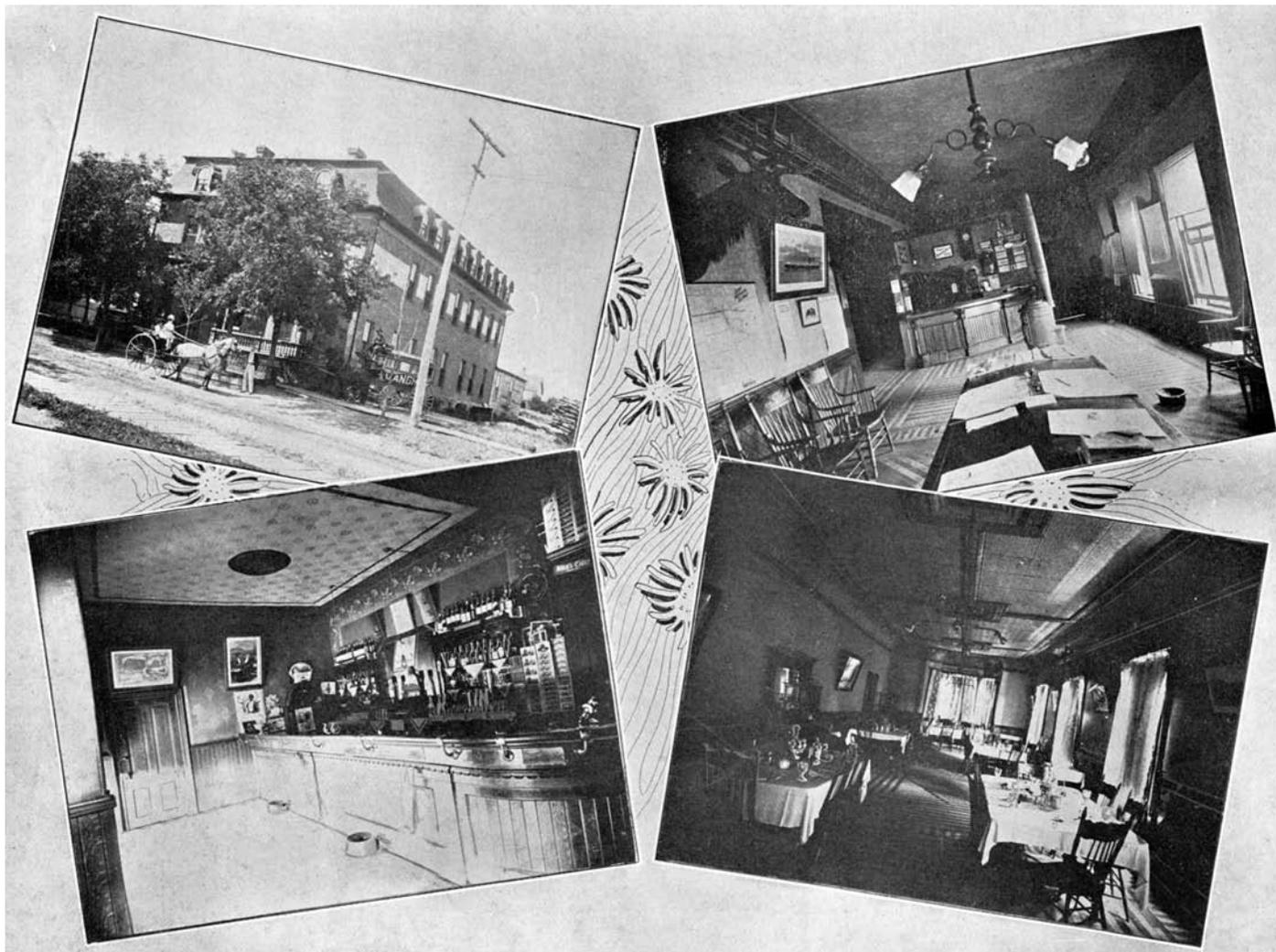
**The average hotel had just under fifty rooms, dining areas of a similar capacity, and a variety of associated services, such as barber shops, news stands, "parlours", and pool (billiard) rooms. They had something for everybody: one stop shopping for the travelling male.**

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spatial decline thereafter, which left the pattern in the 1960s very similar in number and distribution to that of 1903. Of course, some of the bars that existed at the end of our study period were also in existence in Brandon's early days.

Almost certainly the social structural changes in Brandon also negatively affected the pubs. Families were becoming ever more characteristic of the population, and single young males less dominant partly because of the effects of the war. Prohibition ended in 1922, but there was no way back for many of the old hotels, and those that remained were in the eastern and southern sections of the core area, east of the Cecil and north of the CN terminus (Figure 1).<sup>37</sup> Some of the older structures were burned (see above), demolished (e.g., in 1936 the Edie House/Merchants Hotel/King Edward), or had already been converted into other uses (the Reno Apartments in the Reno, once Royal, Hotel<sup>38</sup>). In fact, rather than rebound, the bar-scene continued to decline with the King Edward and the New Pacific closing around 1920.

The difficult economic conditions of the 1920s were followed by the Great Depression and in 1937 another era ended with the closing of the Empire Hotel—which had in 1917 let Woolworth's become its ground-floor tenant as a way of staving off the negative financial effects of



*Brandon Illustrated Souvenir*, William A. Martel, Publisher, p. 144.

**The Langham Hotel** on Twelfth Street, with William L. Capell as proprietor, had one of the western-most beverage rooms in Brandon, circa 1901.

prohibition!<sup>39</sup> Further, a proposal to turn the Empire into apartments in 1941 was turned down, and ironically it was replaced by an “ultra-modern F. W. Woolworth and Company departmental store” in 1957.<sup>40</sup> The population of the city had reached about 16,500 by 1936 (Table 2). Six bars were maintained for the next thirty years, but by then the aforementioned forces of suburbanisation had started to take their toll. One famous bar-restaurant that to some extent signalled the coming change was called the “Suburban” and was located at Twenty-Sixth and Victoria (then the Trans Canada Highway through town). By 1966, while the population of Brandon was 29,981, they were about to be serviced by institutions that would increasingly set up shop away from the CBD. In terms of bars, this turning point is symbolised by the opening in 1964 of Brandon’s first Motor Hotel, the Canadian Inn—ironically in the CBD at the corner of Fifth and Princess. But its central location could not disguise its more modern outward-looking functions, which now include a small bar (“Mario’s Bar”), a huge poorer-youth-oriented barn-like dance club most recently called “CODE” (currently closed), a restaurant, conference facilities, and an indoor swimming pool. Once again, something for everybody: one stop shopping. In a sense, forward to the past was the watchword of the new hostelry. This was followed in 1968 by a name change at the Prince Edward Hotel in favour of the Prince Edward *Motor* Hotel. These two establishment changes, both reflecting the dominance of the automobile, mark the end of the downtown hotel era for Brandon.

### Conclusion

Today, the bar and alcohol scene in Brandon is very different from a century ago. There is one government liquor store at Tenth and Victoria, and another in the suburban “Shoppers Mall.” The last brewery closed its doors many years back. Most bars are now outside of the city centre and like so many urban functions cater to a more youthful, mobile, automobile-oriented, population. This is hardly surprising. Perhaps more interesting is what remains in the CBD. There are several licensed restaurants, and some “new” bars. One of the latter, as mentioned above, is associated with the Canadian Inn, recently acquired by Travelodge. The third, the “Double Decker” is a pseudo-British pub fairly typical of an ilk quite common throughout contemporary Canada. The fourth, Clancy’s, is a recently opened pseudo-Irish pub.

There are also four “historic” beer parlours still extant. The Beaubier, continuing the family name but now owned by a local “real estate entrepreneur” remains financially viable by renting rooms to a marginalised section of Brandon’s

population. It was once a “fine-dining” establishment and may have only become a pub in the 1920s.<sup>41</sup> Today it is at best a shadow of its former self, and although opening at 9 a.m. (for shift workers) it was purchased by the owner of the City Centre in order to eliminate competition rather than to be a big money maker. The Crystal, on the site of the original “Grand View” hotel caters to an older crowd. It once served the incoming train passengers and was a favourite haunt of many East European immigrants from north of the CPR tracks. The City Centre (also owned by the Beaubier proprietor) is located on the site once occupied by the old Grand Union Hotel, although it actually replaced the “Wheat City” pub. It caters to a younger “rock and roll” cohort. As late as the mid-1980s it had the “second highest consumption per chair” in Brandon, but times have changed.<sup>42</sup> The fourth, the Brandon Inn closed its doors in the late 1990s, its demise reflecting in part the changing conditions of bar-use in the City, although it had been having trouble making it for some time. Only strippers, Brandon’s equivalents of biker gangs, and marginalised people living close to downtown had kept it going. It reopened in 2005 under new ownership, but its future is not secure.

The advent of the new Maple Leaf “hog-processing” plant in Brandon has recently increased trade in downtown drinking establishments, but all four remaining central area beer parlours are probably threatened by the (no) smoking legislation that was passed by City Council in 2002 (50% of the City Centre’s patrons are said to be smokers<sup>43</sup>). They would be more severely threatened if video lottery terminals

(VLTs) were to be removed. A fifth hotel, the famous Cecil, burned down in the 1970s and was never rebuilt. It is likely that the immediate future will show little change. One of the older bars may close in the near future. An oft-touted “brew pub”

may become a fact, although the current bar owners doubt the viability of such an enterprise. If it did come, such a pub would undoubtedly hasten the demise, or at least cause a significant change in, the contemporary watering holes. The landscape is likely to continue to change, but it is very unlikely to ever reach its early twentieth century heights. A diminishing call for “time gentlemen and ladies please!” is a more likely scenario. ☞



**Assiniboine lager** was brewed by Alberta’s Big Rock Brewery in commemoration of Brandon’s 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007.

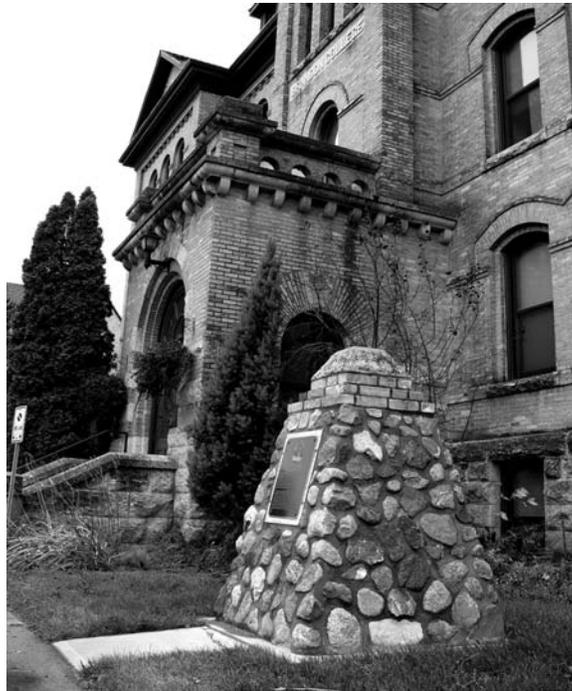


Notes for this article  
are available on the MHS web site:  
[www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb\\_history/56](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/56)

## “To Bestir Themselves:” Canadian Baptists and the Origins of Brandon College

by Tommy McLeod  
Victoria, BC

If it is so, as one of the great sages of professional baseball has claimed, that “the game ain’t over til’ it’s over,” a parallel course of reasoning might lead to the conclusion that most, if not all, great stories “begin before the beginning.” Both conclusions come readily to mind when contemplating the course of Brandon College’s history. Selecting the date of 1 June 1900, the day on which Royal Assent was given to an Act incorporating “Brandon College” as the one which marks the birth of the new institution on the banks of the Assiniboine, satisfies only legal niceties. Even to go back of that date to such others as 1 August 1899, to the announcement of the opening of the College as carried in the denominational journal, leaves much that is relevant to the story unsaid. The same might be said of moving still farther back to the June 1898 meeting assembly of the Manitoba and Northwest Convention that took the decision to establish a college, which would provide instruction both in Arts and in Theology. Such dates recognize only decisions made and actions taken to meet the demands and realize the possibilities of a newly opening Canadian West.<sup>1</sup>



G. Goldsborough

A commemorative cairn on the grounds of Brandon University was built, in part, with stones from the original Prairie College building at Rapid City.

The challenges confronting the Baptists in the Canadian West were not dissimilar from those which the denomination had faced in earlier years when settling in what was then Canada West. The responses of those times, in terms both of ideas and institutions, formed the most important part of the baggage carried into the new land in the missionary venture launched by Eastern Baptists, latecomers to the Western sweepstakes. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians were already hunkered down in the Red River Valley, their institutions, including their colleges, already well established. However, it was for the Baptists to be to the fore when settlement finally burst from the Red River Valley on to the hitherto avoided uplands of Manitoba.

The history of Brandon and of its College form an integral part of the story of the march of the forces of Ontario Protestantism into the new and, for much the greatest part, unoccupied (at least in Euro-Canadian parlance) land. It was, in its own right, a country,

and one which for two centuries had been held, virtually in economic thrall, by the Hudson’s Bay Company. During the time of the Company’s supremacy, it had been challenged only by periodic, if at times violent, intrusions of less privileged traders seeking to share in the rich harvest of furs. Settlement in the days of the fur economy was confined for the most part to such river valleys as the western plains provided, and of these, only that of the Red River could be regarded as being of consequence. As J. W. Dafoe explained in describing the bleak land of the north-west: “Portage la Prairie was the extreme westward outpost of what was called the Red River Settlement. Beyond it stretched

*Born in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, Thomas Hector MacDonald McLeod attended Brandon College from 1937 to 1940. He then obtained an MA from the University of Indiana, after which he returned to Brandon to teach economics and sociology. When Tommy Douglas became Premier of Saskatchewan, he recruited McLeod to the civil service of his home province, where McLeod held a number of positions. He has received the Vanier Medal for outstanding contribution to public administration in Canada and, in 2003, was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada.*

for nearly eight hundred miles the vast plain, tenantless except for the location at strategic points of the forts of the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>2</sup>

The Red River settlement itself might well be regarded as something of a phenomenon, existing in defiance of proclaimed laws of nature, which decreed the prairie reaches of British North America to be suited only to the requirements for fur-bearing animals and migratory Aborigines. It existed in a land, proclaimed, if only by and in the interests of the Hudson's Bay Company, to be otherwise, unproductive and uninhabitable. With the "surrender" of its rights to the new Dominion of Canada in 1869, the song changed dramatically.

Under the new authority the western land, both in public thought and in public policy, came to be seen and treated in a new light. Contrary to past contentions, the western territory was now to be seen as a promised land; one that held out opportunities for a substantial measure of prosperity, if not unlimited wealth, for those willing and able to make the necessary effort to grasp them. The surge of westward migration marking the response to this lure brought with it a concern within Canadian church communities for the settlers moving into a land seen to be destitute of the institutions of civilized communities. This concern was compounded for Canadian Baptists, faced as they were when the westward race began, with the total absence of church brethren, much less organized church institutions, in the newly opening domain.<sup>3</sup>

Though the Eastern Baptists may have been somewhat tardy in meeting the challenge that was before them, when in time they did respond, the mission-minded brethren who came forward, carried with them to the new land certain convictions as to the role of their denomination in matters both evangelical and educational. While it is from the perspective of the latter that this narrative is primarily focused, it will be seen, as the story of Brandon College unfolds, that the two were inextricably, some might argue even fatally, entwined. Taken together, as they existed in the minds of those first coming to the scene, they provided the rationale, the guiding philosophy and institutional structure for the creation of a new college.

To arrive at the origins of the ideas which came to life anew, prevailing in the building of Brandon College, history must be pushed back almost half a century from the day in 1900 when the College assumed its chartered existence. And even then, in tracing the evolution of what became effectively "the Brandon idea," selection must be made from among a variety of dates and circumstances. At least as early as 1838, the Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, in their efforts to set out their role in higher education, had, in the words of the *Baptist Year Book*, launched their struggles

"against the vicissitudes" of their situation, leading to a catalogue of ventures which were in some ways heroic, if not uniformly successful.<sup>4</sup>

However, in selecting a specific date that most likely marks the beginning of the "idea" carried into Manitoba, choice most properly falls on 1 December 1855. On that day, the denominational journal, *The Christian Messenger* carried a letter headed "A Proposal." It was signed only by "F." The letter was addressed to the need for the Baptist community, acting in the light of its denominational requirements, to define its role in the field of higher education. It was a letter that would later be described as "the seed in which the germ of ... Woodstock College ... was enfolded."<sup>5</sup> It was the flower from this seed that the founders of Brandon College sought to transplant to western land. Mention must be made, too, that general agreement has it that the author of this seminal letter, "F", was Robert Alexander Fyfe.

While the designation "father of Brandon College" must be reserved for another more immediately identified with the development of that institution, that of "grandfather of

Brandon College" might readily be given to Fyfe as Fyfe's broad influence within the affairs of the Baptist community of Ontario and Quebec worked, directly and indirectly, to shape much of the course of development of the denomination's affairs in the new Northwest. An early biographer speaks of him as "the founder and father of the

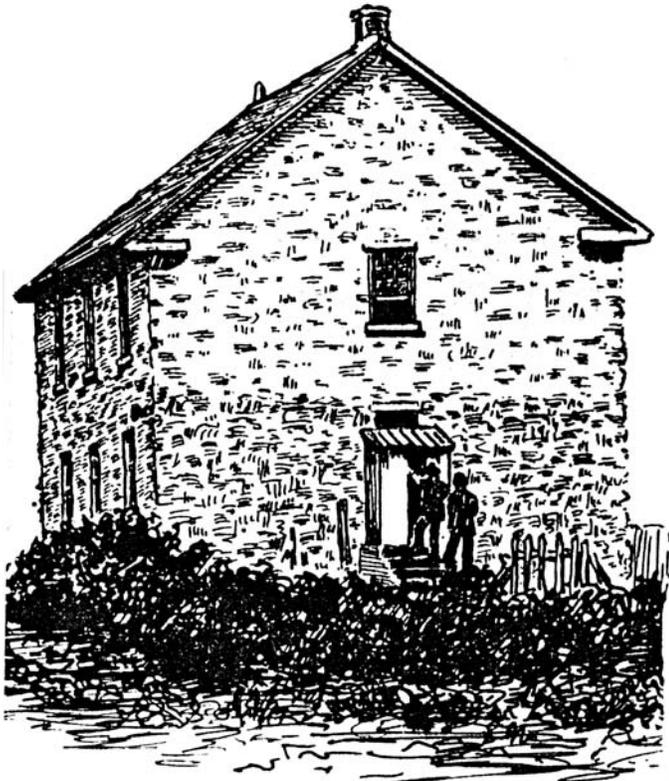
Manitoba Mission" that marked the incursion of the Baptists into the new province.<sup>6</sup> As the mission established itself firmly in new ground, and the denomination's presence increased in numbers, there was a growing concern for establishing a denominational position in higher education, in particular as it bore on the preparation for the ministry. It was here that Fyfe's influence, at one stage remote though it was, became dominant. The structure, the conduct and the educational philosophy which were eventually to mark a college proudly flaunting the motto "Education Crowned with Reverence" were readily traceable to Fyfe's conquests completed earlier in Canada West, now translated anew to meet the needs of the new country.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the formative years of the 1880s and '90s that as the Baptists struggled to respond to the increasing demands for their own educational institution, the shadows of Fyfe and his College hovered over the discussions. When the decisions were finally taken that were designed to transform wishes into reality, the ideas of Fyfe and the model of his Woodstock College would be dominating elements. The results could hardly have been different, given the fact that those officers charged with the responsibility for bringing the new institution into being were, as were the missionaries before them, not only of Woodstock persuasion, but charter members of the Woodstock experience. Then, too, the absence of an existing

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**The challenges confronting the Baptists in the Canadian West were not dissimilar from those which the denomination had faced in earlier years when settling in what was then Canada West.**

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Archives of Manitoba, Rapid City - School 5.

**Prairie Baptist College**, which operated at Rapid City between 1880 and 1884, is illustrated in this 1884 sketch.

established alternative within Canadian Baptist experience may have weighed heavily in influencing the choices made. Earlier attempts of the Baptists to develop Bible schools more narrowly focused in terms of curricula and clientele than the more broadly based educational model offered by Fyfe's Woodstock institution, had almost uniformly failed for lack of financial support.<sup>8</sup>

Of more immediate concern to the Brandon narrative are the consequences of other roles that Fyfe played within his church, first as chairman of the Regular Baptist Theological Education Society, and later as President of the Baptist Home Missionary Board of Ontario. A writer for the *Baptist Year Book* described Fyfe as "a man of action, of indomitable courage, not lightly diverted from any purpose on which he had set his heart."<sup>9</sup> Fyfe did not hesitate to use his positions within church bodies to pursue his convictions concerning his church's role in higher education, and its mission in the newly opening west. In the unfolding of western affairs, it was from his position as President of the Home Missionary Board that Fyfe's impact on western affairs was first felt.

In 1869, two years after the new Dominion was formed, and one year before the Province of Manitoba came into being, Dr. Fyfe (as he had become by that time), aware of the promised potential of the new Canadian west, introduced a motion at the annual meeting of the Baptist Home Missionary Board calling for the appointment of a

deputation to explore "the Great North-West Territories" and to report on "its physical, political and religious condition in order that ... the Baptists might judge of the possible future of that country and better understand their duties as a body of Christians toward the vast territory."<sup>10</sup> The deputation, consisting of Rev. Thomas L. Davidson and Rev. Thomas Baldwin, left on its mission in mid-June 1869.

In their report, the commissioners celebrated the agricultural potential of the west: it was "a country of unequalled fertility as regards the richness of the soil." And the climate was fine: the commissioners thought "that all staple crops which are grown in Ontario can be grown in the territory in great abundance."<sup>11</sup> The commissioners noted that the native population formed by far the largest number of those living in the new province. The region's original inhabitants were impatient with "the slow manner in which the Dominion moves in the matter of their interests."<sup>12</sup> The Canadians who had already arrived in the region, the deputation reported, "were rallying for British rule in the North-West."<sup>13</sup> It would come but only after the Riel resistance in the fall and winter of 1869-70.

Alas, there were few Baptists among this original Euro-Canadian population already in the great North-West: one statement recorded it as one, a second as none. It seemed to the deputation that more Baptists were required to justify the expense of a missionary for the region. As their recommendation put it: "... it is our opinion ... that the conditional appointment of a missionary, providing a colony of Baptist families would unite, move and settle together, in the great North-West would be a means of spreading Baptist principles in that far off country faster than by any other way within our reach ... We would not recommend the Convention to send a missionary for the sake of the present inhabitants."<sup>14</sup> But a missionary was sent. In 1873, Dr. Fyfe in his capacity as chairman of a recently constituted Committee on the Manitoba Mission, announced that his Committee had secured the services of a missionary ready to undertake the cause of carrying the Baptist faith into the new province. Naturally enough, the missionary, Rev. Alexander McDonald, was a product of Fyfe's Woodstock institution.<sup>15</sup>

Later as settlement anticipated and followed in the wake of the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Baptists joined the western migration. Before long "Baptist churches were coming into existence in the many new towns, growing up almost like mushrooms over the prairie."<sup>16</sup> Such growth posed a critical problem of supplying the many new mission fields with trained ministers. There was no surplus in eastern Canada. And those who did take up work in the west would face "the hardships of a new country in a severely cold climate ..."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the problems could be solved with "home grown" ministers.

The first response to this growing concern of the western Baptists came six years after Alexander MacDonald's installation as resident head of the Manitoba mission.

## Origins of Brandon College

Once more, the initiative centered on Woodstock College and a sixty-five year old Professor of New Testament and Hebrew, Rev. John Crawford. Convinced that the new west was to become one of the most important sections of an expanded dominion, Crawford approached the Ontario Baptist Convention with a proposal that they should develop a college there. His proposal was rejected, though he was conceded the right, if he so wished, to undertake such a venture on his own initiative, and to approach eastern congregations for financial support. This he did, and by 1879 was convinced, incorrectly as it turned out, that the response to his plea warranted his proceeding with the scheme, although he was still doing so primarily on his own. He sold his property in Woodstock and apart from retaining what was necessary to re-establish living quarters in a new land, placed all of his remaining resources at the call of his educational venture.<sup>18</sup>

Associated with Crawford in this undertaking was Rev. G. B. Davis, a former student of Fyfe's college.<sup>19</sup> McLaurin later described him as "an all-round man, optimistic, ready for almost any kind of toil or search."<sup>20</sup> Davies, too, made a cash contribution to the project, though his contribution was to be regarded as an advance and presumably recoverable. As will be seen, this was not to be.



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University

**Reverend John Crawford** (1819-1895), was the founder and principal of Prairie College at Rapid City.

Their undertaking must be recorded as a genuine, demanding exercise in pioneering, and in some respects a heroic one. In speaking to his projected venture in the Canadian Baptist, Crawford stated: "In my projected college in the Northwest Territory, it is the intention that the students when they have completed their studies shall take up farms in the midst of their flocks, and support themselves pretty much by the labour of their own hands with whatever assistance the people can afford, until their churches be strong enough to support them altogether."<sup>21</sup>

This at a time when the steel rails of the Canadian Pacific Railway, though laid down past Winnipeg, would not cross the Assiniboine River for another two years.<sup>22</sup> Through a number of incarnations as a trading post, Brandon House, had existed somewhere in the vicinity of the eventual crossing. But what was to become the site of an almost instant city remained as a vacant spot on the map, and, as such, a matter of no particular concern to Crawford's party. Their objective was to reach Rapid City, at the time a settlement of no consequence. Speculative rumours had it, however, that it would soon become a boomtown sitting astride the approaching lines of the Canadian Pacific—the first divisional point west of Winnipeg. Because of this promised strategic location, it would grow to be the second city of Manitoba. It was here that Crawford and Davies would plant the Woodstock seed in prairie soil, a purpose which in time, could be said to have been in some measure rewarded. At least the seed was planted, though it would take time beyond the efforts of Crawford and Davies to grow.<sup>23</sup>

The translation of Fyfe's inspiration into Crawford's reality required the acceptance of conditions which, at times, bordered on the Spartan. Davies led the little band of pioneers in their westward trek. The final leg of the journey to their destination posed for him and his small group of students what they must have regarded as unusual if not daunting demands. Their story is detailed succinctly by McLaurin "From Winnipeg they reached Portage la Prairie, (on) the first construction train after that section was completed. From there, they went one hundred miles north-west to Rapid City, through an untravelled country, making a very difficult journey." Their journey took eight days. Their destination, when reached, was later described as "the first cluster of houses, mostly of log, that indicated an advanced civilization after leaving Portage." Over that time, "less than a dozen houses had been seen."<sup>24</sup>

It was planned that in their new surroundings that the little community would be self-sustaining. They would live collectively through their efforts on the land, working their homesteads, caring for their own domestic needs, pursuing their courses of studies, and supplying prairie pulpits on the Sabbath. Their first act was to gather stones and lay them, creating the building that would house their enterprise. Within its walls, the spirit of Woodstock College and its predecessor, the Canadian Literary Institute were to be recreated.

The Woodstock "model" went well beyond the matter of denominational resistance to secular intervention in



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University, S. J. McKee Fonds, 9-15.

The students and faculty of Brandon Academy, around bearded principal S. J. McKee in centre, gather for a photo in 1892.

its affairs. It was, in the first instance, less a challenge to the state to confine its attention to its own affairs, than it was a challenge to the church membership to “bestir” itself in meeting its divinely ordained responsibilities for attending to the education of its young. Some years after the initial responses to Fyfe’s proposal to the brethren to go west, responses that came from individuals rather than from any corporate element of the church, a writer in the *Baptist Year Book* commented that “it is a little mortifying that Baptists have not an educational institution of any grade in the Province [of Manitoba].” Coupled with that observation was a second, which in the light of the subsequent history of Brandon College, might be regarded as prescient. He wrote that there was within the denomination the ability to do anything needed “provided they will cultivate a little more largesse of soul and a little more forbearance with one another.”<sup>25</sup>

While Fyfe’s immediate concern was for the general educational needs of young Baptist men and women there was also recognition of the pressing matter of the appropriate preparation of candidates for ministry in the church itself. In commenting on this aspect of Fyfe’s proposal, his biographer commented: “This letter strikes a new key. It does not propose to commence at the wrong end by establishing a purely theological college without providing any steps by which the illiterate young farmer or mechanic, who felt it his duty to preach the Gospel, could climb up to its entrance.” Beyond the immediate matter of providing for the needs of an aspiring clergy went the

conviction, in the words of the biographer, “that education under religious influence is the best training for other spheres of Christian activity, as well as for the pulpit.”<sup>26</sup>

To meet the needs of the constituency he regarded as coming within the church’s concern, Fyfe proposed an institutional structure that would provide through one element theological training, and through a second academic training, the whole to be combined in his Literary Institute. This was the basic structure Crawford carried with him into Manitoba, a structure that was continued through the later years of McKee’s Academy that succeeded Crawford’s Prairie College, and on into the years of Brandon College. As with the issue of denominational independence, as will later be seen, Fyfe’s principle of organization, involving the merging of the academic and the theological, the marriage of faith and reason, provided fertile ground for dissent and dispute. It was an arrangement which, when built into the structure of Brandon College, was at the root both of the denominational schism that colored the days of President Whidden, and at least in the opinion of some observers of the ultimate failure of the Baptist college to survive.<sup>27</sup>

Almost contemporaneous with the opening of Prairie College, Rapid City’s dream of glory was ended abruptly as the steel rails crossed the Assiniboine River. On its banks an instant city, the one Rapid City had hoped to become, came into being. At the end of a three-year struggle to realize his vision, crushed by the financial burdens involved, Crawford faced not only the loss of his investment in the venture, but total bankruptcy. The hoped

for financial support of mission minded Easterners never materialized. Performance lagged well behind promises, as the East seemed preoccupied with its own educational problems, and Crawford's college was forced to close.<sup>28</sup> The student body dispersed, the larger number of its members going to the recently established Toronto Baptist College. Others went on to pursue further theological training in the United States.

The Crawford-Davis partnership was terminated amidst recriminations over the financial arrangements. It is of interest to note here that there appears to have developed by this time, among some influential eastern Baptists, a commitment to the idea that there should be but a single, centrally located Canadian institution dedicated to the preparation of the church's pastors. Inevitably, it was contended that any such institution should be located in the city of Toronto. The wish seemed to have become a reality in 1880, almost contemporaneously with Crawford's western venture. Funded by Senator William McMaster, the Toronto Baptist College, as it was first named, was to become, within a few years, a full-fledged university, bearing McMaster's name. It is not unreasonable to speculate that the commitment, if not the preoccupation, of the eastern constituency with its own institution of higher learning was an inhibiting factor of consequence in determining the fate of the Brandon mission's campaigns for continuing eastern financial support.

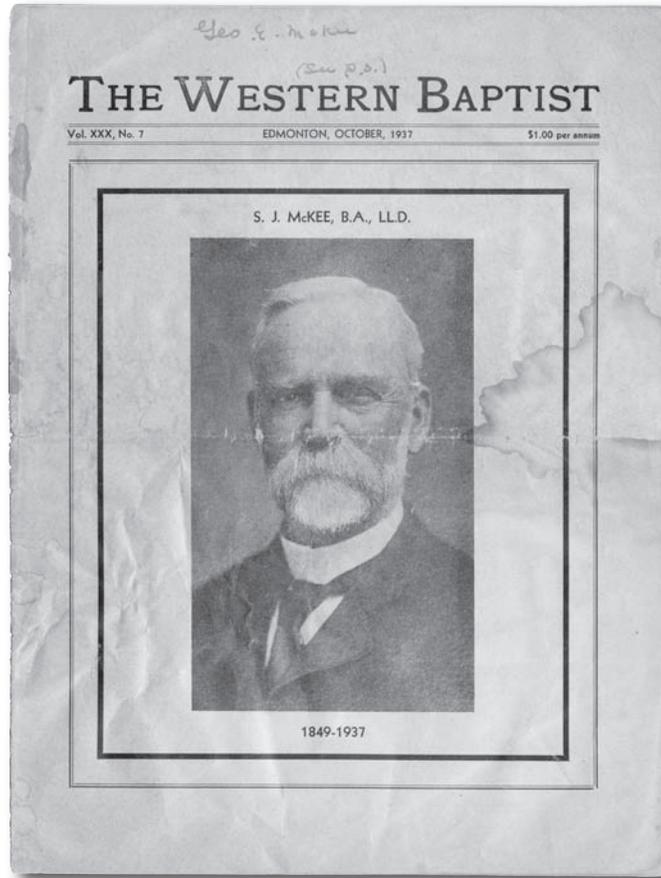
However, Crawford's dream of establishing an educational mission in Manitoba, even at Rapid City, was not lost. Before the dust had settled on the site of Prairie College, G. B. Davis renewed the effort to establish an academy in that same community. It was at this point that Samuel James McKee, whose name was later to loom large in the history of Brandon College, entered the picture. McKee was Davis's brother-in-law, and as might be expected, one of the Fyfe acolytes, an ex-staff-member of Woodstock College. An honours graduate of the University of Toronto, McKee had not sought a career in teaching, and initially spurned the blandishments of Fyfe who sought to

recruit him for his Woodstock staff. He did shortly succumb however, and in 1872 entered upon what was to be a fifty-year career as an ardent churchman serving in the field of education.<sup>29</sup>

In 1881, for reasons related to his health, McKee left Woodstock, intending to start life anew as a homesteader in the newly opening west. For this enterprise he chose the Rapid City area, most likely because of the presence, if not the influence of Davis. So it happened that when his brother-in-law needed assistance in bringing his academy into being, McKee, being close at hand answered his call. His term as an aide to Davis, if that is what was originally intended, proved to be a short one. Davis soon accepted a call to the pulpit of a new Baptist church in Moose Jaw, NWT. The wheel of fortune, if not Divine intercession provided the conditions for the continuance of a second academy in Rapid City, this one, now under McKee's guidance. It was to be known, fittingly, as the Rapid City Academy. Throughout the lifetime of this school, McKee divided his time between teaching and farming. It may have been the combined efforts that enabled him to avoid the financial disasters of the earlier educational institution.

As he was to demonstrate throughout his life of service to the cause of his church in higher education, McKee was possessed of a considerable evangelical drive, though he was not by that token to be readily slotted into the category of "fundamentalist." When, in

due course, Brandon College was swept up in the crisis of a fundamentalist-modernist confrontation, he was not to be found in the ranks of the former. His evangelism seems, rather, to have been founded on an unswerving dedication to bringing, through his works, the power of Christian beliefs into the life of his community and his nation. Although the full structure of the Woodstock model was not to be realized in his Rapid City school, the Fyfe influence was readily apparent in an Academy announcement that set out its purposes as McKee envisioned them: "To gather together in a first class boarding school those young men



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University, MG1, Brandon College - Teaching & Administration, Box 1, File 13

**Reverend Samuel James McKee** was held in such esteem that his obituary was featured on the 1937 cover of *The Western Baptist*.

and women who desire in the highest sense to make the most of themselves, to throw around them such moral and Christian influences as will help to develop manly and upright lives, to extend to them at all times such sympathetic help as the student is ever in need of, and to send them home after each year's work capable of proving themselves more useful members of their own families and in the communities from which they come."<sup>30</sup>

In 1883, the annual meeting of the Baptist Home Mission Convention of Manitoba pledged itself "to keep pace with the times (and) establish a college in Winnipeg."<sup>31</sup> In the following year, the 1884 meeting of the Manitoba Convention received the unexpected news that Crawford's dream had ended with the collapse of Prairie College. Taken together these events appear to have created a new awareness among denominational leaders that they would have to move out of the bleachers and into the bull-pen if their expressed wish to establish a solidly based educational institution was to be realized. While there was at the time full and appreciative recognition of McKee's personal determination and financial commitment to maintain a Baptist presence in Manitoba with his Rapid City Academy, there was also a growing recognition of the need for a more formal mustering of the greater resources of denominational bodies to the cause of education. From this point on, and for the remainder of the century, issues related to the Baptist Church's role in higher education in the Northwest and to the policies appropriate for giving effect to any such role, commanded, increasingly, the attention both of the churches in conclave, and of the editorial columns of their periodicals.

In 1885, the first issue of the Baptist Convention's newly founded journal, *The North West Baptist*, space had been given to a report of the Convention's President, in particular to comments that were made on the church's role in education. The President, Rev. F. W. Ashe noted that "We (have) Roman Catholics, Church of England People and Presbyterians with their respective colleges as teaching bodies which send their students up to the University for the purpose of examinations and receiving degrees." In words reminiscent of those voiced some years earlier by Fyfe in Ontario when, speaking to his fellow Baptists, he urged the brethren "to bestir themselves on this important issue" Ashe envisioned a time, not five years hence, when "a sufficient amount would be raised for the literary department of a college ... where young men could receive a classical education, and those called to the ministry a partial training for the present in a theological college."<sup>32</sup>

While this might be taken to reflect determination that something should be done, it did not reflect any commonly held conviction as to what that something might or should be. Six years later, in 1891, though McKee had by then

re-established his academy in Brandon, the editor of the North-West Baptist brooded further over what he saw as the growing dilemma facing the denomination: "Our educational policy is pretty much up in the air ... The ranks of our preachers cannot be sufficiently recruited by drafts of men from the Eastern Provinces ... Shall we attempt to provide theological training next year, or shall we wait? Is the denomination able to maintain two schools, one theological, one literary? Should the two departments be included in one institution or be separate? And where is the school or schools to be? A false start now will imperil the whole future of our work. It is best to begin small, and then we can feel our way."<sup>33</sup>

In noting the hiatus between Baptist expressions of concern and decisions made to take corrective action, it must be conceded that the denomination's organizational superstructures of the times, while adequate in allowing for discussion and debate, were less suited to promoting than to inhibiting the taking of collective decisions. The traditions of the denomination placed primary importance on the individuality of the church member,

free of encumbering creeds, in the matter of conscience, and on the autonomy of the individual congregation in any matter of organized endeavour. In respect of the former, as a Baptist preacher by the name of Tommy Douglas once commented, "each Baptist is his own Pope."<sup>34</sup> In respect of the latter, each congregation

might only with difficulty yield up any element of the authority presumed to inhere fully within its purview. On the one side, the Baptist tradition may be seen to provide, as followers of the faith claim, for the greatest degree of personal liberty, subject only to the dominant will of God. In terms of organizational endeavour however, concomitant preoccupation with the potential evils of theocratic authoritarianism might well work to produce instead a kind of theocratic anarchy, sufficient to make sustainable joint action always difficult, and at times impossible. This thought is one to be constantly borne in mind as the history of Brandon College unfolds.

Throughout the extended period of denominational hawing on matters of educational policy, S. J. McKee continued his own efforts, though not uninterrupted, to establish a Baptist teaching institution on the prairies. However, despite his highest hopes, as it had been with Prairie College so it proved to be with the Rapid City Academy. At the end of five years, the hopes of his community for a greater role in the affairs of the Province having been blighted by the redirection of the railroad, McKee withdrew from the Academy, and in 1889 it closed and McKee returned to Eastern Canada.

Though Prairie College failed, a victim in part of the centralization of Baptist theological training at the recently

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**The traditions of the [Baptist] denomination placed primary importance on the individuality of the church member ... [A]s a Baptist preacher by the name of Tommy Douglas once commented, "each Baptist is his own Pope."**

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Magnacca Research Centre, Daly House Museum, 86-148-2.

**Brandon in the early days of the College.** A circus elephant lumbers down Rosser Avenue, near the northeast corner of Ninth Street, circa 1905, while interested Brandonites (including one sitting up in a utility pole) look on.

established McMaster University, interest in establishing a Baptist institution of postsecondary education in the West continued.<sup>35</sup> In 1889, the Manitoba and North-west Baptist Convention embraced a proposal to found a college in Brandon, Manitoba.<sup>36</sup> The plan was based on a report of the Education Committee of the Convention. The report recommended the establishment in Manitoba “in the near future [of] a first class educational institution.” The college would “provide the intended training (a) for our students for the ministry, and (b) for children, both boys and girls who are compelled to leave home to obtain an education.” For practical financial reasons, the college would accept “students of all denominations.” The college would also have a broad curriculum including preparatory university work, and education in support of teacher non-professional examinations. The response of the Convention to the committee’s report was a positive one, reflected in the motion “That this Convention now decide to establish a Baptist College with capacity suited to the work outlined by the committee ... provided a guarantee of annual revenue of \$8,500 for three years is secured.”<sup>37</sup> S. J. McKee had attended the convention as a representative of the Rapid City Baptist community and was charged with fund-raising in the east to support the project. He spent the late summer and fall

of 1889 in Ontario canvassing for the cause of the college. The initiative failed.<sup>38</sup>

It is to be noted that the action proposed by the Convention in 1889 had been greeted with what might be only described as modulated enthusiasm by the editor of the *North-West Baptist*: “That a grand opportunity is now provided us to influence and mold the character of youth of our country cannot be debated. But back of these considerations are the necessities of our direct mission work, work which cannot be adequately provided for without an educational institution in which the men whom God has called to the Gospel ministry can receive the training that is indispensable to prepare them for their work.”<sup>39</sup>

These sentences laid bare what was to emerge as a fundamental and persisting difference of opinion within the denomination. At issue was the direction of its educational efforts, its constituency, its structures and its programs. The problem as phrased by the editorial writer might be readily rationalized as being simply one of whether the essential requirement of the time was to pursue the more ambitious challenge of establishing a broadly based, Woodstock inspired, presence in the pioneering community of the west, or should the Baptist community focus rather on the more limited undertaking of creating a Bible School dedicated

to the training of a Baptist ministry suited to the needs and conditions of the times.

Through the 1890s the question of creating a Baptist College was discussed annually at the Convention of Manitoba and North-west Baptists. Differences of opinion as to the kind of school required and its location delayed action until 1899.<sup>40</sup> The debate featured as a central theme in the columns of the *Canadian Baptist* (in reality, the Ontario Baptist) and the *North-West Baptist*. Two separate realms of discourse reflecting fundamental differences in the views of East and West, both as to the nature of the western challenge, and the nature of the Baptist responding message emerged in the debate.

The Baptists of Ontario responded extravagantly, in words if not in money, to the call of the West as they visualized it. A correspondent of the *Canadian Baptist* wrote: "Today (1898) Ontario Baptists are given the opportunity of laying the foundations of a gigantic structure. The great North West is swelling into new life. Whether that new life will be devoted to those New Testament principles so dear to us depends on whether [we are] willing to put out our hands to help our brethren labouring and planning for its future welfare."<sup>41</sup> Another correspondent writing to the *Canadian Baptist* in March of 1898 wrote: "... if we rightly value our principles and apprehend our mission in this great land and the world, the establishment and generous equipment of Christian colleges and universities stretching from sea to sea and in organic connection with our several Conventions must be recognized as having no secondary claim upon us as a group."<sup>42</sup> This was a dream that was to persist, unfettered by reality.

To the prospect of the swarming millions moving westward, as enthusiastically embraced by these various writers, was added a sobering judgment rendered by the editor of the *Canadian Baptist* "This country has entered upon an era of expansion ... The great wave will soon react upon the East for bane or blessing. Whatever else Canadian Christians must do, they must leaven the West. And now is the time—now or never." His central concern: "the turbulent and polyglot mass of Europeans" that required to be "welded into Christian and Canadian types" or a social blight would disfigure the youthful Dominion.<sup>43</sup> It is evident that the Baptists of eastern Canada accepted the challenges presented by the west as those of evangelism and education.

Western editorialists and correspondents were much less sanguine with respect both to the size and to the content of the educational package they wished to see delivered—and they were still in large part dependent on eastern benevolence for its delivery. Although it was less than two decades from the time when the eastern investigators had reported only one or less Baptists to be found in all of Manitoba and the Territories, considerable unease was now being expressed concerning the fact that their growing western denomination possessed as yet no institution of its own dedicated to the preparation of a ministry attuned to the particular demands of their

pioneer community. A number of reasons were given for the west's continued reliance on "the East" for the pastors required to fill western pulpits. Difficulties in securing supply preachers in adequate numbers, much less than the difficulties in holding them on any permanent basis given the living conditions, made it appear necessary, in the eyes of editors and letter writers, to produce a home-grown ministry, accustomed to the unique demands of western life, and prepared to live with the vagaries as well as the opportunities of western missionary endeavours. In the words of the local editor:

... The men who are to be the teachers of the people in divine things, who are to unfold to the truths of the Book of Books, and be their leaders in the great work of founding and establishing Christian churches, in order to do the work, must be trained to think correctly and must possess a thorough and systematic knowledge of Scriptural teaching. This generally can be obtained only in institutions dedicated to this special object.<sup>44</sup>

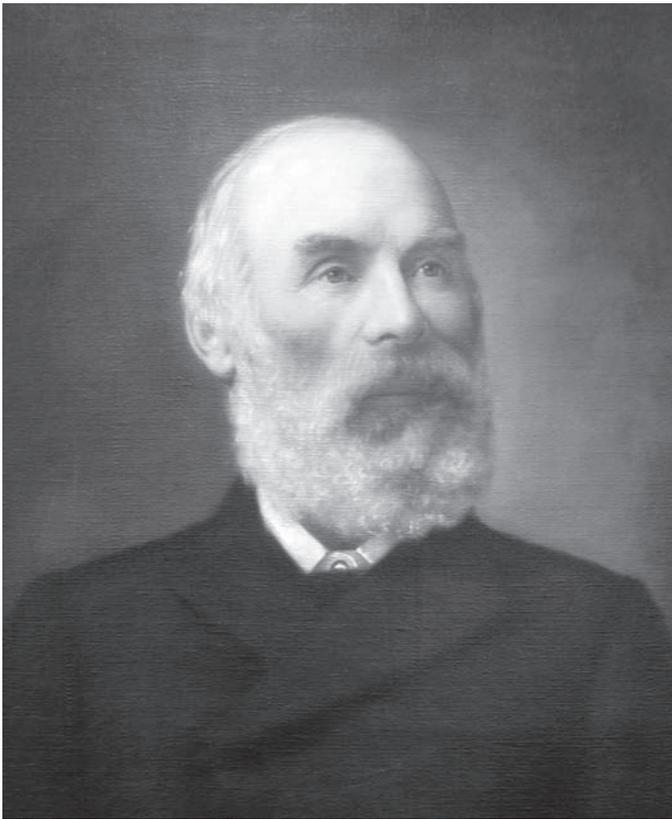
In the West, the need for a denominational college was less the question to be debated than was that of the philosophy and structure of the program to be offered when seeking a ministry "trained to think correctly." One contributor to the debate staked out a popular view:

If on the other hand, there is wanted a man mighty in the scriptures, of rugged spiritual strength, with quickened mental perception to draw profit from every available source, a man who will not



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University, BU Fonds RG6, Series 6, Senate, Box 1 (Brandon College Calendar, 1900-1901)

The new Brandon College building, planned for completion in October 1901, "will afford excellent accommodation for the work of instruction, and will also provide residence for about eighty students."



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University

**Industrialist William Davies** (1831-1921), made his fortune by sending meat to England in refrigerated ships. He and his sister paid for the Brandon College building with a single donation.

develop into a functionary, but stand erect and preserve his bearings in a sea of humanity, who can think and speak to the measure of the average human creature which is his material, then the course through which the prospective preacher and pastor has to be put must be such as to develop these traits.

In existing theological courses too often "emasculatation and namby-pambyism" was the result. The object was "to send out men whose hearts are full of the word of God and who are red-hot to declare it in plain, simple, bold language, men who shall be heard with profit, if not pleasure by all ..." Thus the principal work of Baptist education was to "make men mighty in the scriptures."<sup>45</sup>

The initiative of 1889 in which S. J. McKee had played a central role had failed, but in the fall of 1890 Brandon did get a new college. In 1890, with an eye to the future, McKee moved his academy to Brandon.<sup>46</sup> Without apparent reference to the disputes of the times, McKee's new college was designed, Woodstock fashion, coupling the literary with the theological in the educational fare to be offered. McKee's Brandon Academy offered classes "specially

adapted to young men and women" in preparatory and advanced English, shorthand, typewriting, music (piano and organ) drawing and painting (oil and water color.)<sup>47</sup> One could also prepare for Teachers' examination and the Preliminary Examination for the University of Manitoba and take commercial classes.<sup>48</sup> It was this Academy, designed and guided by McKee, which in time provided the foundation on which the "bestirred" Baptists, following a decade and a half of investigation and debate, established their Brandon College.

Over the ensuing decade, while the brethren were arguing the issues of educational policy, McKee dedicated his efforts to building and maintaining an institution that progressively gained favor in the eyes of the local community, if not uniformly in the eyes of his denominational colleagues. Quite apart from the fact that he had built and maintained an institution on which his denomination would come in time to build further, the extent to which McKee in his work succeeded in building that institution into the life of the community itself must be noted. Well before a legally constituted entity bearing the name came into existence, McKee's establishment was known to the readers of the local press as "Brandon College."<sup>49</sup>

In 1898 the convention of Baptists from Manitoba and the Northwest territories established a committee to consider the transformation of McKee's Brandon College into a fully-fledged Baptist institution in the Wheat City which would provide instruction both in Arts and in Theology. And Eastern Baptists played an immediate role in the creation of the new college. In 1898 a Toronto industrialist, Mr. William Davies, and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Emily Davies, pledged \$25,000 to be used to establish a Baptist College in Brandon. In the summer of 1899 Brandon College was established on the foundation of work done by S. J. McKee.<sup>50</sup> Prof. McKee's Academy was merged into the new institution and the quarters of the Academy in the Stewart Block on Rosser Avenue at Ninth Street continued to be used. On 13 July 1900, Mrs. Davies laid the cornerstone of the Brandon College building that would rise on the 200 block of Eighteenth Street on land purchased from the city. On 1 June 1900, Royal Assent was given to an Act incorporating "Brandon College." That College and City grew together, establishing an enduring relationship that was to be of considerable importance in later years when the College was pushed to the brink of dissolution.<sup>51</sup> ✎



Notes for this article  
are available on the MHS web site:  
[www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb\\_history/56](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/56)

## Brandon History in Postcards

by Jack Stothard  
Brandon, Manitoba

I have always had a great interest in the history of Brandon. So it was only natural that I would collect historical postcards, many showing buildings, events and people which no longer exist. Initially, I found the cards at local antique sales and flea markets. More recently, my membership in the Toronto Postcard Club has allowed me to obtain Brandon postcards from across Canada. My collection now numbers over 600 cards, and I suspect that many more hundreds exist for me to find. To remember whether I have a postcard when digging through boxes at sales, I developed a catalog of my cards. In the process, I noticed some common themes. These include scenes on Tenth Street and Rosser Avenue (historically, Brandon's main roads), the railway and its station along Pacific Avenue, and views of Brandon hotels, schools, and public buildings. A few of the cards from my collection are shown on the following pages.

### First Spike

Discussions by the Brandon city council took place for a number of years before the city began building the roadbed for a street car system. The biggest controversy was whether the system should be publicly owned or built and operated by private enterprise. This issue was hotly debated and voted on by the citizens of Brandon. It was eventually decided to be privately owned when, at the last minute, councillors changed their minds and made it municipally owned. Construction workers began building the roadbed and laying the street car tracks throughout the city about 1910. Although work on the street car tracks had been underway for some time, this postcard shows Mayor John

*Jack Stothard has lived all of his life in Brandon. For many years, he collected Manitoba business and trade tokens. While looking for these items, he began to notice old postcards of Brandon. He was hooked.*

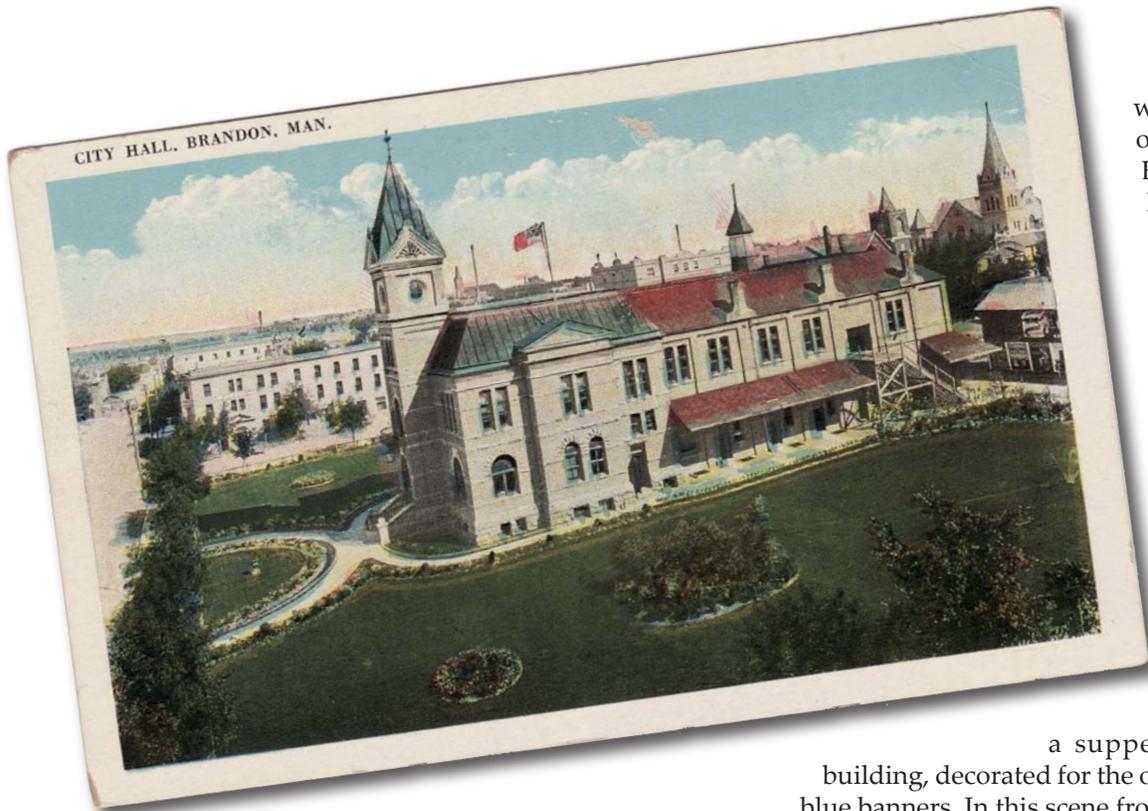
The  
Whitehead Foundation  
For Western Manitoba Inc.

**Thank  
You!**

Color reproduction in this article is made possible by a grant from Brandon's Whitehead Foundation for Western Manitoba Inc.



W. Fleming driving in the ceremonial "first spike" in the tracks for the Brandon Municipal Street Railway system on 12 October 1911. As we see here, a large crowd of businessmen and workers commemorated the event. The location of the ceremony was on Tenth Street, just south of Rosser Avenue. The street car system was finally completed and its inaugural run was made on 16 May 1913. This was just in time for the 1913 Dominion Exhibition held in Brandon from 15 to 25 July, when approximately 200,000 people descended on the city.



### City Hall

In 1890, Brandon City Hall was built on the south side of Princess Avenue, between Eighth and Ninth Streets. The location had been the subject of considerable debate. In the 1880s, the city developed mostly along Sixth Street and Rosser Avenue, and some aldermen felt the Princess Avenue location was too far away from the business district. The construction contract was given to local contractor F. T. Cope and, after several delays, the official opening was held in February 1892.

Members of the city fire brigade held

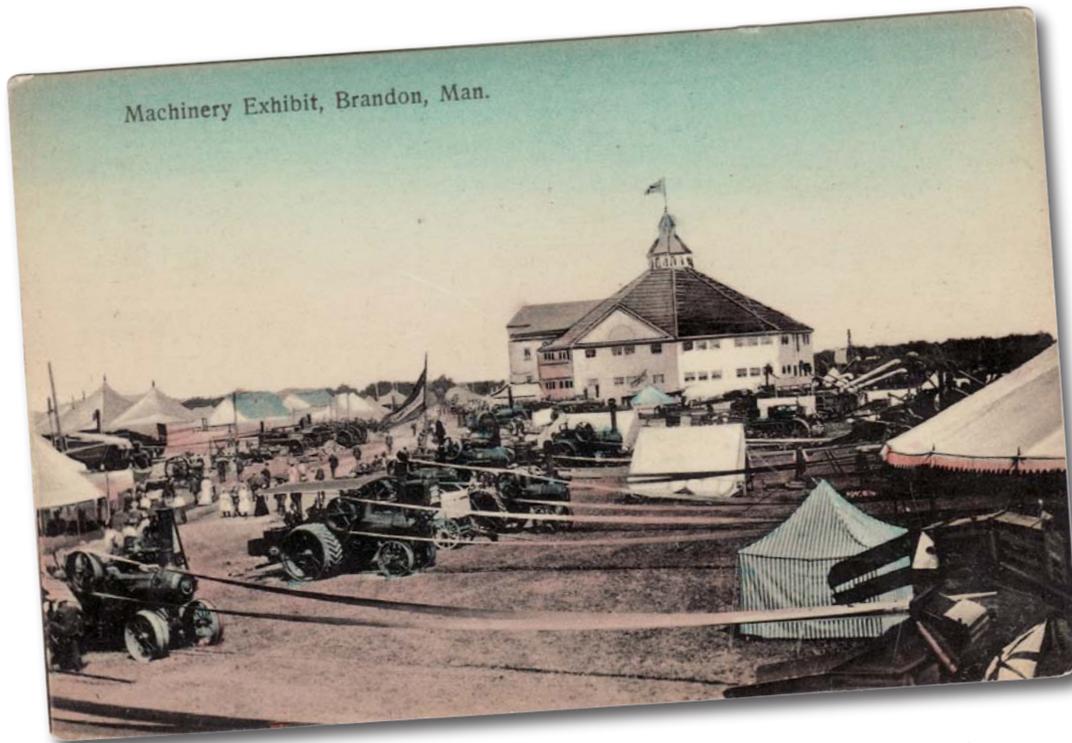
a supper and dance in the new building, decorated for the occasion with red, white and blue banners. In this scene from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we see a view of City Hall looking south east. Behind it is the Beaubier Hotel. Over the roof is the top of the old YMCA building and at the south end is First Church United and St. Paul's United Church. It was eventually replaced by the present city hall in 1971. The old city hall was demolished in March 1971.

### West End Park

When Brandon was laid out by the Canadian Pacific Railway, a block of land was set aside for a park. The block was located between Fourteenth and Fifteenth Streets, and Princess Avenue to Lorne Avenue. In 1894, the railway sold it to the city for \$1, and it was named West End Park. This card from about 1906, taken from the top of Park School (built 1904) shows the white buildings of the Brandon Brewing Company in the background on the left. The taller building is the brew house while the lower building stored the finished product. To the right is the Maple Leaf Flour Mill and elevator on Pacific Avenue between Fourteenth and Fifteenth Streets. In 1907, the park was renamed Stanley Park in honour of Dr. Stanley William McInnis (1865-1907), a local dentist and Conservative MLA for Brandon from 1899 until his sudden death from



appendicitis in November 1907.



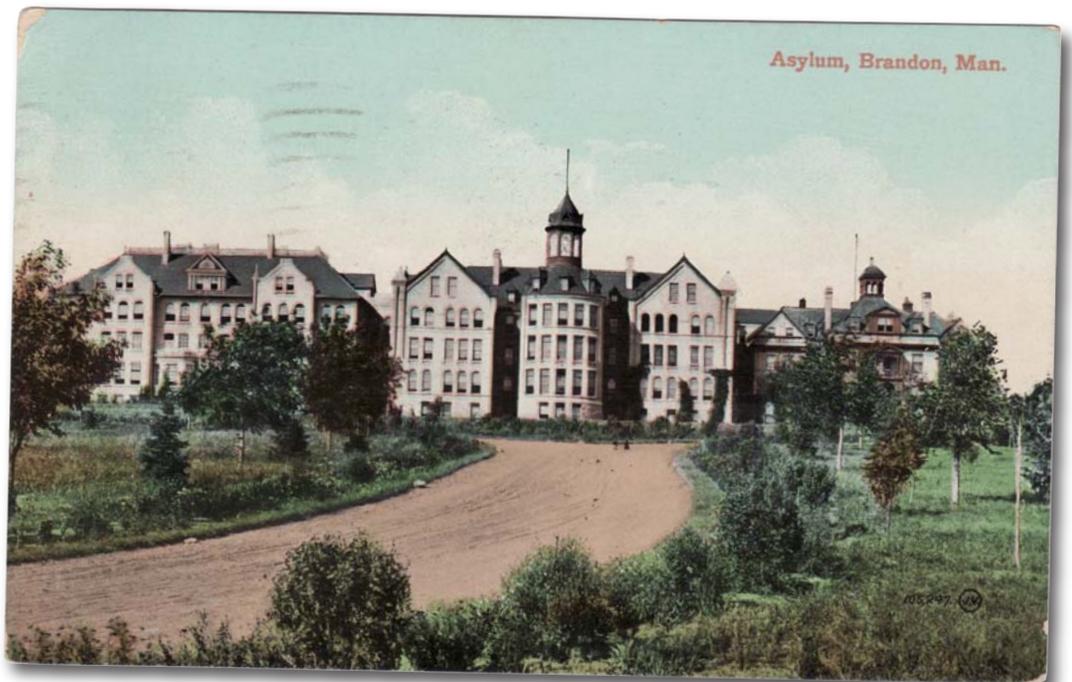
### Machinery Exhibit

This card shows the latest machinery available to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century farmer. Many manufacturers and their agents were represented at the Brandon Summer Fair to demonstrate their newest equipment, showing what their machines could do to make their owners more productive. The motive power for the threshing machines was the big steam engine with long drive belts connected to the machinery. People in the background are inspecting other displays of equipment. Several tents in the background are probably displaying

other gadgets for use in the farm household. It was a busy time at the Fair and a highlight of the year for farm families throughout western Manitoba. The large building in the background was the Crystal Palace which was built in 1884, demolished by a cyclone in 1904, and rebuilt the same year.

### Asylum

This facility started out as a provincial reformatory for juvenile delinquents, constructed in June 1890 at a cost of \$30,000. A staff of three was nicknamed the "Mulligan Guard" for the single charge they oversaw, William Mulligan. In early 1891, the Reformatory was converted into the Brandon Asylum For The Insane. As the demand for space increased, a second building (in centre) was built in 1892 at a cost of \$45,000 and opened in March 1893. The third building on the left was added in 1903-04 and opened in the summer of 1905. Unfortunately, in the early evening of 4 November 1910, fire swept through all three buildings. Every fireman and piece of equipment in Brandon was summoned to fight the blaze. A total of 643 patients and 75 staff members vacated the buildings safely. The patients were eventually housed in the Winter Fair buildings on Tenth Street until



a new building was built and opened in December 1912. This building still stands today, although it now houses a campus of the Assiniboine Community College.

### Electric Light Power Dam

The Brandon Electric Light Company was formed in late 1888 by 75 locally interested citizens, and incorporated on 14 January 1889. The first power plant was erected on the site of the old city hall. This was a direct current (DC) system and started up on 19 February 1889. In 1900, the

company decided to build a hydroelectric power plant—the first in Manitoba—on the Little Saskatchewan River 16 kilometers (10 miles) west of Brandon. The dam and powerhouse were designed by local architect Walter H. Shillinglaw and constructed by Koester Brothers, at a cost of \$48,000. Construction began in September 1900 with the plan to install the machinery before 1 March 1901. The dam was 18 feet high and 80 feet long, composed of piles driven into the ground, braced with timbers, filled in with rock and sheeted with planking. The water fall was 10 feet high, and was expected to produce 250 horsepower. The waterwheel and dynamos arrived mid-summer and were assembled. The poles and power line were erected in September 1901 from the plant to the company's switch yard on Tenth Street. The facility produced its first electrical power on 4 October 1901 and was soon supplying half of Brandon's electrical needs. The local newspaper reported that "the electric lights are run by that mysterious fluid which is carried to us ... on wires."



### C.P.R. Yards and Depot

Railways were the transportation centre of Brandon. This view of the railway station (built in 1887) was taken from the Eighth Street bridge. The west-bound train is seen on the left side; east-bound on the right. During these times, there was a mail car on each train where mail was received, cancelled and sorted for delivery into mail bags for each town or city the train passed through. After the train departed, the pace slowed down and the crews got ready for the next train to arrive. The tall building in the background on the right was the Brandon Brewing Company. On the left side behind the smoke from the steam engine was the Maple Leaf Milling Company's grain elevator and flour mill.





### Lake Clementi

Lake Clementi is located about 16 kilometers (10 miles) south of Brandon on highway 10. Starting in the early 1900s, it was a popular place to spend time and enjoy the summer. Since the lake was not far from the city, it was easily within reach by horse and buggy or wagon, automobile and even bicycles. At one time, it was even proposed to run a line of the city street car system out to the lake, but this never happened.

Families and church groups held picnics at Lake Clementi to enjoy the cool water and the wooded hills around the lake. There were canoes for rent, a boat dock, a launch offering cruises on the lake, and a dance hall with confectionery. By the 1930s, however, Lake Clementi began to lose its popularity, as people started going instead to the recently opened Clear Lake resort in Riding Mountain National Park.



### Cutting Ice on the Assiniboine River

Harvesting of ice to stock Brandon's iceboxes is shown in this scene on the Assiniboine River. During the coldest part of the winter, river ice was marked out and crews sawed the ice in 30-inch wide blocks. The blocks were floated to a ramp and pulled out onto a raised platform by teams of horses fitted with special shoes for better traction. The

ice was cut to size and loaded onto sleighs and taken to the ice houses. There were two big ice houses in Brandon. One was on the west side of Fifteenth Street, north of Rosser Avenue. The other was on the south side of Princess Avenue between Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets. The ice houses were large, four-storey buildings with walls a foot thick. A layer of ice was put in the building and covered with straw, then another layer of ice was added. There was about one-third shrinkage in the ice during the hot summer months. The quantity of ice harvested was reported in March 1946 as 7,000 tons and February 1953 as 10,000 tons. The Assiniboine River was said to be one of the best places for ice since the water was clean and pure. From the ice houses, the ice was delivered door-to-door by horse-drawn covered wagons. ❧

## Martin Kavanagh Arrives in Brandon

Introduced by Jim Blanchard  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Growing up in Brandon I knew of Mr. Kavanagh and being a history buff I had copies of his books. I remember speaking to him once on the telephone, when I called to ask him for help with a paper I was writing. He was courteous and patient with me and did what he could to help me. My older brother had him as Geography teacher at Brandon Collegiate and he remembers a tall, thin, rather austere figure in a schoolmaster's gown. He never had any trouble with discipline because he commanded respect with his rather aloof and distant manner.

In the first chapter of his unpublished and unedited memoir, Kavanagh describes favorite teachers from his own school years and there is no doubt that he chose to emulate some of these men and their techniques. He was also from another age and another country where relations between teachers and students were less democratic than they were becoming in the 1960s.

The memoir shows Mr. Kavanagh in a warmer light, as he tells his personal stories (referring to himself in third person) with dry humor. He is remembered as a good teacher because he could make subjects interesting. He also had a certain cache for students as the man who not only taught history but had actually found the site of a fur trade post and the wreckage of an old river steamer.

Born in Ireland in 1895, Martin Kavanagh was educated in Wexford, Dublin and London. He was driven to immigrate, like so many at the time, by the terrible unemployment after World War I. He chose to come to Canada in 1923, and taught in rural schools. In 1929 he joined the staff of Brandon Collegiate Institute where he taught Latin and Geography until 1963.

*Jim Blanchard received a BA at Brandon University. A trained librarian, he is Head of Reference Services at the Elizabeth Dafoe Library (University of Manitoba). Jim has published three books and several articles on Manitoba history, and he served as MHS President from 2000 to 2002.*



Kevin Kavanagh

**Martin Kavanagh** (1895-1987), Brandon teacher and historian.

The Brandon that Martin Kavanagh came to in 1929 was a prosperous market town, enjoying the benefits of the improved wheat crops of the late 1920s. The expanding use of the automobile during the 1920s meant that people from farther and farther away had become customers for the city's stores and services. Farmers, with money in their pockets for the first time in years, were buying.

Brandon lay in the heart of country settled largely by Protestants from Ontario and in 1929 the population was still quite homogenous. As a Roman Catholic, Kavanagh must have felt as though he had landed in a place more like Ulster than his home in Southern Ireland.

The prosperity of the late 1920s was short lived and soon enough the Stock Market crash, poor crops and low prices, and the terrible drought of the early 1930s left Brandon in a desperate situation. The city, obliged to support large numbers of citizens on relief, was almost bankrupt in the mid 1930s and her affairs were put under the control of an administrator. As the Depression ground on and on, the young teacher must have wondered at times why he had left Ireland. But he and Brandon persevered and eventually enjoyed the prosperity of the post war years.

He left us two books, *The Assiniboine Basin: A Study of Discovery, Exploration and Settlement* (1946) and *La Verendrye - His Life and Times*, in 1967. Both books are well researched and carefully written, as one would expect of a man like Martin Kavanagh, and they continue to be useful sources. His point of view was very much that of a man of his generation and he was criticized for, among other things, portraying La Verendrye as a "great man" bringing civilization to the wilderness.

Toward the end of his life, Mr. Kavanagh established a scholarship at St. Paul's College at the University of Manitoba, to encourage the study of La Verendrye, and he was given a special Margaret McWilliams Medal by the Manitoba Historical Society for his contribution to the understanding of Western Canadian history and geography. He died in 1987.

## Taking Up the Load - Odds and Ends

Excerpted from the unpublished and unedited memoir of Martin Kavanagh

When Kavanagh arrived in Brandon for all practical purposes he knew no one so he parked his car near the City Hall and commenced a search for a hotel. He examined the Prince Edward Hotel, the Brandon Hotel, and the Beaubier Hotel. All had price pretensions so he rejected them in favour of a room at the YMCA. It was clean. It had a bath and a Cafeteria and it cost under \$2.00 a night. (At the time Kavanagh was dictating these notes a Brandon Resident had flown home from a trip to Vancouver. She mentioned that her hotel there charged \$92.00 for room and bath, but, because she was one of a number of delegates to a convention, the hotel charge was reduced to \$45.00 a night and she considered the charges reasonable even without meals.)<sup>1</sup> Kavanagh considered he was paying 'plenty' in 1929, when the desk clerk told him their charges were \$1.50 for bed and breakfast. Other meals were to be purchased at the cafeteria.

After a few days, paying these 'exorbitant' prices, generally accompanied by a YMCA denizen, repeating verbatim the previous Sunday's sermon, he decided to seek a Boarding House. The Secretary of the School Board, F. A. Wood told him that there was a family at Fifth and Lorne Ave. anxious to 'board' a teacher. The new arrival visited the home. Mr. B. occupied a huge house with very large rooms. He informed the visitor that the house was built as a family residence in 1885. In actual fact the house was intended to be a boarding house for early construction workers. As the years passed the owner became somewhat house proud as he became more affluent and the family now wished to forget about the boarding house era. The new boarder became a "P.G." (Paying Guest). He sojourned there for several months. The *mise en scene* was not always pleasant. The family had two members in the Mental Hospital and their Mother at times became overwrought.



Christies Bookstore, Brandon, Manitoba: *The Wheat City*, no date.

The Brandon YMCA where Martin Kavanagh, newly arrived in the city, stayed in 1929.

Every Sunday Mrs. B. invited a lady—about the P.G.'s age—for dinner. After a while Martin understood that his landlady wished to ensure that the boarder should marry. Not wishing to prolong a tiresome subject the guest asked where someone could get a view of the layout of Brandon. There seemed to be a unanimous opinion that the north hill was the ideal spot. He decided that it must be investigated. On a future occasion he betook himself there.

## Brandon City

In 1929 there was no Number 1 Trans-Canada Highway in the Prairie Region.<sup>2</sup> In the Brandon Area it was as yet only a wagon trail used infrequently by local farmers. The North Hill Road (which lay a mile south) was the northern boundary of the city.<sup>3</sup> It too was hardly passable. It was 'pock-marked' with sandpits, which encroached on the 'Road' as the gravel was gradually excavated for use on the streets or to form basements for buildings.

The new arrival navigated the sandpits till he was approximately half-way between First and Eighteen Streets. From his location he had a panoramic view of 'the city'. The physical geography was simple. The Assiniboine River meandered from west to east. On the south was a gradually increasing incline of about half a mile and then an undulating plane for seven miles gradually rising to the Blue Hills of Brandon. On the west the plane declined gently from Kemney. On the east the land was almost a flood plane through Carberry and Portage la Prairie to Winnipeg.

The visitor soon realized that the older Anglo-Saxon Pioneers had settled on the hillside south of Rosser Avenue while the New Canadians who came later, settled on 'the Flats' north of Rosser.

Kavanagh was intrigued by the manner in which the names of Princess Louise Victoria—elder daughter of Queen Victoria—were romantically entwined with that of her husband McTavish, Marquis of Lorne, to identify the avenues. They were Princess, Lorne, Louise, Victoria, McTavish. The names of the avenues to the north were more democratic: Pacific, Assiniboine, Stickney, and Manitoba. The streets ran north and south. First Street was easily identifiable running down North Hill to First St. Bridge and southward. The streets east of First had names, but west of First, the more prominent streets seemed to be Sixth, Eighth, Tenth and Eighteenth.

The busiest centre was the Canadian Pacific Station adjoining the intersection of Tenth St. and Pacific Avenue. There were Street Railways but there was no transportation by buses.<sup>4</sup>

As the new teacher scanned the city from West to East he could see easily identifiable buildings - Brandon College, International Harvester Building, the Arena and Winter Fair Buildings, the Fire Hall, and McKenzie Seeds. Prominent Churches were noticeable: St. Mathews (C of E) Pro Cathedral, St. Hedwig's R.C. Church, the Baptist Church on Eleventh St., St. Paul's Presbyterian Church—the new continuing Presbyterian Church on Twelfth St. had not

been built—the First Methodist Church, St. Augustine’s of Canterbury Catholic Church (an outstanding Church for graceful architecture and interior furnishings), St. Mary’s Anglican Church and St. Michael’s Academy at First and Victoria. In the east was Brandon’s first Courthouse and Jail. Martin sought out school buildings. There were two easily identifiable Junior High Schools: ‘Earl Haig’ at First & Victoria and ‘Earl Oxford’ at Eighteenth and Victoria. He noted especially Brandon Collegiate Institute between Fifth St. and Sixth St. on Louise Ave. He did not think at the time that it would be his ‘place of work’ for thirty four years. Brandon Normal School was outstanding on Twelfth St. South.

The new teacher learned afterwards that Brandon’s population growth was: 500 (1881), 5,620 (1901), 13,859 (1911), 16,500 (1929), and 1981 (38,000).

### Brandon Collegiate

Kavanagh’s first days at Brandon Collegiate were a blur. He remembered visiting the school on the Friday preceding Labour Day, which was invariably the first Monday in September. School opened the next day. The principal showed him the room assigned to him. It was “IE” a Grade X class. It was on the ground floor at the southwest Corner of the Collegiate. The smell of oil, varnish and chalk dust permeated the building. Martin noticed there were six rows of single seats with seven desks in each row. There were passages between the rows of seats making it easy to check on any student’s work. He was quite pleased.

The next time he visited his ‘room’ the seats had been ‘doubled-up’ leaving a passage between every double row of seats, and accommodation was made for fifty-nine students. He learned too that sixteen of these students were ‘repeaters’ i.e. students repeating the year because of failure in examinations. The students (in IE) were all boys and most teachers know that in an otherwise mixed school discipline could be difficult as segregated teenage boys are inclined to think that they are being deprived of ‘something’.

While Martin had been engaged as a Latin Teacher in Grade X, XI and XII and felt very happy about the arrangement because he planned to concentrate on Grade X Latin as a basis for his major subject in the senior grades. The principal assigned a lady teacher—his personal protégée—to teach Grade X Latin and Martin was, much to his disgust, assigned to teach Grade X Science in all rooms. The student body was over four hundred and from the commencement the new teacher felt he would have a difficult year.

Nineteen-twenty-nine was the beginning of the Great Depression. Jobs were not available to teenagers, who wished to leave school hence their parents obliged their boys to attend school as an alternative to ‘frequenting pool halls’.

The new teacher was well aware of disciplinary problems, which could arise, when students are more or less compelled to attend school. When he attended St. Mary’s Teacher Training College, Brook Green



Magnacca Research Centre, Daly House Museum, 86-113-4

**Brandon Collegiate**, no date, where Martin Kavanagh taught generations of Brandonites starting in 1929.

Hammersmith, London in 1922, the London County Council introduced Continuation Schools for students aged 15 to 16. Disciplinary problems were feared and anticipated. Only the best experienced disciplinarians on the staffs were considered for the new schools, even so chaos ensued and the newly engaged teachers were soon pleading to be released from their contracts. The situation in Brandon was not dissimilar.

When the Brandon teenagers attended Brandon Collegiate for the first time, academic subjects were only being taught. Technical Schools, Practical Arts Schools and Community Colleges were a thing of the future. Martin had practical experience of the unsuitable academic course. Mrs. Kavanagh employed a recent grade XI graduate. She knew ‘The Myths of Greece and Rome’ and some Latin and French but, she was completely ignorant of how to make ‘a button hole’ or the simplest dish and to crown all she mixed white and coloured garments in the washing machine so that the garments emerged like Joseph’s Coat of Many Colours.

Martin was assigned to take charge of Physical Training and to ‘run’ the Debating Society and Social Activities like Proms (Dances). He felt his plate was full. He braced himself to the task and soon began to think of other things.

### Teachers’ Pensions

When Kavanagh came to Manitoba in 1923 there were no Teachers’ Pensions. In 1924 the Progressive Government—a Farmers’ Party—decided to initiate a Pension scheme. The penurious attitude of prairie school trustees towards teachers was enshrined in the Act for the first pensions.<sup>5</sup> The average teacher’s salary was \$1000 annually. The new scheme set the teachers’ contribution at 50¢ on the \$100 dollar—the government to pay a like amount. The average teacher’s contribution was \$6.00 annually. The first teachers pension was in one case at least \$3.50 per month. In 1930 the contribution was 2% per annum on the salary. Needless to say Insurance Agents dogged the footsteps of individual teachers seeking to insure them for large amounts. A feature—and at that a



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University, Watson Collection, 36-1997

**Brandon Collegiate teaching staff, 1935**, from *The New Era* yearbook. Martin Kavanagh is in the back row, at right.

not nice feature—was that some agents sought membership on the School Boards in order to bring pressure on their employees to buy a Policy.

### Debating

One of the extra-curricular activities that was assigned to the new teacher was Debating which as things developed he organized as an Inter-class contest in the form of a League. In the outcome it created wholesome interest.

A debate is a discussion on an agreed topic in which the affirmative speakers try to prove the truth of a statement, while the falsity of the proposition is supported by speakers for the negative. A debate is a battle in which words are the swords. Their arrangement is based on logic. The original debates in North America were discussions by two speakers—but they gradually increased to two speakers on either side. Debates are systematically arranged arguments. The affirmative side seeks to prove its point of view, while their opponents seek to disprove the topic. Every form of argument is permissible but while there may be appeals to emotion, prejudice, and sentiment the discussion is based on logic with minor points being allotted for manner of presentation of the subject: department, enunciation, clarity, research, etc.

Martin had seen and heard debates in Maynooth but the Debating Society was in the hands of a clique and few students took part. He remembered clearly that he had never seen a member of the staff present at the discussions. He personally had never taken part in a debate because he was too shy and the clique did not encourage new speakers. This was a pity. George Bernard Shaw attributed his success as a speaker to his participation in open air debates with a mob audience. He learned to think 'on his feet'.

In a proposed debate the procedure is as follows: First a topic is chosen. Next ground rules as to procedure are laid down. This includes the time allowed for each speaker. The debaters then choose sides ... who will speak for the affirmative (positive) side? Who will speak for the negative?

The debate is opened by the first speaker for the affirmative side. He outlines the topic, the procedure and

generally refers to the name of his supporter and the names of the opponents supporting the negative side. The second speaker speaks next. He is followed by the supporter of the positive side. Next comes the supporter of the negative.

The leader for the affirmative side sums up for his side and closes the formal part of the debate. The judges then withdraw to decide which side was victorious. They also decided which of their members will hand down the Criticism and the Judgement. In the interval a musical item may be presented. This is followed by the Critique and announcement of the winning side.

While presiding at Collegiate debates Martin, who was very interested in Public Speaking made it a point to call attention to the finer points of public speaking as taught in S.P.C. and in Maynooth by McHardy-Flint, Professor of Elocution.<sup>6</sup> Martin stressed diction, choice of words, cogency of arguments, enunciation, declamation and modulation of the voice. In particular he referred to Shakespeare's advice to actors: "Speak the speech as I tell it to you, Trippingly on the tongue ..."

### Potpourri

During the academic year September 1929 to June 1930 the new Brandon teacher was quite busy getting to know his surroundings, his more or less new 'teaching load' and 'his own affairs'. After he left Mr. & Mrs. "B's" at the corner of Fifth and Lorne Avenue he moved to Waldron's a family living close-by on Fifth St. After he "settled in" he felt distinctly uneasy because the landlord spent all his time in bed. It soon turned out that he had tuberculosis and while all health regulations were carried out with great care, the 'guest' felt that it would be best if he sought a residence elsewhere because he could possibly transfer the germs to his pupils. These were the days when T.B. was looked upon as incurable and the only palliatives were rest, fresh air, a collapsed lung and good food. The sulfa drugs did not come on the market for twenty years. When the opportunity offered Martin rented an apartment at 27 Alexander Block belonging to Hughes Co. on Tenth St. Brandon. He prepared his own breakfast and evening meal. He found a Boarding House run by a Miss Scott in the Three Hundred Block on Sixth St. She provided a good mid-day meal. Miss Scott's sister was married to the Reverend Patterson a former Continuing Presbyterian Moderator and then after his conversion a pastor of the Four Square gospel. Mr. Patterson occupied a suite in Miss Scott's house. As the Reverend was an educated man of some ability the conversations at dinner were interesting and stimulating.

The furnishing of the newly acquired suite (flat) in the Alexander Block was a step on the road to freedom from landowners. He learned that in choosing a residence one should locate near one's place of work, stores convenient for shopping and a church close at hand. Choosing furniture had to be kept to a minimum because he hoped to set up a permanent abode in the new year and leave the purchase of furniture to his new bride.

No sooner had Kavanagh “settled in” than he met Stuart Robertson a former Treherne resident, who had secured a job as a shoe salesman at Creelman’s—a store—located at the south-east corner of the intersection of Eight St. and Rosser Avenue where today the headquarters of the Royal Bank grace Rosser Avenue. Stuart was seeking employment. As he was a pleasant person Martin offered him a temporary home till he got established. The understanding was that Stuart was to cook breakfast and the evening meal and pay \$30.00 a month room and board. This worked quite well till the “Market” on New York Stock Exchange collapsed and people were so frightened of a further “crash” that they did not make purchases at the stores. Stuart told his landlord that ‘Creelman’s Shoe Store’ with its four employees never sold a single pair of shoes for several weeks. Mr. Creelman “ducked out” when it came to ‘pay time’ for the employees on Saturday nights. Stuart was lucky because his family on the farm near Treherne, was able to come to his assistance.<sup>7</sup>

A feature of a man taking up residence in a bachelor apartment was that unattached males found out about it and were inclined to come to roost in the suite at inopportune times. Martin had to take the phone off the hook.

At this time the beginning of January 1930 Martin used to read about the hard times being encountered by unemployed workers across Canada and the USA. The situation became increasingly dangerous because most people—especially people just coming on the labour market— spent their meagre weekly pay-cheque and had nothing ‘to take up the slack’ if they were put on half-time or became unemployed. The situation became increasingly dangerous in big cities with large groups of unemployed workers.

The social legislation introduced in Great Britain and Ireland in 1905 anticipated at least in part the unemployment situation of the “Thirties”. The Employer, the Employee and the Government contributed each week towards an “Unemployment Fund,” a Medicare fund and an Old Age Pension Plan. There was no such legislation in Canada or USA. The situation became chronic.

Martin’s first direct contact with the seriousness of the situation came to his attention in January 1930. As he left the Collegiate after 4 P.M. he walked north on Sixth St. and westward on Princess Avenue to where Brandon’s first City Hall was then located. He noticed a group of men entering a bakery on the north side of the avenue opposite the City Hall. They emerged rather shamefacedly with unwrapped loaves which they put under their jackets. That was the first time that relief had been doled out. The men were not “bums” but decent unemployed day labourers (hired men). He saw no unemployed females. Martin had read about

the situation in the newspapers, but the scene, which he viewed, shocked him.

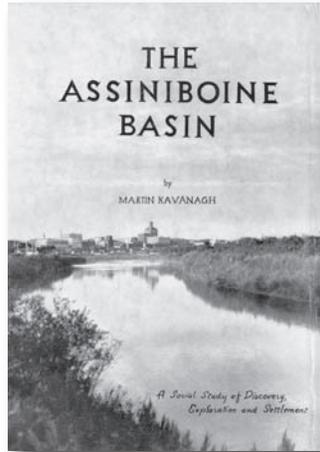
In his room at the Collegiate he had an experience which showed how tight the economic situation was. The School Board would not buy footballs for the gym classes, so Martin asked his classroom to collect a nickel (5¢) from each of the fifty nine boys. The class president told him privately that at least half of the class could not contribute so the matter was dropped.

About this time 1930 there was a federal Election.<sup>8</sup> The candidates were R. B. Bennett Conservative leader and McKenzie King Liberal Prime Minister. Both appeared at the Arena at Tenth St. and Victoria Avenue. Bennett, a corporation lawyer of fine presence told the audience how he was going to raise the tariff walls by 50% to keep out foreign imports and then lower the new tariffs by 20% to attract buyers from Great Britain. The audience listened in open-mouthed astonishment, but economically speaking things were so bad that it would clutch at any straw and listen to any spell binder who would promise work and food even for ‘labour camps’ with a pittance for pocket money.

McKenzie King appeared in the same Arena on a different date. The audience was not large and King sat in the top back seat, where the audience usually sat at hockey games. He appeared to the teacher to be

a fussy middle aged bachelor with no audience appeal whatsoever. Bennett too was a bachelor but he at least had a presence. He was naive as a politician— all sound and fury. King was a political manipulator—just a shade to the right of centre. He seemed to be riding for a fall. He fell. He was the type that “sat out” a storm.

Bennett, who became Conservative leader in 1927 was all blandness and suavity to the eyes and ears of his audience but suddenly he required a paper from his secretary. The latter, who had probably heard his master’s claptrap a few dozen times, was having forty winks. Richard Bedford Bennett turned from his audience to get the information. He found the secretary awaking from his slumbers. The future prime minister of Canada turned on him and in a quiet voice, laced with venom, he said: “What do you think I am paying your salary for?” Then once more he turned, oh so suavely, to his larger audience. Martin, sitting close by, mused: “Well I never!” ☹



*The Assiniboine Basin*, published by Martin Kavanagh in 1946, is available on the MHS web site:

[www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/books](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/books)



Notes for this article  
are available on the MHS web site:  
[www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb\\_history/56](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/56)

## Memories of Martin Kavanagh

by Kevin Kavanagh  
Chancellor Emeritus, Brandon University

Martin Kavanagh, my father, arrived in Canada in 1923. Although many of his Irish countrymen went to the USA, his preference for British institutions brought him to Canada. Travelling across the country, he ran out of money at Winnipeg, so he took employment laying railroad tracks for the summer of 1923. Eventually, he used his BA degree in Latin and Greek from the National University of Ireland and his certificate from the St. Mary's Teacher Training College in London, England to obtain a teaching job in Manitoba. For the remainder of the 1920s he taught at a succession of rural schools; at Tummel, Greenridge, and Treherne. In 1929 he found a permanent job teaching at the Brandon Collegiate.

Throughout his teaching career, without fail, my father was at his desk at an early hour, preparing lessons, marking exam papers, or reading in search of new material. He expected his students to work equally hard. I was a student in his Latin class, and it is still vivid in my memory that in Grade 12, he required the class to attend three lengthy morning sessions of special preparation for final exams.

Beyond teaching, he was a man of abundant energy and community enthusiasm. At a time when health insurance was in its infancy, he sought out an insurance provider and persuaded the school board to facilitate participation through a payroll deduction, for the benefit of all Brandon teachers.

When he discovered that Brandon had no public library, he made a presentation of its merit to city council and, over time, with the help of others, caused the library to be established.

My father was firmly imbued with the idea that more Anglo Canadians should be able to speak French, so he studied the language and attended summer schools for several years to improve his skills. He could converse comfortably in French, and read and write the language too. He felt a special affinity for Quebecers and believed that francophones had played a critical role in the development of the Canadian West. As a result, he developed a deep interest in explorer Pierre Gaultier de Varennes la Vérendrye (1685-1749). My father was also

keenly interested in new arrivals from eastern Europe. He was very defensive of Ukrainians and Poles and would not tolerate pejorative names in common usage at the time, preferring to call them "New Canadians." He helped many of them to learn English and invited them to share our dinner table.

Regardless of these and other community endeavors, Western Canadian history was my father's passion. Compared to the strife and chaos of the civil war that raged at the time of his departure from Ireland, he

found excitement in the stories of the Canadian West, and a sense of optimism for the future. In retrospect, I believe that in contrast to the restrictions and impaired freedoms of his origins, he was liberated by his new Canadian environment and its "nothing is impossible" outlook. So from the time of my childhood, I recall my father studying maps of early settlement spread over our dining room table; his many conversations with senior citizens living in and around Brandon who had memories of the early years; his correspondence with far-flung libraries when he could find no local sources; and his extensive reading about earlier and simpler times from stacks of books spread around the family living room. As well, he went looking for historical sites around Brandon. I remember accompanying my father to the site of Brandon House, the old fur trade

post, then situated in the middle of a farm field, and his disappointment at finding few remnants.

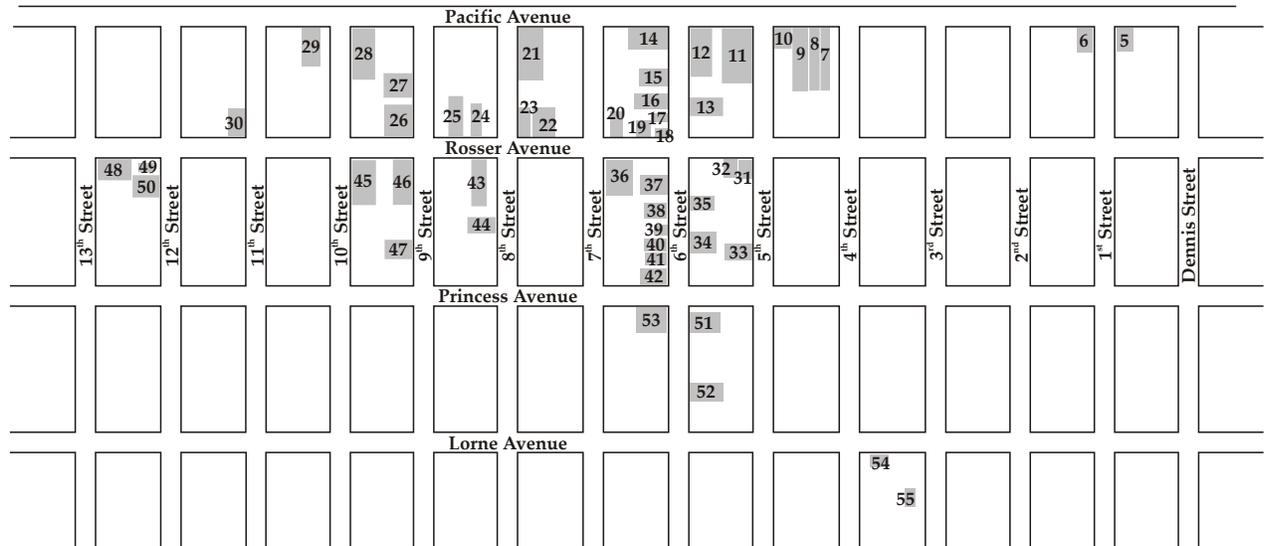
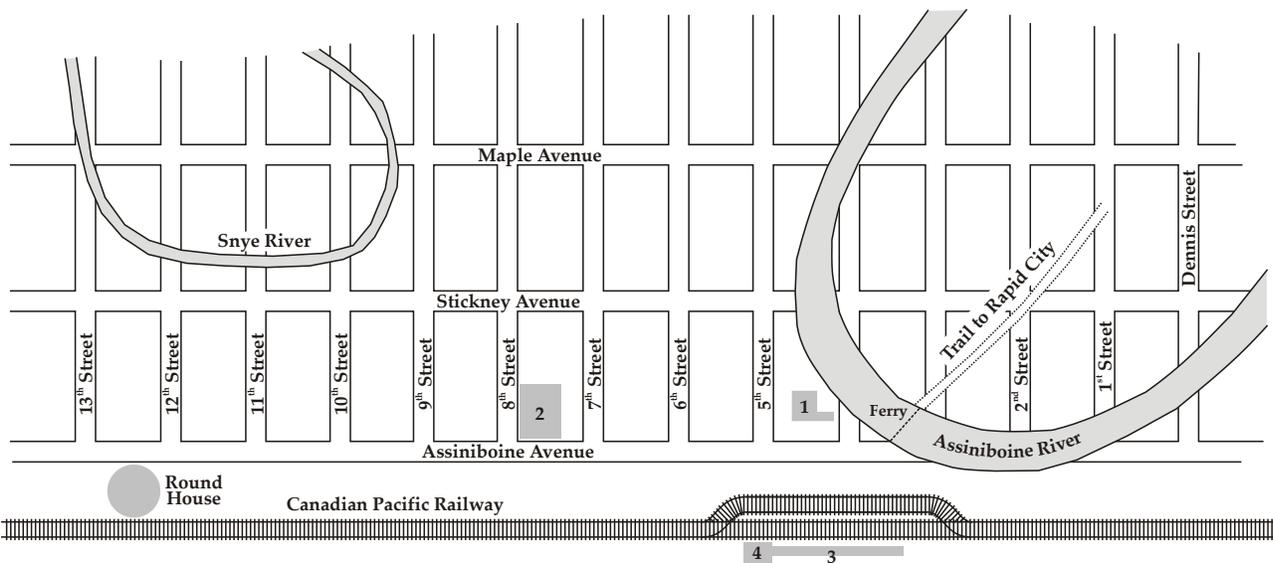
The outcome of his labour was *The Assiniboine Basin*. With its focus on the place and people he came to love, its completion was immensely rewarding to him. Fifteen hundred copies of an original "Pioneer Edition" were quickly depleted so more were printed. In 1967, for Canada's one hundredth anniversary, he arranged the printing of a "Centennial Edition," copies of which can still be found in used bookstores. He would have been thrilled to be part of the celebration of Brandon's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and to have his book and reflections on its beginnings made available by the Manitoba Historical Society.



Kevin Kavanagh

**Martin Kavanagh**, a student at St. Peter's College at Wexford, Ireland, circa 1914.

# Martin Kavanagh Arrives in Brandon



## Brandon, 1881

This map, redrawn from Martin Kavanagh's 1946 book *The Assiniboine Basin*, shows Brandon as it appeared in the Fall of 1881, six months after settlement began. The locations of buildings, businesses, and residences are denoted by numbers.

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 Fisher Flouring Mills                                   | 13 H. Sage Stables                              | 35 Johnston & Star (Butchers)                              |
| 2 Frank D. Myer and Charles Whitehead (Contractors)       | 14 P. Paulin & Bergeron Hotel                   | 36 North-West House, D. C. McKinnon, Prop. (Central Hotel) |
| 3 CPR Freight Sheds                                       | 15 Owen Carson (Grocery)                        | 37 Thomas Lee (Saddlery)                                   |
| 4 CPR Station   | 16 G. H. Munroe (Grocery)                       | 38 Thomas Barton (Saloon)                                  |
| 5 J. E. Woodworth & John Rounsefell (General Store)       | 17 James A. Smart (Hardware)                    | 39 John McVeigh (Butcher)                                  |
| 6 J. F. Woodworth & B. F. Woodworth (Italian Goods Store) | 18 Winter & O'Neil (Grocery)                    | 40 Port Warham (Billiard Hall)                             |
| 7 Al Rowe Boarding House (Windsor Hotel)                  | 19 Munroe & Warwick (Tinsmiths)                 | 41 Methodist Church, Reverend Lawson                       |
| 8 George Winters (Grocery)                                | 20 White Brothers (Bakery)                      | 42 Victoria Boarding House (Kelly House)                   |
| 9 Sinkbell Shoe Store                                     | 21 William Buttlebank (Lumber)                  | 43 William Wright & Edward Wright (tinsmiths)              |
| 10 Gurnett Brothers (Immigration Hall)                    | 22 G. B. Angus & John Lyons (Contractors)       | 44 Tebo Livery Stable                                      |
| 11 Bracket & Chute Lumber                                 | 23 Fleming Drug Store                           | 45 Queen's Hotel   |
| 12 Coombs & Stewart Grocers                               | 24 D. Young (Merchant)                          | 46 Dickinson & McNulty (Grocery)                           |
|   | 25 P. E. Durst (Jeweller)                       | 47 Moblo Grocer  |
|   | 26 Deacon & Hooper (Grocery)                    | 48 Royal Hotel   |
|   | 27 L. M. Fortier (Post Office)                  | 49 W. J. White   |
|   | 28 Bower, Blackburn, Mundell & Porter (Grocery) | 50 Sun Office  |
|   | 29 McManus Boarding House                       | 51 Russell & P. McKenzie (Blacksmiths)                     |
|   | 30 Leask & Rose (Drug Store)                    | 52 T. Palmer (Farmer)                                      |
|   | 31 John W. Sifton (MLA)                         | 53 Ezekiel Evans (Banker)                                  |
|   | 32 Mulholland Stables                           | 54 Roman Catholic Church                                   |
|   | 33 Molesworth (Civil Engineer)                  | 55 Adamson Shack   |
|   | 34 C. Greer (Barber)                            |  |

# “Three Mere Housewives” and the Founding of the Brandon Friendship Centre

by Scott M. Kukurudz  
Vancouver, BC

The Brandon Friendship Centre has been in existence for over forty years serving the First Nations and Métis population of south western Manitoba. Today, the Centre boasts a vast array of activities; educational and employment support, non-profit housing, childcare, recreation and wellness programs, are just some of the impressive list of services provided by, and for, the region’s Aboriginal population.<sup>1</sup> It is a key Brandon institution whose origin can be traced to a decade of dedication and sacrifice by a small group of Brandon women. It was these women who made the establishment of the Brandon Friendship Centre possible because they banded together creating a political and community voice that spoke in order to raise awareness of the problems of racism and to find ways of providing help for Brandon’s Native population. Under the leadership of Audrey Silvius, these women were responsible for the creation of the Brandon Friendship Council which ultimately led to the establishment of the Brandon Friendship Centre. This article briefly examines the social climate of Brandon in the late 1950s and early 1960s with regards to the Native population and then goes on to detail the history of the Brandon Friendship Council and ultimately the Friendship Centre.

In the 1950s, growing concerns emerged of increasing problems and potential clashes between the dominant “white” society and Aboriginals. Contrary to the beliefs of a

naïve Canadian government, the Native population would not diminish to extinction on the reserves. Historian J. R. Miller explains that the Native population revived during the depression decade and rose back above 110,000 people after steadily decreasing for the previous two hundred years. The population continued to gradually increase until the 1950s, after which it experienced another period of accelerated growth.<sup>2</sup> The growth trend in the Native

population in the postwar period mirrors the general Canadian pattern.<sup>3</sup> Miller cites that this increase in the Native population brought the Department of Indian Affairs financial trouble because “the paternalistic programs, such as selling off reserve land and keeping Indian children for prolonged periods in residential institutions, were becoming expensive.<sup>4</sup> Finances were not the department’s only problems in the 1950s. Natives were developing a political voice and they, along with many other

Canadians, questioned the humanity of the department’s policies.

World War II was a big factor in changing public opinion about the Native population. According to historians Kurt Glaser and Bernard Joei, “active participation of Indians in World War II stimulated a movement to give them more voice in their own affairs.”<sup>5</sup> This awakening not only occurred among the Native population but also among the white population and the Canadian government. War veterans in particular were quite willing to publicly defend their fellow Native soldiers. However, the result of this newly found postwar racial enlightenment would only result in minor changes in the revised Indian Act of 1951.<sup>6</sup> Real political gains would not be made until the 1960s.

The culmination of these factors (the rise in the Native population, the increase in spending for Native programs, and an emergence of a political voice for improved Native



G. Goldsborough

The Brandon Friendship Centre, 2007.

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rights) led the Manitoba government to pursue more information. They hired Jean A. Legasse to undertake a large scale inquiry of the Native and Métis population in Manitoba. Legasse, originally from Saskatchewan, had just received his Master's degree from Columbia University and was given the position as the Director of the Social and Economic Research Office.<sup>7</sup> The result was the five hundred page report entitled "The People of Indian Ancestry in Manitoba." The report proved to be a key source of information for Silvius and other volunteers in addressing the problems of the Manitoba Native population.

The report showed that from 1924 to 1958 the Native population in Manitoba increased from 12,000 to 22,000.<sup>8</sup> Manitoba was divided into eight Indian Agencies and Brandon was placed in the Portage La Prairie district, which included approximately 3,000 Natives on eleven reserves; approximately half of the population was in the Portage la Prairie and Winnipeg area, while the other half was closer to Brandon. This meant that Brandon was the major city centre for roughly 1,500 Natives.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it was estimated that by the early 1960s, one hundred to two hundred Native people lived within Brandon city limits.<sup>10</sup> Of this population in Brandon, only fifteen Natives were eligible to receive provincial or municipal services.<sup>11</sup> Statistically, this was not considered good news because it pointed to the challenges of increasing number of Natives entering the cities.

Legasse reported that "with the rapid depletion of natural resources and the constant increase in reserve populations, life off the reserve [was] becoming an economic necessity."<sup>12</sup> However, due to racial discrimination and lack of equal opportunity, the transition from the reserve life was an extremely difficult step for a Native person to take. It was under these circumstances that Silvius became aware of the Native population's problems and took it upon herself to aid their plight.

Audrey Silvius was born in the southwest Manitoba village of Elgin in 1924 and spent her youth at nearby Fairfax. After graduating from high school, Silvius trained as a nurse in Winnipeg. In the late 1940s she moved to Brandon and completed a degree in psychiatric nursing at the Brandon Mental Health Centre (BMHC). Silvius settled with her husband on the North Hill, near the BMHC, and started to raise a family; she had four children in total.<sup>13</sup> It was while living on Third Street North that Silvius became interested in the Native population. In an interview Silvius explained that in 1958 there was a Native couple living in a tent in the vicinity of where the Brandon Canada Games Sportsplex currently exists. The couple, the Benns, had children and were lacking the necessary shelter to survive the upcoming winter. Silvius decided to help this couple find a home, and she succeeded. Later that year, Silvius

experienced a very difficult pregnancy that debilitated her for a period of time. Gladys Benn came to Silvius' aid and "brought sanity to the situation" by helping to maintain the Silvius household and take care of the Silvius' children.<sup>14</sup> The two women became friends and through this friendship, Silvius learned the prejudice and difficulties experienced by the Native population. Silvius therefore dedicated her time to supporting and improving the Natives' place in society. To honour the work that Silvius had contributed to the First Nations, the Sioux Valley Reservation made her an honorary member and gave her the Indian name "blue star" after the first star that comes out at night because Silvius was the first white person to reach out to their reserve.<sup>15</sup>

Grace Godmaire is another key figure in the history of the Brandon Friendship Centre. She lived on Second Street North and was a close friend and neighbour of Audrey Silvius. Godmaire joined Silvius in her crusade to support the Native population. She was crucial in the establishment of the Brandon Friendship Council, community fundraising, and eventually held an executive position in the Brandon Friendship Centre.

The final key woman in this history is Jean Halliday. Unlike the previous two women, Halliday did not live on the North Hill but rather on Seventeenth Street across from Brandon College. Halliday became involved when Silvius

and Godmaire announced that there was to be a public meeting at the YWCA concerning Brandon's Natives. Halliday responded to the meeting's notice in the *Brandon Sun* by telephoning Silvius and asking if she could make a contribution by bringing a cake.<sup>16</sup> This was in the time period just prior to the formation of the Brandon Friendship Council.

Halliday first became interested in the Native population after a group of Explorers, a United Church youth group, came to visit Knox United Church from the Brandon Residential School. The visit intrigued Halliday and she made several excursions out to the Residential School to see the children. On one bus trip it appears that Halliday experienced a great epiphany. In a report made for a conference on community relations around 1960, Halliday wrote that while on the bus full of Native children, she realized that if she closed her eyes, "their fun and fooling sounded just like any bus load of our kids would sound."<sup>17</sup> This led her to recognize that "there was a powerful lot of prejudice around our fair city, and [her] eyes were open to the fact that all of us harbour some of it inside us even though we don't realize it."<sup>18</sup> Halliday responded to this enlightenment by devoting her free time to the organization that Silvius and Godmaire were slowly forming and also by adopting a couple of Native foster children.<sup>19</sup>

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**In the 1950s, growing concerns emerged of increasing problems and potential clashes between the dominant "white" society and Aboriginals. Contrary to the beliefs of a naïve Canadian government, the Native population would not diminish to extinction on the reserves.**

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These three women were the core of the Brandon movement that quested for the better treatment of the First Nations people. Their public voice and consistent presence in the political background however, did not always earn them respect. Silvius noted that some Brandon elite took to calling the trio the "three mere housewives," because it was believed that these women could never truly accomplish anything.<sup>20</sup> Those people were gravely wrong.

After Silvius and her friends decided that they should help Brandon's Natives they started holding small meetings and gatherings at the Silvius household on Third Street North. However, the group felt that they should have a public place where all people could feel welcome attending. Silvius approached the YWCA and asked if they could get a room in which they could hold meetings, and the YWCA accommodated them.<sup>21</sup> There was no agenda or formalities to these meetings, they were come and go and very casual. The group slowly became active in the community. The "three mere housewives" started speaking out in public about their cause and drew attention. After a few meetings at the YWCA, it was decided that an invitation should be sent out to the women of the Sioux Valley Reserve, then known as Oak River Reserve. This brought Silvius some anxiety because she did not know how the women might respond to such a sudden invitation. Much to her relief, three carloads of Sioux women arrived for the meeting and the little room that they regularly occupied was now full. Soon the group expanded to include men and by 1962, this simple gathering formed into the Brandon Indian Friendship Council.<sup>22</sup>

Silvius explained that the formation of the Friendship Council was not planned, but rather "just grew to be."<sup>23</sup> The organization, she added, emerged from a group of people who saw a pattern among the Native population; they had difficulty finding homes, getting jobs, and even walking down the street.<sup>24</sup> Once the council was formed, Silvius' group drew the attention of the Brandon Council of Women who admired the work they had done.

The Brandon Council of Women decided to support the Friendship Council and issued a statement of resolution at one of their meetings in the early 1960s. The resolution was in response to resistance of Natives in white communities and stated that the council believed in the Canadian idea of multiculturalism, that the Native population can contribute to Canadian society, and that Natives leaving reserves experience resistance from white communities. Therefore, the National Council of Women requested that the Federal Government aid the Native population and prepare white communities to receive Native peoples.<sup>25</sup>

Through this new connection with the Brandon Council of Women, Silvius, Godmaire, and Halliday were invited to speak to some local audiences, including an important community development conference held at the Prince Edward Hotel. The women were often criticized for the political statements that they made, especially when they challenged that international problems, such as the

Hungarian revolution, were drawing more public attention when they should take second place to domestic issues, such as the problem of Native integration into white society.<sup>26</sup>

In her speech at the conference, Halliday addressed the six main goals of the Friendship Council: through genuine friendship, help the Indian find the life he wants to live in the modern world; to find a market for Native handicrafts; to provide advice and help to those seeking more education; to provide advice and help to those seeking employment; to provide social activities; and to act as go between between government policies and red tape, and the Indian people.<sup>27</sup>

From a report issued by Silvius in 1963, it is clear that after one year of existence the Brandon Indian Friendship Council had remained true to its goals and accomplished a great deal. In the report, Silvius stated that the first year was one "of study, learning and service. We [the council] believe as a result there has been some improvement between Indians and Whites in this area."<sup>28</sup> The real contribution that this organization made can be seen in the numbers. In the first year, the council directly placed sixteen Natives into jobs, helped two male students enter vocational school, and made over forty public addresses.<sup>29</sup> Silvius notes that public speaking was one of the hardest things to adjust to because prior to the council she had no public speaking experience. However, by the first year of the council's official existence she was speaking publicly almost once a week.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the council held eighteen meetings throughout the year, petitioned the government, made radio appearances, petitioned the local media to refrain from using ethnic identities when broadcasting crime or court proceedings, and helped sell Native handicrafts from the local reserves.<sup>31</sup> All this can be seen as a great accomplishment since none of it occurred before the council's existence. It is an especially grand success because it resulted from the work of "three mere housewives."

However, there were some elements that the council could not control within the community of Brandon, mainly those of racism and prejudice. Silvius explains that there was still a great resistance to having Native people moving into white neighbourhoods and even remembers a public debate about a Native family that wanted to move into the east end of Brandon. The basic attitude from the white population was "stay with your own kind."<sup>32</sup> Silvius remarked that sometimes there was "in your face racism" while sometimes it was quieter. Tears swelled in her eyes as she recapped when one of her Native friend's children returned from the school bus stop with his new jacket covered in spit, the white children had spat on him and called him a dirty Indian; Silvius added that there was still ugliness in the community because children learn from the parents.<sup>33</sup>

On 17 March 1962, The following advertisement was placed in the *Brandon Sun*:

I believe the Canadian Indians should be confined to the reserves. Their education should be restricted to grade four and they should not be eligible for social welfare benefits.

The resources of the province should be utilized for the benefit of the white race.

**ALLAN DARIEN,**  
**1710 Princess Avenue,**  
**Brandon, Manitoba**

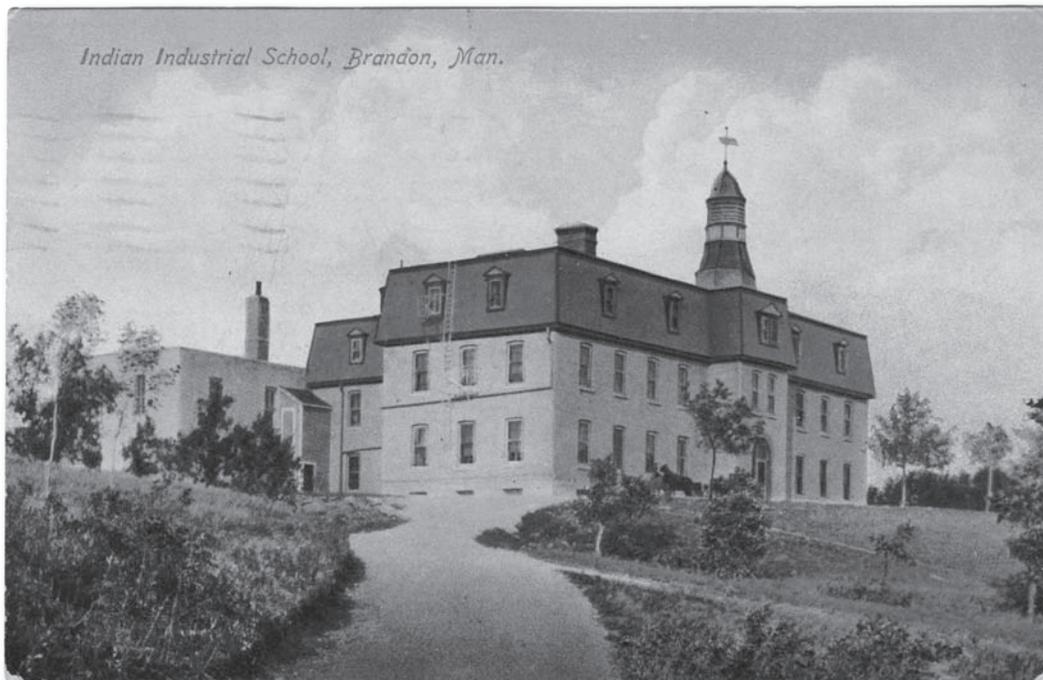
**111S, B.C.**

What was not explained was that this ad was actually an experiment conducted by a third year sociology class at Brandon College, now Brandon University. Under the guidance of sociology professor Dr. W. L. Zwerman, the class of thirteen had attended that same conference at the Prince Edward Hotel that Halliday had addressed. The conference inspired the students to take some action and decided that such an ad was the best course of action. Student Arnold Hersack placed the ad using his address, but under the alias of Allan Darien with hopes of receiving letters with public reaction. The "111S, B.C." in the bottom left hand corner of the ad is code for sponsored by third year sociology at Brandon College.<sup>34</sup> In a follow up article in the *Brandon Sun*, Hersack stated "it was and still is, our opinion that had the ad been inserted which was sympathetic to the Indian there would have been very little or no public reaction."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Hersack stipulated that "the ad was not intended to lend support to prejudicial

attitudes and it obviously didn't."<sup>36</sup> However, the ad raised a number of eyebrows and complaints and stirred public controversy.

Within a week, the ad stimulated from the public twelve letters and over fifty phone calls to the *Brandon Sun* and the CKY "Party Line."<sup>37</sup> Several of the opinions that were expressed, even after it was revealed that the ad was a social experiment, stated that the ad was simply a "typical idiotic student prank, that has done more harm than good, and the Sun had no justification for printing it."<sup>38</sup> The *Brandon Sun* was also criticized because it ran the ad for the sociology students free of charge because the newspaper felt that such a project had potential and should receive support.

Throughout the last two weeks of March 1962, the topic of the ad's controversy frequently visited the *Brandon Sun's* pages and several of the letters that the newspaper received were published. Laurie Smith was a respected member of the community and veteran of the Great War who served alongside Native men. In response to the ad, Smith said that it was "a pity that in this land of freedom there should exist such bigotry."<sup>39</sup> Deanie Thomas of Brandon wrote that an Indian boy with his grade four education was still better than Darien.<sup>40</sup> The Fergusons responded by writing that they thought such attitudes disappeared with "the Dark Ages ... the ad smirks of Hitlerism."<sup>41</sup> M. A. Yeomans of Brandon asked a question in his response: "Is Brandon now to be classed with Little Rock by this infamous declaration?"<sup>42</sup> This was a reference to the racial tensions the southern United States at the time. Silvius' close Native friends, the Benns, also responded to the ad



Jack Stothard

**Brandon's first Indian Residential School**, shown in this postcard circa 1910, was built in 1891. Its replacement, completed in 1930, was demolished in 2000.

and stated that the Natives deserved the same equality that was enjoyed by the majority of Canadians. They added that ninety-five men from their home community had volunteered in World War II to help preserve freedom.<sup>43</sup> In one of the last articles that dealt with the ad, the students involved provided a list of individuals and organizations that the public could contact if they wished to contribute to or support the Native population in the Brandon area.<sup>44</sup> While it is difficult to assess the attitudes of most *Sun* readers, the incident had served to highlight both the prejudice that existed in Brandon, as well as the growing sentiment that more needed to be done to challenge racist beliefs and behaviours.

Going into their second year of official existence, the Brandon Friendship Council slowly became overwhelmed by the demand for their services and two major problems emerged. First, the workload for the volunteers was a full time job and second, the organization's growth required more space. Friendship Centres were not new to Canada. Toronto established theirs in 1951, and Winnipeg and The Pas set up their Friendship Centres in the late 1950s. The Brandon Friendship Council concluded that evolution into such a facility was a good step to take, but decided to research the idea before acting. The Council delegated two groups. Silvius and John Cooke went to a ten day

conference at the University of Saskatchewan on the Urban Indian and a five member delegation went to the Friendship Centre in The Pas. The five that went to The Pas included Halliday, Godmaire as well as Fred Clarke, Maurice Kinyewakan, and Mary Joynt.<sup>45</sup> There is no direct evidence as to what these two groups reported to the council when they returned to Brandon, but the decision to establish a Brandon Friendship Centre had clearly been confirmed. For the remainder of 1963 and throughout 1964, the Brandon Friendship Council's main goal was to create a Brandon Friendship Centre.

This goal required raising money and winning sufficient community support. This was not going to be an easy task, especially when a significant portion of the white population in Brandon was indifferent towards the Native population. In her public speeches, Silvius began stressing the need for such a centre, selling it as a necessary "half-way house between the reserve and city life."<sup>46</sup> Slowly but surely, the idea began to gather momentum. If the council raised five thousand dollars, then it would become eligible for a government grant. The Friendship Council drafted a letter that it sent out to businesses in hopes of receiving donations. The letter outlined the history of the council and its goals. Near the end of the letter, written by Godmaire, the council stated the reason for its financial request:



Audrey Silvius

**The Friendship Centre's first official board**, which replaced its original volunteer board, came into office in 1966. Its members included (front row seated, L-R): Audrey Silvius, Cordelia Wasteste, Grace Godmaire, Pat McKay, Rose Esquash; (second row): Margaret Kinyewakan, Norma Walmsley, vice-chairman Arthur Wambidee, E. C. Gorrie, chairman H. F. Morse; (third row): R. B. Hunter, Morris Kinyewakan, Helen Reisberry, and Chris Verhoef. Missing from the photograph were M. C. Holden, Allen Hamilton, David Hammond, John W. Pool, Dr. John E. Robbins, and Don Simpson.

## Three Mere Housewives

We [the council] propose to rent or lease a small building to function as the Indian Métis Friendship Centre of Brandon. We hope to gain the support of you, the members of Brandon and Southwestern Manitoba, to establish and organize the centre. A policy and program will be established for the centre based on the Indian cooperation. Later the finances and responsibility will be left solely to the Indian. However, your support is needed to initiate this worthwhile project.<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, the majority of community support for the centre emerged from women's organizations and not local businesses. The Brandon Council of Women and all its affiliates became the back bone of the fundraising for the centre. Local sororities joined in the fundraising. Beta Sigma Phi was particularly active; the Xi Zeta Chapter held a car wash<sup>48</sup> and the Delta Chapter presented the council with a cheque for one hundred dollars, money the girls had earned doing snow carvings at the Canadian Inn.<sup>49</sup> The Trillium Business and Professional Women's Club decided that instead of exchanging Christmas presents they would donate a sum of money to the centre.<sup>50</sup> The largest donation came from a Founders Day Fair and Tea hosted by the Brandon Council of Women in the then new 4H building. The profits from the fair as well as a donation from the Brandon City Council amounted to approximately one thousand dollars and gave the Brandon Friendship Council a good start towards the five thousand dollar goal, the amount needed to apply for the government grant.<sup>51</sup>

It is important to note that the Native population was quite active in the fundraising as well. The Sioux Valley Reserve made frequent donations to the council,<sup>52</sup> and the women of the reserve cooperated with a local Souris woman in the creation of a cookbook, another fundraising venture. The cookbook contained 1960s "white" dishes such as macaroni and cheese casserole and some traditional Native dishes such as pickled beaver tail.<sup>53</sup> There is no evidence to indicate whether or not this cookbook was a best seller.

The Friendship Council was well on its way to reaching its financial goal but was still far from the five thousand dollar mark. There was an immediate demand for a larger facility than room 12 at the YWCA. Luck was on the council's side, as well as local Member of Parliament Walter Dinsdale. With Dinsdale as a connection the council was able to find a building rent free,<sup>54</sup> and all it was responsible for was the taxes, maintenance, and upkeep.<sup>55</sup> The house at 202 Thirteenth Street, which belonged to the Salvation Army, became the Brandon Friendship Centre and a grand opening was held on 15 November 1964. A board of directors was appointed with twenty-one members, with a stipulation that one-third of the members be Native or Métis.<sup>56</sup> The Friendship Council now had a headquarters from which they could extend their community programs and continue their fundraising efforts. The grand opening of the Brandon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre was a highly publicized event. The ceremony included several

local politicians, including Mayor Magnacca and MP Dinsdale and drew a public crowd of about two hundred people.<sup>57</sup>

The first year of operation of the Brandon Friendship Centre continued in the tradition that the Brandon Friendship Council had for the past two years. While continuing to aid the Native population, the centre remained focused on fundraising. Halliday predicted "the house would not provide the space needed for the programs and activities developing."<sup>58</sup> In the fall of 1965, a promising opportunity for the centre emerged as the Elks Hall on Lorne Avenue came up for sale. The building was exactly what the centre needed. However due to a government clause pertaining to capital expenditures, the Friendship Centre could not take out a mortgage; it could only pay rent. Silvius explains that she found this very frustrating because she knew very little about business.<sup>59</sup> Fortunately, the young Friendship Centre and its board received help from another powerful ally.

Dr. J. E. Robbins was President of Brandon College and had long been interested in Native causes. As a consequence of his activity, he would later be made an honorary chief at Sioux Valley and given the Native name Sitting



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University

**Dr. John E. Robbins** (1904 - 1995), President of Brandon University and early supporter of the Brandon Friendship Centre.

Eagle after a deceased noble elder.<sup>60</sup> Brandon University subsequently honoured Robbins by naming its library after him. Robbins knew of the Brandon Friendship Council and was a supporter of the Friendship Centre. Robbins became aware of the situation involving the purchase of the Elks Hall. According to Silvius no one approached Robbins for help, he, "God bless him,"<sup>61</sup> just volunteered his services to the centre's aid. Robbins gathered thirteen prominent Brandon citizens and formed the Brandon Friendship Foundation. The foundation was able to guarantee a loan from the Royal Bank of Canada and purchased the Elks Hall for the Centre. The Centre in return paid the foundation a rent of two hundred and fifty dollars per month as well as any surplus it had to reduce the loan. When the principle was paid, the building would then belong to the Centre.<sup>62</sup> This allowed the Friendship Centre to obtain the building it needed to fulfill its community goals. On 23 October 1965 volunteers helped move the Friendship Centre from its old home to its new home at 836 Lorne Avenue.

In its early years, the Friendship Centre was able to extend its services far beyond the confines of the Friendship Council. The first annual meeting of the Centre was held on 29 January 1966 and reported on all the business related to the Centre since it opened in the first building on Thirteenth Street. Godmaire, who was the Centre's Executive Director, set out five new long range goals for the centre: to help fill the social needs of the group, and thereby channel energy and interests in a more positive direction; to coordinate the efforts of individuals and organizations engaged in programs of, by or for the Indian people; to encourage an understanding between Indian and non-Indian, and an appreciation of the contributions of each other; to stimulate Indian leadership and pride of heritage; and to stimulate the development of services and facilities necessary for the well being of people of Indian ancestry, and others in Brandon and surrounding communities.<sup>63</sup>

The Centre also established its own publication, a monthly newsletter called *The Scout*.<sup>64</sup> *The Scout* was to act as a medium of expression and communication and provide a means of education.<sup>65</sup> The report also provides some numbers as to the success of the Centre's first few years. One hundred and seven people were counselled, ninety-one referrals were made, housing was found for fifty-nine individuals, three families were provided with financial assistance to move to Brandon, and thirty-five individuals found employment through the Centre. Approximately one hundred fifty people visited the Centre each month.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, the success of the January report was dampened by Silvius' resignation as an executive board member. Another difficult pregnancy kept her out of the spotlight.<sup>67</sup>

The first few years of the Brandon Friendship Centre's existence were very successful. Finances were stable, the programs were fulfilling their goals and its placement in the community was thoroughly established. However, before the Centre could solidify its future it had to go through a difficult period in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Due to government cutbacks and an increased popularity and need for the Centre, the financial stability of the Centre began to falter. The position of Executive Director had exchanged hands five times in 1970 - 1971, most likely due to the high stress of the job.<sup>68</sup> An increase in sports programs was a reason for the increase in spending. To compensate, the Centre applied for a two thousand dollar grant from the provincial government, but they received only five hundred dollars.<sup>69</sup> In late 1972, the tide turned and the Centre was able to begin rebuilding some of the programs that had suffered in the troubled years. Changes were made at the federal and provincial levels to secure proper funding for Friendship Centres throughout Canada. By 1972, Brandon Centre's operational budget was \$20,000 per year. The Centre also adjusted its constitution to

increase the number of Natives on its Board of Directors.<sup>70</sup> These new conditions removed the air of vulnerability from the Centre and allowed it to further grow. Now, the Brandon Friendship Centre owns three buildings, offers over twenty-four programs, and is a well established institution in the Brandon community.<sup>71</sup>

After researching and analyzing this history, several conclusions can be made. The Brandon Friendship Centre would most likely have emerged without the work of Silvius, Godmaire, and Halliday. However, it would have been established at a much later date and left Brandon without a service for the Native population for several years longer. Furthermore, the foundation that the "three mere housewives" had laid in Brandon and the surrounding community was a bed that ensured the longevity of the Centre.

The first Friendship Centre in Canada was established in Toronto in 1951 where the city's population was over one million people.<sup>72</sup> Being such an important economic centre and big city, it is easy to see why a Friendship Centre emerged there. The same argument can be made for Winnipeg, but also the city's rich history in Métis and Native tradition can be seen as obvious factor that led to the establishment of a centre there. In The Pas, the Native reserve was just across the river and the two communities had difficulties getting along. In a survey done in 1962, over seventy percent of the white population in The Pas admitted to being prejudice towards the Native population<sup>73</sup> and the establishment of a centre there was to help integrate the two factions and reduce racism. In Brandon however, none of these issues were present. There was not a large Native

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**... [T]he majority of community support for the [Brandon Friendship] Centre emerged from women's organizations and not local businesses.**

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**Friendship Centre pioneers.** L-R: Elder and Souix Valley leader Eva McKay with “two mere housewives” Grace Godmaire and Audrey Silvius, circa 1997.

population, there was not a history of Native tradition in the city on the level of Winnipeg’s, and issues of racism did not seem as apparent. Within the city of Brandon the Native population was practically an invisible minority. It was through the hard work and devotion of women like Audrey Silvius, Grace Godmaire, and Jean Halliday that the Natives’ situation in Brandon improved. These women pre-empted the cry for reform by getting a head start in fighting racism and discrimination and struggled to return pride to a people that had been wronged for so many years. The movement that these women participated in was not isolated to Brandon. However, the history of the Brandon Friendship Centre is unique and resembles nothing else found in Canadian or Native histories.

The main question with this history is why did these three women risk public ostracism and fight racism head on? This question cannot be answered very easily. When asked why she and her friends did the things that they did, Silvius responded that they acted as neighbours who saw a need.<sup>74</sup> She said “the civil rights movement was in the air ... [and] ... made them take a second look at life in Canada.”<sup>75</sup> According to Silvius, the racism in Canada was not as formal as in the United States; it was “just sort of understood.”<sup>76</sup> However, Silvius still attributes the start of the Friendship Council to neighbourly friendship and not from a larger influence of reform. To claim that the activities of these women were manipulated by a larger movement is a false assumption that some historians may have. These women deserve recognition in their own right.

Another question that can arise from this article is where were the men? They were present, and some like Dinsdale and Robbins contributed a great deal to the formation of the Friendship Centre. However, it was the women who stand out in this history and therefore are in the spotlight. The husbands of the “three mere housewives”

were all very supportive. Maurice Godmaire worked as a welder with several Native co-workers and shared the same views as his wife and worked along side her in the community.<sup>77</sup> Mr. Halliday worked at the Prince Edward Hotel and gave winks of encouragement to the women while they were attending meetings there. He encouraged his wife in all her community endeavours.<sup>78</sup> Silvius says that her husband, despite being a little jealous with her constant absences, still supported her work.<sup>79</sup> Without the support of their husbands, these three women would not have achieved the things that they did.

One may criticize this story because it writes a Native history with very little emphasis on Native peoples. In Brandon, at least, it was white reformers who spearheaded the quest for equality. This alone signifies the racism present in Brandon. The Native population would have been unable to make gains for their community because the white population failed to take them seriously and they needed to find an ally. In turn, the Native population surrounding Brandon found several allies that laid down the foundation for them to enter into Brandon’s community and make gains towards equality. While the “three mere housewives” and the people responsible for the Friendship council acted as a catalyst to this movement, the Native population did not stand by idle. There were many key Native people who contributed to the Brandon Friendship Council and Brandon Friendship Centre who went unmentioned in this history but do deserve recognition. For example, Lorraine McKay was a remarkable woman who dedicated her life to her community. She was the first Native person to be elected to the Brandon School Division and a constant contributor to the Brandon Friendship Centre.<sup>80</sup> McKay personal contributions warrant a scholarly study of their own.

Racism had not been defeated. The work of Silvius, Godmaire, and Halliday was only partially about finding Natives jobs or places to live; it was really about combating racism. With all of our science, technology and social achievements there still exists a prejudice in the hearts of many human beings. If only each person could realize that no one is absolutely free of prejudice, such awareness may be the best way to fight racism—when people close their eyes and listen to the world with their hearts. Until then, it is important for everyone to do whatever they feel they can to defeat racism. It does not take much ... just look what “three mere housewives” accomplished. ☛



Notes for this article  
are available on the MHS web site:  
[www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb\\_history/56](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/56)

# The Forkin Letters<sup>1</sup>

Introduced by Errol Black

Historical working class, labour, and labour political organizations in Brandon, fashioned in response to the boundaries and subjugation of the city's liberal capitalist order, provide a remarkable and diverse testament to the rich variety of influences that mediated the experience of Brandon's workers. Records of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council, and Brandon chapters of the Socialist Party of Canada, the Dominion Labour Party, the Canadian Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party disclose rich seams of working class discourse and agency in the city. They also tell us about the agency of individual activists—men and women—in the city, some of whom went on to acquire national reputations for their work on behalf of working class Canadians.<sup>2</sup>

The Forkin family of Brandon made an unusual contribution to working class activism in Canada. Six children of the Forkin family became activists in the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) after its formation in 1921. Martin and Hannah Forkin and their six children (Joe, 1899; Stephen, 1901; Patrick, 1903; Stan, 1905; Ruth, 1909; and Tom, 1911)<sup>3</sup> immigrated to Canada and settled in Brandon in 1912. Martin found work as a boiler washer's helper on the Canadian Pacific Railway and they lived in a small house at 545 Douglas Street on the outskirts of the city's east end. They had another son, Frank, in 1913.

The character, values and ideas of the Forkins were shaped in the context of a closely-knit family living during turbulent times in a turbulent world. Among the critical events that affected them were World War I, the 1916 Easter Rebellion in Ireland (their father Martin was born into peasant stock in 1870 subsequently migrated to Dublin and then England, where he met and married Hannah), and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. As well, they were profoundly influenced by the grinding poverty faced by working people in Brandon and conflict between labour and capital that culminated in 1919 in a general strike in Winnipeg and a sympathetic general strike in Brandon.

Throughout his adult life Pat Forkin suffered from the debilitating effects of tuberculosis. In 1924, Pat was sent to the Ninette Sanatorium, where he remained until

1929. Major surgery helped to mitigate the ravages of the disease, but it also left him in a weakened condition because of reduced lung capacity. But these circumstances did not prevent him from taking an active role in the activities of the Communist party and related organizations.

After his release from the Sanatorium, Pat threw himself into party work in Brandon. In 1930 and 1931, he was elected to the executive of the Brandon Unemployed Association. He became a key speaker at Association meetings and demonstrations and succeeded his brother Joe as Brandon and area correspondent for the CPC paper, *The Worker*.<sup>4</sup>

In 1932, Pat moved to Winnipeg where he became an executive member of the Unemployment Conference of Winnipeg. As it turned out, he did not have the stamina to undertake the work required of him as an organizer. However, his talent as a writer had been noticed and in short order he was invited to Toronto to work full-time for the Communist Party *Worker*. Health problems continued to plague him in Toronto, however, and in 1936, the Party decided to send him to the Soviet Union as Moscow correspondent for the now renamed Communist party newspaper—the *Daily Clarion*. Party leaders also believed that Pat would receive better treatment in the Soviet Union than he was getting in Canada. Phoebe Singer, a party activist from Montreal, who became Pat's wife, went with him to the Soviet Union.

The letters home from Pat and Phoebe while they lived in the Soviet Union provide a window into the warm, loving and open relationships that existed between Pat and Phoebe and Pat's parents and siblings. They also provide valuable insights into the problems they experienced while contending with their jobs and Pat's health problems.

The bulk of the letters Pat sent home from the Soviet Union dealt with issues of everyday life relating to agriculture, industry, community and politics from the bottom. Often, he linked his stories on Soviet life to conditions in Canada, and especially Brandon. Pat's account of the Soviet Union was shaped by his hope that progress there would provide a model for the improvement of the lives of working people in Canada and around the world. And much that he saw in the Soviet Union from health care to the provision of paid annual holidays for working people were in sharp contrast to the conditions he was familiar with in Canada. Pat and Phoebe's uncritical accounts of the Stalin show trials should be viewed in this context.

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Unfortunately, Pat's health deteriorated further and he spent increasing time in sanatoria, which he found frustrating because it prevented him from doing the job he was sent to do. Pat died from tuberculosis on 12 December 1939. At the time he was in the Mountain Sun Tubercular Sanatorium in Miskhor, Crimea. He was buried in Yalta.

There were many tributes to Pat following his death. A tribute from Tom and Rosa Ewen<sup>5</sup> written to Pat's parents in Brandon is especially poignant: "The Canadian people have lost a great tribune in the death of Comrade Pat. His was the ability to translate the great drama of the building of a New World into warm proletarian language. Pat loved the Soviet People; he was deeply interested in everything they did; he could see a humorous as well as a serious side of things; he never poised as "an expert" of Soviet affairs and he poured the warm love of his heart into his writings."<sup>6</sup>

After Pat's death, Phoebe eventually married Andrei Curato and moved with him to Italy, where she lived for ten years. She returned to the Soviet Union so her son Andre could complete his education. While she lived there, Phoebe worked as a translator for Radio Moscow. She returned to Canada in 1993, after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Phoebe died in Toronto at the age of 95 in 2005.

October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1936.

Gulf of Finland

Dear Folks:

We land this afternoon in Leningrad from where I will post this letter.

I didn't prove as good a sailor on this trip as I did on the Atlantic passage, possibly because the weather was rougher and the boat much smaller with consequent pitching and rolling. We sailed last Saturday. Sunday in the North Sea was terrible. I didn't eat a meal all day and spent the time between my bunk and the bathroom ... trying to give up what I hadn't eaten. That night we got into calmer waters near the Kiel Canal and I began to feel better and got a couple of slices of bread down me.

We went through the Canal in the early morning. It was quite an experience and I got up especially early to see as much of Germany as I could.

At the other end of the Canal we came out into the Baltic Sea and into another gale. Monday wasn't so bad but Tuesday was worse. However, I began to get my sea legs and didn't miss any meals although I felt little like eating them. Wednesday was fine and today it is nice and

smooth also. We have seen the coasts of Holland, Germany, Denmark, the Swedish island of Gotland, the Estonian island of Dago and other smaller ones, and this morning we are passing some of Finland's islands.

I have managed to keep warm for the weather hasn't been as cold as I thought it would be in these northern latitudes. The winter won't be so bad I take it, for some of the Americans working in the Soviet Union who are now returning from holidays on this boat, tell me that the coldest temperature in Moscow is about 30 below. We [have] worse than that in Brandon.

We have only 15 passengers on the ship this trip although there is accommodations for about 150. It is too late for the tourist season now. However, the ship earns its way in carrying cargo. This time it is loaded with cocoa and race horses. One of the race horses died during the storm and had to be heaved overboard. The Soviet Government had just paid \$12,000 for it in England and were taking it back for breeding purposes. Fortunately they had it insured against loss. The third mate tells me they buy many Irish and Arab horses, in fact, he says, they have some aboard every trip back.

The grub has been excellent. Better than that we got on the Aquitania. However, it is served up in a different way to what we are used. Tea is very weak, served in tumblers, with a slice of lemon instead of cream. We have had chicken, meat, fish, candies, cake, ice cream and a host of other stuff ... all Russian. If this be starvation ... then lead me to it.

Well, I won't tell you too much about the trip because I'll be writing it up for the paper anyway and you

will borrow a copy from Stan and read it there. Just now I see through the port hole that we are getting close to land and I must get up on deck and see as much of it as possible. I'll never get another chance to see this part of the world perhaps.

Don't worry about my health for I am feeling first rate in spite of my coming out second best on a couple of day's bouts with the Old Man of the Sea. There's one thing about sea-sickness – when it's over, it's over.

I'll drop you another line just as soon as I get a bit settled down in Moscow. That may take me a day or two. Until then "so-long". Remember me to Stan, Marge, Duffy, and Patricia,<sup>7</sup> and also to Gav and Ruth<sup>8</sup> and the 657 folk and all other inquiring friends.<sup>9</sup>

Yours as ever, Pat (signature).



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University, Errol Black Collection

Pat Forkin convalescing at the Ninette Sanatorium, 1928.

Khovreeno San. U.S.S.R.

Jan 30<sup>th</sup>, 1937

Dear Stan and Marge:

Just a short note to send this answer back to Duffy. Phoebe and I were tickled with his letter. He's making very good progress, that's evident.

I'm still here and will be till Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>. However, I have my typewriter now and permission to work in the evenings so I am beginning to turn out copy again. I should really have been at the trial for the paper but have made arrangements that it be handled. Feel rather bad about not being right on the spot though. Folks here are sure steamed up about the case – and no wonder. Talk about a treasonable sell out if you ever saw one! Prominently placed people too. Don't suppose all the evidence will find its way into the Canadian paper on account of its great length but believe me, it's hair-raising. They stopped at nothing.

Am enclosing a couple of exhibits for the souvenir box. One is a pass for Patrick Martinovitch Forkin to the Red Square on November Seventh,<sup>10</sup> and the other a pass for the same to the Moscow Province Congress of Soviets.<sup>11</sup> I have one for the All Union Congress but it is at the hotel. Best regards to all. Must pipe down for now as the bell has rung for bed. So-long, Pat (signature)

February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1937.

Dear Stan:

Just a short note to say that the enclosed stamps are for Mrs. Broadhurst. Sorry I overlooked it when I sent out the last letter. There will be several new issues of stamps featuring Pushkin<sup>12</sup> and several other famous people and I'll send them along when they are put out for sale.

Pat is still stacking away the meals and showing resulting gain in weight. By the way, I forgot to tell you in my last letter that ocean voyages in mid-winter are nothing to rave about and I don't know beans about tractors – I'm a stenog.

Everyone is still het up about the trial of the Trotskyites, although the 13 who were condemned to death have already paid the penalty.<sup>13</sup> But it is almost unbelievable that men who once risked their lives to bring about the revolution should now pay with their lives for trying to overthrow it. Such is the end of those who take the opposition. I wish every Canadian could have been over here and followed the trial, day by day, and heard the evidence disclose the enormous crimes they had committed. I know you will be getting something about the trial, but not in complete detail as we here did, and it is hard to get a complete picture. I am going to send you all the issues of the Moscow Daily News containing the evidence, even though I know you will get some of it in the *Clarion*<sup>14</sup> and the *Imprecorr*.<sup>15</sup> The spontaneous demonstration that was held on the 30<sup>th</sup> of Jan. hailing the sentence meted out was something to see! The crowds shouted so that the windows rattled and tramped so that the earth shook. No mistake as to their feelings about the Trotskyites. I would have marched too, but didn't know anything about it, as it took place on rest day, and



S. J. McKee Archives, Brandon University, Errol Black Fonds.

Pat Forkin's press card to get into Red Square for the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great October Revolution.

was spontaneous, so that only those shifts that worked on that day knew about it. As it is, it was big enough and impressive enough.

Well, I must stop typing as it is late and I'm disturbing the neighbours on both sides of my room. I think I told you about my work – in any case, I mean to write something about office workers here, for the benefit of my union back in Toronto. Knowing the grievances of office workers back home, and working on the job here, I can do a better job, from the point of view of facts, than Patrick can.

Regards to everyone there, although the only one I know personally is Ruth. As ever, Phoebe (signature)

Box 360, Gorky Street 17  
Moscow 9, U.S.S.R.

June 22/38

Dear Folks:

It seems I always make good resolutions about writing more often, but when it comes to checking up I don't carry them out. It must be well over a month ago since I last wrote you ... I should be thoroughly ashamed of myself. However, I hadn't heard from you either in the meantime, and as I got a letter just yesterday this breaks me out of my stupor to drop you a line.

Thanks for the little sprig of shamrock you enclosed. In exchange I'm sending you a marguerite and a little bit of forget-me-not out of a bouquet of wild flowers Phoebe and I gathered last rest day.

You ask me in this letter if I got the letters you sent "a short time ago with a note from me." If you mean the one including letters to you from Peggy and from Taimi – yes, we got that one all right ... but it was over a month ago I think.

You mention that Joe<sup>16</sup> and Fay will likely be coming to Brandon in July, so may be they will be there when this arrives. If so say "hello" for us. Hope Joe is feeling o.k. and that the adhesions you mention are not proving too much trouble. After their visit you say you may be going up to the coast for a trip. If so, I hope you have a good holiday and enjoy yourselves up there with the part of the family

residing in those parts. If Frank is home give him a greeting from this part of the world too. You suggest me dropping a line sometime to Mike and Mrs. Kane. I'll do that one of these days. I don't think Mike will see any of my stuff because they get the *Clarion* weekly in Moose Jaw and my articles appear generally in the Daily.

We got a letter yesterday also from Taimi<sup>17</sup> after not having heard from them in a long time. They enclosed in it the letter they had recently received from Stan, so we learned in that way about his trip down through the mining country of Ontario in search of the very illusive job.

We two have been wishing very much that it would have been possible for Jim to have accepted the ticket to the Soviet Union as his prize instead of the money. What a good time we could have shown him here during his stay. I would have steered him around during the daytime and then Phoebe would have taken hold in the evenings and we could have almost run him off his legs going to interesting places and seeing things he would never forget. However, it's no use crying about spilt milk, and I guess that a few ready dollars looked pretty big to them after so long on relief diets. You say in your letter that he won both the ticket and the money, but he really won the ticket OR the money.

Well, things with us are pretty much as usual. Both are o.k. I've had a pretty heavy cold for a couple of weeks but have shaken it now except for the last remnants. We have had some fairly rainy weather of late and maybe I picked it up that way.

We have both taken to going out into the country for the rest day and intend to keep up this idea during the summer. It's so nice to get away from the city and out into the meadows and woods. We have discovered a nice little rest home where for a reasonable cost we can go out the night before rest day, sleep there overnight, have three splendid meals (and afternoon tea too) and then come back in the evening of rest day. We were out there last week and enjoyed it immensely. I took a morning and afternoon nap but managed to get in quite a little countryside roaming besides. Phoebe covered an enormous amount of territory (without a hat) and got a wee touch of sunstroke for her pains. We came back at night with a great bundle of wildflowers of all sorts and descriptions.

The Russian countryside is lovely and there are many beautiful wildflowers. The meadows around our little rest home remind me somewhat of those I remember at Saltend so many years ago. There were fields of marguerites there too. However the woods here are different to English woods and are more like our Canadian type. The rest home is set in a copse of pine and white popular woods and the rooks make an awful din cawing and rushing to and fro from their nests in the tops of the trees. I didn't realize till I got out there that I was so lonesome for the grass and meadows. Of course, there are wonderful parks right in Moscow, but somehow this year we don't seem to have got around to going there of an evening.

Some time ago I wrote a letter to a chap I used to know in Toronto who is now in a T.B. sanatorium near that city. I told him about the sans here. Recently I got a letter from the editor of a sanatorium newspaper at Gravenhurst, Ont. asking me for more information about the Soviet methods of fighting T.B. Its seems that my personal letter had been handed all around the san by my friend and then when they were through reading it there, they had sent it along to another san at Gravenhurst where it had gone the rounds again and finally finished up getting published in the paper. Hence the request from editor for more information. So, this month, in answer to the request I wrote a quite long letter to the San paper telling them about treatment here. I suppose they will use some of the material for their columns. It certainly shows how interested people are in all phases of life in the Soviet Union. Of course, there is every reason for it. And especially so in the field of T.B. fighting for they have made such wonderful strides here in stamping out the disease.

Just now I am writing a series of articles on Soviet (some text missing here) Dad may be surprised to know that they have started producing locomotives here (steam locomotives) that make a sustained speed of 111 miles an hour. They have roller bearings instead of brasses on the main journals and are streamlined to look like a steel-jacketed bullet. Put these engines on a train between Brandon and Winnipeg and they would cover the distance in very little over an hour.

This last week I have also visited a big bread factory here in Moscow and also a big dairy. You can hardly call a place that bakes 220,000 loaves of bread a day, a bakery ... that's why I say "factory". I'll be writing about these places after I finish my railroad series.

Phoebe and I intend to take a trip down the Moscow-Volga canal soon. It will be a two day journey to the city of Kalinin and back. She has been down the canal before (last year while I was up north) but I haven't made the trip yet.

Well, it's getting near bed time and the "missus" is telling me about it. I should start writing earlier in the evening. So long for the time being. Give Duffy and little Pat a good hug for both of us and best of regards to Stan and Marge. As soon as I get extra energetic that long promised letter I owe Stan will be on its way. I've been going to write Gay for months and months and finally this last week both Phoebe and I chipped in and we sent a letter off to 657 enclosing a bunch of stamps that we had gathered up. Well, again, so-long for the present. Write soon and tell us all the news. It's always a good evening when we get a letter from home. As ever, Pat (signature) ☞



Notes for this article  
are available on the MHS web site:  
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## General Rosser's Legacy

by Ken Storie  
Gimli, Manitoba

What's the connection between Rosser Avenue, Brandon's "Main" street, and the Rural Municipality of Rosser near Winnipeg? What do the communities of Brandon and Stonewall have in common? How about the connection between The Battle of Little Bighorn and the creation of Manitoba's second city?

It all starts with the railway. At the beginning of 1881 what we now call southwestern Manitoba was part of the Northwest Territories, as the western provincial boundary stretched only slightly past Portage la Prairie. It was, quite literally, not on the map. Specifically, it was not on CPR Chief Engineer Sanford Fleming's map, dated 8 April 1880, and submitted as part of his report on possible rail routes westward. He mentions that the regions thereabouts had "so far as known, have not been explored."<sup>1</sup>

Though perhaps not explored, the territory had been considered in an abstract way. Mr. Fleming, despite continuing to advocate for a slightly more northern route along the Little Saskatchewan Valley and skirting the Riding Mountains to the south, also envisioned a southerly extension that would cross the Assiniboine near the mouth of the Little Saskatchewan. He noted the agricultural potential of the region and that it might become a site for a future city that would "shortly become important."<sup>2</sup>

*Ken Storie was raised in southwestern Manitoba, graduated from Brandon University, and spent many years teaching in Westman communities. His interest in local history grew out of canoe trips, hikes, and back-road explorations which prompted investigations into the abandoned villages, fur trade posts, and rail lines that he encountered. Ken has written reports on Heritage Sites for the Historic Places Initiative ([www.historicplaces.ca](http://www.historicplaces.ca)) and other projects on Manitoba history at [www.virtualmanitoba.com/storie.htm](http://www.virtualmanitoba.com/storie.htm).*



Thomas Rosser Cochran, Jr. & Ann Cochran Cully

**Thomas Lafayette Rosser** (1836-1910), Founder of Brandon, was a Confederate General during the American Civil War.

This largely unpopulated area was slowly developing the first tentative forays into agriculture with the noticeable beginnings of towns seen at Rapid City, Minnedosa (Tanner's Crossing), Millford (near the confluence of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers), and Grand Valley (a few kilometres east of Brandon). These locations are mentioned in the George Wyatt's 1881 *Guide for Settlers*, which includes a list of post offices and charts with destinations for both steamboat and stagecoaches,<sup>3</sup> while the site that would later become Brandon was an undeveloped homestead.

Before the end of 1881, this unassuming patch of riverside prairie had become a bustling town with hotels, grocery stores, restaurants and various outfitters popping up like crocuses on the sunny side of a hill. Now, in any normal prairie town, activity of this sort would be taking place on Main Street; or on a main street by any of the other generic names: Front Street, Railway Street, sometimes even Commercial Avenue. Even Winnipeg has a Main Street.

Instead, Brandon has Rosser Avenue and it was named after the CPR's Chief Engineer who established the site: Thomas Lafayette Rosser. That's a considerably enduring tribute considering that the man worked for the CPR for less than a year and departed in the midst of accusations, recriminations and scandal. And also considering that two of Rosser's bosses, Alpheus B. Stickney<sup>4</sup> and William Cornelius Van Horne<sup>5</sup> find their surnames on less prominent avenues.

But then Rosser was not your ordinary railroad engineer. In fact, it is proper to refer to him as General Rosser, an American no less, southerner even, and a well-respected veteran of the American Civil War.

That said, the man liked naming things and in his short time in our province invoked his admiration for fellow

countryman Stonewall Jackson by bestowing that name on an upstart town just north of Winnipeg and had his own name attached to a village and a municipality also near that city. He even had the village of Griswold, near Brandon, named after one of his American friends.<sup>6</sup> You might say that he left his mark.

In the spring of 1881 this former soldier, well into his second career as a Railway Chief Engineer, crossed the Assiniboine River at a point about 200 kilometres west of Winnipeg, bargained briefly with a Mr. Adamson and purchased the town site of Brandon for little more than a song. As with many other deals struck in the creation of railway towns in the era, potential profit for Mr. Rosser was a consideration.<sup>7</sup> He'd just rejected the site known as Grand Valley, the area's most well-established settlement, a few kilometres downriver in a famous confrontation with area pioneer John McVicar, who had his own notions about profit.

The story of the founding of Brandon has often been told, in its various and conflicting forms. Where does fact give way to legend? Do we believe Mrs. Dougald McVicar, sister-in-law of the Grand Valley property owner who makes no mention of Rosser's offer to purchase the town site.<sup>8</sup> How reliable are the various other accounts that have McVicar falling victim of bad advice from cronies? What about Brandon pioneer Beecham Trotter's account wherein McVicar immediately asks for double what Rosser was willing to pay, only to be stung by Rosser's, equally quick reply, "I'll be damned if a town of any kind is ever built here."<sup>9</sup> The most reliable account may be found in the memoirs of James Secretan, a CPR surveyor who worked with Rosser. He recalls that Rosser indeed made a \$25000 offer, and when McVicar did counter with a request for \$50000, the General abruptly ended negotiations and moved on upstream.<sup>10</sup>

Upon taking the suggestion of the captain of the prairie steamboat the Marquette, and naming the city Brandon in a nod to the nearby hills and former HBC post, he set about putting his stamp on the community. It was General Rosser who ordered the surveyor Mr. M. P. Hawley to keep the lots of the new city small, and the streets narrow (66 ft. as opposed to 99) — more profit was the first concern.<sup>11</sup>

If this and other decisions benefited Rosser, one must also acknowledge the benefit to both his employer the CPR and to the public. His policy of avoiding established towns, first evidenced in the Grand Valley episode, saved a fortune. The decision to establish the CPR headquarters in Winnipeg was a sensible business decision and certainly good for Manitoba, and of all the decisions he made, his selection of the site of Brandon has had the most lasting impact.

Who exactly was this "General Rosser"? There seemed to be a lot of Generals and Colonels involved in the opening of the west.

According to one of his surveyors, James Secretan, whom Rosser appointed to take charge of the line west, he was "... a most lovable man ... a tall, handsome, swarthy

Southern gentleman of the real old type, had fought in the 'late unpleasantry,'"<sup>12</sup> Biographer Thomas Beane referred to him as "a superb horseman, tall and muscular, with a firm jaw and a manner that exuded self-confidence."<sup>13</sup>

He was, in fact, a Confederate Major General of Cavalry during the American Civil War, promoted to command by Confederate Army leader J. E. B. Stuart who cited his leadership, bravery and tactical ability.<sup>14</sup> That's a pretty good resume, but on the other hand, biographers also note that he was a man driven by a quest for financial gain, and a person who could be "arrogant, aggressive, racist, and proud to a fault."<sup>15</sup>

There is general agreement that, in an age when many self-important people tended to attach questionable military ranks to their identity, Mr. Rosser, in fact had earned his rank in battle.

He was indeed complex person, and undeniably, one with many talents and a wide variety of experiences. The two key aspects of his character: his almost ruthless, action-oriented approach to getting a job done, and his ever-present eye on the possibilities for profit, are amply demonstrated through his actions during his short time with the CPR.

It turns out that this authentic Confederate General was also a West Point classmate and friend of the illustrious General Custer, he of Little Bigfoot fame. It reminds one that the west was indeed a small place in those days and that, especially in this region, history intertwined often on a north-south axis regardless of borders. How did a Confederate General end up in Grand Valley as advance man for our national dream?

Rosser, who was born in Virginia in 1836, spent his youth on the Sabine River near the Texas-Louisiana border before entering West Point in 1856. Just weeks before graduation, the outbreak of the Civil War caused him to skip that formality and head home to enlist in the new Confederate Army. His colleague and friend, George Armstrong Custer, class clown and all-round hell-raiser, being from the north was able to stay on and finish.

Lieutenant Rosser soon distinguished himself as a cavalry officer, and moved up the ranks quickly. Superiors, in particular, noticed his calmness under fire and his ability to mould groups of raw recruits into an efficient fighting machine. He was a perfectionist who took great pride in his accomplishments.

From all reports he developed a flair for the dramatic. Perhaps he had taken to reading his own press. Describing a difficult situation during the turning point Gettysburg campaign he later reported: "The enemy greatly outnumbering us, appeared in force everywhere, and it became apparent that victory was the only means of escape."<sup>16</sup>

And escape he did, and although the war continued to go badly for the South, and Rosser himself sustained several serious injuries, he continued to be a formidable presence, harassing the Union forces wherever he encountered them, capturing supplies, never avoiding a fight.<sup>17</sup> In fact he was

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so successful that the Union commander General Sherman ordered one of his young up-and-comers, George Custer to deal with his former classmate. Thus began a series of engagements and a gentlemanly rivalry.

A now famous battle against Custer at Tom's Brook (8 October 1864) in the Shenandoah Valley saw Custer with his customary flare for the dramatic, or perhaps mere gentlemanly courtesy, ride between the lines before the onset of hostilities and deliver a gracious low bow to his worthy opponent. Rosser acknowledged the gesture with a smile and explained to his staff, "You see that Yank down there bowing? Well that's General Custer, the Yanks are so proud of, and I'm going to give him the best whipping he ever got."<sup>18</sup> It wasn't to be. Custer easily prevailed this day in a contest later dubbed the "Battle of the Woodstock Races." The moment, like so many in Custer's career has been recorded for posterity in a drawing.

Custer, at one point, was fortunate enough to be able to capture Rosser's luggage complete with a uniform. He wrote his friend thanking him for the wardrobe addition and suggesting that Rosser have his tailor make the coattails of his next uniforms a little shorter to accommodate his (Custer's) shorter stature.<sup>19</sup>

As we all know, it was in a losing cause. But Rosser was not inclined to "cut and run." He earned himself a place in the history books, and perhaps some grudging respect from the victors for refusing to surrender his unit when everyone else could see it was all over.

With his military career cut short by the end of the Confederacy, Rosser, with scant success, tried various job and business enterprises until in 1869, like so many others,

he headed west. There he landed a "starting level" position with a small railway concern and quickly established himself in this the growth industry of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> The building of railways across the "untamed" west offered travel and adventure, even a bit of danger. It was almost as good as the army! And Rosser rose just as quickly. Starting at the bottom he worked his way from roadman, to scout, chief surveyor and, soon enough, Chief Engineer of the Northern Pacific Railway.<sup>21</sup>

As he engaged in the task of surveying the line westward through Montana there was some resistance and harassment from the local inhabitants the Sioux, who for good reason didn't trust the intentions behind this intrusion into what they had every reason to suppose was their home. To the rescue came old friend Custer, who, being on the winning side of the recent north-south conflict, hadn't had to give up his profession. The victorious North hadn't waited too long for a new enemy to appear and what we charitably refer to as the Indian Wars was underway, with Custer as a central figure.

This military-railway collaboration was perhaps the first of what some would insist became a trend in the U.S.; the use of military force to back the interests of large corporations whose endeavours are identified with the natural interest. It didn't do much for relations with the west's natives.

The meeting of Rosser and Custer in a camp on the Northern Pacific line must have been like a reunion of old friends. They no doubt recounted old times and those see-saw series of battles and skirmishes along the Shenandoah Valley and the exchange of notes and friendly jibes.<sup>22</sup>



Magnacca Research Centre, Daly House Museum, 93-487-16.

Rosser Avenue circa 1881, as Thomas Rosser might have seen it.

Rosser's friendship for Custer was perhaps most famously displayed after Custer's demise at Little Bighorn. With the Custer legacy under attack, and the President himself beginning to lay blame, Rosser jumped to the defence of his former adversary. In a letter to the *Chicago Tribune* he put the blame for the disaster on the shoulders of Custer's subordinates:

I feel that Custer would have succeeded had Reno with all the reserve of seven companies passed through and joined Custer after the first repulse. I think it quite certain that General Custer had agreed with Reno upon a place of junction in case of a repulse of either or both of the detachments, and instead of an effort being made by Reno for such a junction as soon as he encountered heavy resistance he took refuge in the hills, and abandoned Custer and his gallant comrades to their fate.

As a soldier I would sooner today lie in the grave of General Custer and his gallant comrades alone in that distant wilderness, than when the last trumpet sounds I could rise to judgment from my post of duty, than to live in the place of the survivors of the siege on the hills.<sup>23</sup>

Rosser was soon forced to retract his impetuous attack on Reno, under threat of lawsuit,<sup>24</sup> but his spirited defence of Custer, aside from accurately highlighting a central point of a fascinating controversy, is indicative of a relationship that is much easier to understand when taken in the context of the times. The Civil War provided countless stories of friends and even family members taking opposite sides.

In any case Rosser and Custer made a good team, and the survey into Montana was a particularly dangerous operation. Rosser himself usually carried a rifle, a brace of pistols, and saddle bags full of ammunition when traveling and once had occasion to use his weapons in a stand-off with Sioux who had just killed his co-worker and friend.<sup>25</sup>

While Rosser and Custer were pushing the Northern Pacific westward, James Jerome Hill, a former Canadian based in St. Paul, Minnesota, was the president of the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway, a company he had taken over at the verge of bankruptcy and turned into a gold mine.<sup>26</sup> By 1881 he was a member of the Montreal syndicate with the first CPR contract, something he had at first undertaken with the hope of uniting it with the lines south of the border, thus creating the beginnings of a western transportation empire. At that time many thought that an all-Canadian route, north of the Great Lakes, through the Canadian Shield was neither advisable, nor economically feasible. The logical route was to go south of the lakes, through the United States, and through Pembina and on to Selkirk. Logical that is, if from a Canadian perspective, one forgets the political implications; or from the American perspective, one fully expects the U.S. to control the entire west in any case. In the meantime, Mr.

Hill was a man with a track record and when he needed someone to solve problems in the operations north of the border he called on Rosser.

And what was in it for Rosser? A reasonable salary, to be sure, the element of challenge and fact that Rosser had worked with Hill briefly on the "Manitoba Road," were all factors.<sup>27</sup> But there was also the tacit understanding that it wouldn't be totally out of line to use one's influence and inside information to make a few extra bucks. At least that's the way Rosser seemed to see it.

The establishment of a railway in undeveloped country is the original ground floor opportunity for a venture capitalist. The laying of the rails is the first step in the creation of the new map of the area. Everything rides on a few key decisions. The locations of the general route, specific route, divisional points and sidings all determine the location of towns. The growth of those towns depends largely on the railway's use of them. Divisional points, located about every 300 kilometres will be major supply centres, while stations or sidings will be less important. Either way, railway decisions will be the key determinant of land values in a given settlement.

Rosser had been through all this before with The Northern Pacific. He had been responsible for selecting town sites, and crossings – in fact his selection of crossing of the Red River at Fargo, and the land speculation profits he is assumed to have garnered, was the beginning of his personal fortune.<sup>28</sup>

Originally the CPR was to cross the Red at Selkirk, a preferred crossing in that the area near Fort Garry at the forks of the Assiniboine and Red was prone to flooding and that the route was then to follow the flat, easily-crossed area we now call the Interlake, through the narrows of Lake Manitoba and northwest towards the Saskatchewan River. The Carleton Trail, already in use for decades, followed the Saskatchewan River to Edmonton, and from there the Rockies were to be breached at the Yellowhead Pass.

The choice of this route was based on exhaustive research by two extensive exploratory expeditions. John Palliser, an Irish gentleman adventurer, who had already traveled widely in the American West was selected by the Royal Geographical Society and the Imperial Government to explore the area between Lakes Superior and the Rockies and report on everything from plant species to possible travel routes. After a two-year field trip he concluded that the only good land in the area lay in a belt along the North Saskatchewan. In fact the vast area comprising the southern third of Saskatchewan and Alberta, now called Palliser's Triangle, was deemed thoroughly unsuited to agriculture.<sup>29</sup>

Another expedition, sponsored by Canada and led by Henry Youle Hind, a geology professor from Toronto, came to similar conclusions. There was, apparently, no real future for the southern prairies. Normally, railways are built where the customers are. In this case the railways came before the customers, so it was a case of deciding where the customers would end up.

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And that's the way it stood when General Rosser rode into the picture in the spring of 1881. He was at the table, when James Hill and the Executive Committee of the CPR changed the history of the Canadian West. In short order they decided that the route across the prairies, instead of following the northern route would take a much more southern route, essentially where it now exists through Brandon, Regina, Calgary and the Kicking Horse Pass. As to the reason for this dramatic reversal of policy, one theory is that it all turned on the work of one man, John Macoun. For he too was at that famous meeting.<sup>30</sup>

Macoun had accompanied Sanford Fleming on his first survey of the Carleton Trail route ten years earlier, and returned for extensive research in 1879 and 1880. His observations were that the southern prairies were indeed well situated for agriculture. Now we know that the reason for the differing points of view are as simple as the cycle of drought normal to this prairie region. Palliser and Hind made their observations in 1857 - 1859, the centre of a dry spell. Macoun in 1879 and 1880 witnessed the wettest years of the century.<sup>31</sup>

The decision, or more significantly, its approval by the government, may also have rested on a few other foundations. Politically it was advisable to locate closer to the American border to pre-empt possible competition from an American line and to keep a firm grip on the territory at a time when many prominent Americans viewed the annexation of the west by the U.S. as not only desirable, but inevitable. On a more practical note we were probably seeing the beginnings of the CPR's policy of avoiding high prices and land speculation by bypassing expected routes and established communities. They truly were doing the unexpected in this case. Additionally the southern route was shorter and would be (they thought!) less expensive to build. Some have speculated Mr. Hill saw the possibility of some arrangement whereby his other venture the Great Northern in the U.S. would benefit from some arrangements with the CPR.<sup>32</sup>

So it was that in early May of 1881 we find Rosser at the end of the line near Portage La Prairie turning the

sod to start what would be a season of frantic activity for the largely uninhabited stretch of prairie to the west. As they proceeded, General Rosser and his boss, Alpheus B. Stickney quickly found that creating new towns was also more profitable for them personally than using already existing ones. It was a short-lived relationship, but various reports have the pair making \$130,000 between them during their brief careers with the CPR. Not a bad haul in 1881 dollars.<sup>33</sup> As an example of what could be done, Rosser was suspected of having had the preliminary survey of the line

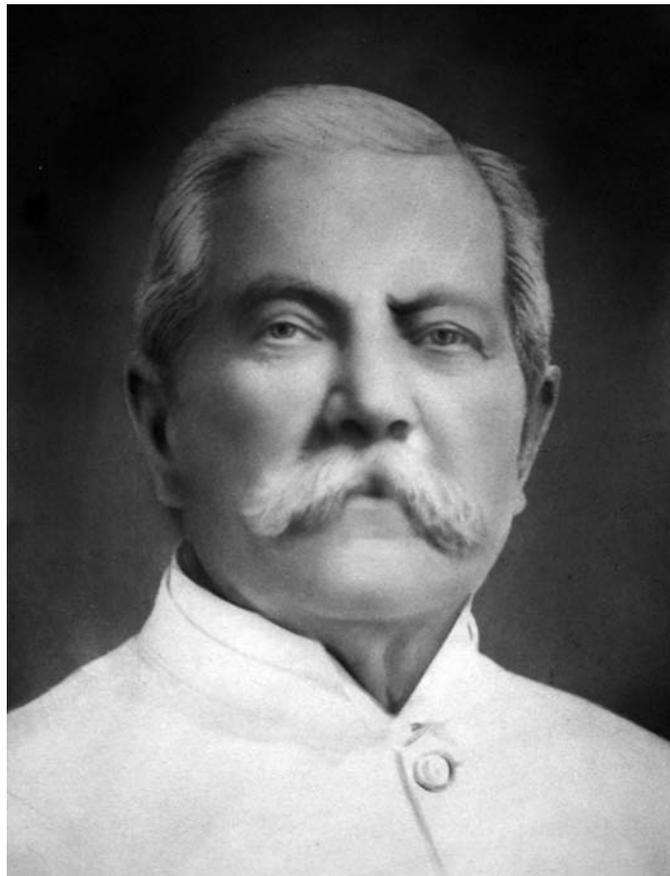
in Saskatchewan altered to bring it through present day Regina where he had invested.<sup>34</sup>

They made a lot of money, but it did not go unnoticed. The local press, especially in existing centres where hopes and speculations were dashed by CPR decisions, raised a hue and cry and almost before it began, Rosser's career as a railway entrepreneur was over.

First, Stickney was replaced by William Cornelius Van Horne. Perhaps it was the bad press, or perhaps he actually was alarmed at the Rosser/Stickney speculations, but one of Van Horne's first acts was to dash of a telegram firing Rosser. Rosser deemed it an inconvenient time to be sacked, ignored the message, and left town on urgent business. Van Horne again asked Rosser to resign. Lawsuits and

harsh words ensued. In a famous incident in a Winnipeg club pistols were produced and only the intervention of friends prevented bloodshed.<sup>35</sup>

The end result was that Rosser sued for malicious prosecution, asking for \$100,000 and getting \$2,600,<sup>36</sup> then took his "earnings" home to Virginia where he dabbled in farming and in a succession of imaginative business ventures that never seemed to make it past the planning stage. By the 1890's he was the most prominent living Civil War veteran, now slipping into the role of American Patriot. He did get one more shot at a military career, this time as trainer of recruits for the Spanish-American War in 1898. At the time his death in 1910 he was Postmaster of Charlottesville, Virginia, a political appointment he had secured in 1905.<sup>37</sup>



Thomas Rosser Cochran, Jr. & Ann Cochran Culley

An elderly Rosser, circa 1905.

And here in Canada, his legacy is mixed, or worse still, unconsidered. By most standards, his accomplishments are noteworthy. In that crucial summer of 1881, when the laying of the tracks set in motion the pattern settlement would take, Rosser certainly tackled the task at hand. Supplies were purchased and delivered, men were hired, supervised and provided with food, towns were created. As Beecham Trotter, who worked on the railways that summer, so aptly noted in his account of the times, it was all done with the focus being the day-to-day, no one being overly conscious that history was being made.<sup>38</sup> There were lines to grade and bridges to be built.

So, tempted as we may be to find fault with some of General Rosser's healthy regard for his own financial

self-interest, we should examine his record through the lens of time and circumstance. To this day it is difficult to find fault with Rosser's decisions regarding town sites, even if they also benefited him personally, and his work in pushing the rails westward during the summer of 1881 has perhaps not been fully recognized for what it was; a job very well done. ✎



Notes for this article  
are available on the MHS web site:  
[www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb\\_history/56](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/56)

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## Editorial

# The Worst Canadian: When Popular History Turns Nasty

These days it seems that North Americans have become fascinated with best and worst lists. Blackwell's catalogue of worst dressed Hollywood celebrities has become a fixture at Oscar time, Canadian Idol and American Idol television competitions revel as much in the bad performances as they do in the good, while (according to my daughters) TV's Much Music channel dines out regularly on countdowns of the year's worst songs and videos.

Into this mix we can now add an article that appeared in the August/September 2007 issue of *The Beaver*, that once venerable magazine of Canadian popular history. In a controversial piece entitled "The Worst Canadians?" new editor Mark Reid summarizes the results of an online poll that asked readers to name the worst Canadian in history. Many responded, 15,000 according to Reid, and the results are surprising to say the least. With no qualifiers such as worst politician, worst military leader, or even worst celebrity, we are presented with a perplexing top ten list of politicians, musicians, and mass murderers. Four prime ministers are included, three horrific killers (Clifford Olson, Paul Bernardo, and Karla Homolka), Doctor Henry Morgentaler, disgraced business tycoon Conrad Black, singer Céline Dion, and even an obscure Winnipegger named Chris Hannah. Absurdly, Pierre Trudeau tops the list as the worst Canadian in history according to *The Beaver's* online poll, ahead of even Olson, Bernardo, and Homolka. Second place honours went to Hannah, the punk rocker who proudly lobbied with friends and others for votes. Even Brian Mulroney, Jean Chretien and Stephen Harper were rated 'worse' than Clifford Olson.

In a valiant attempt to bring a measure of gravity to the proceedings, editor Reid claims that readers' responses were

"tempered by their personal, political, religious and socio-economic agendas. East versus West," he writes, "urban versus rural; English and French immigrant experiences ... [are the] divides that face Canada today." High-minded sentiments indeed, although it is quite the stretch to claim that the results of this survey speak to the "divides that face Canada today." Even publisher Deborah Morrison wades into the debate, claiming the survey was successful "for the many conversations [it] has started around kitchen tables, water coolers, and elsewhere." I suspect, however, that any conversations related to this article are probably less about who is the worst Canadian as they are about the propriety of publishing such a piece in the first place. Ultimately, "The Worst Canadians" is little more than a ratings stunt, a sensationalist piece of journalism more suited to a tabloid newspaper than the pages of one of Canada's oldest and most respected magazines.

That is not to say that the growing penchant for ranking cannot have its upside. CBC Television's "Greatest Canadian" series, for instance, provided an interesting and enjoyable diversion, as did CBC Radio's solicitation of listener votes on the greatest Canadian song. These contests were agreeable much in the same way one enjoys some simple pleasure; they were not, historically speaking, taken much beyond the spirit of entertainment for which they were intended.

However, when we get into lists like "The Worst Canadians," the inevitable result, I suppose, of the shallow pop culture in which we live, things tend to get a little more incomprehensible and a whole lot nastier.

Robert Coutts  
Editor-in-Chief, *Manitoba History*

## Exhibit

# Mollie-Irene Ives: Dressing for Court

*The Mollie-Irene Ives exhibit will be on display in the foyer of The Manitoba Museum from 2 October 2007 to 31 January 2008. Contact the Museum at 204-943-3139 for hours and location.*

In November of 1969, Mollie-Irene Ives of Winnipeg made history when she became the first woman to successfully plead her own case before the Supreme Court of Canada. On only two previous occasions, once in 1947, and then in 1955, had a woman represented her own case before the high court. Neither of these appeals was successful.

The Mollie-Irene Ives case began in the spring of 1964, when the Province of Manitoba expropriated 80 acres of a 140-acre parcel of land in the Bird's Hill area that Ives had purchased in 1963. Not only did she lose land, but the expropriation also cut off access to her remaining acreage. The government wanted the land under dispute for its newly created Bird's Hill Provincial Park. Ives and some 60 other landowners in the area protested that the expropriation of their lands, nearly 9,000 acres in total, had proceeded without consultation and recourse to appeal. Ives soon became the most vocal opponent of the government's actions.

Although Ives had paid only \$6,000 for her 140 acreage, she still refused the Province's offer of \$12,330 for her 80 acres. She was determined to draw public attention to what she believed was the injustice of laws that permitted governments to file for land expropriation at a land titles office and then simply inform the owners that their land had been taken over.

As a first step in her quest to challenge the law in court, Ives and her lawyer appeared in county court to plead her case before a provincially appointed arbitrator. In January 1968, the arbitrator ruled in her favour and awarded her \$20,570 for the expropriated land. The Province refused to accept the arbitrator's report and launched an appeal of the decision before the Manitoba Court of Appeals. The Appeals Court reversed the arbitrator's decision and reinstated the original provincial allocation of \$12,320. Ives had to either accept the ruling or appeal it to the Supreme Court of Canada. She chose the appeals route, knowing that the battle would be costly and time consuming. Ives knew that her gender and non-legal background would make it an even more daunting task. She had determined already the fees for the lawyer and two land assessors needed to provide evidence in support of her case meant that she could not afford to pay additional legal fees. Ives' decision to represent herself before the Supreme Court demonstrated her absolute conviction that the laws on expropriation were undemocratic.

Ives spent eighteen months in the painstaking preparation of her case. She compiled and paid for the preparation of twenty-five copies of a 200-page casebook that contained all the details of the expropriated land

and the proceedings of her previous court appearances. She prepared a "factum" in which she stated her reasons for appealing the Manitoba court decision. Finally, after eighteen months of research, writs were filed and submitted to the Supreme Court in Ottawa.

At many points along the way, the hostility from the predominantly male legal system frustrated Ives. When



Robert Barrow

**Mollie-Irene Ives chose this outfit**, which she recently donated to The Manitoba Museum, for her appearance before the Supreme Court of Canada in November 1969. When the "Bird's Hill" case came up, Mollie recalls, she had three days notice and did not know what to wear. She went downtown to a boutique at Eaton's and asked the salesclerk for something that "looked like lawyer's robes." Mollie was shown "a very expensive dress made from a new, synthetic fabric" that she bought "on the spot, without even trying it on." Mollie also donated her monogrammed briefcase and a copy of the "factum" that she prepared for her appeal.

she arrived at the Supreme Court, for example, a clerk dressed in robes informed her that there was no seating area available for women. Ives was directed to a chair in the men's lounge that opened onto the men's shower room. She later recalled the embarrassment of seeing several male lawyers in various stages of undress who took great pleasure in taunting her from the archway leading to the showers. They made it clear that females were not welcome in the Supreme Court.

Ives appeared before five judges of the Supreme Court and, on 5 February 1970, they ruled in her favour. She was awarded \$20,570 plus the costs of her legal challenge. This brought to an end Ives' six-year legal battle. The story had all the drama of David and Goliath, except in this case the underdog was a woman. This important victory cleared the way for other landowners to negotiate improved settlements with the provincial government.

Mollie-Irene Ives received local and national press coverage over her Supreme Court victory. She became something of a local celebrity. Local newspapers sought her out regularly for comment on many different public issues. She spoke about the many cultural and economic barriers facing women, including being trying to have her ideas taken seriously in patronizing news reports that identified her variously as "Mrs. Charles Ives" or the "a pretty blonde housewife and mother." In a newspaper report in 1967 Ives told the story about how as a woman she could not buy cigars. Born in Winnipeg in 1920, to a family of six daughters, Mollie had begun the unladylike practice of smoking cigars with her father after dinner when she was thirteen. After his death in 1959 she tried to purchase a supply for herself from the firm in England from which her father had ordered his cigars. The company informed Ives in no uncertain terms that it catered only to a male clientele. As she concluded in her 1967 interview, "it's a man's world."

Ives' interest in politics dated to the Red River flood of 1950. She helped with flood relief work and later supported

victims of the flood seeking government compensation for their losses. Her family was one of those who suffered greatly during the flood. On April 20, two days after a young volunteer helping to pump water out of a neighbour's basement drowned in a sudden burst of floodwaters, the Ives family was forced to abandon its Kingston Row home in St. Vital. By the time the river peaked there were sixteen

inches of water in the attic of the house. After the flood, Ives became the secretary of the Greater Winnipeg Flood Protection committee and later worked on the European Flood Relief Fund.

In the years that followed Ives remained interested and increasingly active in politics. She served as a member of the Manitoba Civil Defence Board under Premier D. L. Campbell from 1952 - 1959, and participated in the Canadian-American Civil Defence Convention held in Winnipeg in 1955. In 1953, she was appointed to the Manitoba Censorship Board. Ives opposed censorship but was prepared to classify movies to inform the public of their content. The Board screened films in a private movie theatre in the basement of the Legislative Building, and when the House was in session Ives stayed late to listen to the debates. She was also active in the Manitoba Urban Association, secretary of her community club, a member of the (South Winnipeg) YMCA Board of Directors, and a "lady" air raid warden in St.

Vital. In 1970, after her victory before the Supreme Court, Ives was approached by various officials including James Richardson, MP for Winnipeg South, concerning a possible appointment to the Senate. She declined. She preferred to live in Winnipeg where she still lives today. Mollie-Irene Ives resides at Fred Douglas Place. She will be 88 years of age on 1 January 2008.

Sharon Reilly  
Curator of Social History,  
The Manitoba Museum



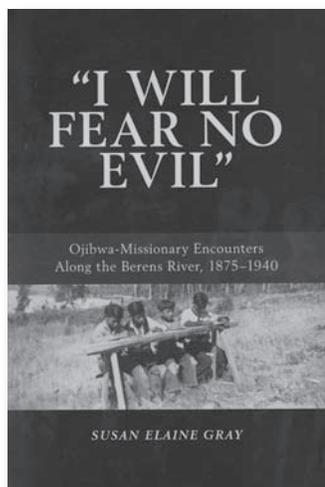
University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections,  
Winnipeg Tribune Collection.

Mollie-Irene Ives, February 1970.

Susan Elaine Gray, *"I Will Fear No Evil:" Ojibwa-Missionary Encounters Along the Berens River, 1875 - 1940*

Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006, 214 pages.

ISBN 1552381986, \$29.95 (paperback).



Dr. Gray makes the central point that we have been too easily (sometimes inadvertently) caught up in negative assessments of “the missionary imposing Christianity on the disempowered Native.” She goes on to show how this is not only wrong; it is also in varying degrees stereotyping, judgmental, and condescending. People everywhere make choices as to what they will believe, and it is rare that the situation is so coercively

limited that they must make choice-less choices.

Gray makes this central point with some judicious subtlety of method, by summing up her study with a thoughtful inventory of points held in common between the two traditions (p. 155 - 156), where a more celebratory mission history or a politically engaged criticism would be content to describe points of difference. In their writings about the Natives and their rival missionaries, points of difference were very much in evidence. In contrast, most Native people were able to distinguish between the personal narrow-mindedness of the missionaries (seen as partially flawed individuals) and the unencumbered inclusiveness of the one God that they all looked to.

We are shown that there is a sustained pattern of exclusivity in the thinking and preaching of both Methodist and Catholic missionaries, in contrast to the inclusivity of Ojibwa folks as they seek to understand the messages of the Christian Bible. When the individual missionaries stayed for enough years and were open enough to learn something of the Ojibwa views, they became more secure in their situations and able to be more flexible, and everyone benefited. As the Ojibwa individuals sustained their careful scrutiny of the meanings in the Bible, understanding came. On the whole, people’s traditional “bush” beliefs were not so much disconfirmed or rejected as they were blended by the incorporation of Christian specifics into a syncretic spirituality that allowed people to make their own personal choices (146ff).

Sometimes the choice is to put aside drumming and conjuring, and sometimes not. The number and intensity

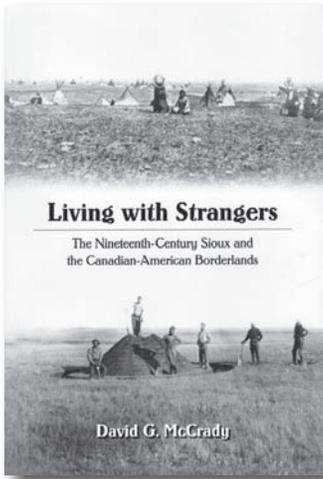
of relations with non-Natives was strongest around the settlement of Berens River, on the coast of Lake Winnipeg, simply because it was easy to access. Accordingly, pressures to take on white practices and attitudes were stronger at Berens River than at the inland settlements of Little Grand Rapids or Pikangikum. William Berens, Chief (and son of a chief) at Berens River, chose to take on a more modern form, but felt that he could have chosen either path, and could have changed his mind if he had wished to. Implied here is the necessary basis for such a change, in deep knowledge of Ojibwa spirituality as well as Christian spirituality.

Once again we are treated to a rethinking of A. Irving Hallowell’s classic works on Ojibwa spirituality and worldview, as Mary Bartholomew Black did in her PhD dissertation in the 1960s. Black’s rationalist, ethno-scientific methodology was a marked contrast with Hallowell’s gestalt-inspired ethnography. Hallowell commented to me that it was nice to be confirmed in that systematic fashion, but that he was glad he had not had to write in that genre himself. Gray would agree. In place of methodological rigour, we are given a rich corpus of first hand verbatim statements by a good number of Berens River folks, complemented by Gray’s work in written archives and her rich comparative information on spiritual incorporation and syncretism. Her intellectual breadth is very pleasing, ranging from Johannes Brahms on the spiritual nature of his creative work to Northrop Frye on the centrality of (religious) myth in his life, and in all of our lives.

In my own work on East Cree spirituality I found close parallels to much of what she describes in this book. The deep resonance for Ojibwa of statements regarding Jesus’ sacrificial blood is strikingly comparable to what I have learned from Crees of James Bay, and speaks to the sacrificial blood of animals who at a somewhat mysterious spiritual level give their bodies so that humans can eat, and live. They give the hunter and his family life in this world, and hunters were careful to save and eat the blood, and not to leave it where it could be seen to be wasted. At another somewhat mysterious level, it was said that Jesus’ blood promises forgiveness for wrongdoings and a safe passage to eternal life. The ritual eating of Jesus blood and flesh has a direct resonance. And we can appreciate the widespread Ojibwa and Cree admiration of the painting “The Last Supper.”

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David G. McGrady, *Living with Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands*  
 Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006, 168 pages.  
 ISBN 9780803232501, \$45.00 (hardcover).



Many American historians define their topics, pursue their research, and write their books limited by a border mentality that halts their endeavours at the Rio Grande or the forty-ninth parallel. For many Native peoples, however, an international border is a recent phenomenon in their histories, an arbitrary and artificial line that cut across existing tribal spaces, even as it compelled new political arrangements. Understanding Abenaki,

Assiniboine, Ojibwa, Blackfoot, or Métis history in the North (or Apache and Yaqui history in the South) requires historians to widen their focus, attempt to write histories that transcend national boundaries, and consider how Native peoples understood, used, and sometimes ignored those boundaries.

David McGrady is not the first historian to take such an approach on the Northwestern Plains. John C. Ewers and Hana Samek both looked north and south of the border in their books on Blackfoot history (John C. Ewers in *The Blackfeet: Raiders of the Northern Plains*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958; Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880 - 1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U. S. Indian Policy*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), and Theodore Binnema's *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001) treats the area as a single bioregion in which diverse communities competed for resources centuries before a border was established. Other authors have written on the Canadian Sioux (James H. Howard, *The Canadian Sioux*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984; Gontran Lavolette, *The Dakota Sioux in Canada*, Winnipeg: DLM Publications, 1991). But *Living with Strangers* makes an important contribution by representing nineteenth century Sioux—the quintessential “American Indians”—as a borderlands people and confirms the growing awareness that “borderland studies” should not be confined to the American Southwest.

Sitting Bull's escape across the “medicine line” to seek sanctuary in Queen Victoria's land following the battle of the Little Bighorn is well known. But the Hunkpapa leader's four-year sojourn in Canada was not a unique event in Sioux history. The Eastern Sioux or Dakotas had a long

history of relations with the British; Sioux refugees moved north of the border to escape the American military after the war in Minnesota in 1862 and, like Geronimo's Chiricahua Apaches who operated between Arizona and Mexico in the 1880s, Sioux bands used the border to their strategic advantage during the wars of the 1870s. Other Indian peoples also crossed and recrossed the poorly manned border to hunt, trade, and visit, and for Métis people the borderlands were homeland.

Recognizing that the border was “open” adds an additional cast of peoples to the kaleidoscope of Dakota and Lakota military, economic and kinship relations. Although McGrady provides more narrative and incident than analysis and interpretation, he creates an effective picture of moving relationships in a time of escalating contests for diminishing resources. Instead of beleaguered



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**One Bull**, nephew of the Hunkpapa Sioux leader, Sitting Bull, 1882.

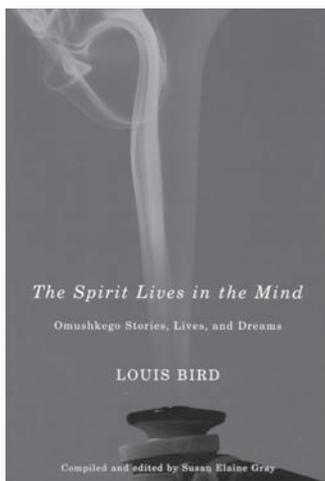
refugees, the Sioux in Canada emerge as a people who were at home in the borderland region, creative in their uses of the international line, and active players in exchange and negotiation with other borderland peoples. They traded with the Hudson's Bay Company as well as with American and traders; they negotiated with agents of both the United States and Canadian governments, and they had to deal with the US cavalry and the Northwest Mounted Police. While they dealt with Crows, Cheyennes, and Pawnees in the South, in the North they dealt with Assiniboines, Ojibwas, Crees, and Blackfoot. Nineteenth-century Sioux, concludes McCrady, "used the boundary both as a shield against oppressive policies and as a gateway to new opportunities." (p. 6)

The book is grounded in such extensive archival research on both sides of the border and explores such interesting territory (literally as well as figuratively) that

one feels a little disappointed at its brevity (114 pages of text). Readers who shell out \$45.00 will likely be more disappointed. Nevertheless, this little book has important points to make. Coming on the heels of Beth LaDow, *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York : Routledge, 2001), Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), and Sterling Evans, ed., *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-Ninth Parallel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), *Living with Strangers* adds to the growing and welcome attention to northern borderland studies. More importantly, it restores to the Sioux a single coherent history, instead of two separate histories played out on either side of a non-Indian construct.

Colin G. Calloway  
Dartmouth College

**Louis Bird, *The Spirit Lives in the Mind: Omushkego Stories, Lives, and Dreams*  
Compiled and edited by Susan Elaine Gray.  
Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, 256 pages.  
ISBN 0773532102, \$29.95 (paperback).**



Intended as "a source book for readers who wish to gain an insider's view of Omushkego ... culture and its spiritual underpinnings" (p.xvii), this book is truly amazing. No matter how seemingly skilled an Omushkego hunter was, s/he might not find food. Despite knowing the habits of one's prey and having the best tools or weapons, the hunter just might not be successful. S/he also needed to have mental and emotional

strength and powers to live harmoniously with both prey and people—a unique worldview, a "Spirit [that] Lives in the Mind." You can read one man's account of this complex worldview thanks to Louis Bird's generosity in sharing what he has learned from traditional stories and historian Susan Gray's skill at selecting and weaving them together in a respectful collaborative partnership. (The Omushkego or Swampy Cree homeland stretches across the Hudson and James Bay lowland from Churchill to the Quebec border.)

Let's get one issue out of the way. English is Louis Bird's second language and a few readers may object to the book's verbatim loyalty to his spoken English. But if you want fluent prose, you have to heavily edit what the

storyteller has generously given us—changing not just the story, but the storyteller too—rejecting both the gift and the giver. For this book arose from a simple moral contract between storyteller and editor, in Louis' words to Susan: "[W]e have understood that we would keep it alive with my voice just as it is when I tell the stories—and that's the great thing that you did ... to keep the story person alive—his voice, and his ways of telling stories—to bring it alive on the page" (p.3). Some will want to argue that this sometimes went too far, leaving punctuation or spelling errors which weren't his ("its" instead of "it's" on p. xiv and "then" instead of "than" on p. xii). Nor were the Cree words written according to any standard orthography (more than one *mitew* is the Cree plural *mitewak*, while more than one *wihtigo* is anglicized as *wihtogos*; sometimes long vowels are indicated and sometimes not, and voiced and voiceless consonants are used interchangeably). But editing is a slippery slope and, for Louis, avoiding a heavy editorial hand is "the great thing that [Susan] did" (p. 3). Susan Gray accepted the way that Louis spoke and didn't try to turn his everyday spoken English into something that lacked "authenticity" (p. xvii).

One more caveat. Louis also wanted this book to stand alone, as much as possible: "to be printed in a plain, story-telling way. We will not ask any other experts to put anything else in" (p. 5). So this is a book without any academic cross-referencing or commentary, much less than we saw in Louis' excellent first book, *Telling Our Stories: Omushkego Legends & Histories from Hudson Bay*. All we get the second time is a nine-page list of further readings at the end of the book.

If you're still with me, you'll love this book. Louis Bird (in Cree his surname is Pennishish) was born in 1934 into an Omushkego family on part of the vast territory that was and is home to the people now known as the Weenusk First Nation. He attended the Roman Catholic residential school at Fort Albany for a few years, survived as a hunter and trapper and was in the 1970s elected as chief. In between, thanks to the Cold War, Louis began working for wages at the Winisk Mid Canada Line air defence station, near the mouth of the Winisk River, across from the Hudson's Bay Company post where he traded his furs. Obviously a dependable worker, Louis later found employment further south, in Ontario and Manitoba, with the Canadian National Railway. Respected for his skills as a translator and interpreter, Louis began to focus his life on stories. A collaboration with scholars at the University of Winnipeg resulted in his magnificent bilingual (Cree and English) website [www.ourvoices.ca](http://www.ourvoices.ca) and his first book.

*The Spirit Lives in the Mind* draws on a thousand pages of transcripts from the University of Winnipeg Our Voices project but is supplemented by new narratives generated by Louis' interaction with Susan Gray during the production of the book. The introduction and ten chapters are entirely Louis' words. *Water, Earth and Skies* includes the Omushkego origin story, thunderbirds and three Chakapesh tales. *Intruders and Defenders* is self-explanatory, as is *Wihtigos and Cannibal Hearts*. *Pakaaskokan* describes the person Louis nicknames "Bag of Bones." *Values for Life and Survival* compares Christianity and Omushkego beliefs, a theme that is repeated in *Mitewin Heroes and Villains*. A lengthy chapter is about relations

between Women and Men, a briefer one with *Relations with Animals*. *Personages* contains four stories including *The Defeat of the Giant Skunk*. The final chapter has seven stories about the trickster *Wisakaychak*. Concepts like dreaming, *wihtigo* and *mitewin* cut across several chapters, weaving them together.

One of my Omushkego friends rebuked me once for using the expression "language loss," reminding me of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. "It's not just the loss of our language," he said, "it's the loss of our worldview." In no small way, Louis Bird and Susan Gray have succeeded in making much of the Omushkego worldview understandable to people who do not speak the language. While much more would be gained by telling the stories in Cree, in a traditional setting and over time, many Crees today speak English and do not live in the bush. Given the tragic reality of Aboriginal language shift, Louis and Susan have organized and made many of his stories available to Omushkego and non-Omushkego audiences in written form. Now we wait for the audiobook.

The cover of this book shows tobacco smoke rising from the bowl of a pipe, at first glance a pan-Indian anomaly in a book about that strives for authenticity. Louis explains: "after Europeans arrived, when the tobacco was one of the famous items to trade" it was offered to Omushkego healers by those who sought their intervention, "not as a payment but as a good gesture ... a gift, a symbol of faith" (p. 81-2). This book is a gift, Louis to Susan, Susan to Louis, and from them to us.

John S. Long  
Nipissing University

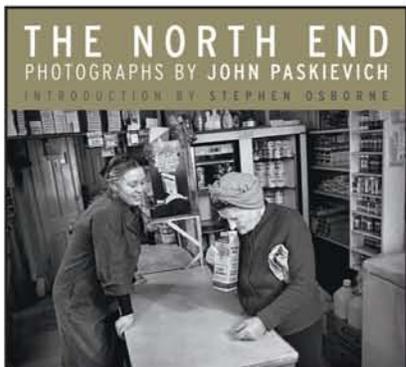


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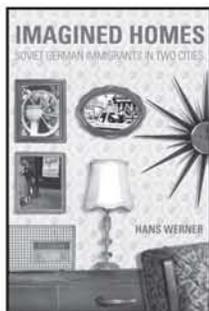
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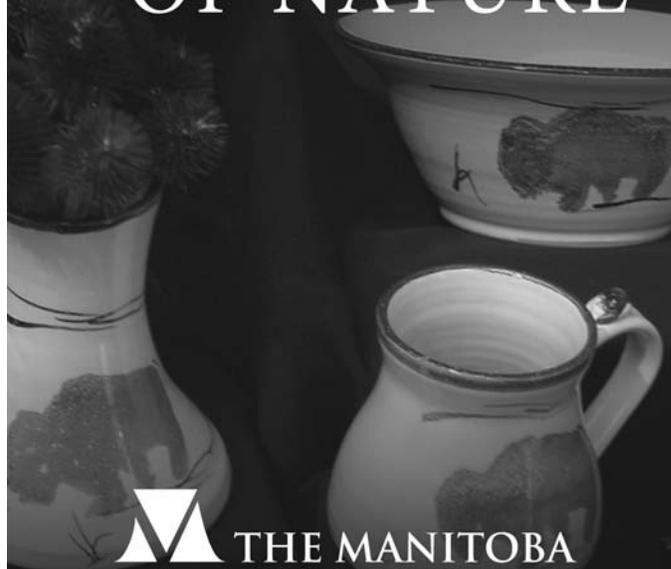
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