

I scanned the vast prairie surrounding Whitewater Lake and saw promise for the future! Rich hay-land bordered the lake's shoreline - perfect for a new business venture – the Morton Dairy-Farm Company! I'm George Morton. Folks out east call me the 'Cheese King of Canada' - due to the cheese factory I owned in Kingston.

I came to Turtle Mountain area in 1878 - and immediately saw the potential for large-scale cheese production! It was perfect! I had business connections with Sir John A McDonald – and through him found investors. With their help, I purchased 72 square miles west of Whitewater Lake – land, I heard, was recently prime grazing for buffalo. With confirmation that the CPR would be building a railway through here, I set the wheels in motion!

I supplied settlers with a small herd of dairy cattle - each on a quarter section of land. In 1881, I bought the sawmill at Lake Max and supplied lumber to the new settlers, and then laid out a townsite on the northwest corner of Whitewater Lake. This was to become a business center and community base. Everything was ready. We were destined for success!

But - we ran into trouble. During the summer of '82, our farmers brought 1,000 head of cattle from Emerson and Brandon and built corrals walled with tightly packed swamp hay - open to the sky. During the cold weather, instead of being let out to generate heat by moving about the pasture, the cows were tightly packed in their corrals. As frigid temperatures and relentless snowstorms set in, hundreds of them froze – right where they stood.

It was a terrible loss! And my troubles continued. I had relied on the CPR's promise to come through in time to transport my trademark prairie cheese out of Manitoba, but the rail line wasn't built past Whitewater Lake until 5 years later in 1886 – AND - they built it a few miles south of us.

The loss of the cattle, and the unfulfilled

promises of the CPR, brought an end to my cheese project. However - I didn't lose faith in this area's possibilities. It had such great potential!.



George Morton - from Cheese King to Town Father.

In 1883, I set up a store and a sawmill closer to Turtle Mountain, It was called 'Wassewa' which means 'Friendly Light' - because of the lantern we'd hang on the store gate to help guide (and invite in) passing travelers.

When the CPR finally built their rail line to Boissevain in 1885 I moved the Wassewa store into town - alongside the tracks where it became Boissevain's first business. That's when I changed from George Morton, 'Cheese King' to 'Father of Boissevain'.

Betty Sawatzky and David Neufeld adapted "Cheese King to Town Father" from a story in Vantage Points 3.