

Reverend L. O. Armstrong and the
Boiler Trail
 RMs: Turtle Mountain, Morton and Winchester
 1880

REVEREND LOUIS OLIVIER ARMSTRONG WAS A key figure in the development of southwestern Manitoba as a settler destination. Born in 1850, he was ordained in Ontario in 1873 and worked first in Quebec before moving to Emerson, Manitoba. Emerson, in 1879, was the second largest commercial centre in the province and the gateway to all points farther west.

Armstrong put together a series of lectures explaining the merits of southwestern Manitoba. He forwarded pamphlets to fellow clergy in England where they made their way into English papers and into the homes of thousands of potential immigrants. An 1881 edition of the *London Illustrated Graphic* printed:

“ . . . the fertility of the soil . . . will soon attract a large population to [southern Manitoba] which in beauty and variety of scenery is said to excel any other part of the North-West, whether British or American.”

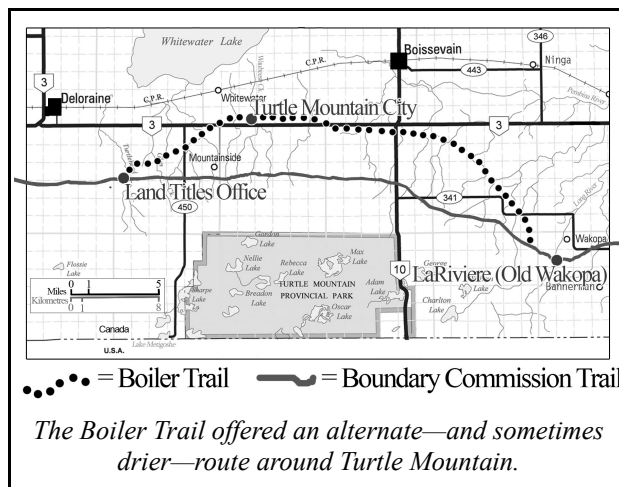
Armstrong desired to see southwest Manitoba settled by middle-class Church of England farmers. He was also a staunch supporter of efforts to build a rail line farther west. Emerson never got a railway leading west (though in 1878 it got one running north-south), but Armstrong was successful in encouraging English farmers to take up homesteads in the southwest.

The Boundary Commission Trail served as the link between east and west. It began as a First Nations and Métis trail, was later used as a fur trading route and finally as the avenue traveled by Boundary Commissioners surveying the 49th parallel between 1872 and 1874. Settlers arriving in Emerson discovered a ready-made road to lead them to places farther west.

When the year 1880 was only a few days old, Armstrong made a three-week long trek to Turtle Mountain country. His goal was to make a personal

inspection of the lands that he was promoting so that he could more authoritatively advocate for the area. Armstrong followed the Boundary Commission Trail during this trip, except for the portion passing north of Turtle Mountain, which was too wet to traverse. Instead, he blazed a trail that bypassed the muddy and awkward ravines close to the forested mountain and struck out onto the more level prairie to the north. This trail branched off from the Boundary Commission Trail about a mile and a half (2.4 kms) west of Old Wakopa and met up with the Trail again at the Old Deloraine Land Titles Office. It was known as the Boiler Trail or the Northern Trail. On this first trek to Turtle Mountain, Armstrong established a stopping place where the Boiler Trail forded Waubeesh Creek. This stopping place grew into the village of Turtle Mountain City, which evolved into the town of Waubeesh, which in turn served as the basis for Whitewater: a town that flourished into the 1960s.

Later in the summer of 1880, Armstrong served as a land guide to Dr. A. R. C. Selwyn who headed a Dominion Government coal exploration party westward. The spring and summer of that year were incredibly wet, and portions of the Boundary Commission Trail, under normal conditions quite passable, were at that time underwater. Therefore, the party took the detour provided by the Boiler Trail. This route was named after a massive boiler – the source of power for coal drilling machines – that Selwyn's crew hauled with great difficulty through Turtle Mountain country to the coalfields farther west.



In 1881, Armstrong resigned from his duties as a land guide. After another visit to Turtle Mountain in November as an agent and land commissioner for the South Western Colonization railway line, he sold out and moved with his family to Winnipeg.

References:
 Armstrong, L. O. *Meet You on the Trail or West Before the Railroad, Volume 1 Southern Manitoba and Turtle Mountain Country, 1880*. Winnipeg: Boundary Commission—NWMP Trail Association, 1991.
 Map: Adapted from: The Boundary Commission NWMP Trail Association. *Twelve Questions and*

