

# The Six Buildings of the Waskada Museum

While preparing for Vantage Points III I asked one of the TM-SPHA board members, Hilt Wallace, if he could help me by digging up some stories from the Waskada Museum. He reminded me that they had just added a sixth building to their collection, a rural schoolhouse. I thought that in addition to the schoolhouse, it would be a treat to find out the stories behind all six of the buildings that make up the Museum's collection.



The Waskada Museum's collection dates back to 1967. In that year, Canada turned 100 years old and celebration events were held across the country. In Waskada, local residents got very excited about displaying their old artifacts: pioneer items, tools, farming equipment, etc. At the time, the old MacLean's Hardware store was vacant, and it was used as a display space during the festivities.

Three years later, at the Manitoba Centennial, the village of Waskada repeated the museum display idea, only this time they found that after the celebration many people didn't want their items back. A Museum Committee was formed and went about trying to find a permanent location for the items.

**Building #1: Royal Bank.** The museum's first building was built in 1906 by the Union Bank, but was taken over four years later by the Royal Bank. Ray



Straus was bank manager for the Royal Bank when the museum was looking for a space, and he was also on the museum board. In 1967 a new hotel went up in town and a new Royal Bank opened up in that building, leaving the old one vacant. Straus convinced the bank to donate the old building to the museum.

**Building #2: Anglican Church.** It soon became apparent that one building was not enough, as they very quickly ran out of space in the bank. At that time the Anglican Church, built in 1914, was sitting empty a few blocks away, having ceased operating in 1950. The Museum Committee moved the church beside the bank in 1975 and soon had the building filled with more artifacts. They further enlarged this space in 1978 with a pole shed addition onto the back.

**Building #3: Elwood's Shed.** Elwood Heath was a local farmer and a member of the Museum committee. He had a number of large agricultural vehicles and implements (a collection of steam engines, binders, threshers, tractors etc) that he wanted to donate to the Waskada Museum, but at that time there was nowhere to put them. One morning he stopped Hilt outside the coffee shop in Waskada and suggested that he would personally donate \$10,000 towards the building of a shed to house these vehicles. Hilt couldn't believe his ears. The committee solicited further donations from residents of the district,



*◀ The Anglican Church (#1) and Royal Bank (#2), both 100 years old, were the Waskada Museum's first two buildings. (#4) Ren Amos' blacksmith shop, (circa 1909, pictured on the left side of the photo) joined the museum's collection in 2000 along with the coal shed (#5) (photographed in 1989 in its original location). (#6) Members of the Waskada Museum Committee moving the porch of the Menota School, the museum's latest addition.*



## A Story from the Waskada Museum: A WALES-WASKADA CONNECTION

A man showed up in Waskada with a diary in hand, written by a man he had never met . . .

In July of 1997, Hilt Wallace of Waskada was at his familiar summertime hangout—the Waskada Museum—when a couple arrived to tour the museum. They were accompanied by an elderly gentleman, who carried with him a small diary. Over the next few hours Hilt was treated to witnessing a connection between an old man

and a history nearly 100 years old.

The man's name was Arthur Ledsham Jr and he had found the diary after his mother passed away. It had been written by a man he had never met—his father, Arthur Theodore Ledsham Sr.

Arthur Jr was currently visiting Canada from Wales. While staying with his

daughter and her husband (who lived in Aurora, Ontario) he had convinced them to take him west to the town of Waskada, a place he had heard his father mention in his diary.

According to the diary, Arthur Sr arrived in Waskada with his brother Amos in 1910. They found work with farmers in the

and along with some grant money they were able to build a structure with 4200 square feet in 1999.

#### **Building #4: Blacksmith Shop.**

In 2000 the Museum Committee acquired a blacksmith shop that was across the street from the rest of the Museum complex. Blacksmith shops back in the day were a key part of agricultural success: farmers couldn't start turning the sod if no one was around to sharpen their plows. Ren Amos built the first blacksmith shop in Waskada in 1899. It burned down and he replaced it with another building that lasted until 1927. In that year he built an all-cement building that exists to this day. After Amos was done with the building it was used as a storage shed for the town until the Waskada Centennial. Today, the shop looks very much like it would have in 1927: it is decked out with hammers, anvils and a forge and is fully operational.

#### **Building #5: Coal Shed.**

Also acquired in 2000, the coal shed was bought for \$1.00 from the Paterson Grain Co. and became a display space for many artifacts. The coal shed was once a staple building in any community that wanted to stay warm in the winter. All elevator companies had a coal shed that sat beside the railway track, near the elevator. The shed had four big doors on one side where the coal was unloaded from the train car into bins in the shed, and another four big doors on the other side where customers could load the coal onto their wagons to take to their homes. In town there was always a drayman whose job it was to deliver coal and other freight with his wagon/sleigh to people in town.

area: Arthur Sr worked on the Donald Radcliffe farm and Amos worked with Ernie Lowes. In 1912 Arthur Sr went back to Wales to find a bride. After his wedding, he was drafted into the army and killed. His wife gave birth to his son, Arthur Jr several months afterwards.

Arriving in Waskada 85 years later, Arthur Jr asked Hilt about the Radcliffe farm and Hilt offered to take him there. The land was now owned by Bob Radcliffe. After visiting with Bob and his wife Pamela

## **Building #6: MENOTA SCHOOL**

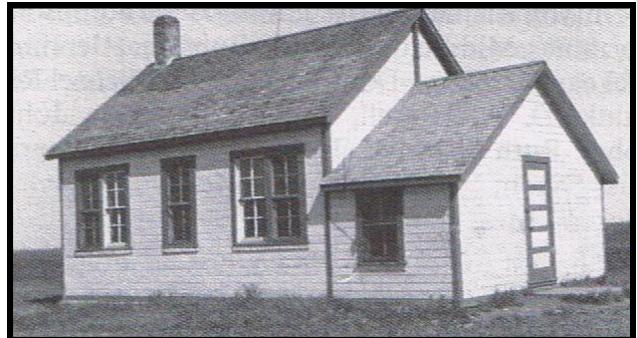
Though the Menota School hosted its last class 60 years ago, the building continues to take on an educational role as the newest addition to the Waskada Museum's collection.

Though there is very little information about the Menota School, its story is similar to that of most rural schools. What could be the earliest register dates back to 1888, when the school boasted 14 students. The schoolhouse closed permanently in 1952 and the district was later dissolved in 1959. This is a common story for schoolhouses of the era, as the rural school districts were consolidated and more spacious schools built in larger centres. Menota school, located about 15 kilometres north of Waskada, closed before the general consolidation of rural schools and students scattered to attend other rural schools in the area.

The Waskada museum had their eye on adding the schoolhouse to their collection of historic buildings for ten years before the farmer who owned the land could be convinced it was a worthy idea. In 2009 the Waskada Museum Committee started moving the school. They were able to move the porch themselves, using a front-end loader to lift the little building onto a trailer. It was then hauled by a tractor into town. They poured a new foundation for the school and the main body of the small heritage building was later moved onto it by Smitty the Mover.

they drove to the Lowes farm, and afterwards enjoyed tea with Hilt and his wife Ruth.

Later Hilt did some investigation on his own to see if there was any record of Arthur Sr being in Waskada. Apparently Donald Radcliffe had been a meticulous bookkeeper. His daughter-in-law Muriel had inherited the book and Hilt paid her a visit. Muriel advised him to visit Mary Radcliffe McGregor (Donald Radcliffe's daughter), who remembered Arthur Sr being



*The Menota School, pictured in the mid 1940s.*

*The building was in use from 1888-1952.*

Renovations were carried out to preserve the schoolhouse and spruce it up—the building had not seen occupation over half a century. For a few years after it closed the building had been used to store grain, and it was quite a mess when the museum committee got hold of it. Using a grant from the Community Services Council, new windows were put in, the interior woodwork replaced and the roof reshingled. Norm Reid, a very active and dedicated Museum Committee board member, did the interior painting and decorating before old-style desks were moved in.

In 2012 the finishing touches of a flagpole and faux chimney were added to the schoolhouse. The building is now a regular part of the museum's display, furnished with a teacher's desk and bell, old water fountain and old-fashioned outdoor toilet.

**Sources:**  
Brenda History Committee. *Bridging Brenda Vol. I.* Altona: Friesen Printers, 1990. Pg 110.  
Wallace, Hilton. Personal Interviews. 24 Aug 2012, 30 Jan 2013.  
Heritage Photo: Brenda History Committee. Pg 110.  
Moving photos: Wallace, Hilton.

around her father's farm and Waskada.

How fascinating it is that an unknown father could cause such a burning curiosity in his son that he would visit the place where his father worked—an ocean and a continent and a lifetime away! And that unbeknownst to the father, despite only living for two years in Waskada, he would leave behind a memory and a story.

**Sources:**  
Wallace, Hilt. Personal Communication. 24 July 2012.  
Brenda History Committee. *Bridging Brenda Vol. II.* Altona: Friesen Printers, 1990. Pg 1043.