

The Two Desfords

A pioneer settlement is reborn as a railway village

An Englishman named Barneby did a tour of North America in 1883. He passed through Brandon and then went south. In the book he published, he mentioned one of the little villages that came and went in those early days.

“On our route we passed a store named Desford, where we watered our horses; but the water was bad. A road comes in here from Brandon. The Turtle Mountains are still to the south.”

That’s about all he had to say, but the settlement got a mention.

The Desford community began in the late 1870's along the Old Commission Trail about twelve kilometres south-southeast of Boissevain, and was, after Wakopa, the first trading

centre in the area.

People living where Boissevain would soon be located would do their shopping and get their mail at Desford in the store opened by E. Nichol. The first church services were held at James Burgess’s log house.

More Claims to Fame....

Duncan Henderson recalls: *“Practically all our travel was done on foot and I have walked to Old Desford, eleven miles distant, for the mail and shouldered a hundred pound sack of flour back.”*

Mrs. A. E. Cook recalled: *“There were no stores where food could be purchased, nearer than Brandon, except those at Desford, Wakopa and Waubeesh.”*

In 1882 the Porrieth brothers of Desford owned the first steam power southwest of Brandon. Desford seemed ready to become an important town if only the railway would pass through.

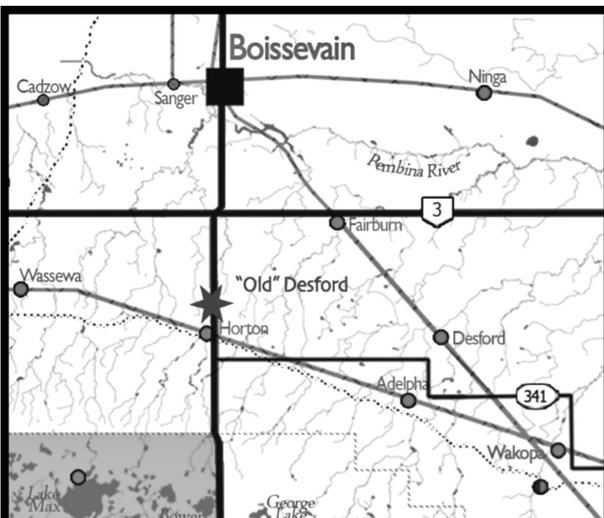
That didn’t happen. The railway passed to the north and the town of Boissevain became the centre of the region.

A Second Life....

In 1906 the Great Northern Railway was put down through the area and



▲ All traces of Desford are gone. This sign, placed in 1970, is left to remind us of an earlier time.



▲ Desford, a stop along the Great Northern Railway, borrowed its name from “Old Desford” (indicated by the star) several miles to the west.

a small village, a bit to the east of the original spot, but also called Desford, sprang to life.

In 1908 the hamlet consisted of: the Railway Station, water tower for the trains, elevator, section house, bunkhouse, Methodist Church, a blacksmith shop, community hall, a general store and a few houses. It was a community in every sense and like so many others was a busy place for a time. The population exploded to near thirty! The local retail businesses thrived.

In many ways, such villages never recovered from the depression, but that merely hastened their inevitable decline. An all-day trek to Boissevain with a horse and buggy over muddy trails, soon became a ten-minute drive over graded gravel roads. The businesses of Desford were the first to go, while the social activities remained vital for another few decades. By the 1950’s there just weren’t enough people for a good school dance and the village faded away.

Source:
Boissevain History Book Committee. *Beckoning Hills Revisited. “Ours is a Goodly Heritage”*
Morton – Boissevain 1881 – 1981. Altona. Friesen Printing, 1981.