

Main Street In Bede

Two heritage sites link us to the story of a typical railway siding

Have you ever noticed how cemeteries are often placed on a hill? It's the exception that proves the rule. On Highway 83, about midway between Pipestone and Melita there is a cemetery that is not on a hill. A glance around reveals a distinct shortage of hills.

It is an attractive cemetery nevertheless, well kept, and, in keeping with its bald prairie demeanor, not shaded or hidden by trees. A modest brick building is quite visible just on the other side, obviously a schoolhouse.

Welcome to Bede. Not so much a ghost town, but rather another community that didn't quite become a village.

By 1902, when the Canadian Pacific Railroad surveyed the Lauder-Alida line, western Manitoba had enough towns. What was still needed were railway stations, and elevators. A post office and maybe a country store were also welcome, and houses appeared only when necessary.

The siding that sprang up was originally named Ruth. The station name was soon changed to Bede but the post office still remained Ruth for some time. The trainmen

referred to the spot as the "Twin Cities."

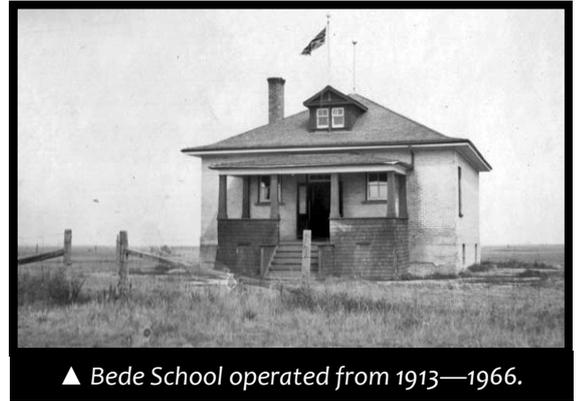
As usual, fire played a role in the evolution of the site. In 1922 the Lake of the Woods elevator burned and never did rebuild. But a few years later, about 1928, United Grain Growers put up a new elevator and also built a house for the operator. The CPR built a new home for the foreman and his family in 1924.

Thus ended the growth spurt.

But just because Bede didn't have a bustling main street, doesn't mean it wasn't a vibrant community.

The first European settlers and their families arrived in the district in 1882. Schools were located: Hathaway to the west, Huston to the north, Gould to the east, and West Brenda to the south. With the establishment of the railway siding it made sense to shuffle things a bit and build a school in the new village. To facilitate the change Hathaway School was moved to Broomhill and Gould to Bernice – other stops on the new rail line.

Bede had an open air rink on the north side of the track with a



▲ Bede School operated from 1913—1966.

CPR boxcar for a dressing room. Interdenominational church services were held in the school.

One of the better-known Baptist student ministers was Tommy Douglas. He helped to entertain at some of the fowl suppers. Another was Stanley Knowles, also a distinguished politician. He recalled that in 1929, Reston's Baptist Church owned an old Model T touring car that was put in shape so he could use it in summer in order to get out to Bede.

The school also served for fowl suppers, picture shows, dances, box socials and pie socials. At all dances, ladies were allowed in free if they brought lunch. There were also whist drives, bingos and, in early days, spelling bees and other cultural activities.

Funerals were also conducted from the school and even these sad events had an upside for the students who received half a day off from classes.

We can suspect that the residents didn't mind the odd trip to Reston or Melita for a more complete shopping experience, and were happy to have the elements of a stimulating social life close to home.

Sources:

R.M. of Albert History Book. *Reflections of Time*. Friesen Printers, Altona, 1984.

Photos: Above Source, & Ken Storie



◀ Bede Cemetery.