

Dr Frederick Valentine Bird arrived in Boissevain in 1913 on the early morning train, penniless, having never been to our town before

One of Dr. Bird's mentors at Medical school had suggested that Boissevain would be a good place to practice. Within four months of his arrival he was making a modest living and settled into serving our community for what would be the next 62 years.

Today when we get ill, we go to see the doctor.

And if we're really ill, we stay in the hospital. In the days when Dr. Bird first moved to Boissevain, it was different. If someone fell ill or had an accident, the first response was to "call the doctor!" and the doctor would come out to see you –sometimes travelling great distances with a team of horses. This was especially difficult in the wintertime. Due to poor weather the doctor often wasn't called for until the illness was very bad, and Dr Bird had to deal with many emergency procedures by the dim light in a homesteader's bedroom. A particular claim to fame of his was that over his long career in Boissevain he delivered over 2200 babies!

The Thirties were a difficult time for the community of Boissevain and for Dr Bird specifically. Farmer's crops were worth next to nothing – they could not pay shopkeepers in town, so business-people also had very little. Dr Bird continued practicing medicine even though his patients had nothing to pay him with. As if things weren't bad enough, Boissevain also suffered a polio epidemic the summer of 1936 that claimed 6 lives and left two others with lasting physical damage.

Perhaps Dr Bird took the strug-

gles of the depression more personally than most because he served as Boissevain's Mayor from 1929-1940. He launched two relief projects which aimed at giving local unemployed men temporary work. Boissevain had very few trees prior

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to 1929, and we have Dr Bird to thank for lining our streets with elm trees. The other relief project he instigated was replacing the old wooden boardwalks and mud paths downtown with cement sidewalks.

He continued treating patients until his death in 1977, he was 92 years old.

Source:

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

Not Your Average Ancestors

Dr Bird's Great-grandfather James Curtis Bird was born in England and came to York Factory on Hudson's Bay to work as a clerk with the Hudson's Bay Company. He rose quickly through the ranks and served as the head of the company in Canada for two years. Like many men working in the fur trade, Bird was married to an Aboriginal woman, as was his son after him. Thus our Dr Bird had strong Indigenous roots and would today be described as Métis. Throughout his life, he was proud of his heritage.

Another of Dr. Bird's relatives has a National Park named after him! Dr. Bird's great-uncle was the Speaker for the first Manitoba Legislative Assembly when the province came into being in 1870 under the leadership of Louis Riel. Bird's Hill Park (northeast of Winnipeg) was named after him.

