



# We Made Melita

Profiles of People Who Made a Difference



Revised 2019

## We Made Melita

**T**HE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE who have made the Melita their home over the years, since its inception in 1890, have been a fascinating group, full of strength and wisdom, wit and vigour, kindness and foresight.

Some of these people are also significant, key figures in our history. They have either come to define the region by their very being, or they have changed our communities through their actions and decisions.

This booklet recognizes and honours these people.

On the following pages you will encounter the collection of people who have made a real difference. The useful way we have chosen to explore and describe these people has been to focus on traditional occupations and avocations. With one key person typically defining each entry (a merchant, a school teacher, a brick-maker, etc.) we expect that the rich and deep experience of life and work in Melita can be effectively and succinctly defined.

The people profiled in this booklet are special, but we have also endeavoured to feature others with slightly lesser claims to significance who help define or enhance a certain entry. And where possible we have also added information and details on certain occupations and avocations so that readers can come to fully understand and appreciate who these people were, what they did, and how they did it.

This booklet was developed through a project called *Notable People*, an initiative of the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism. That project allowed us to develop a comprehensive inventory of potential candidates, and to carefully analyze and assess the relative significance of the 180 individuals profiled. We are grateful to the Province for this support and direction.

It is easy at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to forget the origins and qualities of Manitoba's smaller communities. But at their beginnings these were very industrious places, with young, ambitious people, full of life, and with great dreams for their new home. It is also important to recall that these places were also self-sustaining, with nearly everything one would need made at hand. Much of what was required for daily life was manufactured here, from bricks to dresses, harnesses to flour. Places like Melita in 1900 were active, lively and fun.

It is important to set the stage for the following stories. They come from the excellent local history, "Our First Century" produced by the Melita-Arthur History Committee in 1983.

In a foreword to that volume, entitled, "*Some Sidelights of Melita's Past*" by Robert Livesely offers some advice that we paraphrase here:



*“A difficulty in dealing with the more human and therefore more interesting feature of the progress of any community is that events of a century ago cannot be fairly read in the light of today.*

*The reading public may not recognize the absolute truth of the phrase Other times, other manners.”*

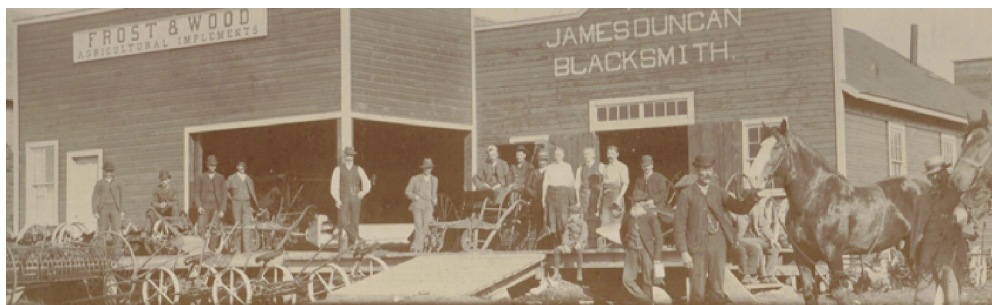
*They, who so to speak, put Melita on the map deserve the best that those who are the heirs of their efforts and successes or even failures can think of them. The occasion was great and they were men of the occasion.”*

Melita is one of numerous Manitoba towns that had its original location abandoned when a nearby site was chosen by a railway company. In this case the fledgling town of Melita had only a short way to travel. It is also one of dozens of towns that sprang up almost overnight when a railway station appeared in the middle of a well-populated farmland.

The settlement of the Melita area began in 1879 with the arrival of a few settlers from Ontario who traveled along the Boundary Commission Trail. As the first settlers established themselves three identifiable communities developed. Sourisford, situated near the mouth the Antler Creek, soon had a post office and a store. A town site. Souris City (alternately, “Souriopolis”) was created at 26-2-27, which was briefly the location of the new Land Titles Office.

Dobbyn City, a bit east of the current town at (32-3-26), was promoted by owner John Dobbyn, and lots were offered to speculators. It was one of dozens of speculative townsites in Manitoba during the Manitoba Boom of 1881-82. Although the “City” was short-lived a Post Office, called Menota, did offer some basic services to the region.

It was Manchester, a rival town promoted by Dr. Sinclair, that went beyond the paper stage and evolved into Melita, first by undergoing a name change, and then by moving a short kilometre or two to be alongside the C.P.R when it finally arrived in 1891.



James Duncan established his Blacksmith Shop at the Manchester site and was one of several businesses that moved to the new site of Melita.

With very basic services in place the settlers turned their attention to the business of establishing farms while the railway company just kept making promises. By the time the current town of Melita appeared in 1890, the region itself had a long and interesting history.

Three identifiable communities developed within a few miles of the current site of Melita. Sourisford, home to the Goulds and Elliotts was situated near the mouth the Antler Creek soon had a post office and a store. While Dobbyn City failed to materialize as hoped by its promoters a Post Office, called Menota, did offer some basic services to the region. It was Manchester that went beyond the paper stage and evolved into Melita, first by undergoing a name change, and then by moving a short kilometre or two to be alongside the C.P.R when it finally arrived in 1891.

Before the first train whistle sounded Mr. G.L.Dodds had moved his Hardware & General Store to the site of the new town and virtually everyone followed. By 1892 numerous business blocks lined Main and Front Streets. An interesting item from an 1891 edition of the Melita Enterprise states that: "Most of the houses brought into Melita this year have found ready sale." Quite a few of those early buildings, including a few commercial structures, made it into the modern era, and although one might not recognize them, both the former Morrow Pharmacy and the McMaster Insurance (Sears) Building date from that time. The current Presbyterian Church also dates from 1892.



In the early years of the twentieth century Melita consolidated its position as the primary trading centre for the region while to the east, Napinka, and to the west, Pierson, also prospered. Nearby Elva, Coulter and Tilston remained smaller service centres.

It was predictable that Melita would grow quickly and confidently in that that the vital rail link placed it at the centre of an already well-established agricultural base. There was no speculation or uncertainty about its importance as a service centre.

Buildings were moved from the previous location just across the tracks or built quickly from readily materials readily available via the new rail line. Many of these building were substantial, but few survive today. Within a few years they were supplanted and replace by more ambitious structures reflecting such as the Northern Bank, the I.O.O.F Hall and the Crerar Law Office; all of which continue to grace the Main Street. It was in that period that many fine homes were erected, of both frame and brick construction, some near the core area, but others on the perimeter. Owned by community leaders with names like Dobbyn, Duncan and Holden, several of these buildings have been well cared for and survive intact.



**Main Street 1910 (Manitoba Archives Photo)**

As Melita looks forward to the century ahead it has taken steps to preserved important aspects of its past, including the preservation of the Melita School as of the Antler River Museum.

## Pioneer

### W.T. Brockinton



Mr. W. T. BROCKINTON was a graduate of Oxford University in England. He quit a position as an auditor for The Birmingham Railway to come to Canada.

He arrived at Brandon in the spring of 1882 with a party of other settlers. After stopping in Brandon to get organized and get supplies they started out with oxen to find their homesteads.

They went up past the sand hills at Lauder and then along the Souris River's west bank up to and past where Melita is now, on south along the river for another ten kilometres or so, and then west to where their homesteads were located.

They set up their tents and went to work to build, some with sod shanties and Mr. Brockinton with a lumber shanty, which was much colder.

During February, with food supplies getting low, Mr. Brockinton took his oxen and drove about ten miles across the prairie to Dave Elliott's at Sourisford where he had been told he might be able to buy a bag of potatoes. Arriving there alright he got his potatoes O.K. when

a blizzard came up, but cleared up by ten o'clock with a bright moonlight night.

Mr. Elliott wanted Mr. Brockinton to stay till morning but Mr. Brockinton said much as he would like to he thought that as he had a wife and two children out on the prairie he had better start out. With the oxen plodding along Mr. Brockinton got colder and colder and then got feeling sleepy. He remembered reading that that was the last feeling one got before freezing to death, so he got out to walk but was so stiff that he had to hook one arm around the back of the sleigh and get dragged along for 50 yards until he could walk. He finally got home with his bag of frozen potatoes.

He said if it hadn't been for the beaver-cut driftwood that he was able to get they could easily have frozen to death as one morning it was 20 below zero in their wood shanty.

The second summer he was able to get a second homestead pre-emption on the river flats where there was plenty of wood. He dug into the north bank of a ravine and by sodding up the sides he built a warm place to winter.

In 1895, he built a stone house, which is still standing today.

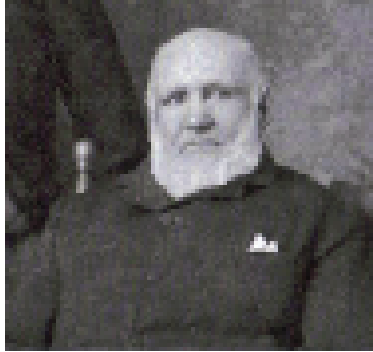
Mr. Brockinton was a very good violinist and taught music to the family and others who wished to learn the violin. Mr. and Mrs. Brockinton continued to live on their farm until their deaths. Mrs. Brockinton died in November of 1924 and Mr. Brockinton died in September of 1933 at 83 years of age.

Adapted from a submission by Percy Brockinton in "Our First Century".



## Pioneer

### John Dobbyn



John Dobbyn's parents, Richard Dobbyn and Maria Bobier were married in Castledomer, Kilkenny, Ireland, in 1815. Shortly after their marriage they decided to come to the New World and seek their fame and fortune in British America.

After a series of adventures during which Richard was captured by a press gang, escaped, and was reunited with his wife, the couple started farming in Ontario, where Richard also taught school for 12 years.

Their son John married Jane Laird in 1847. With their children Richard John, Charles Sidney and Edward Francis, they all came to Manitoba in the early 1880's to take up farming.

In 1881, John selected a homestead near where Melita is today. He returned to Ontario in the fall and brought family out the next spring.

The years 1881 and 82 are remembered for the "Manitoba Boom". Across the province rumours of rail lines prompted the creation of speculative cities, which were created on paper and aggressively marketed. Extravagant claims were made. Each site was to be the next big thing. By buying into one of these boom towns one was betting that the rail line would pass through and the paper city might well become a reality.

In the spirit of the times, Mr. Dobbyn had "Dobbyn City" surveyed on his property in anticipation of a coming rail line.

# DOBBYN CITY!

The Future Great Manufacturing City of the **Souris** District. Magnificent Water-Power, and illimitable supply of Coal and Iron.

**On Sec. 32, Tp. 2, R. 26 West.**

The Centre of the Souris River county in South-Western Manitoba, at the point where the Manitoba South-Western Railway crosses the great Souris River. The whole country surrounding Dobbyn City is acknowledged by all to be the actual garden of Manitoba, and every available foot of land for miles and miles around is settled. Mr. Dobbyn, after whom the city is called, having

## Colonized Five Townships

himself with wealthy farmers from Ontario. Dobbyn City is to be made the

# COUNTY TOWN

OF

# Souris River County

**Winnipeg Daily Sun, March 9, 1882**

The railway did eventually come, but Dobbyn City was long forgotten. Melita was created a bit to the west.

Mr. Dobbyn had long since focused on his farm, but the entrepreneurial spirit never did leave him. In 1905 at 80 yrs. started Melita Brick & Tile Co. after discovering red brick clay near the river.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 36, 377, 508

## Pioneer

### G.L. Dodds

Mr. Dodds had a Hardware & General Store as well as a boarding house in the new settlement of Manchester. In 1890 When the railway selected a site about a kilometre east for a station, Mr. Dodds was one of the first to move his business to the new site. He was one of the first property owners in the new village of Melita. His store was on the site that would later be home to the Northern Bank. He had a new store built there in 1903. When his property was sold to the Northern Bank the store building was moved south to the next lots.

Mr. Dodd's name is scattered throughout the Melita story and appears in several newspaper accounts of the time. He served as a Land Agent for CPR and Canada North West Land Co. He sold farms and traveled to Ontario to solicit settlers. He served as Magistrate. He was a tireless advocate for the new community and took a leadership role in many projects. As an example, he helped organized efforts to create a ferry crossing for the new settlement. He served as Reeves, and as such laid the cornerstone of the new Victoria Methodist Church in 1897.

In 1928 another notable citizen, A.B. Estlin paid tribute in the local paper:

"No history of Melita would be complete without some reference being made to G. L. Dodds. He was a man who devoted much time and ability to public work, and to him we owe, among many other things, our fine school building and our parks. His work in the Municipality of Arthur gave us many improvements in the way of roads and bridges, which contributed in no small degree to the prosperity of the town. Like anyone else who does public work, there were many who did not see eye to

eye with him; consequently, he had many hard election battles.

Mr. Dodds was always bitterly opposed to both the incorporation of the Town, and the Board of Trade, but we always considered that his opposition was due to his fear that the prestige of the Municipality of Arthur might suffer, as he usually strongly advocated any forward movement. His policy of roads and bridges was much the same as we find today."

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 205

*Deloraine Times says: Mr. G. L. Dodds, of Melita, arrived home last Thursday night. He has been doing emigration work in the neighborhood of his old home, visiting Peterborough, Markdale, and other places, and interesting the people in Manitoba lands. Mr. Dodds is of opinion that there will be considerable immigration to this part of the Province.*

**Brandon Sun - March 26, 1890**



**The corner of Main Street and Front Street, before 1906.**

## Medical Services

### Doctor Herbert Byers

Dr. Herbert P. Byers was born near Sheffield, England, on September 17, 1860. He received his school education at King's Lynn and Manchester, and then commenced at Leeds his long association with medical practice. In 1882 he came to Manitoba, and for some years was active in the survey of western Canada.

In 1886, he married Ann E. Pruden of Selkirk.

Resuming his medical studies, he graduated at the Manitoba Medical School with Gordon Bell in the class of 1890. He then went out to the new settlement of Melita, at that time a small collection of tents on the hill to the west of the present town. Here, save for six years at Selkirk, from 1895-1902, was the scene of his life's work.

For many years he was a keen cricketer, excelling in his ability behind the stumps; indeed to him may truly be given the highest praise desired by an Englishman, that of having played cricket all the days of his life.

Though after his return to Melita he took little part in the affairs of the province outside his own area this was due to his devotion to his task, to bring his very best to the case, comfort and health of his people and to keep himself abreast of modern advances. True to his type, he seldom used the knife, but left the surgical treatment of his patients to those of his colleagues who were more recently trained and more accustomed to the art, but generations bless him for his skill in diagnosis, his wise choice of treatment, and of his ever-gentle and diligent care.

No journey was too difficult for him, and pecuniary reward was his last thought. In his association with those who succeeded each other in sharing with him the medical service in Melita and southwestern Manitoba he was, in all but name, the very pattern of an elder partner.

For many years he held the appointments of Health Officer to Melita and the Municipality of Arthur, of Coroner, and of Medical Officer to the Canadian Pacific Railway. He was a member of the Anglican Church and Sons of England.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 452



**Cottage hospitals were the first centralized health care facility established in pioneer towns.**



## Recreation

### Curling Champion, George Anderson



**Melita Curlers win cup at Brandon 1898.**  
**L.-R: Wm. W. Anderson, George M. Anderson. Seated: Wm. J. Cobb, John J. Anderson Jr.**

George M. Anderson, born in 1869, came to Melita in 1889 with his family and farmed for over fifty years beginning in 1897. In 1905 he married Eliza Helen Linton.

George spent his leisure time skating, curling and playing in the Melita Band. He was especially skilled at curling and was a regular winner at bonspiels throughout the region. He was a founding director of the Melita Curling Rink Co. in 1903.

His other interests included automobiles, he and Eliza participated in the Melita Automobile Club activities and tours.

He was one of several influential Melita landowners who realized that the treeless prairie the early settlers found could be made more suited to agriculture by careful management. He planted and tended over 4000 trees on his property

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 409, 274

### The Melita Curling Club

At a meeting in 1892 a decision was made to build a rink for skating and curling. For the next eleven consecutive years, the Melita Club won district matches and Melita curlers successfully participated in various bonspiels throughout the province and in the adjoining area in Saskatchewan.

The first annual meeting of the Melita Curling Rink Co. was held November 17, 1903. Thirteen rinks of curlers were formed. That winter the first open bonspiel was held in the new rink.

In 1904 for the fourth time since the Honourable Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, began putting up gold watches as a prize for the Premier Event in the Brandon Bonspiel, these watches were won by Melita curlers.

In 1907 a sheet iron skating rink was built and used for auxiliary curling at bonspiel time with four sheets of curling ice being used.

In 1909 the Melita rink was honoured by its selection along with five other Canadian rinks, to play against six visiting American rinks. The Melita rink won its game by three points.

In 1916 the Curling Club arranged a bonspiel for high school students at the end of the curling season.

In 1928 Melita had the distinction of having the second largest bonspiel in Canada, with an entry of 94 rinks. This was probably the largest bonspiel in Canada sponsored by a single club.

## Men's Wear Merchant

### G.B. Barker



G. B. Barker of England came to Melita in 1892 and was employed by R. M. Graham. He then moved north of Melita and farmed for a few years.

George then went to Toronto and took a barbers' course and was in this business for a short time.

In 1899 he bought a building on Main Street and opened a Men's and Boys' Shoes and Clothing Store. He built a new building on the same spot in 1915. The business remained in the family at that location for over 70 years.

G. B. Barker was secretary of the school board for many years, active in the Board of Trade and Past Master of the Masonic Lodge. He passed away in 1945.



**Street scene of the Orange Parade 1912, including the first Barker's Shop.**

## Implement Dealer

### Albert Edward Cameron



A. E. Cameron was born in Ivernesshire, Scotland and came to Ontario with his parents. He came to Manitoba in 1889 and worked for the implement firm of Frost and Wood. In 1891 he was appointed general agent for the same firm. He retired in 1892 to form a partnership with James Duncan, who was the local agent for Frost and Wood at Melita (Cameron and Duncan established 26 agencies and warehouses from Deloraine to Yellow Grass, Saskatchewan).

His son remembers that Albert made trips to the implement factory where he bought carloads of machinery to be shipped to the various agencies.

About 1908 when the company of Cameron and Duncan dissolved, Mr. Cameron purchased a fruit farm about five miles out of Victoria, British Columbia and moved the family to a warmer climate. He kept the farms in Manitoba however and returned in the early twenties to manage them. He died in 1932

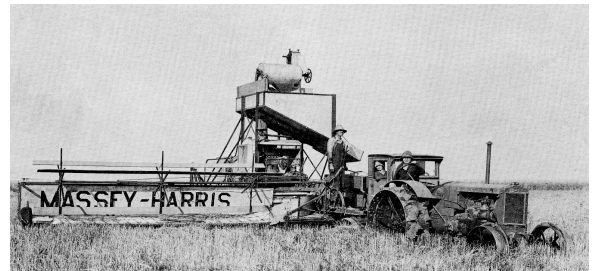
Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 453

## Implement Dealers

Albert Cameron's business as an implement dealer was a key one in Melita, and one that many other individuals also attempted over the years. All would have been very familiar with all lines of farm machinery, and of the firms that manufactured them.

Prior to 1900, all manufacturing consisted of short-line companies: full-line companies emerged primarily as a means to overcome competition.

Canada had two full-line companies: Massey-Harris (later to become Massey-Harris-Ferguson, and finally Massey-Ferguson) and Cockshutt, both located in the Hamilton region of Ontario. The Massey Company at one time was the world's largest manufacturer of farm equipment; however, it fell on hard times and went into receivership in 1988.



Perry Cowan, Edna Cowan, Nellie Carter, 1928.

Perry and Edna Cowan and Nellie Carter in 1928.



## Hotel Keepers

### John and Mary Cobb



Prior to 1880, John Cobb, who was born in Lechfield County, Quebec, was engaged in logging and the lumber industry in the Ottawa Valley. In 1880, along with his wife Mary and their ten children, he proceeded west to Winnipeg, where he obtained contracts to build rail-bed for the CPR which was pushing its way west across the prairie at that time. During this operation the family was established at Gopher Creek, near Virden, where the children obtained schooling. At the conclusion of his contract work near Calgary, John Cobb returned to Virden and erected a hotel which he operated for a few years. In 1890, he decided to move his family to Melita, a new town that was springing up approximately 40 miles to the south. He sold the Virden enterprise to new owners with the intention of building a new hotel in Melita.

It is to be remembered that the railway did not arrive at Melita until 1891, and so it was necessary to haul building materials for the hotel from both Virden and Deloraine for part of the construction with horse-drawn wagons over prairie trails. During the period of construction, the family, along with the carpenters employed at the building site, was housed in a double-decker tent. It was situated directly across the street from the site of the Metropolitan Hotel. A frame lean-to kitchen and two rooms housed the

family, and from here they prepared the food which they served in the large dining room on the ground floor. Even at this time, two rooms on the upper deck were reserved for any travellers who might need accommodation. Upon the arrival of the railway, the hotel was completed, the pride of the village and the finest of its kind for miles around

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 482  
Submitted by Ken Cobb



Photo from the Manitoba Archives (1914)

## A Day in the Life of a Small Town Hotel

“Running a small-town Manitoba hotel in the early 1900s was hard work. The hotel staff usually consisted of at least two chambermaids and a cook who worked from morning till night, cleaning the guest rooms, doing the laundry, and washing dishes. The maid's work day usually started at 6:00 a.m. and ended at 9:00 p.m. for which she was paid \$10 per month, plus room and board. Porters not only assisted hotel guests with their luggage; they also washed dishes, milked the cows that supplied the milk for the hotel and did all the odd jobs. The upstairs maid also polished the silver and glassware and kept everything shining.

All members of the hotel owner's family had to share in the work of running the hotel. “One of the duties of the kids was to help with the housekeeping and at noon you had to take your turn at washing the dishes before going back to school. My sister, Irma, served as a waitress in the dining room when she was barely taller than the table tops.” “The years in the Hotel were busy ones for all of the family. It was the boys' job to fire the wood-burning furnace. This meant rising about three a.m. and again at six to stoke the furnace. ... We were responsible for bringing in blocks of ice and snow to melt for the daily wash. ... We hauled our drinking water from the town well.”

Wash days – usually Mondays – were an ordeal, especially in winter. Washing bedding and clothes was often a two-day proposition. Water had to be hauled and then heated in tubs the night before. Start-up time was set for five or six a.m. and the laundry process quite often ran into the afternoon. The next day, one of the maids would run the clothes and sheets through a mangle, a machine used to wring water out

of wet laundry. Most hotels did not get running water until the 1940s or 1950s, so water had to be hauled from a well in the summer. In the winter, hotels used melted ice and snow, or water that had been collected in rain barrels during the previous summer.”

© Joan Champ, 2011



*Melita's Grand Union Hotel*

## Legal Services

### Lawyer John Crerar



John Crerar was born in the County of Perth near Stratford, Ontario, on September 22, 1848. He was educated in grammar school, Stratford, Upper Canada College and Toronto University. From the latter he graduated in 1872, taking natural science as his honor course with silver medalist standing.

Following his graduation, Mr. Crerar studied law in the office of Edington and Miskle, Stratford, for four years and was called to the bar in 1876. He came west in 1879 settling in Minnedosa, where he opened an office in May 1880. He was elected to the Manitoba Legislature at a by-election in October 1881. He did not run for reelection in 1883 but ran unsuccessfully in the 1886 and 1899 general elections. He practiced for a time in Birtle before opening an office in Melita.

In September of 1902 Charles Armstrong accepted a position with Mr. Crerar. They formed a partnership January 8th. 1903, which dissolved in December of 1903. In January 1904, F. Campbell practiced law with Mr. Crerar in the Odd Fellows Hall, while a new law office was being built. They moved into the new law office, which was (and is still) situated at the corner of Main Street and Souris Street, in July of 1904. In

December of 1904, R. Cole Jr. began his study of law with the Crerar, Campbell partnership. The partnership dissolved in 1907, and Mr. Crerar continued the practice on his own. In July of 1926, F. G. Barrett came into partnership with Mr. Crerar. This partnership dissolved in January of 1928, when Mr. Crerar retired, selling his interest in the partnership to Frank Barrett.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 393

**THE Birtle Eye-Witness says:—**  
“Mr. John Crerar, of Melita, paid the town a visit this week, and gave such flattering accounts of the business prospects down there that Porteous Bros. have decided to take a number of their horses to that town, and start a livery and feed business.”

Brandon Sun - Oct. 22, 1891

## Pioneer Blacksmith

### James Duncan



James Duncan was born in **Aberdeenshire**, Scotland in 1857, the son of James and Jane (**Dalgamo**) Duncan. Mr. Duncan came to Canada in 1882 where he met Miss **Helen McGuire**, formerly from England. They were married in **Moffat**, Saskatchewan in 1887.

He **homesteaded** in **Wolseley**, N.W.T. (now Saskatchewan) and also served in the North-West Rebellion in 1885.

In 1888, Mr. Duncan settled in **Melita**. He worked at his blacksmith trade before the town was incorporated. Later he established a farm implement business and he was also associated with insurance.

Soon after the incorporation of Melita, he served on the town council and rendered the community excellent service in this capacity. In other ways he devoted his energies to the development of the town and district. He was a member of the Board of Trade for many years and his work as such, was recognized by his associates, who elected him to the presidency.

He was a justice of the peace under the **Greenway** Government.

Mr. Duncan linked up with the **I.O.O.F.** in the early days of his career. He was past noble grand of Melita Lodge No. 20, past grand master, and past grand representative, attending the Grand Lodge at Atlanta, Georgia, Indianapolis, Indiana and Winnipeg, while he was also past chief patriarch.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 520



**Photo from the Manitoba Archives**



## A Day in the Life of a Blacksmith

For the early settlers, the blacksmith was perhaps the most essential tradesman. Not only did he make the iron parts for the first farming implements, he also could repair all iron objects by hammering them by hand on an anvil.

After heating the iron until white-hot, the blacksmith would then shape and wield a multitude of objects from it, including carriage bolts and wheels, iron work, cooking utensils, and most importantly, horseshoes.

Blacksmiths who made horseshoes were called farriers, derived from the Latin word for iron. At a time when horses were the only means of transport, the blacksmith was important to not only individual farmers and travelers, but also to merchants whose businesses depended on transporting their goods to other places. Also, because they spent much of their time shoeing horses, blacksmiths gained a considerable amount of knowledge about equine diseases.

The new industrial output of the late 1800s allowed the smith to improve his shop. With a small boiler, steam engine, and a system of overhead shafts, pulleys, and leather belts, the formerly hand operated shop equipment like the post drill, the blower, and other equipment could be easily powered. The small belt powered machines like the Little Giant trip hammer or its blacksmith-built counterpart took its place in many small shops. Later, the "steam" part of the steam driven leather belt systems were replaced with small gasoline engines or electric motors. In time, many power hammers were fitted with their own electric motors.

Many blacksmiths were manufacturers as well. Wagon boxes, the setting of wagon and buggy tyres, lathe

turned parts for spinning wheels, the single bob manure sleigh, the making of sleigh runners, bolsters, bunks and tongues, and the custom manufacture of truck transfer boxes with cattle hauling equipment were some of the items fabricated with finesse befitting the labourers.

Always, along with the aforesaid, there were the innumerable interruptions to repair broken machinery as is bound to happen in a mixed farming area.

## Pioneer Historian

### Businessman A.B. Estlin



Mr. Estlin's name appears throughout the history of Melita and Arthur. His main occupation was as the Wawanesa Insurance Agent from 1919-1936. Before that he seems to have been involved in several of the business undertakings in the community. He was a grain buyer and a contractor. He served as Secretary of the Melita - Arthur Telephone Co. established in 1905. He built the Blackwell Block, which was originally at the Manchester site. He was the first local agent for the Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Company.

He was very active in many aspects of community life. He belonged to the gun club. His name was often in the news.

For example: a news article from 1899 indicates that he was on a committee to canvass town for fund to plant trees in the cemetery. From a 1900 report we learn that: "The first shipment of Russian Poplars arrived last night and the remainder have been shipped ... they were ordered by A.B. Estlin."

However, his main service to his community may have been as an observer and

chronicler. He was a charter member of the Melita Old Timers Association formed in 1926 and in that capacity prepared historical sketches, some of which much later provided essential background information for Melita's first history book, "Our First Century". His personal reminiscence, combined with his research and curiosity has left us with a good record of the beginnings of the community.

He has kept alive important details about the early history of the region, the first settlers, and the origins of the town, and about early influential citizens such as W.F. Thomas.

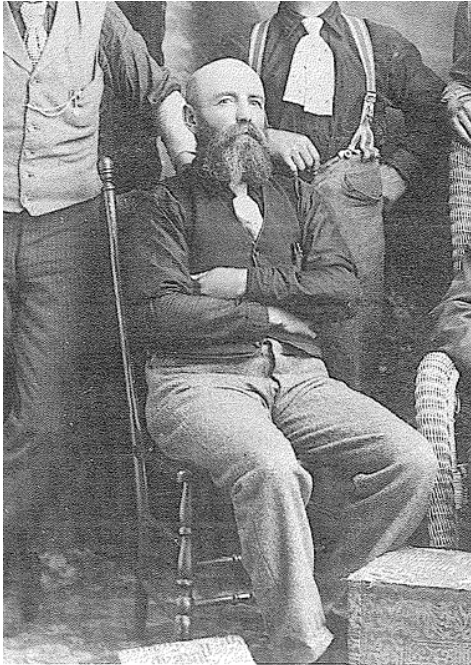
Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 205

We know little about Mr. Estlin's origins. He was born on February 27, 1860 in Middle Burnham, Somerset, England. Vital Statistics tells us that he was married to Mabel Francis Flesher in 1893 in Deloraine, and that he died on January 7, 1939 in Melita at the age of 78. It is only from Vital Statistics information that we learn his full given name: Alfred Bagehot Estlin. In local reports he was always just A.B.

Charles Prior (C.P.) Estlin whose name also appears in Melita early history was his brother.

## Pioneer

### Alfred Gould



Alfred Gould, one of the first pioneers to the Sourisford - Coulter area, was born in Plattsville, Ontario in 1856. He and his neighbor David Elliot journeyed west and arrived at Sourisford in May 1880. Early photographs show they had a meager beginning, living in tents until a log cabin could be constructed.

When the log building was constructed, another building was also constructed to the west at the foothills. This other building became the centre for considerable activity over the next six years, as it became a trading centre or general store.

Alfred Gould played an important part in both the store and the community as evidenced by the formation of a Pioneer's Association in 1889. He served as its first president.

Alfred married Rachel Snyder in 1886 in a ceremony, witnessed by his fellow pioneer David Elliot. In the period between 1880-

1887 they homesteaded at Sourisford on the north bank of Antler Creek.

The Goulds in 1889 look up residence in Pierson purchasing where they operated a general store under the name of "Gould and Elliot", buying and shipping grain in anticipation of the railway line. In 1902 they came back to the Sourisford area.

At this time they constructed the stone house from fieldstone and mortar. This house remains at the fork of the Souris River and Antler Creek.



Following the establishment of a railroad to Coulter, Alfred Gould built and operated a store there.

Throughout his life Alfred Gould took an active part in the business and public life of the community. He continued to take an active part in the Pioneer Association and served on the R.M. of Arthur council from 1900 to 1910, and also was interested in School Board affairs and served as Sourisford's first postmaster, also Coulter's first postmaster when that office was established.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 550

## Manchester Pioneer

### R.M. Graham

*\*As published in Our First Century, page 54 under the general heading "Pioneer Writing"*

R. M. Graham left Ontario in 1882 for the West and made a tour of the province visiting several points north of Brandon and traversing southern Manitoba's entire length extending from the Red River to Range 28 and finally took up the farm where he is now residing. He removed thither with his family from St. Thomas, Ontario in June 1883, and started a small store in connection with his farm.

The store business gradually expanded resulting in a branch store at Sourisford and later another at Lyleton. The second year after settling here, he erected a blacksmith shop, which was occupied by different tenants until the advent of the railway. Mr. Blackwell also opened a repair harness shop and soon after Mr. Dodds removed his store from Wolseley resulting in quite a country village corner.

Store goods were freighted at Brandon until a road was opened to Virden but the last few years prior to the building of the Souris railway all merchandise was freighted at Deloraine the terminus of that branch at the time.

When the Souris railway was completed to this point Mr. Graham moved his stock to what was then popularly known as the new town. He purchased the "Pioneer Store" which had been built in 1891 by Mr. Coughill.

In 1884 he was appointed a commissioner for taking affidavits.

In September following, on strength of a petition circulated by James McConnell, Mr. Graham was appointed postmaster

beginning with the magnificent salary of \$10 per annum and the name Manchester was changed to Melita. The first school district in the vicinity was formed in 1886 and Mr. Graham was trustee and secretary-treasurer of the first school.

In 1891 the Melita Enterprise reported that, "Mr. Graham is in receipt of a carload of groceries – the first ever received in Melita."

Mr. Graham has always taken an active part in educational, municipal and other matters of public interest pertaining to the will of this part of our province. In religion he is a member of the regular Baptist denomination and took an active part in the erection of the new Baptist edifice that now graces our town.

Since disposing of his store business Mr. Graham occupies his time supervising the work on his farm and attending to his post office duties together with odd jobs in conveyancing which he says is ample employment for one of his time of life.

Messrs. R. M. Graham and J. L. Campbell, of Melita, returned home on Tuesday, and it is said failed in their mission to induce the C.P.R. to make Melita the junction instead of Napinka, as is the case now. It was not altogether expected they would succeed, but if it is true that the junction was promised to Melita, and on the strength of this promise business men were induced to settle in Melita, Melitaites have ground for a complaint against the C.P.R.—  
Deloraine Times.

*Brandon Sun - June 9, 1892*

Mr. Graham was always an advocate for his community.



## Furniture Dealer & Undertaker

### Charles P. Holden



Charles Parker Holden came to the west from Ontario in the 1880's and homesteaded north of Deloraine, where he spent a few years farming. In 1891 he set his course westward and came to Melita to engage in business. As the railroad was not yet constructed to this community, Mr. Holden had to transport his first load of furniture by horse from the nearest railway, which could have been Deloraine. His furniture store located on the northwest corner of Main Street added another merchantile establishment to a town that was soon to enjoy a substantial boom. As Mr. Holden had been trained in cabinet making it seemed to be natural to be in furniture retailing.

In the Western Progress, dated January 11, 1899 it is noted that his advertising stated bargains in furniture also that picture framing and undertaking was a specialty. Then in later issues it stated that the undertaking supplied a hearse. Mr. Holden had his own black team with fancy harness and nettings over the horses with glass paneled hearse on wheels, which could be

changed to specially built sleighs for winter use. This newest hearse was built by a carriage maker in Napinka some time before 1910.

As for furniture, the Enterprise weekly paper, October 1904 carries an ad for Newcombe pianos, no price quoted, but a new shipment of iron beds are quoted from \$4 up.

Mr. Holden's life in Melita was an active one, and he is entitled to a full share of credit for the community's upbuilding. The Melita Band was one of his favourite organizations. He was a member for 47 years. His name was also recorded in the membership of the Canadian Foresters, the I.O.O.F. Lodge, and the L.O.L. He served both as a councillor and president of the Board of Trade, as a member of the Town Council and the board of Melita Consolidated School. The Curling Club will remember him as one of its oldest members. Victoria Methodist Church and later Victoria United Church found him a staunch and faithful servant on the board and in later years as an Elder. He was also a member of the choir for many years. Service to the community was something of supreme importance to Mr. Holden. He was well known and highly esteemed over the entire southwest part of the province.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 360, 572

## Garage Owner

### Dave Lamont



Each president was responsible for compiling history over a specific period of time. Mr. Lamont's entry began thus:

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 283, 301

Dave Lamont purchased the carriage making shop of George Lea in 1904. He built a new two story brick building and established a blacksmith shop – with the upper floor used to build buggy wheels and make repairs. He also did wood working there. The blacksmith shop functioned into the 1930's but Mr. Lamont soon branched out and moved with the times.

In 1904 he build a 15 foot boat for W. R. Brockington. In 1906 the Melita paper recorded that, "Mr. Lamont's boat was launched Friday and made her maiden trip up the river."

In 1918 he established Lamont's Garage, which sold Willys Overland Cars, Fords, and later became a GM franchise. This business became Cobb Motors in 1945.

Mr. Lamont was very active in the community. In 1904 he was the overseer of the Gun Club. He Organized the Auto Club in 1913. In 1926 he was a charter member of the Melita Old Timers Association, formed with the purpose of collecting and preserving historical records and leaving the same with the secretary-treasurer of the town. To qualify as a member one had to have resided here for 25 years and pay a fee of 500.

## Melita Old Timers Association

This association was formed in 1926 with the purpose of collecting and preserving historical records and leaving the same with the secretary-treasurer of the town. To qualify as a member one had to have resided here for 25 years and pay a fee of 500.

The first officers were: President — J. Duncan; Vice-President—A. B. Estlin; Secretary-Treasurer—W. J. Graham and Executive: Messrs. D. Lamont, George Stewart, John Crerar and W. F. Thomas.

Each president was responsible for compiling history over a specific period of time. The last meeting recorded in the New Era was 1946.

These annals finally surfaced late in 1982 and excerpts were a valuable addition to “Our First Century”. The complete documents were placed in the Melita Museum.

### Annals 1904-1906 by Dave Lamont

On September 10, 1903 the Melita district suffered a severe loss in the death of Dr. A. M. Livingston who was one of the district builders.

Many of you will remember the blizzard we had on September 12th that year which was one of the worst storms probably ever experienced in September. Nearly all the crop was out and in some places the stocks were covered with snow.

Considerable discussion arose at this time about dividing the Municipality of Arthur into three separate municipalities, which was done later, the new municipalities being named Arthur, Albert and Edward.

On July 16, the Town Council appointed a committee to look after the matter of lighting and ever since that time this subject has been a big issue.

### Annals 1907-1910 by Robert Love

The first car owned in town was purchased by H.H. Richards the manager of the Northern Bank, and it wasn't a Ford either,

Dave Lamont constructed a motor-boat and having had a shipment of gasoline brought in, was prepared to make moonlight excursions to Sourisford and Napinka.

Even in 1908 our young people were not at all behind the times as they staged a debate on the question of the advisability of shortening ladies' skirts.

In June of 1909 three autos were purchased by townsmen. In purchasing one of these I found that a set price was placed upon the bare car, with additional charges for windshield, lamps, speedometer and collapsible top.



## Veterinarian

### Dr. William “Doc” Leslie

Doc Leslie came to Melita sometime before 1900 and moved with his wife and daughter into a little house across the road from the United Grain Growers Elevator. This remained his home until his death in the early 1940's. Mrs. Leslie was a well known teacher in Manitoba, becoming a member of the Senate of the Agricultural College which later became the University of Manitoba.

Doc found that the veterinary practice would not support him when tractors and the depression both took their place in history. He then became a farm inspector for Osler, Hamilton and Nanton, the Credit Financier, and other firms that owned the farm land during the depression. This was not always a popular job as he often had to deal with the former owners who now were renting their own farms back and had to answer to the firms through Doc.

He traveled upwards to 200 miles a day checking on farms and making needed arrangements so that farmers could continue working the land. He had a game leg and as a consequence he did not like to walk out into fields so he and his model A Ford often were seen going through the ditch, through a fence that Doc somehow never seemed to notice in time, across the field and to the spot where the farmer was working. Then with his conversation completed, he would reverse his way back to the road, and the farmer would stand there either purple with rage or shaking his head at the damage. He always drove a model A for this had a high wheel base thus allowing him to drive over the grain etc. As a consequence he ran at least three model A's into the ground and seemed to have the current car always in for repairs.

Doc told of the time that the bank was robbed and the robbers collected at the United Grain Elevator just below his bedroom window. He apparently stuck his head out to see what was wrong and gave one of his famous bellows at the men making all the noise in the middle of the night while Mrs. Leslie, with an equally strong voice shouted at him to get his head in or he would get it blown off. The Sure's store window on Main street still had the bullet hole in it during the thirties that was the result of the one and only shot that supposedly was fired during the robbery, although how this could have been the case when shells were left near the elevator office, was never explained.

Doc Leslie was one of the characters of the town that seemed to have its fair share but he was good hearted, helping others where he could and although he was often rough and gruff, the twinkle in his eye gave him away.

Doc was also very active in the Curling Club and his name appears often in connections with community activities.

*Adapted from Our First Century, page 611*

## Veterinary Medicine in Manitoba

In 1874 with 24-year-old Dr. Wesley F. Lipsett travelled to the newly created province of Manitoba as a recent graduate from the Ontario Veterinary College. Dr. Lipsett purchased a farm in Meadow Lea just west of Winnipeg where he began farming and established a clientele for his veterinary services.

### **1879 - Manitoba's First Animal Health Care Act**

Dr. Lipsett's interest in politics saw him elected to Manitoba's fourth Legislative Assembly in 1879 as the Woodlands representative. High on his political agenda was advocating for improved care for the province's livestock. On June 25, 1879, the first Act regarding animal health was passed in Manitoba. An Act Respecting Infectious and Contagious Diseases of Domestic Animals encouraged people to identify for inspection animals they suspected were suffering from a contagious disease. Historically, this Act had additional significance since it specified the appointment of a veterinary inspector licensed to practice in Manitoba. At the time, no licensing body existed for veterinarians so the Act effectively paved the way for creation of a veterinary association.

### **1881 - Manitoba's First Veterinary Association**

Manitoba's first veterinary inspector was Dr. Willet J. Hinman an Ontario Veterinary College graduate from the class of 1875. Dr. Hinman's first annual report drove home the point that Manitoba needed more veterinary inspectors. In a meeting with John Norquay, Manitoba's premier at the time, Drs Lipsett and Hinman and a few other veterinarians in the province discussed the need for a veterinary association. The outcome was the passing

of An Act Respecting Veterinary Surgeons on May 25, 1881. This Act stated that all people practicing veterinary medicine as of June 1881 and licensed according to the provisions of the Act were deemed to form the Veterinary Association of the Province of Manitoba.

### **1890 – Two New Acts for Veterinarians**

Unsatisfied with the state of affairs for the profession, Manitoba's veterinarians gathered on December 17, 1889, to reform the Veterinary Association of Manitoba. Of first priority was the drafting of updated legislation. On March 31, 1890, the Veterinary Association Act 1890 was passed into law, providing the association with the authority to oversee registration of veterinarians in the province once more. By year's end, 20 veterinarians were registered.

On the same day, legislature also passed An Act Respecting the Diseases of Animals that established positions for district veterinarians who would work for the government as required. In 1893, this Act would be amended to include the appointment of a provincial veterinarian who would administer the Act. Dr. J.S. Thompson was the first to hold this position from the period of 1893 to 1904.

*Adapted from the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association*

[http://www.mvma.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=153&Itemid=81](http://www.mvma.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=153&Itemid=81)

## Public Servant

### Reeve Thomas Shirley Loucks



Covered wagons may have figured prominently in the settlement of the southwest although they were seldom mentioned by early settlers. It was on a Sunday, July 8, 1900 that Thomas Shirley Loucks drove his covered wagon up the main street of Melita, to complete a long 600 mile journey from Forestburg, South Dakota. He first settled west of Melita.

Of United Empire Loyalist descent, Mr. Loucks was born in Fredericksburg, near the town of Napanee, Ontario in 1871. In his 23rd year, he married Nellie May Brooks.

He then decided to go west, and he and his wife and children set out by train, arriving at Dickey, North Dakota. They remained there for two years, returned to Ontario and again made the trip to the western states. This time they settled at Forrestburg, South Dakota, coming to Canada two years later.

Their children Melbourne and Anna received their education at Peninsula and Melita Schools. In this period, Mr. Loucks served 18 years as

secretary-treasurer of the Peninsula School district as well as branching out into the larger field of Municipal Councilor and Reeve. Altogether, he was connected with the Arthur Council for twenty-two years.

He was a former president of the Arthur Pioneers' Association and passed through all the chairs of the Oriental Lodge A.P. and A.M., Melita. His first vote in the Dominion election was cast for Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada's first Prime Minister.

His twilight years were spent in Melita. He died on July 1, 1956. His wife, Nellie May, predeceased him in August 1937.

Several members of the family have remained in this southwest region.

*Adapted from Our First Century, page 616  
Submitted by Laura (Loucks) Warren and Anna (Loucks) Sterling*

## Harness Maker

### Robert Love



Robert Love came to Melita around 1900 and established himself as a leather worker making and repairing harnesses and shoes. These were vital services in a pioneer farming community. By 1910 he was operating "The Melita Shoe Hospital" in a building which later housed "Lefty's Grill" and is still standing on Melita's Main Street. Before that he had operated in out of the back of the Blackwell Block, one of the original Manchester buildings that were moved to the new town.

Some time in the 1920's Mr. Love, perhaps seeing the inevitable decline in harness making and shoe repair, became an agent for Wawanesa Insurance, taking over from another Melita business pioneer, A.B. Estlin. He continued in the insurance business until 1951 when he was bought out by Murray Cameron and the business became C. & C. Agencies.

His long service to the community in a commercial capacity was important, but it was his service in various community endeavours that perhaps was more influential.

On September 13, 1913 he purchased property for erection of a building to house moving pictures and other forms of entertainment. It was 30 feet by 90 with a 20 foot stage and a floor on a slope.

Seating capacity was 400. The first moving picture was shown in December of 1913. Excerpts from the Melita Enterprise during the ensuing years are filled with ads reflecting the great variety of entertainment provided in this venue. The Opera House was destroyed by fire in 1917.

On a recreational and cultural level we see that he was a founding member of the Lawn Tennis Club as Secretary-Treasurer, as well as a founding member of the Glee Club in that same year. He was Grand Master of the I.O.O.F. in 1915. He served the Victoria United Church as Clerk of Session and Superintendent of the Sunday School for 12 years, resigning in 1946. He was Secretary-Treasurer of the Manitoba School Trustee's Association in 1928 and also served on the Melita town council.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 301, 373, 553



## Builder

### Mason and Bricklayer Frank Morrow



**The Sturgeon Block in Melita.**

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 633

Frank Morrow was born in Huron County, near [Allenford](#), Ontario in 1876. He came to [Melita](#) the first time in 1906 and joined his brother J. J. Morrow (John) in the mason trade with plastering and bricklaying. At this time they assisted in putting the second story on the stone block on the corner of Main and Front Street. He returned to Ontario and came west again in 1908 to marry. He was married at [Wilcox](#), Saskatchewan on December 16, 1908. They came to Melita and the rest of their lives were spent in Melita.

The [Alex A. McRae](#) house and also the [Rodney McRae](#) house north of [Elva](#) were built by the Morrow brothers. The Melita sidewalks (one of which still bears his name stamp) built in 1925, and the archway at [Sourisford Park](#) are examples of their work. Elsewhere, Frank worked on Banff Springs Hotel.

To supplement his income, Frank was caretaker of the curling and skating rink for fifteen years or more. He also kept milk cows and we children delivered milk to many homes in [Melita](#) for several years.

## The Stonemason

Many of our first settlers brought with them a range of construction and building skills which served them well and served their new communities well as they set about creating, in an actual physical sense, new communities.

The variety of stone buildings; commercial, agricultural and residential, still standing across the province commemorate the impact they had. Fine homes still elegant today, sturdy barns and solid business blocks still fulfilling their functions, exist in many communities. No other building material makes the same statement: stone structures reflect an intention of permanence.

Masonry is a very old art form. Early humans started putting stones together to make homes thousands of years ago, and decorative work with stone soon followed. Masons pride themselves on creating functional, beautiful work, which is precisely created for the needs of each client, whether it be the ornamental foundation stone of a new building, or a replacement for a worn door mantel. This craft profession is also unusual in that it cannot be entirely replaced with mechanization, although modern masons may use advanced tools like water jets and lasers for cutting.

There are a number of different types of stonemasons. Quarrymen cut raw stone, sawyers transform the rough blocks of stone cut in quarries into smaller chunks, while banker masons work in workshops to shape these pieces of stone as required for a job. In pioneer communities the mason would be somewhat of a generalist, doing all these tasks.

Some stonemasons talk about being able to read or listen to the rock that they work with. A good stonemason has learned how different rocks behave and feel. A fully qualified stonemason is also capable of working with a wide range of stone, from hard granite to soft limestone. The pioneer stonemason specialized in working with whatever stone was at hand.

While commonly used on public buildings and stately homes, the mason's skills were also directed towards more modest utilitarian structures: chicken coops, milk houses, granaries, and yes, even the iconic pioneer outhouse.



**This one remains idle, though fully functional, on an abandoned farm site near Baldur.**

## The Pope Family



Fred Pope was born on October 2, 1881 in **Thamesville**, Ontario, the second youngest son of Septimus and Annie Pope who arrived in **Melita** in the late 1800's. They **homesteaded** until his father's death, at which time the farm was sold and his mother Annie moved the family into **Melita**. She purchased a general store, which she ran with the aid of her family until her death in 1936.

In his early adult years Fred taught school in the **Lyleton** district, worked in the United States, and then homesteaded in the **Mazenod** district, southwest of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. At the start of the hostilities in 1914 he joined the army and went overseas with the 49th Regiment of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. While on active service in France he was wounded and invalided to the Birmingham Eye Hospital in England. Here he met a nurse, Annie Askew, his future bride.

After the war they farmed for two years and in 1921 moved to **Melita** where Fred became the Customs Officer. Later, he and his family moved to the newly constructed Canada Customs Office at the port of Coulter. He held this position until 1937 when ill health forced him to retire. He passed away on March 17, 1941.

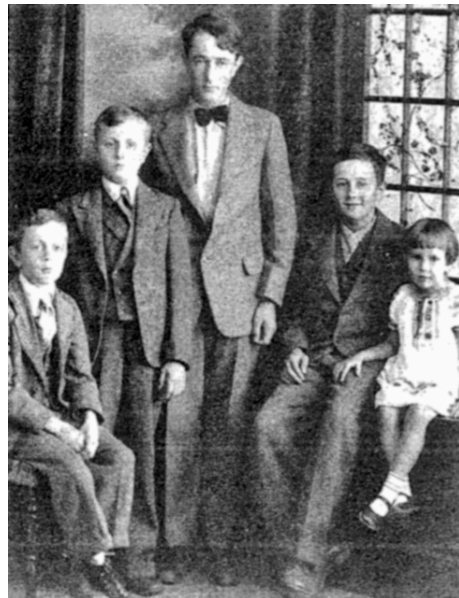
Fred and Annie had five children, three of whom served in World War II.

**Fred**, the eldest, served as an **R.C.A.F.** pilot overseas during the war. He later became a geologist.

**Bill**, served in the R.C.A.F. as an **Airframe Mechanic**. He later moved to Winnipeg where he established a retail hardware business.

**Arthur**, after service in the R.C.A.F. as a wireless air gunner, began a five year career with Canada Packers before joining Air Canada.

*Adapted from Our First Century, page 693 (by Art Pope)*





## Merchant

### Shop Keeper Mrs. R.H. Richardson



**Mrs. Richardson, second from the right, in front of one of Melita's first retail operations. Just in case there was any doubt about who was in charge, her name is prominently displayed.**

Among the very early pioneers of this district are Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Richardson. Mr. Richardson came to Manitoba in the spring of 1882 from Wakefield in the province of Quebec, about 22 miles from the City of Ottawa.

For about 12 years previous to coming to Manitoba he had worked at the carriage making business. In the early days in this country, his knowledge and skill with tools proved of great value. During the summer of 1882 he worked at carpentering in Winnipeg and late in the fall came out to this district, and selected a homestead, two miles from the site of what is now Melita. He then returned to the east, but in the spring of 1883 came west again accompanied by Mrs. Richardson.

The Richardsons moved to the new townsite of Melita before the railway had arrived and started two businesses; a carriage shop and a makeshift fruit and vegetable stand. 1891 a more permanent structure housed Mrs. Richardson's growing Fruit and Vegetable business and served as a residence as well. The East End Fruit Store was operated by Mrs. Richardson until 1901.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 56, 699, 386

## A Day in the Life of a General Store

The small-town general store, also known as mercantiles and emporiums, were essential aspect of commercial activity in small-town life, and saw their heyday in the period between 1880 and 1930.

These establishments served the rural populations of small towns and villages and the farmers in the surrounding area. Besides selling dry goods, farming equipment and other supplies, they sometimes also served as the local post office, drugstore and undertaker. They were also a popular meeting place for socializing and news gathering.

The storekeepers stocked their establishments with merchandise procured from salesmen who represented wholesale houses and manufacturers found in larger cities. Merchandise selections were often large and varied, though most of the items available for sale were those of necessity. As people and businesses prospered in the economy during the 1890s more luxury items were introduced into the store inventories. The expansion of the railroads, the advent of mass production and technological advances such as the refrigerated railcar to transport perishable foods all combined to escalate the national distribution and variety of goods that were available in the stores.

Most of the wall space in a general store was taken up with shelving to store and display for the merchandise; likewise the floors were crowded with barrels, wooden boxes and crates. Store counters were good for holding display cases for the smaller items, a coffee grinder, scales and a cash register. Many stores had a display window or two in the front of the building.

The proprietors of general stores knew almost all of their customers and they were adept at anticipating their needs. It was not uncommon for articles to be sold on credit or for payment to be accepted in the form of bartered goods.

Food and consumables included coffee beans, spices, baking powder, oatmeal, flour, sugar, tropical fruit, hard candy, eggs, milk, butter, fruit and vegetables, honey and molasses, crackers, cheese, syrup and dried beans, cigars and tobacco.

Dry goods included bolts of cloth, pins and needles, thread, ribbon, silk, buttons, collars, undergarments, suspenders, dungarees, hats and shoes.

Essential items such as rifles, pistols, ammunition, lanterns, lamps, rope, crockery, pots and pans, cooking utensils and dishes, farm and milking equipment and even coffins could be found.

The apothecary sections of the stores were well represented with a surprisingly large number of patent medicines, remedies, soaps and toiletries and elixirs.



*Mrs. Lawrence in the Lawrence Store in Lyleton*

## Clergy

### Rev. William Stocker



The first Anglican services in the Melita district were held in 1888 and usually only for the summer months. They were held in homes and in the Peninsula School.

In 1890 the Anglican Church in Melita was known as a Mission. About 1894 a petition was presented to Archbishop Machray of Rupertsland to build a church.

In 189, under the direction of Rev. William Stocker, a well-planned church was built on Main Street. Rev. Stocker himself was the architect. He also carved the fine communion table of solid oak, which is still in use in the church today.

The church was dedicated on October 29, 1897, by Archbishop Machray. It became known as Christ Church.

## Early Ministers of Christ Church — Melita

1890 Rev. H. J. Watson  
 1894-1898 Rev. Wm. Stocker  
 1898-1900 Rev. A. R. Davis  
 1904-1909 Rev. S. J. Roche  
 1910-1913 Rev. H. S. Ram

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 80



*Christ Church - Melita*



## Municipal Official

### Walter Thomas



Walter F. Thomas was born in [Queenstown](#), Ontario, on November 3, 1856. Like many other Ontario boys, he left home and came west, to look for a job. His travels took him to Port Arthur, Winnipeg and Stony Mountain, before he stuck out towards the Souris River country.

In 1879 Walter was one of three men who made their way from Winnipeg to the Boundary Commission crossing near Sourisford. They came overland via portage La Prairie, through the sandhills and along the Souris River. They pitched camp on December 1<sup>st</sup> of that year. The other two, James Kinley and Alfred Dugay, later moved on leaving Walter Thomas alone claim the honour of being the region's first settler.

Adventure seemed to follow Walter in his early days in the region. On a trip through a snowstorm he narrowly escaped death and had to resort to eating his dog. While operating a ferry at Sourisford he accidentally discharged a gun into his arm. and almost died of infection before Dr. Joseph Dann a vet from Butterfield was able to amputate the limb. No anesthetic was available and the kitchen table was the scene of the action.

None of the mishaps seemed to slow him down.

When the Municipality of Arthur was formed in 1884 was appointed clerk, which position he held for nearly 50 years.

He also was Secretary-Treasurer of the Pioneers' Association for over 30 years, being obliged to relinquish both offices on account of failing eyesight.

On June 29, 1929 Walter was photographed at the Pioneer Picnic with six other area pioneers, all of whom had been residents of Manitoba for 50 years at that time.



**Picture taken June 29 at Coulter Park.**

*Adapted from Our First Century, page x, 2, 5*



## Politician

### M.L.A. John Williams



John Williams was born in the Welsh mining village of **Ysccifiog**, Flintshire, North Wales, on July 3, 1860, the youngest of three children, born to Thomas and Hannah (**Phillips**) Williams. His father was a lead miner.

On May 26, 1881, John Williams sailed for New York, much against the advice of the old miners who hinted he might be killed by lions or tigers in that "wild country". While not used to speaking English, it became necessary from then on to use it.

In November of 1882, John came west to **Brandon** and walked to the Robert Russell homestead near Deloraine where he worked that winter. In December of that same year, he made a journey to the **Souris** River and on seeing the river valley and the hills, he picked his homestead and pre-emption on 14-3-27 through which the **Souris** River had its course, as it looked more like Wales than anything he had seen in Canada up to that time.

John Williams was always interested in and took an active part in public and community affairs. He was present at the organization of the Peninsula School District, and acted as trustee and secretary. He was a

councilor in the Greater Arthur Municipality and was the first Reeve of the present **R.M.** of Arthur after the division in 1905.

He was elected as a member of the Legislature for Arthur Constituency in 1907, and was defeated in 1909. He was on immigration work in Wales in 1911, and was re-elected as an **M.L.A.** in 1912. He held this seat until his defeat of the **Norris** Government in 1922. He was appointed as Minister of Agriculture in late winter of 1922 and remained as such until the installation of the **Bracken** government that fall.

The farm had been rented and the family moved to **Melita** in the fall of 1906, so that the children would go to high school. They remained in Melita until the spring of 1915 when they returned to the farm. He remained there until his death March 2, 1931.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 59, 788

Submitted by Ken Williams

## Builder

### Contractor R.N. Wyatt



Robert Nicholas Wyatt, son of Nicholas and Ellen Wyatt, was born at Port Hope, Ontario on July 3, 1877. He was educated at Port Hope and moved to Millbrook, Ontario (Cavan County) about 1884, where his dad ran the flour mill.

He came to Melita on a harvest train in the fall of 1902. He remained for the winter and the following summer returned to Ontario where he married Bessie Wood, bringing her to Melita as a bride in 1903.

He worked at carpentry and contracting, building bridges, schools, barns and banks. He went into Winnipeg in 1910 to buy his first car and was talked into taking the Ford Agency. He sold Fords until 1914. He then acquired the Chevrolet agency and sold eight or ten Chevrolets that year. He retained this agency until 1918 when he moved to Winnipeg. That fall he was presented with a Waltham watch before leaving with the following inscription inside the back "Presented to R. N. Wyatt by his Melita friends October 25, 1918".

While in Melita he was a member of the Odd Fellows and Masonic lodges. In Winnipeg he continued contracting till 1930 when he returned to Melita for a couple of years. After the depression he returned to

Winnipeg where he joined the Rotary club. He continued contracting till his retirement in 1952 when he returned to Melita. He died at Deloraine August 5, 1954. Mrs. Wyatt died one day after her 90th birthday, September 24, 1964.

Some of the highlights of Mr. Wyatt's years in the car business were; a motoring trip to Estevan in 1912 in a Model T (an all day trip returning the following day) and a trip to Hamiota for New Year's Day, 1915 in a Baby Grand Chevrolet (unheard of in those days). Many people will remember the cars coming in, in boxcars, standing on end or one on top of the other, four together in a car.

Adapted from *Our First Century*, page 796

## Influential Families

We know that R.N. Graham was instrumental in the creation of the Manchester community, and that a group of forward-thinking pioneer businessmen with names like Dodds, Richardson, and Duncan established the economic foundation of the new village of Melita.

What we mustn't forget that despite the noteworthy contribution made by the people identified in this tribute, they weren't alone.

Of the many families who made Melita what it is today, these names stand out, partly because many of the names live on through descendants in Melita today. Their exploits are well documented in "Our First Century".



**Carels Family** – Charles Carels was born in 1910 in the Turtle Mountains. He moved his family to Melita in 1936. His son Kenneth took over the Red & White Store from Charles in 1973. Ken served as Mayor from 1980 – 2002 and was a Director of the Union of Manitoba Municipalities from 1982 to 1998. Terry Carels operated the Cornish Luck Dollars Store.

**Coates Family** – The Coates brothers, William, James, Matthew Robert and Andrew, came to Arthur Municipality beginning in 1888. The Coates School District was established in 1901.

**Cocquyt Family** – Paul Cocquyt was born in Belgium in 1871. He married Julia Kersebelk and took up farming. They came to the Melita area 1907. With four children and had four more after settling here.



**Greig Family** – John Grieg was born in Scotland in 1861. He and his wife, Jessie farmed at Smallburn, Aberdeenshire until coming to the Melita area in 1910.

**Snyder Family** – John Wesley Snyder was born in 1856. In the fall of 1881 John was one of first four to file on homesteads west of the Souris River. Purchased the first binder in the district. He was Trustee and Secretary Treasurer for Sourisford School. His sons all farmed in the district and many descendents were and are active in the community.

**Tilbury Family** – The descendants of the James Tilbury and Fanny Kercher from Overton Hants in England who came to the Melita area 1908 have continued to have an impact on the region.

**Vanbeaselaere Family** – Victor and Leon Vanbeaselaere were born in Belgium. Victor came to Deloraine in 1913. He moved his family to the Melita area in 1915. Leon join him their. Many from their families remain in the region.



**The Fletchers**