Wakopa

1. The Trail

The story of Wakopa is a story of firsts. It was the first village in Manitoba's Southwest Corner, the first gristmill in the region and the seat of the first Municipal Government in the region.

Between 1793 and 1805 four or five trading posts were located close to each other on the Assiniboine River a few kilometres west of its junction with the Souris River. The Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company each had a post north of Whitewater Lake, and the HBC had a post (Fort Ash) near Hartney.

Alexander Henry, in his diary, mentions visiting Lena's House, located some sixty miles from Brandon House on the slopes of Turtle Mountain. Early settlers in the Wakopa district mentioned that the Hudson's Bay Company had a post due west of Old Wakopa. Joseph Ducharme, who was well known by the people of the Wassewa and Old Desford districts in later years, drove many wagon trains of furs, first to St. Louis, and later to St. Paul. His father was one of Alexander Henry's guides in 1805-06.

In the mid-1800s Manitoba was in transition, as the era of the fur trade moved into the era of European agricultural settlement.

In the area that would soon become Southwestern Manitoba, it all started with the trail.

<u>Setting the Scene - The Oldest Highway in the West</u>

The Boundary Commission Trail was the route taken by the Boundary Commission in 1873 & 74 as they surveyed the Canada – US Border. They bridged creeks, established crossings, and cleared bush as necessary; but the general route they followed spans centuries, crosses cultural lines, and involves a multitude of goals and purposes.

Although one short period of its life at the dawn of European settlement gave the trail its name, it was well travelled long before that time.

Parts of it began as a First Nations' travel and trading route, which the fur traders of the 18th century naturally used when they began penetrating the interior of Rupert's Land, as the region was called. Not too long afterwards, the Red River carts of the Métis wore grooves into the prairie sod of the trail in their pursuit of the bison as the large animals retreated ever westward.

In 1818, Canada and the United States had agreed that from Lake of the Woods to the Pacific, the 49th parallel would separate the two countries, but there was no pressing need to be more specific about it. In 1870 when Canada had purchased Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company, and thoughts were turning to the possibility of large-scale agricultural settlement on both sides of the border, the time had come to mark it more precisely.

In September of 1872, two parties set forth from Lake of the Woods, Ontario. Her Majesty's North American Boundary Commission and the United States Northern Boundary Commission worked in cooperation from their respective sides of the border. They each had their own astronomer who calculated the location of the 49th parallel. In the event that calculations were different, the mid-point between them was accepted as being correct.

Over two summers, the Boundary Commissioners, guided by Métis scouts, were followed by labourers breaking the trail and by surveyors traveling behind. While the British commissioners were very lightly armed, the Americans on the other side of the border were accompanied by a heavy military escort. The Dakota, who hunted on both sides of the line, were often hostile towards Americans for establishing posts on sacred land and for ignoring and breaking treaties.

A supply ox train leaves from the Long River depot, following the newly cleared Boundary Commission Trail.

For centuries the trail served as the highway to the west, transporting goods and people. The first settler villages in southern Manitoba were established alongside the trail, flourishing until the railroad came to the area. With the railway came a new era of prairie lifestyle. Thus overland tracks and trails that offered intimate wafts of wild rose and yarrow fell into disuse. Evidence of the Boundary Commission Trail still exists in places such as Newcomb's Hollow and Sourisford.

Emerson, by the Red River on the US border, was the point of entry to all of the Canadian territory recently opened up for homesteads.

The Boundary Commission Trail, rough highway though it may have been, was by 1878, very well used. The tide of settlement proceeded, creating the towns that would become Morden, Manitou, Crystal City and Cartwright.

One early traveller reported that: "Passing Pilot Mound on my return west I noticed a flag flying from a pole on the mound that could be seen for miles. As I continued on west and neared 31-1-6 on the east of the section on another high knoll was a second flag, which was also visible for miles. These were wonderful guides for people who settled many miles away from either side of the Trail. They stood for many years. Most everyone who travelled the Commission Trail would stop at Pancake Lake to rest and eat. Harry Coulter gave it that name one evening in 1789 when he stopped for supper and cooked his pancakes over a wolf willow fire."

Settlers picked a spot for a village, perhaps just a post office and store, and hoped a railway line would come by soon. Often that didn't happen and the village would move, keeping the name or not. For example, Crystal City, Pilot Mound and Deloraine each moved to be on a railway line and kept their names. In the case of Nelsonville, Norquay, and Archibald, buildings were moved while the names disappeared.

When the tide of settlement approached Turtle Mountain, Wakopa was the place to be.
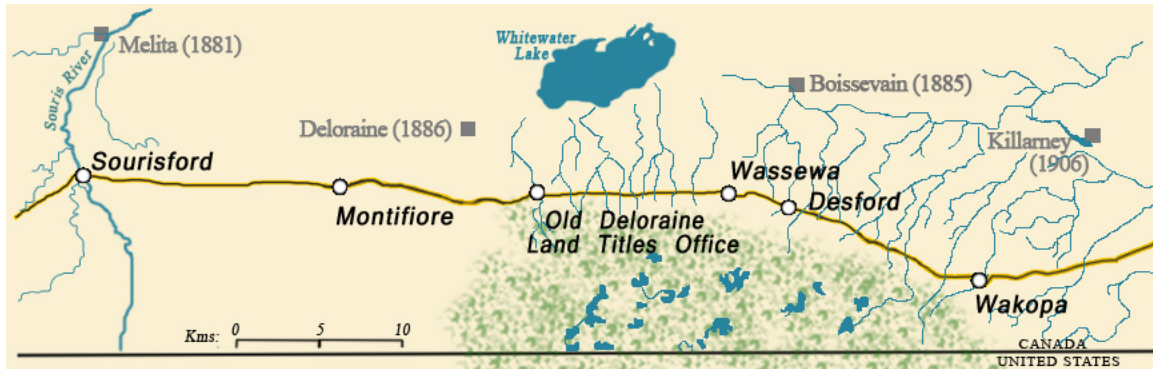
The Boundary Commission Trail in western Manitoba.

The North West Mounted Police

The Boundary Commissioners finished their survey during the summer of 1874. Near the end of that year the North West Mounted Police used the Boundary Commission Trail – freshly blazed – as their avenue of travel on their trek to "establish law and order in the west" and to prepare the frontier for agricultural settlement.

For a short time, they made used of the depot established near where Wakopa was located.

Transportation Evolves…

While the settlers of 1878 and '79 came by way of the Commission Trail from Emerson, by 1880 many also came by the way of the Assiniboine River to Millford, near Wawanesa, on stern wheeler, flat bottom boats, and spread to the south and west over a system of prairie trails. One branch continued on south to the Wakopa area, which was usually referred to as the "Wakopa Timber Trail."

Then when the railway reached Brandon in late 1881, another route opened up. The Heaslip Trail crossed the Souris River at Sheppard's Ferry near where Highway 10 crosses today, then proceeded southward to the town sites situated near or on the Commission Trail

When the Manitoba South Western Railway reached Cherry Creek, soon known as Boissevain, in early 1886, everything changed again. But up until that time, Wakopa was the primary commercial settlement in the region.
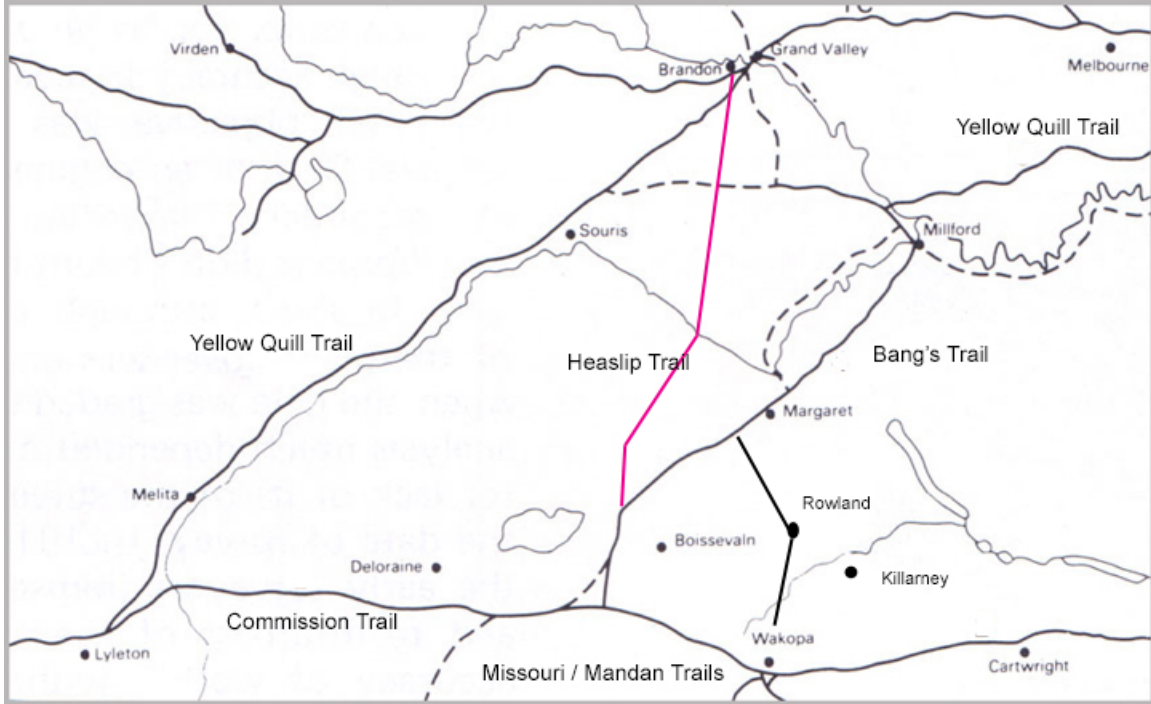
Transportation in the early 1880's. Note that the towns named are there for reference, most did not yet exist.

2. The Stopping Place

B. B. La Rivière & the First Stopping Place in the Southwest

There are, or were, two Wakopas. Many people refer to the first one as Old Wakopa.

The story of "Old Wakopa" begins with, Bernard B. LaRivière.

What we know about his past is a bit hazy. Word of mouth has it that he traded furs at Crookston, Minnesota where he owned a large fur warehouse. It seems that in 1874 he was asked to leave that community by law officers after being suspected of selling liquor to the Aboriginals.

Whatever the motivation, he settled in Nelsonville, a would-be boomtown that quickly disappeared when Morden was established. On a hunting trip to Turtle Mountain in 1876, he saw an opportunity. The Red River valley was already dotted with farming communities. Everyone knew that European settlers would be pushing westward soon. Treaties were being signed and railways were being planned. Homestead regulations were being formulated.

Mr. LaRivière decided to be ahead of the crowd and have a stopping place and store up and running for when the trickle of traders and surveyors, gave way to a steady stream of homesteaders. There would be many of them and they would need supplies.

Just as a would-be gas station owner in later times would prefer to be on a highway, LaRivière had the same plan. The Boundary Commission Trail was the highway. He selected a spot on the Long River, just east of the slope of Turtle Mountain, a spot once used by Assiniboine hunters as a camping place.

About a kilometre east of his property the Boundary Commission surveyors had built the Turtle Mountain Depot in 1873. The next year it was used by the Northwest Mounted Police on their famous trek to Alberta. It was now vacant and LaRivière bought it and all the supplies that were left.

NORTH-WEST TERRITORY
Township 1   Range 18 West
East boundary of Section 30
Course North
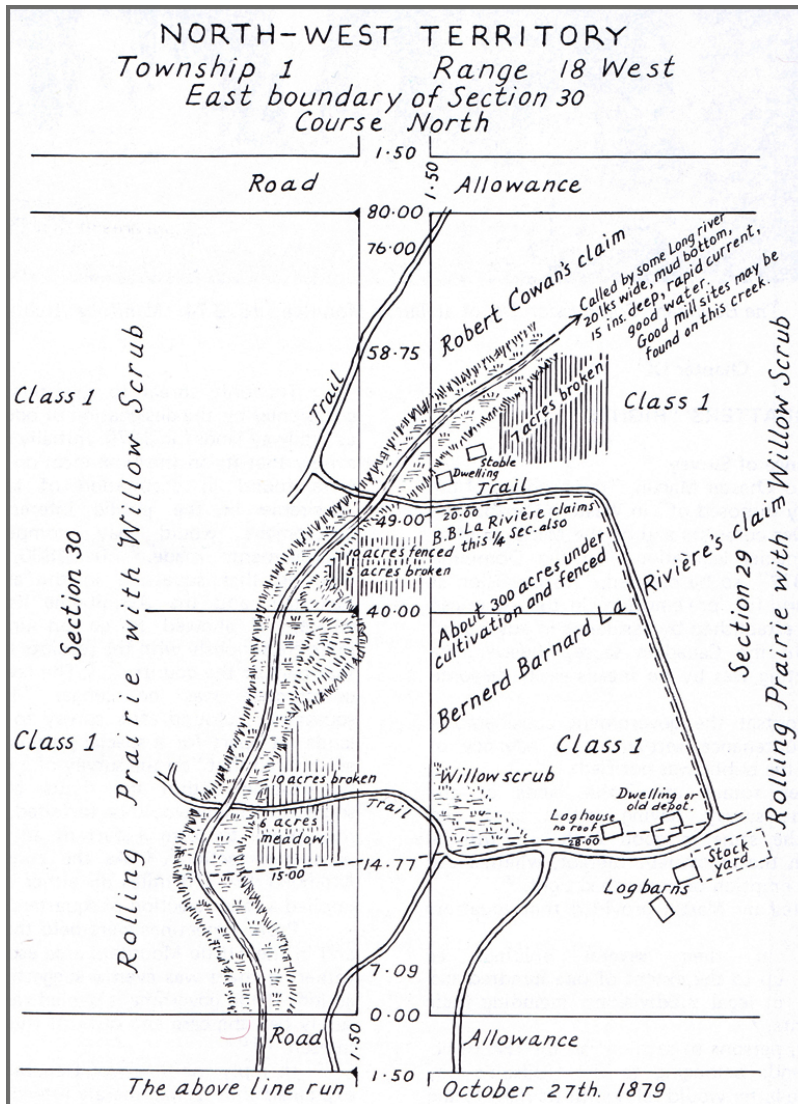
He went back to Nelsonville, loaded several wagons, rounded up twenty cattle and returned to build a store and residence.

At first the settlement was called LaRivière, but an Assiniboine man who lived nearby called him by the name of Wakopa—meaning "White Haired Father". This name was adopted by the village and came into regular use in 1881.

The trading post was the chief source of supplies for settlers for miles around. Prices were high. In the spring of 1880 a pioneer complained that he had to pay $8.00 for a bag of flour. That same year LaRivière bought 2,000 bags at Nelsonville at $1.75 a bag. But high prices were normal on a frontier. Transportation costs were heavy when goods had to be brought by wagon or oxcart from Emerson, Nelsonville or Morden.

Everything that LaRivière did set the stage for the next few years as Wakopa became established at the heart of a newly populated district.

Naming Wakopa

There is some disagreement amongst pioneers when it comes to the story of the name Wakopa.

George Monteith, the son of a pioneer, tells it this way:

"In the early days, a Frenchman named LaRiviere came there as a fur trader. There was also a post of the Hudson Bay Co. fur traders there. LaRiviere gathered a force of half-breeds and they had a fight with the Hudson Bay Company and defeated the company men and drove them out. The name of the fight was called the Battle of the Broken Wheel, a Red River cart having overturned and a wheel broken. The name Broken Wheel is the Indian name for Wakopa."

We're not sure where Mr. Monteith got his information but Mr. Henderson, also a pioneer, passed down this story of his first visit…

"There was a little village started, a house and a store were there, built by a man by the name of LaRivière. The village was at first called LaRivière, afterwards named Wakopa by an old Indian, who thought a lot of LaRivière, Wakopa meaning 'White Feather'."

In the Johnson family, yet another version is told.

"Wakopa – a small village five miles from the U.S. boundary, through which runs what is known as the old "Commission Trail" up which in the Rebellion of /85 the half breeds from the U.S. ascended to the North West. Inhabitants suffered greatly though fear. Its Indian name means Running Water.

In the story of Peter Bryan we come across a variation of our first example.

" Wakopa is the Indian name for Broken-Wheel. A few years earlier the Indians and half-breeds under LaRivière had fought a battle on this very spot. During the fray a wheel of one of the Red River carts was broken. Hence the name of the town that sprang up."

So what are we to believe?

Who was B. B. LaRivière?

In 1880 Reverend Armstrong made a trip west along the Boundary Trail, which ended with a visit to Wakopa. His account of that trip included this assessment of Mr. LaRivière…

Mr. Bernard B. LaRivière was one of the most colourful characters in southern Manitoba history. Originally a resident of Ottawa, in 1869 he moved to St. Paul and from there to Crookston, Minnesota where he opened a general store and also became a fur trader. Here, in the phrase of the Winnipeg Daily Times of 7 July 1880, he soon amassed "a princely fortune." Jealous business rival brought charges against him that he was selling liquor to the Indians of a nearby reservation. These charges resulted in the seizure of his property worth more than $25,000.

About the time when the Boundary Commission was completing its work, he arrived in Manitoba and, making his way to the Turtle Mountains, decided he would establish himself in this district. He purchased the Turtle Mountain Depot from Commissioner

Cameron with its remaining unused stores and again went into business as a fur trader with the neighbouring Sioux Indians, fugitives in their region after the Minnesota massacres in the early 1860s and the St. Joe Massacre of 1874.

He also went into stock raising and starting with four cows in 1874 by the fall of 1879 he had a herd of 61 head on his claim of 1,280 acres. His relationship with the neighbouring Indians was quite remarkable for that period as noted in the December 1879 report of the Dufferin Immigration agent, Mr. J. E. Tetu: "To encourage them he furnished them with means and instruction, lent them oxen and taught them how to till the land, gave them seed corn and potatoes and generally assisted them."

3.The Village

The inscription on the cairn commemorating "Old" Wakopa reads:

On this section was located the old townsite of Wakopa, a Trading Post and junction on the old Commission Trail. The first grist mill in the municipality was located here, and the Council of the R.M. of Turtle Mountain held its first meeting here on January 13, 1883.

Erected by the R.M. of Turtle Mountain, aided by public subscription.
July 3, A.D. 1960

With Wakopa established as a convenient stop on the Commission Trail, and as a place to get supplies and stop for the night, it wasn't long before LaRivière was joined by others..

In 1878 Finlay Young, John, Henry and Tom Coulter, William Henderson, Robert Cowan and the Weirs settled in the area.

They were quickly followed by the Harrison Brothers and Mr. Williams, who built a sawmill and gristmill powered by water wheels and using grinding stones brought from France. Soon the first sod and log homes gave way to buildings of milled lumber. The first frame house in the Turtle Mountain area was built in 1880

In 1880 Williams built a store and took over the post-office duties. The Harrisons and Williams built a boarding house on the north side of the trail, and a large livery barn on the south side of the village. Billy Weir opened the first blacksmith shop and Bob Tyler another, these were essential services for farmers.

Several houses were built by 1883 and the village had become a very busy centre.It has been said that in one day, during the latter part of May of 1882, one hundred and two settlers passed through Wakopa, on every mode of travel imaginable.

After a short absence, one settler noticed that: "On my return that spring to Old Wakopa it was humming with activity. A new boarding house was in the process of being built on the north side of the Commission Trail, which was the town's main street. A livery barn was built in the southern outskirts due east of the sawmill, west of the mill and around the bend of Long River stood the gristmill. "

When George Scott arrived in 1880 he found a busy place with La Rivière keeping over 100 head of cattle in small stables. He had planned on settling further east at Crystal

City, but his son reports that after meeting the people and celebrating May 24th with dinner at LaRivière's Inn, he decided to stay.

Rev. W.O. Armstrong, writing of his 1880 trip to the region, gives the place high praise…

"Here at LaRiviere's we eat the best and biggest potatoes that we have ever seen, and our horses are treated to as clear and full oats as they have ever reveled upon. We were shown very fine samples of wheat, which yielded on La Riviere's farm twenty-five bushels of wheat to the "arpent" upon the sod the first year. "
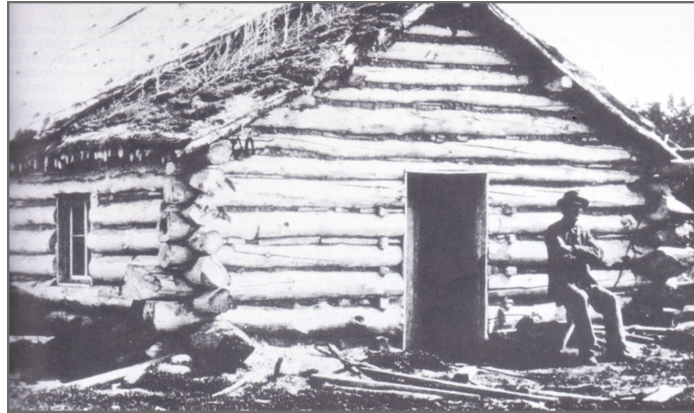
Finlay Young's first house NE 20-1-18.

Being the first village in the southwest corner, Wakopa was home to many other firsts.

It was in 1879 that Lee Severne, LaRivière's son-in-law became postmaster of the first post office in the Turtle Mountain area This would have been an informal arrangement. Before the establishment of "Official" post offices, each settlement would find someone to fetch the mail from the nearest post office and bring it to a central place, usually the first store.

In 1880 Wakopa had its first death. Two men working for LaRivière got into a heated argument during milking one evening. One fellow got up off his stool and threw it at the other, hitting him on one of the temples, killing him instantly. The aggressor took flight and hid in a coil of hay northeast of the townsite. The next day the R.N.W.M. Police noticed the displaced hay and with help uncovered the assailant. Leveque was sentenced to hang, but received a "writ of error" which delayed the execution. He ended up with a sentence of seven years.

Wakopa Post Office was officially established on March 1, 1882 with Clovis Guerin as the first Postmaster. His duties were light. When the mail arrived from Emerson, it was dumped into a big box and each settler hunted out his own. The same box served as a Lost and Found depository. Later the post office was moved to C. W. Williams' store.

The first church service recorded in the Turtle Mountain district was bilingual and took place in LaRivière's store in February of 1879. The clergyman, I.O. Armstrong, gave two sermons, one in English and one in French. He felt that it was hard enough for men and women who were out of training to endure even one, but the congregation was patient and sang hymns with gusto.

Apparently Mr. LaRivière and his family were devout Roman Catholics, with the exception, according to local tradition, of his wife who had little use for religion of any kind.

By 1880, Wakopa had become the business centre of the district, and it was in that year that the first Presbyterian service was held, conducted by the Rev. J. Robertson, the Home Mission Secretary of that denomination. In 1881, the Rev. Wm. Patterson, later of Cooke St. Church, Toronto, made his headquarters at Wakopa and travelled the district on foot ministering to the people under his charge.

The first school erected in the Turtle Mountain and the Souris River Basin area was built at Wakopa in 1882, named Wakopa No. 308.
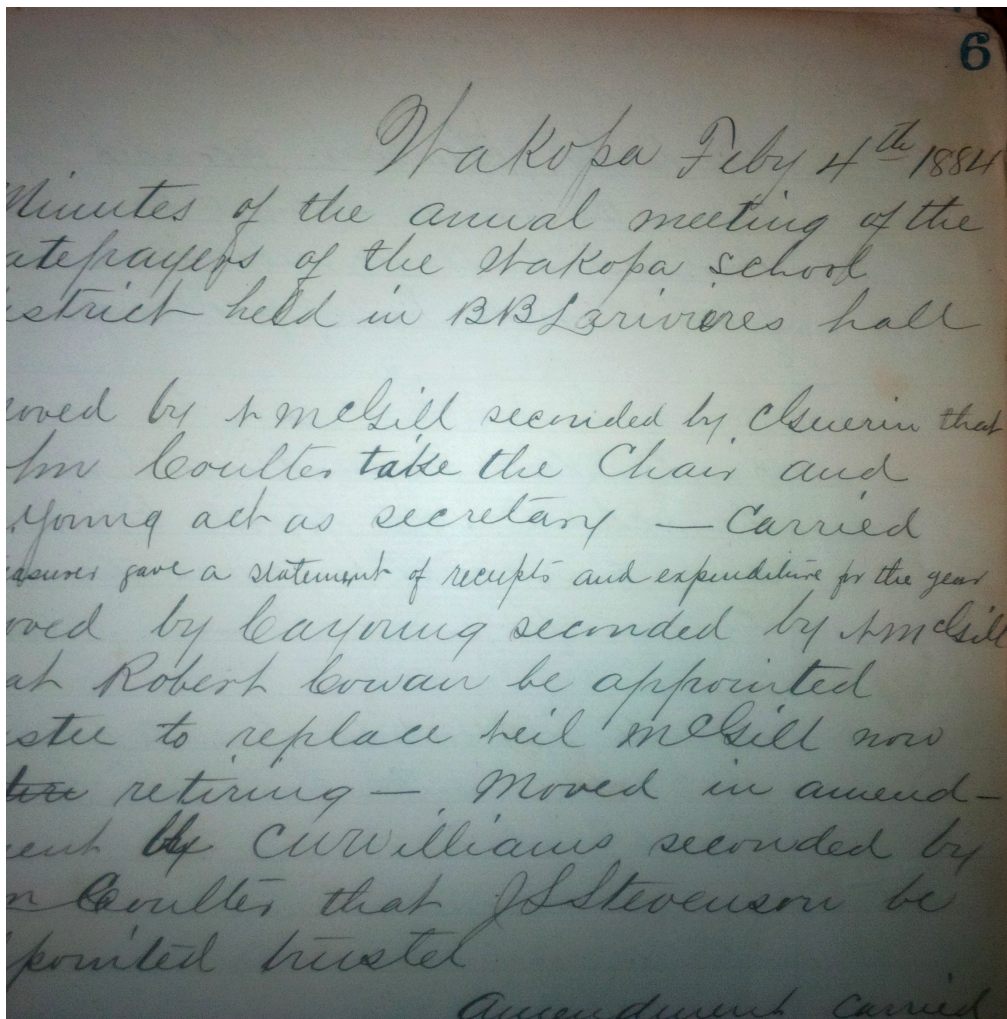
Wakopa School meeting, 1884

The first steam powered butter factory was started by John Hettle, on Sharpe's Creek in 1885. A. Sharpe and the Young Bros. were directors. The Scott family set up a cheese factory on, NE 26-1-19.

The first person buried in the cemetery in the bush beside the school at Wakopa, was John Axford.

Since Wakopa was the only settlement in the district, the Council of Turtle Mountain held most of its meetings there during 1883 and 1884 until schoolhouses were available.

An American Customs Office was located in Wakopa, with C. W. Williams the Customs Officer. The exports were mostly animals for breeding purposes, buffalo bones, and settlers' effects. In 1888 the Customs Office was moved to Killarney after Williams opened a store there.

Being so close to the border put Wakopa on the line of border stations designed to allow the NW Mounted Police to keep an eye on things. Wakopa became a depot.

Like so many of those first pioneer villages, the life span of Old Wakopa was short – the emphasis quickly turned to the new towns on the new railway lines.

When the gristmill and sawmill ceased operation, buildings were taken down or moved away, until other than a few basements, the site once more became part of the original landscape. The waters of Long River now flow leisurely through the old dam site, on to the Pembina River.

But here the story of Wakopa diverges from the regular pattern. Wakopa had a second life.

4. Around the Neighbourhood
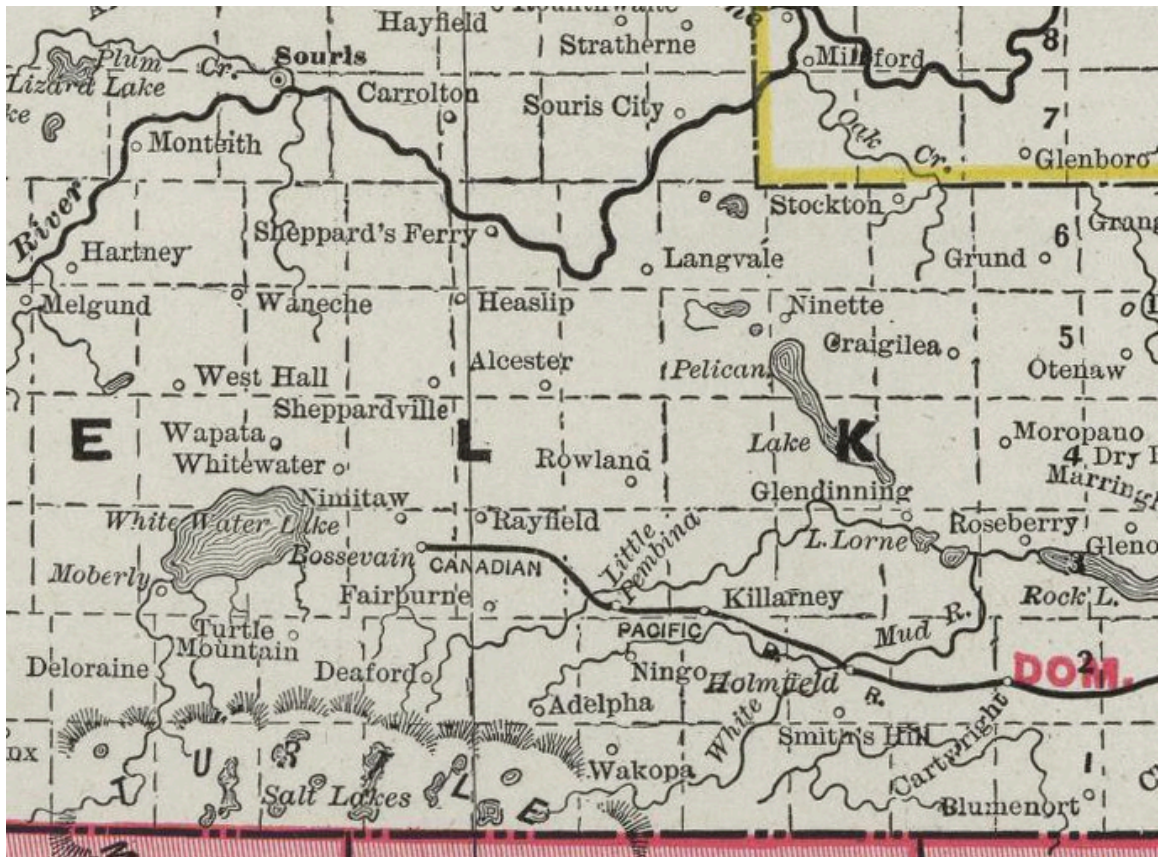
A look at a map from 1885 helps us understand a bit about life in the early 1880's in the Wakopa region, and across western Manitoba. The railway line from Cartwright to Boissevain had just been completed. The towns of Boissevain and Killarney had just been created overnight by decision of the railway company as to where to run the line and where to establish stations. Aside from the few new railway villages, nearly all the other names on this map mark the locations of post offices. Souris City and Millford to the north thrived for a short time, Millford because it was a departure point for travellers coming from Winnipeg via Assiniboine River steamboats, Souris City because it was at a crossing of the Souris River. Neither survived the coming of railway lines. Souris, originally Plum Creek, was one of the few places where the railway entered an established settlement, and Deloraine survived by moving a few kilometres to be on the rail line that arrived in 1887.

When the first settlers arrived they had quite a to-do list. Priorities were to build some shelter, break some sod and plant some grain and vegetables.

They were, of course, very busy. When they did have time to take a deep breath and think ahead, they would get together and build a school.

One thing they often didn't do right away was build a town. They might build a church, and then, if the population warranted it, and someone was of an entrepreneurial turn of mind, a general store or a blacksmith shop might open for business.

But most such settlements never did become towns as we know them, with a grid of streets and a main street set for commerce.

So most of rural Manitoba was indeed rural (and local) in every sense of the word. Towns came later when railways brought easy access to supplies, and each district needed a centre to access those supplies.

So as far as creating towns, Wakopa was ahead of the curve as they say. But travel was time-consuming and the region surrounding Wakopa was still made up of communities and locations, each with their own identity.

Next to Wakopa, the name on the map most widely known was Desford. Early on, it was the only other place nearby that had a store.

The Two Desfords

An Englishman named Barneby did a tour of North American 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 of Boissevain, and was, after Wakopa, the second 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.* "

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.
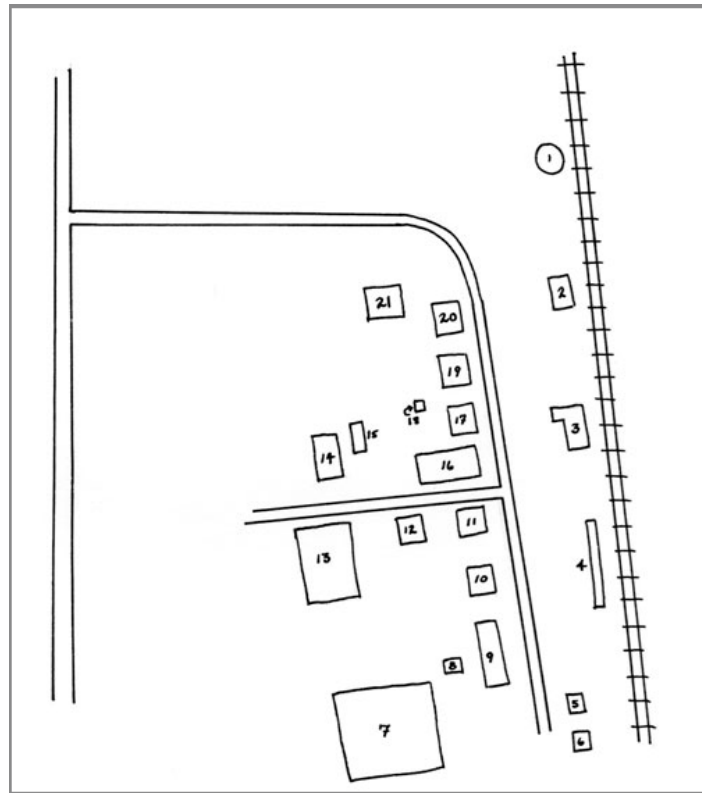
<u>A Second Life….</u>

In 1906 the Great Northern Railway was put down through the area and a small village, a few kilometres east of the original spot, but also called Desford, sprang to life.
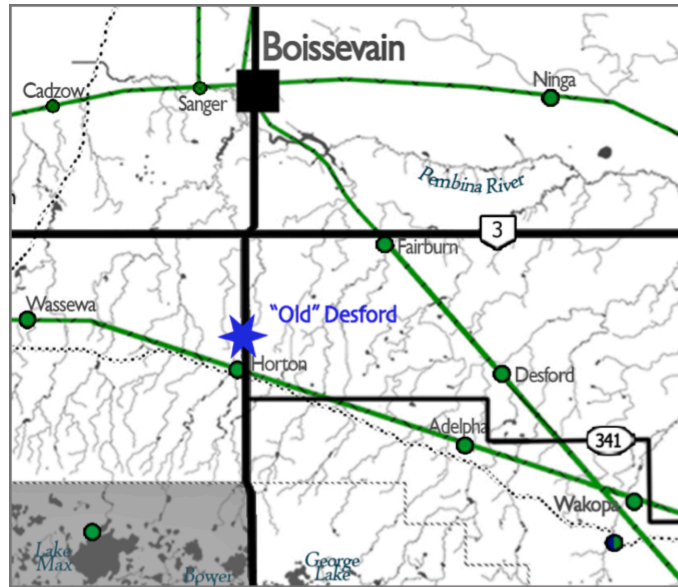
In 1908 the hamlet consisted of the water tower for the trains, the Railway Station, elevator, section house, bunkhouse, the Methodist Church, the blacksmith shop, a community hall, a general store and a few houses. It was a community in every sense and like so many others was a busy place for a time. The population exploded to nearly thirty. The local retail businesses thrived.

Desford in the period 1908 – 1925

The following map tells us a lot about essential services in a village like Desford.

1. Water Tower
2. 2. GN Station
3. 3. McCabe Elevator
4. Loading Platform
5. Section House
6. Bunk House
7. Ball Diamond / Picnic Site
8. Church Barn
9. Anglican Church
10. Bridger House
11. McDonald House
12. H. Bridger, Blacksmith
13. Desford Hall (Former Shoe Shop)
14. Methodist Church
15. Church Barn
16. Skating Rink
17. Davis Store
18. Oil Shed
19. Warehouse
20. 1st Site, Neuman Store
21. J. Bridger. Sr. Blacksmith

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 became much shorter with a car, and even easier as roads improved over the decades. The businesses were the first to go, while the social activities remained vital for another few decades.

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

The Fox Sawmill

In 1880 the Fox family, from Ontario, came to Millford and then south to Turtle Mountain. A neighbour allowed them to live his small log shack in the Wakopa area. Thomas and his oldest son Alfred set up a sawmill two miles northeast of Lake Max. People came from many miles around to use the lumber that was produced from this mill.

In 1881 Tom decided to take a homestead nearby and settled (on 10-2-19) several miles west of Wakopa in the Adelpha area.

In 1884 Tom moved his sawmill west where it was used to cut lumber for the expanding CPR. The mill was dismantled and hauled to Brandon where it was shipped to Calgary. Tom went along with his mill while his family stayed behind and his son Frank took over the homestead.

Adelpha

Adelpha originated as a post office in the home of an early homesteader, John A. Hurt. He settled just to the north of the Turtle Mountain Forestry Reserve, right beside the Boundary Commission Trail.

In the early 1880s Frank Kingdon came to the area to settle. He had a store and brought implements into the region to sell to farmers.

When the Canadian National Railway built the rail line heading southwest from Greenway and created the new village of Wakopa, the rails were extended as far as the section to the northwest of Hurt's home and post office and stopped there. A "Y" was built at Adelpha for turning trains around so that they could head back east.

The train station was named Adelpha and built on that section. At the "end of the line" Adelpha became a commercial hub and center. It served as a neighbourhood shipping point. Adelpha was an important center until 1914 when the CNR extended the Greenway Branch to reach Deloraine.

Lena

On a modern map, Lena is the village closest to Wakopa, the next stop to the east on the new rail line. It too had existed as a post office until the village was was created by the CN Branch line.

On the 1885 map presented previously, Lena is not included. The Lena Post Office didn't open until 1892, and was first situated about one mile south of the present village. The name itself however, is much older, dating back to an HBC Post mentioned earlier.

A. B. Langenfield built the first general store, shown here in 1915.

A hotel was built beside the store and was operated by George Forester. This was a short-lived project and later was used as a hall.

The Young Elevator came into existence shortly after the railway came through. It was later bought by the Paterson Co. The Pool Elevator was organized by local farmers in 1928.

Doug Trevers moved his International Harvester Co. business from Bannerman to Lena in 1924. He later branched into the Imperial Oil and general store business. When his building burned in 1957 the Atchisons moved the former Great Northern Station down from Bannerman, locating adjacent to No 18 highway. In 1968 they sold it to Bert and Ivy Ames who operated it until selling out in 1970. This was the end of the Lena General Store. The Post Office, usually operated by the storekeeper, was closed in 1976

The first school was built in 1907 and was replaced in 1951. In the late 40's Lena had a high school with Grades 7 - 11 taught in the Church.

Church services were held in the school until 1925 when the Lena United Church was built. Although it was officially a United Church, people of other faiths attended and supported it.

The village blacksmith shop, run by Joe Bates (1908-1923), was an important part of the community.

Dances in the hall and school, fowl suppers and concerts in the church, a skating rink in the late 40's, a ball team and picnics all kept the community active. The closing of church and school changed the social habits of the people.

A 'beef ring' operated out of Lena in the 1920's. Andy Miller was the first butcher with Dave Pyper succeeding him. The beef ring was a non-profit venture, which enabled the people to have fresh meat every week from May to September.

William Lake

The first settlers near Wakopa heard from the local Aboriginal people about a lake near the "Turtle's Back", a landmark visible far and wide.

At some point five of those settlers, William Ryan, William Shannon, William Boyd, William Hewitt and William Anderson decided to cut a road through the bush to the lake. Upon reaching the lake they decided to name it after the first name they all had in common: William.

Their efforts to clear a road to William Lake made the lake accessible to other early pioneers of the area. The lake was a popular spot to fish and pick wild berries.

Today the lake boasts a small beach, camping and access to surrounding hiking trails, including the popular Turtle's Back Trail, which offers an impressive view from the top. There is a no-motorboat policy on the lake, making it a quiet and peaceful retreat.
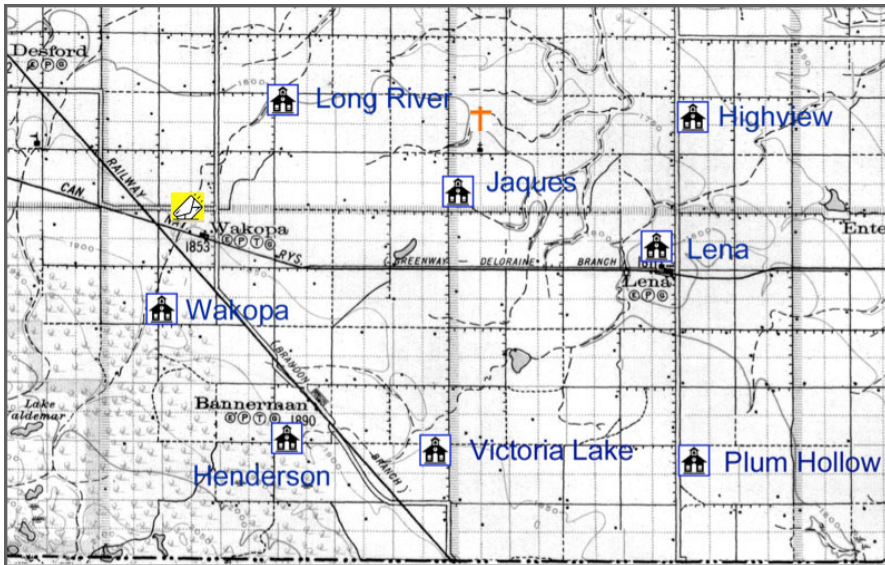
Aside from the small villages, the character of the region was also defined by the term "district". A person might say that they were from the "Wood Lake" district or the "Victoria Lake" district. The district was generally defines by the local school. Sometimes the district might included a church

Jaques Church

5. Real Towns Have Mills

The period from 1881 and 1882, known as the "Manitoba Boom", saw intense speculation in land sale – especially in town lots. Everyone knew that the population of rural western Manitoba was going to explode. Towns would be built, businesses established, and money would be made.

The problem was that nobody was sure where all these new towns would be located. It all depended on where the railway lines would run, and where the railway company would decide to put a station. Although some railway surveys had been undertaken and some lines had been planned, no one knew where the stations would be. So some enterprising landowners decided that a piece of land they owned might just be a good spot for a town

Speculating in town lots was a bit like participating in a gold rush. You stake a claim and hope it pays.

The difference was that in the case of the gold rush, there was at least a tiny chance that there would be actual gold. In the case of town lots it should have been apparent to a discerning investor that the railway decided where towns would be and they generally avoided places where land prices were inflated. And even after a survey, the railway routinely changed its mind as to the exact location of a line, sometimes at the last minute.

So where thousands would willingly rush off in search of gold based on rumours and wild tales, town lots had to be aggressively marketed.

Exaggerations and outright lies were the tools of that trade.

To sell the lots the promoter had to assure prospective buyers that the rail line was a sure thing. An ad for Turtle Mountain City, just a bit to the northwest of Wakopa, made that claim of not one, but two railways. And although it was on the general path of the actual Manitoba Southwestern Railway, when that railway did arrive, it missed Turtle Mountain City by a few miles.

Dobbyn City, near where Melita is today, promised to be an even bigger deal. Railways would connect it to the whole continent! Beyond that, aside from making a claim about the supply of coal and iron, it promised water power and, like most speculative cities, it promised a "large mill".

But the best "Boom Town", story, without doubt, goes to Moberly, located on a swamp on the southwestern tip of Whitewater Lake, and promoted far and wide via newspaper ads and pamphlets, as a sort of seaside resort town with a town square, a steamboat landing and scenic hills in the distance.

Newspaper ads tell the tale.

Turtle Mountain City,

This is the Banner Town of the far-famed Turtle Mountain country, and is the business centre of the best settlement in the great North-West.

Being on the lines of the

Manitoba Southwestern Railway and Syndicate Southwestern Branch,

It will be a competing point for these railways Merchants and others should secure lots there as soon as they are placed upon the market.

Section 3, Tp. 3, Range 21 West.
" 32, " 2, " 21 "

Winnipeg Times, Dec. 20, 1881

DOBBYN CITY!

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

Being opposite Bismarck, it is here that

Connection will be made with the NORTHERN PACIFIC.

A Company is now being formed to build a line of railroad from Dobbyn City by way of Qu'Appelle to Edmonton.

Building is now going on to the extent of $25,000. A large mill is also being built.

Winnipeg Times, March 9, 1882

Mr. R. Brown sold four Moberly lots to T. W. Stephenson, for $105 each.

Winnipeg Sun, March 28, 1882

The claims were beyond extravagant. Indeed the whole episode was so well-known and so outrageous, that the word Moberly became a sort of catch word for the boom town experience. The following newspaper story is one of several that allude to Moberly in this way.

YESTERDAY afternoon a fast horse ran away with his driver when opposite the Globe Hotel on Main street. The driver was thrown and dragged a whole block through the mud and filth of the street. When he tries to clean his clothes he will do so to the tune of "Winnipeg mud thou art loving ever." A reporter who saw him would not have taken the town site of Moberley to go through the same experience.

*Winnipeg Sun, April 5, 1882*
By 1882, the Moberly Development was recognized for what it was.

Despite the rather obvious fraud (Mr. B.B. Johnson of Emerson, one of the promoters, was the only instance I have discovered of someone actually being charged and convicted of fraud is such a matter), even newspaper reporters accepted some of the wild claims and in general, were caught up in the whole thing.

> MR. WADE. of the firm of Wade & Burns, proprietors of the steam grist mill at Crystal City, who has been in the city for a number of days, left for the Turtle Mountain district yesterday via. Emerson. to superintend the erection of a flour and feed store at the new town of Moberly. The firm look to the Turtle Mountain district for a market for their flour. and propose to make Moberly their headquarters for that section of country. They are also thinking of erecting a grist mill at Moberly, having received an offer of a liberal bonus from the enterprising proprietors of that townsite. The need of a grist mill in the Turtle Mountain district is greatly felt by the settlers, as the nearest mill is at Clearwater, some fifty miles east of Moberly.

Winnipeg Daily Sun, Dec 23, 1881

The claims made in the previous story could easily have been set to rest by checking with any local resident.
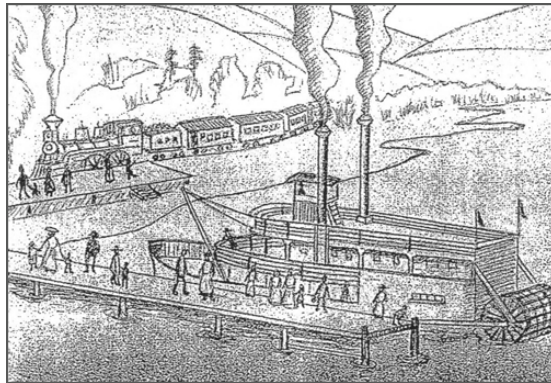
It is hard to recognize Whitewater Lake from the perspective offered in the promotional pamphlet.

Real Towns vs. Paper Cities

There never was a building of any sort at Moberly, and the "nearest Mill" was indeed much closer than Clearwater. The mill at Wakopa, in fact, had been up and running for some time.

Wakopa was a real town, rather than a paper town. And the fact that it had a mill is quite important.

The primary purpose of pioneer agricultural settlements, like those around Turtle Mountain, was to grow grain. The problem was that getting a crop to market was a long haul. Having a gristmill nearby, where one could at least exchange wheat for flour was a

24

crucial advantage in making a homestead sustainable until a railway would arrive.

The development of the grain business began in Wakopa long before the railway was built through Boissevain and Killarney. In 1878 Matthew Harrison built saw and flour mills in the new village.

The rumbling mill was powered by a water wheel on the banks of Long River. George Bennett, who freighted from Emerson to Wakopa with a team of oxen, Buck and Bright, a fast team of oxen. He brought the first gristmill stones to Wakopa. These stones are very heavy and rest today in the Harrison Mill in Holmfield.

To accommodate the settlers who brought their wheat from afar by oxen to be ground into flour, the family built a boarding house and large livery barn.

A sawmill was another priority for the first settles, as there was no convenient way to import lumber. Many of the first frame houses in the region used lumber from the Harrison family sawmill.

In 1881 Bill Harrison joined his brother, and in 1882 another brother George came west and joined the company.

These businesses, along with B.B. LaRivière's Store and Stopping Place, established Wakopa as an important place. After getting some supplies, one could stop for a meal at the Harrison home, or at LaRiviere's. Mrs. J. Melville's boarding house was there if an overnight stay was required.

The coming of the railway to Killarney doomed this busy centre. The brothers disassembled their mill and built Killarney's first grain elevator. Later they built a gristmill at Holmfield that would serve the area for many decades.

On the second floor of that historic building one can still see the rough cut 2 by 6's that were sawn at the old Wakopa for the Harrison's next enterprise.

6. The CN Line & the New Village

When the Southwest Branch reached Killarney and Boissevain in 1885, patterns of commerce that had been in place for about five years changed overnight. The new towns created on that line eclipsed Wakopa as commercial centres, and Wakopa area farmers were better off in that they now had to travel only ten or twenty miles to the nearest elevator.

But there was always that hope that more branch lines would be built, and farmers kept advocating for better service.

Around 1900 a proposal was being considered that would meet their needs. A branch of the Canadian Northern Pacific line would connect to that line near Greenway and proceed southwest to the Wakopa region. Locals advocated strongly for the line to be built and in 1903 construction began.

Wakopa Railway Delegation

A delegation composed of J. N. Barber, C. S. Finlayson, Robt. Henry, Robt. White, Alex. Porter and Henry Knight, waited upon Premier Roblin on Monday afternoon at Killarney requesting a line of railway into Wakopa district. After hearing the arguments of the different delegates the premier promised to take the matter up and treat with it as the circumstances warranted. The line desired would be a continuation of the line advocated from Greenway on the Canadian Northern through the Glenora and Glendenning districts. A delegation waited upon Hugh John Macdonald in March, 1900, with a largely signed petition from ratepayers living upon the proposed route praying for the immediate construction of the latter railway, and he then promised to do all he could to give them the facilities considered necessary.

Manitoba Telegraph – June 12, 1901

The grading of the new line of railway from Greenway to Wakopa has followed closely on the completion of the work of the Canadian Northern chief engineer and staff, and the people of the district are accordingly gratified. On Thursday a quantity of supplies, fifty teams and sixty men were unloaded at Greenway. Just as soon as everything was unshipped, the men loaded up the outfits and pulled out on the line and pitched tents on the farm of Malcolm Schink, N.E. 27-4-13. More men and teams have been wired for, and it is expected the colony of workmen will be increased by forty more teams and men immediately.

Manitoba Telegraph - May 28, 1903

The arrival of rail service prompted the rebirth of Wakopa as a village, although the location was just slightly north of the original site, the community and the name remained. A station, elevator and store were soon constructed, and although the population and commercial activity remained small, the importance to local farm families was immense.

The store offered virtually everything a family would need. A blacksmith was an essential service in the days when farm machinery had to be repaired locally. The railway could deliver bulk goods such as coal and take both livestock and grain to market.

The store and station along with the elevator were essential components of a prairie village.

For many years the only establishments were the elevator and Morgan's store. A school located near the old village site continued there until it was replaced by a new building closer to the village.

With the end of the railway line, the elevator ceased to operate and only Morgan's store remained for a time. A visitor to Killarney might not be aware that the small building that housed a Hair Salon, (behind the shopping mall) is the elevator house from Wakopa.

The Store

Bill Morgan in his busy well-stocked store.

Early in the 20th century L.H. Morgan was employed by Killarney merchants Marquis and McCulloch. He and S.A. Oles opened a branch store in the new village of Wakopa, with Morgan as manager and Oles as a silent partner who also for a time operated the delivery service. Morgan bought out Oles and operated the store until his death in 1944.


S.A. Oles and his delivery wagon.

The building housed Les and Lily Morgan and their large family, in living quarters at the back of the store and upstairs. The store area was large with a post office on the east side, the grocery counter the north side. The counter was long and had course glass front on the drawers to inform you what was inside. Another large counter was at the south side.

Les Morgan had a truck with a large box on the back that carried all the school kids to every field day and to Sunday church service once each summer at Lake William. It carried all the adults to the Peace Garden opening in 1932 - where crowds of people met for the dedication of that area that we all enjoy to this day.

The store remained in the Morgan family until 1966.
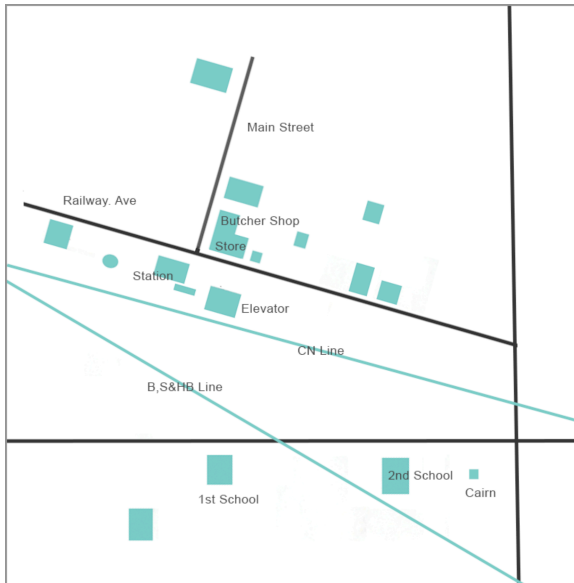
The Village
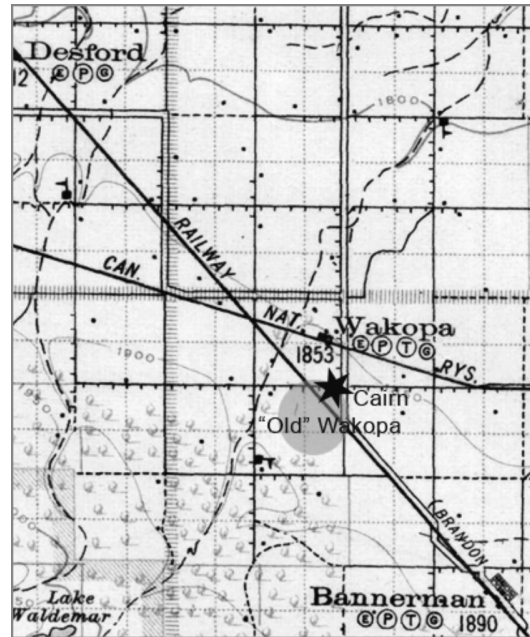
The district.

7. The Great Northern Line

(The Brandon, Saskatchewan and Hudson Bay Railway)

The Wakopa pioneers waited for about twenty-five years to get their railway line. The arrival of the Canadian Northern branch spurred the re-birth of Wakopa as a village and the dust had barely settled on that enterprise when another railway entered the district creating additional transportation options.

The Brandon, Saskatchewan and Hudson Bay Railway, a subsidiary of the Great Northern Railway from the U.S. offered service from Brandon to the small town of St. John, North Dakota where it made connections on the Great Northern lines south to Minneapolis, east to Duluth, and west through Montana to the coast. It was founded by James J. Hill who was part of the original syndicate that built the CPR across the prairies. Originally his plan was to build a track all the way to Hudson Bay, but nothing was ever pursued past Brandon.

The line, born as it was in the optimistic times of expansion, was perhaps doomed from the start, but it did have its impact for a few short decades on several communities south of Brandon, and in a limited way, on the city itself.

We all know about the importance of the railway in the development of the west. Those two venerable Canadian institutions; Pierre Berton and the CBC, have made it hard to escape the role the building of the CPR played in our history. Railways have been romanticized, eulogized, and demonized, but never ignored.

Equally true however, is the fact that in much of rural Manitoba, and across the prairies, the rails are being abandoned, torn up and inevitably forgotten. The railway boom lasted only a few short decades before retrenchment began. For rural communities the presence of a rail link went from being indispensable to being inconsequential in a less than forty years. We had barely completed crisscrossing the land with lines when we began taking them up. Sometimes we built too many.

That may well be the case with the much-anticipated route from Brandon south to the U.S. Border, seen at the time as a forward-thinking link with the extensive Great Northern Railway. But to rural people in southern Manitoba at the end of the 19th century, there couldn't be too many rail lines. Many of the first settlers had waited patiently for the first lines, which in many cases were delayed by the infamous "monopoly clause" in the governments deal with the syndicate that built the CPR. Even after Manitoba's Greenway government was able to end the monopoly in 1888, many farmers still had a long haul to get their grain to the nearest elevator and many had complaints about the service they received, specifically the availability of an adequate number of rail cars in peak periods. Anything that would reduce the length of those trips, plus add an element of badly needed competition, was welcome.

It wasn't just farmers who wanted this railway. There was a lot of boosterism associated with railway building. There was profit to be made in the building of the infrastructure and in the establishment of related services. The arrival of a rail link seemed to secure the fortunes of any small settlement and enhance the prospects of existing towns. This line was destined for a short life span, but in that short time it certainly did provide a much-need service, and made quite an impact along its route.

Once the deal was struck the line was started without delay, beginning in 1905, and decisions were made quickly regarding the route and placement of stations. Despite the best effort of the rival lines to stall the establishments of the necessary crossings at Wakopa, Boissevain and Minto, the line worked its way northward at an astonishing pace. Rights of way were purchased. Established communities of Boissevain, Minto, and, of course Brandon, would be on the route. New sites of Bannerman, Bunclody, Hayfield and Heaslip were created, although not all developed into villages. A deal was struck with McCabe Elevators for grain handling facilities, and Great Northern cash was provided up front to build the twelve facilities. Even the sites of Fairburn, Alcester, Griffin, Healip, McKelvie and Roseland would have elevators, although even in those optimistic times, villages were not anticipated.

While stations were located at most of the villages, even stops that didn't evolve into real villages got waiting rooms complete with pot-bellied stoves. Stops like Beverly (originally called Webster) and Hebron, closely spaced between Bunclody and Hayfield, and known as "sidings", got loading platforms. Several sites had dwellings for section foremen and bunkhouses for crew. Water towers, a vital part of the infrastructure in the days of the steam locomotives, were closely spaced on this line with structures at Bannerman, Boissevain, Minto, Bunclody, Hayfield and Brandon. Each had a pumping manager in charge. Crucial to the whole operation was a 30-year contract to carry the mail. Post offices were established along the line or, in several case,s moved to be closer to the line. By 1906 the trains were running, bringing an immediate benefit to local farmers, improved mail delivery, easier access to both Brandon and points in the US, and a much improved distribution of consumer good into the rural area.
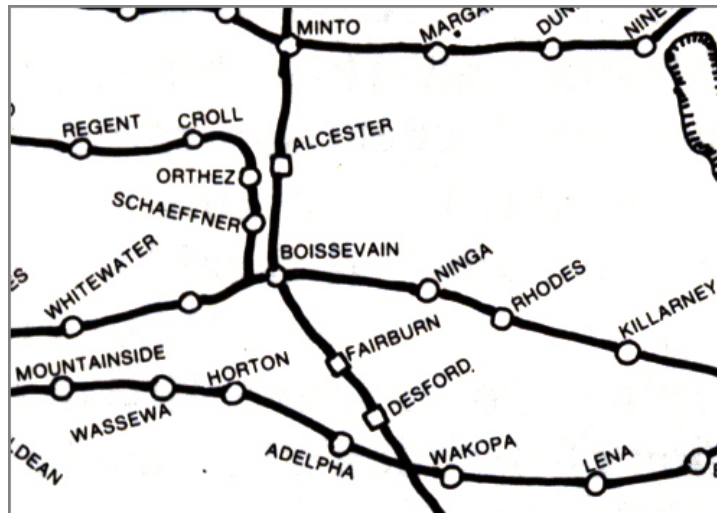
By 1912 railway expansion in the southwest corner was at its peak. This map from 1935 shows elevator locations. Missing is Anderson's Siding, once located midway between Lena and Wakopa.

According to Great Northern records, the line ended up costing $2547281.37. That price was perhaps a little steeper than they had intended. The CPR competed for contractors, offering work on its own lines and thus boosting prices. The GN countered by offering local farmers work on the easier grades with contracts going out in 1906. A story in the Boissevain Recorder insisted that between three and four thousand men were employed in that year. It was the only common carrier railway line ever build in Manitoba with no

public subsidy of land or money, in fact, it often paid inflated prices for land. The extra cost was the first in a series of circumstances that limited the profitability of the line.

Building The Line

Construction of the track bed began in winter. Teams of horses or mules – approximately 12 teams per mile – were used to pull slush scrapers along where the track would be laid. Men operating each team were paid fifty cents per hour for a nine-hour workday and were also expected to supply their own board and feed their team.

A construction gang near Minto

Train Service

The first trip from St. John up the line involved the transportation of coal to Brandon. That train arrived on December 1st, 1906, though only after being stuck in snow cuts for two weeks. The first passenger train operated on April 24th, 1907, and the line soon became the chief mode of north/south transportation for people, mail and goods to and from Brandon. Oil was hauled using the rail line, and a lot of grain. The circus train also came over the line on its way to the Brandon Fair, and stories are told of the train chugging past with giraffe necks poking out the sides of cars.

A train ran once in either direction daily except for Sundays. The roadbed was of very poor quality and in wet weather – particularly in spring – the track would become too soft to be used and service would halt for a month or two. The village of Bannerman, Manitoba, was the first stop along the line on the Canadian side of the border, and this was the location of the customs office for crossing into Canada.

Charlie Bryant

The train operator along the GNR line for over 30 years was a man named Charlie Bryant, who was so well known that the rail line got the nickname "Charlie's Train." A very pleasant and affable man, he was a farmer in his spare time near St. John, but was never too busy to help out his fellow farmers or extend an extra courtesy to passengers. Charlie had no problem stopping the train between stations to accommodate harvest workers, pick up or drop off passengers close to their homes, or pick up goods.

One story that has been handed down concerns a farmer who lived near the tracks. He was threshing and experienced a machinery breakdown. Local dealers didn't have the

part needed, but they were able to have the part sent from Brandon later that same day and the train stopped right by the field to drop it off.

Service indeed.

<u>The End of the Line</u>

The depression in the 1930s brought a reduction in freight and passenger business. The switch from using trains to driving automobiles for transportation began, and in 1936 the Great Northern's mail contract ended. It was not renewed. After this, train service along the GN line ended altogether, and in 1937 the track was torn up.

In 2007 The GN Depot at Boissevain was the last station left standing along the Manitoba section of the line. It had been refitted for use by the Highways Department. It has since been torn down.

A GN Crew House does remain in use as a residence in Boissevain, perhaps the last GN related building in Manitoba.

Great Northern Memories

In 1905 when the surveying for the Great Northern was done, the railway was to go right through the corner of the Alex Henderson's farmhouse. In 1906, Henderson moved out of his home on 12-2-19 and began rebuilding his entire operation on 13-2-19. The Great Northern crew quickly replaced the house on 12-2-19 with railway track. Although some compensation was given to Mr. Henderson for his loss, it by no means covered the loss suffered by the family.

**A thank-you to Mrs. Gertie Henderson for sharing some of her memories.

Bill Moncur - on the impact of the line.

… of course the grain was a great deal and there was a lot of grain shipped along the Great Northern, all the way from Brandon right through to the boundary went to the States and the service was always a little bit better than what the Canadian companies could produce. And then along with that was the express, that is the cream and eggs that we used to ship down to Devil's Lake and that was a real boon to the farm people all the way along the line right through to Brandon. That was a daily service that they got, ship the one day, and your cheque came back the next with the cream can. It was really super and you always got a better price down there than what you could get up here. And of course, then there was objection from the Canadian companies, the creameries, but nonetheless as long as the railroad had the service here, the people made use of it.   A lot of fruit came up this way too from the States, a tremendous amount of fruit. Oh you mentioned that. I can remember these big deals that they used to ship the bananas, high crates and I happened to be in when the freight came in, you'd see all these things be there, different cases of lettuce and that.

8. One Road Leads to Bannerman

Of all the newly created villages along the Great Northern line, the rise and fall of Bannerman was the most dramatic. The new rail line required a Port of Entry, naturally the first stop after a border crossing. A spot on NE 15-1-18, just about three kilometres north of the border, was suitable and available. Settlement in the area dates from around 1880 when James Henderson Sr. was the first homesteader to file in this vicinity. In 1905 as line approached, the town of Bannerman sprang into existence with excitement and a sense of possibility, the first and only port of entry by rail west of Emerson in Manitoba. The Manitoba Telegram ventured the opinion that it would become " a good live town" and that "busy little centres will be established" at all the town site points along the route.

NEW TOWNSITE WILL SOON BE ON MARKET

Bannerman, on Brandon, Saskatchewan &Hudson Bay Railway, Situated in Fine Country

BRANDON, June 9. —(Special)—It is understood that the new townsite of Bannerman, on the Brandon, Saskatchewan & Hudson Bay railway, will very shortly be put on the market. The townsite is surveyed ready for sale and it is fully expected that when the sale is announced it will attract a great deal of attention from south of the boundary line.

Bannerman is about four miles north of the boundary and in the centre of a splendid agricultural district, well settled and prosperous.

The townsite company is now making arrangements for the sale, which it is hoped will be completed by the time the steel is laid to Bannerman and the date of the sale will then be announced.

The Brandon Sun reported on the new village in 1906.

There was of course a rush to build homes, businesses and an elevator. Bannerman quickly developed a boomtown atmosphere.

On Main Street, near the station, was the town's most impressive building – the hotel. . It was substantial with a big dining area and a bar.

In 1913 Mrs. Elizabeth Cook bought the hotel and boarding house beside it. When prohibition came, the bar was closed and it was then changed to a dance hall.

South of the hotel, Owen Bell and Gundar Hallen built and operated a feed and livery barn. The livery stable to the right of the hotel was owned and operated by Bill Cook who also supplied the community with milk. There was a livery team and a sleigh or buggy that was always ready for hire. The lumberyard was owned by A. Bourassa from St. John. On the same side of the street was the poolroom and barbershop operated by Bill Thompson. On the north part of town was a store and post office, built by John Spafford in 1906. Joe Bate owned the first blacksmith shop. The second owner was Mr. Balmoral. Jim Melville bought this building and blacksmithed there for several years. J. Boupre owned the harness and shoe repair shop.

Directly across the street from the hotel was another grocery store, built and owned by Frank Martineau in 1905. Jack Dickson and Sam Gibson also opened a store east of Martineau's. The store was bought and sold many times. Tom Blixhaven operated this store for many years. His sons farmed in the district.

There was a second blacksmith shop on the east side of the street. Andrew Henderson started the first store and butcher shop. This was later sold to Mr. Jasper. They moved it to Wakopa and started the first beef ring in this area. Owners of the first Massey Harris dealership were Joe Bates and John Spafford. Doug Trevors also had an implement dealership in Bannerman. For a time there was a puffed wheat factory and a tannery. At some point a United Church was built in the village.

The station's status as a port of entry meant that the station had two offices, one for the railroad agent and one for the Customs and Immigration officer. These duties and responsibilities required other facilities and enhanced the status of the town. A detention house was soon added nearby for those who were not granted entry, and had to wait overnight for the train back. A quarantine barn was needed, as all livestock was held overnight for inspection. To north of station were two section houses and a water tank.

Another added responsibility was controlling the flow of alcohol. Ever changing liquor laws always seemed to keep make smuggling a worthwhile venture. Agents patrolled the border in the area. Then, as now, border security was an important responsibility. Magistrate John Balfour, aided by town cop Sam Balfour, kept the peace locally.

Each year the circus of the Royal Canadian Shows came by the Great Northern to entertain at Brandon summer fair. Customs agents went to Devil's Lake to start inspection of the many passenger cars and the inspection was completed at Bannerman.

While the creation of the village happened quickly as was the case in many other railway towns, the demise was also quite dramatic. Normally when a railway line was abandoned, smaller village tended to continue their roles for a time. A store and a few services remained convenient for local farmers. The school might be kept. Some of those villages still exist decades after the elevator and train service ended.

In the case of Bannerman, located as it was close to the border, there just wasn't a customer base to keep it going. Wakopa still had a store and elevator. Boissevain and Killarney weren't all that far away for other purchases.

So when the railway ceased operations in 1936, although the store moved in to the railways station and carried on for a while, the writing was on the wall.

Bannerman Today

The site is still quite visible on Google Earth while very little evidence remains on the ground. The N-S grid road placed in the middle of the section curves to cross the tracks at a right angle. It becomes Main Street with the station and hotel to the SE and other businesses on the NW side.

The faded lettering painted on a rock placed some years ago along the road reads; "Bannerman Pop. 3"
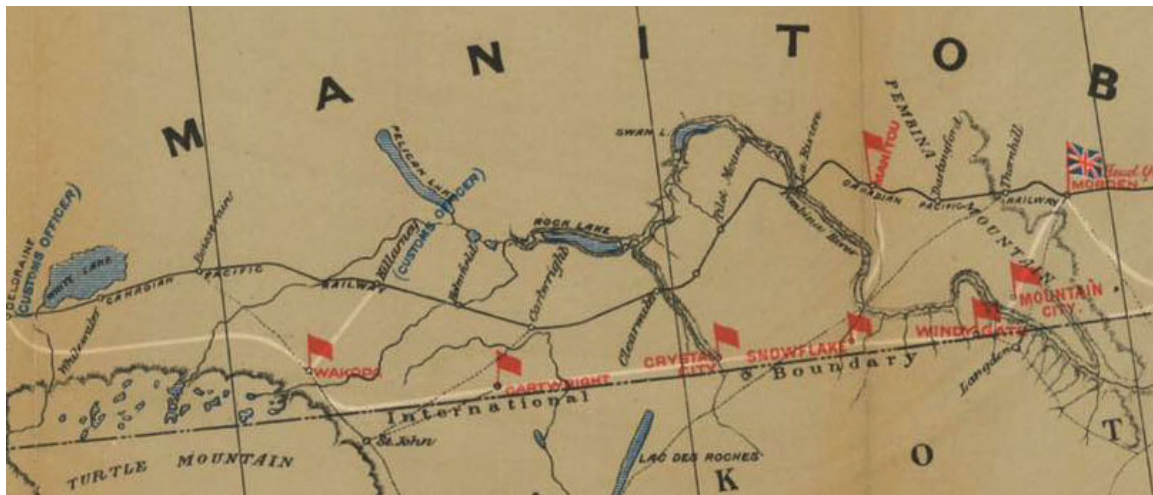
9. On the Border

Communities that hug the border to the south always have some special characteristics. They may serve as points of entry with all the legal and jurisdictional issues that accompany the role. Smuggling can be an issue. Cross border crime can occur. There are therefore law enforcement issues that set them apart from other villages. On the positive side, such communities are in a position to have more of a working and social relationship with folks from across the line. The owners of a few businesses in both Wakopa and Bannerman were Americans.

On the days of the fur trade, the border was just a theoretical concept. Trade and commerce was carried on without a thought for which country owned the land. It was irrelevant in that the governments of both Canada and the U.S. didn't maintain a presence in this remote part of their respective territories. In fact, it wasn't until the mid 1800's that they even decided exactly where the border would be in some areas. In short, west of Emerson, the border was largely ignored until the land was surveyed and allotted to homesteaders.

Even after the line was marked, and Ports of Entry were established, first on railway lines, then on highways, border communities on each side travelled quite freely. The border town of St. John ND, the site of the connection between the Brandon, Saskatchewan and Hudson's Bay Railway and its American, Great Northern counterpart, named the trail they've established on the abandoned rail bed, the "Wakopa Trail".

Law Enforcement

Police services began in this area in 1885. A request for protection had been made on behalf of the settlers by the Attorney General, and a detachment of North West Mounted Police was temporarily sanctioned "for the present and until a local force is formed". At that time it wasn't the purpose of the Mounted Police to provide local law enforcement. A small force was distributed at Manitou, Wakopa, Deloraine and Sourisford.

In 1888, to stop horse thieves from raiding settlers' farms, a detachment of one commissioned officer and twenty-four men was formed to patrol the border to the south. Although these men often boarded in the villages, they had a cabin and a stable on a point of land running out from the north shore of William Lake. This was an ideal spot to

check the trails through Turtle Mountain. They effectively stopped the horse thieves and those poaching wood and timber. Several teams were seized and sold at auction.

Later the detachments were stationed on trails leading from North Dakota to Crystal City, Cartwright, Wakopa, Killarney, Holmfield, Boissevain and Deloraine. One man remained at the detachment while another was on patrol. These detachments were withdrawn in 1894 and not re-established until 1916.

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST HORSE-THIEVING.

Mounted Police to Commence Patrolling at Once in Manitoba.

Yesterday ten mounted police, in charge of Major Shirtleff, got off the train from the west to operate in Southern Manitoba to checkmate the horse and cattle thieves that were so long doing the country. The headquarters of this force will be at Wakopa, and they will operate westerly to the boundary to meet there a detachment from the west. They will guard the frontier easterly till met by another force sent to Emerson from Winnipeg a day or two ago. — *Brandon Mail.*

In reference to the above a reporter called upon Capt. Norman to-day to get particulars about the arrangements. The captain says he has not received any instructions from headquarters as to the disposition of the detachment of 25 men now under his command at Fort Osborne. The item quoted above, he says, is correct so far as he knows. Commencing at two o'clock to-day a regular guard will be mounted by the police at Fort Osborne. The detachment was inspected this morning by Captain Norman. The arms and kits were found to be in excellent condition. The men will be taken to Stony Mountain soon for rifle practice.

The Nor'Wester – Aug. 8, 1884

The Metis uprising in Saskatchewan in 1885 did raise a concern.

A pioneer remembers that: "Sam Kellam, Bill Barber, John Barber and another fellow by the name of McFayden were sworn in as border wardens by the R.N.W.M. Police to prevent Indians from North Dakota from joining the Riel uprising. They were paid a salary and were given powers to call anyone into service should assistance be needed. They had to report each week to the Pembina Police Detachment concerning any incidents, and were assured a quantity of Long Tom guns (British L.A. 1860 issue) with ample ammunition. The guns and ammunition were stored in LaRiviere's trading post and grist mill."

The fighting was many miles away, involved only a very small group of people, and with the benefit of hindsight we know that any escalation of that conflict was unlikely. But the

settlers in rural Manitoba didn't know that. They also were unlikely to have had the opportunity to understand the reasons behind the conflict.

Accepted wisdom today tells us that the native populations across the west almost unanimously refused to have anything to do with the Riel uprising, and populations in the U.S. had their own battles to worry about.

But local officials and media were concerned and Home Guard Companies were formed across the province. Some old timers have reported that border-area homesteaders were given Enfield rifles with bayonets on them.

The "Rebellion" was over quickly, and although life in the new prairie settlements was able to return to normal, people felt vulnerable for a time.

That was understandable given recent history. Our proximity to the United States had made settlers aware of events there that were much more deadly than anything experienced here in Canada. After years of broken treaties and forced resettlement, the tensions between the Dakota in Minnesota led by Little Crow, and the settler communities, erupted into escalating violence. The uprising in 1862 had left hundreds of settlers dead and many communities ruined. At the time, groups of Dakota Santee, most likely innocent in the matter, had settled in the Turtle Mountain area, and many were still in the region. More recently the defeat of Custer at Little Big Horn had caught everyone's attention and some refugees from that conflict had also found their way to Manitoba. Settlers were well aware of these events. It took a while for settlers to see first hand that the Dakota, for example, were here to escape strife and violence they had experienced across the line. The threat level was dialed down.

Killarney.

KILLARNEY, April 9.—The mounted policemen from Wakopa went to Boissevain to meet Tuesday's train, which conveyed the entire outfit of men and horses from southern Manitoba west. The boundary line from Emerson to the Turtle Mountain is now without guards of any kind except an occasional customs officer.

The Nor'Wester – April 11, 1894

This report from the Daily Nor'Wester shows that by 1894, border security was becoming less of a priority. The transportation links provided by good rail links made the whole area feel less isolated. Police could be dispatched much more readily in case of any trouble.

10. Wakopa Stories

Told in no particular order….

Lynx Attack

Jesse Robbins and sister Jane came to Holmfield in the spring of 1894. Jane married William Barber whom she had met in Ontario. Barber homesteaded 18-1-18 in 1881. He walked to Deloraine to file for it and carried a lunch to eat on the way. William, a plasterer by trade, plastered many houses in Killarney. He once went to the sawmill in Wakopa for a load of lumber and while there, a lynx jumped at the horse's head. William hit the animal with a 2 x 4 and after quieting down the team, succeeded in killing the lynx. The horses bridle had deep claw marks cut in the leather.

Now that is Service!

Small town businesses are famous for their personal service. A contributor found an invoice from the Morgan Store to a clothing manufacturer in Winnipeg for a special order for a single pair of pants – size 54 waist, 34 leg. That's a large individual. For the owners of the store, what the customer needed, the customer got. The belief is that the pants were for Brian Arthur. Other speculation is that this is the individual that was noted as the anchor for the local tug-of-war team that participated in an epic contest held at the opening ceremonies for the International Peace Garden. I'd want that guy on my team.

The Governor of Malta

In 1946 (May 25) the Winnipeg Tribune reported that, "Francis Campbell Ross Douglas, soft-spoken son of the Canadian Prairies," had just been appointed the first civilian governor of Malta.

Mr. Douglas lived on a farm near Wakopa until he was about eleven, when his father moved the family back to his native Scotland. In an interview with the Canadian Press he praised the education he got in the local schoolhouse and offered some happy memories.

"Why, all the memories of my childhood are naturally of the prairies. I think of going with a sled to the little wood for fuel, of skating in the cold and of a one-mile walk to school. And then there was the biggest event of my young life…the day I met a wolf on my way to school."

He was also able to confirm that indeed the somewhat mythical "little red schoolhouse" did exist. He insists that the one he attend really was that colour.

A Well-Travelled Horse.

The story is that a horse used by General Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn, complete with saddle, was brought to the Wakopa area by Dakota warriors who were still wearing scalps of the Seventh Cavalry on their belts.

Sounds a bit far-fetched, but according to www.american-tribes.com, Noisy Walker, the son of the Wahpekute, (Chief Inkpaduta), captured Custer's horse after the battle.
We know that Inkpaduta and some of his family came to southwestern Manitoba soon after Little Bighorn.

So while there is no proof, at least there is a rationale behind the story that takes it past the rumour stage. We might I suppose consider it a plausible theory, keeping in mind the other unsubstantiated stories about Custer's horse.

The Strangler

Earle Nelson, an American, was responsible for over two dozen murders across the US and Canada, and was therefore the most dangerous serial killer of his time. Moving form place to place he would rent rooms in Boarding Houses, then kill the landlady and steal her husband's clothes

Near the end of his crime spree, he crossed into Canada, and after killing two people in Winnipeg he went to Regina, and from there, back to southwestern Manitoba.

Thanks to a Wakopa storekeeper, Canadian authorities caught him as he attempted to flee across the US border.

Killarney historian Lawrence Smith tells it this way…

"he hitchhiked with a travelling salesman coming all the way down the back roads, cops looking for him all over the place, but they can't cover all the roads. He hitched to Boissevain, and at that time the railroad ran south into Bannerman down into St. John, he was trying to get back to the States. He got as far as Wakopa and Mrs. Morgan, (he stopped in at the Morgan's store), said she got a real funny feeling in the back of her neck about this character so she told Les and Mr. Dingwall to keep an eye on him. He was hiking down the old railway line. Les went up on top of the elevator to keep an eye on him while Mrs. Morgan phoned the police. And they caught him in Bannerman."

Jim Whiteford was driving a team and wagon going to Bannerman and had given him a

lift.

Mr. Morgan and Mr. Dingwall each received $300. Two other persons also participating in the capture, George Dickson and Dunc Merlin, each received $150.

Recounting the experiences, Mr. Dingwall said the CN train had just left when he met a stranger who had just left the Morgan store. "It was the boots he was wearing that made me suspicious", said Dingwall. "I told Les (Morgan) who I thought the man was, and suggested to Mrs. Morgan that she should phone the police at Killarney. "

Nelson appeared in Winnipeg police court for preliminary hearing on June 23rd. A trial date was set for Nov. 1, 1927 before Crown Prosecutor RB Graham, QC where the jury declared him guilty. He was sentenced to hang Friday, January 13, 1928 at the Vaughan St Jail in Winnipeg.

Peter and Mary's Love Story - A Romance on the Prairies

Peter Bryan operated a successful dry goods store in Liverpool, England, before he was lured to the Canadian West, influenced by the descriptive promotional literature and tales of great opportunities (and perhaps adventure?) in Western Canada. After working on railroads for some time he ended up in the Wakopa area.

Mary Harrison came to the same area with her family. She helped at the store run by the William's family.

That is where they met and it seems some mutual attraction developed.

But, according to Mary's daughter, Mary was an attractive girl and others had noticed this as well. One in particular, a "gallant young Scotsman" named Robert Douglas would also drop by the store, sometimes with his, "prancing steed and gig" to take Mary for a ride.

All was going well until the day they went across the line to St. John and young Robert made a serious mistake. He went off and got drunk, leaving Mary to find her own way home.

That, as they say, was that. With Peter waiting in the wings, Mary had options.

Things went slowly. Mary had moved with her mother to her Uncle's farm. Peter lived nearby. On a fine day he would take his gun over to Victoria Lake and later drop by with a few ducks, which Mary would roast and they all would enjoy a tasty meal.

Life went on this way for some time until Mary decided to be a bit more proactive.

According to her daughter, Mary had a sense of humour and was fond of jokes, "practical as well as verbal." She tells the following story, - a classic happy ending…

"…One chill Halloween afternoon she ambled over to Peter's shanty with a bundle of rags under her arm. He was busy in the field harvesting. She climbed to the top of the shack and stuffed her rags into the smokestack. She then returned home. Peter came from the field ravenous and lit a good fire. To his consternation the shack was soon full

of smoke. We leave it to you to imagine how he unraveled the plot. But mother's little joke worked and she got her man."

As with any good romance movie, there has to be that final scene, where the happy couple rides of into the sunset. In this case they seem to have made quite a fashion statement while doing so.

"on the morning of May 29, 1889, they set of for St. John North Dakota, in the wagon drawn by Dad's pair of prancing blacks – Prince and Maude. Sitting on the spring seat they made a jaunty pair. Mother wore a beautiful wine basque, which reached, to her ankles – with high-buttoned black shoes. On her head she wore a black sunbonnet beneath which dangled golden curls. Dad wore a suit fashioned in his Liverpool tailor shop. It consisted of pants in fine woolsheperd's check with high waist after the style of sailor's pants. His coat was a black swallow-tail and his vest was white. His hat and gloves made his costume complete. On reaching St. John the only minister they could find was a Catholic priest, and he agreed to marry them"

By all accounts they lived happily ever after.

A Different Sort of Love Story

Along with a nice crime story and a romantic love story, every town needs scandal or two.

We know that Wakopa's proximity to the border merited a police presence and that the North West Mounted Police were at times stationed there. It seems that those officers weren't always as reputable as one would hope.

The story starts with this article in the Winnipeg Tribune on December 16, 1890, which we will present as submitted, as it presents an fine example of the journalistic style of the times.

LOVELACE WAS LOVABLE,

AN ELOPEMENT AT WAKOPA

A Constable of the N.W.M.P. Supposed to Have Gone Across the Line

Killarney. Dec. 15 - Constable Lovelace of the N.S.M.., Regina, got off on a month's leave. He came to Ninga last Thursday, and Friday night eloped with a Miss Lynne, of Wakopa. Search was made for the erring couple without success. They are supposed to have skipped across the line. He was stationed at Wakopa last summer and appears to have arranged the elopement by corresponding. Her parents forbade her having anything to do with him, as it is said he has a wife and children in Toronto, and is a bad character. Much sympathy is extended to the parents of the innocent girl. She will probably be deserted in a short time.

We don't hear any more about it until 1895 when the Daily Nor'Wester reported that Anna E. Lovelace was suing her husband, Alfred James Lovelace for divorce. They had been living in New York in 1886 when he disappeared.

Anna Lovelace's lawyer contacted the NWMP in 1895 seeking any information and their records indicate that he was a clerk in Montreal before signing on at Ottawa, and that his postings included Moose Mountain, Regina and Wakopa. Further research indicates that

he was born in Montreal in 1863 to Edgar Maudesley Lovelace and Rebecca Henderson. And that he was married with seven children.

Did they live happily ever after? We don't know. All we do know is that Lovelace passed away in 1908 in the United States.

11. From Rails to Roads

While the village of Wakopa was able to make the transition from the era of pioneer trails to the era of regular railway service, surviving the end of the railway era and the dominance of the automobile was just not possible.

Many villages never recovered from the depression, but losing a railway connection was even more damaging. A local general store might survive for a while in the same way that convenience stores survive in the cities, but when you combine the convenience of car travel, the luxury of the endless consumer goods and farm supplies available in the nearby towns, it was hard to compete, hard to make a buck. On top of that, rural depopulation accelerated just as railway service was declining. There just wasn't a need for a village every few miles.
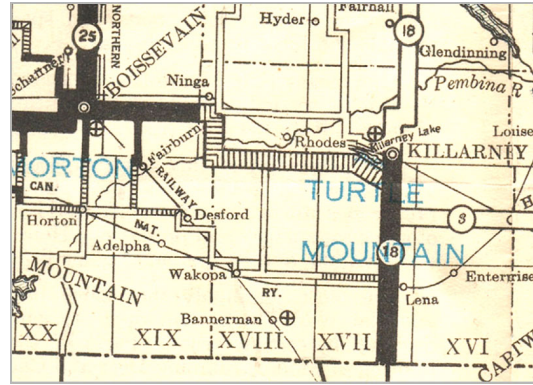
When the railway ceased operation on the Wakopa – Greenway Branch in 1961, there was one less reason for local farmers to make the trip to the village. They were already heading to Boissevain and Killarney for most of their supplies. The Morgans continued to operate the store until 1966.
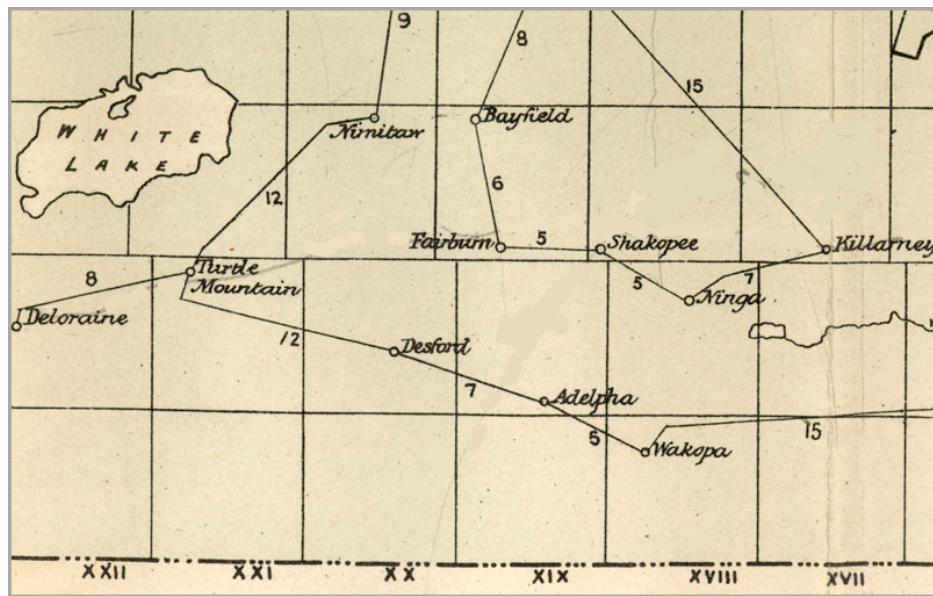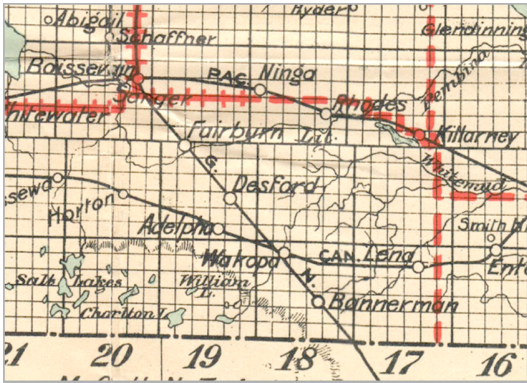

In 1884, before the railway arrived, Wakopa was the oldest and most commercially viable settlement in the region.
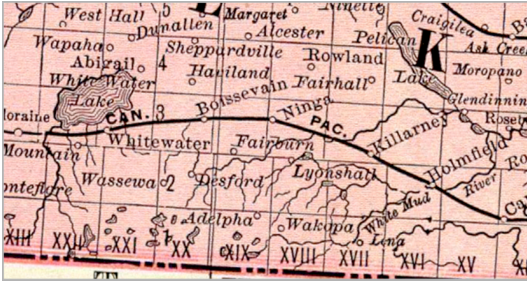
With the arrival of the Manitoba Southwestern, soon to become a CPR branch, Wakopa, like Desford, and Wassewa, became more of post – office / school location rather than a commercial centre.

The arrival of two railway lines meant that almost all the locations on this map had an elevator and a station or loading platform. Wakopa, like Desford, Bannerman and Lena offered some retail activity as well as the elevator and station.

The increased use of cars, and in turn, the increased building and improved maintenance of roads, gradually decreased the commercial activity in the smaller villages and increased the viability of Boissevain and Killarney.
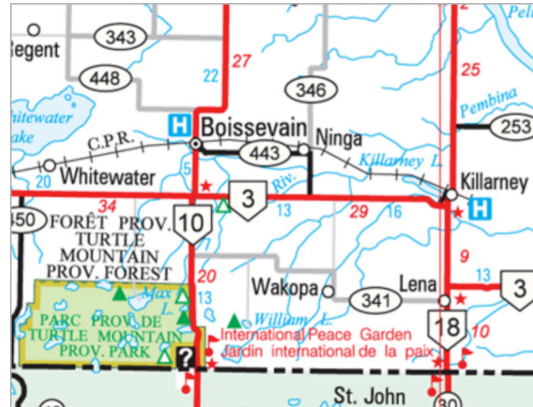
Today there is no trace of all the region's railroad era villages (except Lena) and the fact that Wakopa is still on the map could well reflect its historic significance.

12. Wakopa Today

Between the towns of Boissevain and Killarney on Highway #3, Wakopa Road runs south towards the U.S. Border. If you take that road, just after you pass Rd. 6N, a trail runs westward towards a grove of trees. Once, long ago now, an elevator would have signified that there was a village there, even before you could spot the station and the store.

Wakopa has almost disappeared…. almost but not quite.

If you take that trail you will come to a grassy lane leading north. That intersection was once the corner of Railway Avenue and Main Street in Wakopa. Even if you knew nothing of the village that once stood here, you might still recognize the telltale outline of its small grid of streets. On the northeast corner of the the intersection sat the store, across Railway Avenue there was an elevator and a station.

There is a pattern to the demise of prairie towns. Farms get bigger, families get smaller, roads get better and cars become more common. The railway shuts down, removing one reason to come to town. The school closes, and finally, commercial enterprises are no longer viable.

A place that was once the commercial and social centre of a neighbourhood is now fading away. But the legacy lives on.

Local historians Charlie and Jim Baldock are seeing to that.

With the support of the Boundary Trail Heritage Region they placed an interpretive sign right where the store used to be. Now a visitor can get the short version of Wakopa's history, and perhaps sit at the nearby picnic table and just soak it all in - or enjoy the view.

They also have an important collection of artifacts from the Wakopa region and in particular, the Morgan's Store, housed in a building in Lena, a small village to the east where Rd 5N meets Highway #18. Included are many fixtures from the store, the original Max Lake Sawmill, the door from the Killarney jail cell that housed The Strangler, photos… and much more.

It is a work in progress and this private "museum", will be available for family friends and the occasional group visits buy appointment.

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