

MILESTONES



R.M. of Morris's Significant Historical Themes and Events
2017



A Project of the Rural Municipality of Morris Heritage Committee

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On the cover: Morris municipality in the early 1900s

R.M. of Morris Milestones

The Rural Municipality of Morris has a fascinating and engaging early history. It begins with Aboriginal peoples who traversed the area for centuries – and it continues in the late 1860s, when first settlers began trickling into the area, leading to the founding of the Municipality in 1880. The area has been a productive, agricultural, commercial, and industrious municipality with communities in Aubigny, Kane, Lowe Farm, McTavish, Riverside, Rosenort, Sewell and Sperling.

This booklet will help residents and visitors alike, to appreciate the basic contours of our past. Sections on various themes, noting key events, dates and personalities, enrich an exploration of our past, and bring to life our proud heritage that has defined us for well over a century.

The following essential historical themes contain this story:

- Community Context
- Community Development
- Government Development
- Public Services
- Transportation
- Commercial Development
- Manufacturing and Industry
- Agriculture
- Spiritual Life
- Education
- Health Care
- Culture and Recreation

We trust that this booklet will inform and inspire, suggesting the rich pageant that has been our community's story. We leave readers with this thought, which has inspired us as we developed this project.

Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward.

– Søren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher

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Community Context

This ca. 1858 map of southeastern Manitoba shows Lake Winnipeg at the top right and the Red River extending south (just to the left of the large “N”). Along the west side of the river is a light line with the text reading “Stage Road.” Just below this text is a tributary here named “The Gratiot,” which extends further west to a lake-like feature labelled “Boyne Marsh.” Another light line just above this feature is labelled “Pioneer Trail.” The Gratiot would be renamed the Morris River, and the area around this confluence of waterways and trails would become the Rural Municipality of Morris.



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Community Development

Geographically, the Municipality of Morris is located in the centre of the Red River Valley, directly between the City of Winnipeg and the Canada-United States border. It is situated where the Morris River meets the Red River – and where present-day maps show one river (Morris), early maps show two rivers – the Boyne and the Gratias (Morris).

Here, where the rivers meet, and a timber belt teemed with wild life extended for several miles on either side of the rivers, was a perfect place for settlement. The area had many trappers and hunters, and by 1801 there were fur trading posts at what is now the Morris River. A small settlement known as ‘Scratching River’ bustled with activity, where eventually a permanent village grew.

About 1869, settlers started arriving overland from the east, travelling over the Dawson Trail route that had been opened up. Many settlers came upriver by barge from the south, and as the Stagecoach Road became more widely used by Red River carts heading north and south, the Scratching River settlement in the 1870s was by then a busy stage stop.

The lands along the rivers were taken up first. And with an influx of settlers in the 1870s, foundations began to take place.



Settlers arrived in the Morris municipality by various means. Here, they are travelling across country with their household effects. (Courtesy Manitoba Archives)

A hand-fired brick kiln was operating, a small school was built in 1876 of the local brick, four churches were established, and two doctors practised here. A wooden bridge, built of local timber, had been built over the Scratching River.

With continued and notable growth, people felt the need for a local government, and the county of Morris was formed in 1880. In the rural areas, the central northern and western parts of the municipality were settled first. Rosenort-Rosenhoff was the first village in the municipality, settled by a sizeable group of Mennonites who came from Russia as early as 1874.

To the north the district of Union Point sprang up, and as the most desirable areas became filled the swell resulted in the formation of the Broadview, Sewell, Flowery Bank, McTavish, and Silver Plains districts just beyond the rivers. By the 1890s, there was settlement in all of the areas.

R.M. of Morris Milestones

Government Development

The county of Morris was formed in 1880 (according to the Statutes of Manitoba), and then comprised “all territory between the county of Manchester and the county of Provencher, and between the line between Range 2 and 3 West to the Lake of the Woods.” The municipality was named in honour of Alexander Morris, the first Chief Justice in the Court of Queen's Bench in the then new Province of Manitoba, and who soon thereafter became the second Lieutenant-Governor of the Province (1872-76).

The inaugural meeting of the municipality was held on May 3, 1880, where the following persons were elected to serve on the council: Jean E. Peter as warden (Reeve), Felix Gentes, George Belerance, George Birney, John Earl, Amable Gaudry, Joseph Pelessier, and George B. Elliott as clerk. The territory was divided into three wards, with two councillors representing each ward.

The first meeting thereafter was held on May 11. Business under discussion at that first meeting was the passing of a by-law respecting herding of animals, to regulate meetings and general conduct of business, for the raising of municipal revenue by taxation upon persons and property, and for the regulation of dikes and ditches. Council was under constant barrage from settlers to build bridges, roads and ditches, which were an obvious necessity as more and more homesteaders

moved in and began breaking the prairie sod and settling homesteads.

In 1881, the council undertook the immense task of completing assessment rolls to record the number and location of each person on each lot for purposes of taxation. It was an immense task due to the fact that large tracts of land were bought up by various investment and land companies, who in turn sold parcels to individuals. Land was disposed of in many ways during the settlement of the west – through homesteads, pre-emptions, sales of government lands to individuals and land companies, sale of Hudson's Bay Company lands, reserves for colonies, and grants to railroad companies.

Council meetings were held in a number of places, and although the topic of a new building was discussed for many years, it was only in 1909 that an impressive two-storey building was erected at the Town of Morris.



This building was the centre of activity for the Municipality for 58 years. A Court House, jail and offices, it was also the site of band concerts, picnics and local government affairs. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

R.M. of Morris Milestones

Public Services

As in many small communities, specific services were essential functions. The month of May of 1880 marked the first edition of the *Morris Herald*, the first newspaper published in Manitoba west of the Red River. The editor, James B. Hooper, did all the typesetting by hand, and published from the home of Dr. McTavish. Other public services that developed in the municipality were postal services, telephone and power.

Postal Services

One very early service was the postal service, in which earliest records from the Palliser expedition in 1865 reported the small settlement of Scratching River (Morris) had a post office as early as that year.

At Lowe Farm, official records of the Canada Post Office show that John I. Wiens served as the first official post master from April 1, 1900 until May of 1907. In the Mennonite communities, and before a train station was built, the mail was dropped off two miles south of McTavish at "Swains Spur." Mr. Isaac Harms was the first mailman. Mr. Harms picked up the mail and delivered it to the Brandt store for about twenty years. His daughter, Marie, Mrs. A.R. Klassen, was his "right hand man", often driving the horse and buggy herself at the age of sixteen.



Mr. and Mrs Isaac Harms – first mail carrier in 1910(Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)



Marie, daughter of Isaac Harms, carrying the mailbag to the buggy to be transported to the train station. At first, the mailbag was hooked on a hoop held high, and snatched while the train was still in motion. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

Telephone Services

The advent of the telephone made a great change in rural living, and helped to ease the hardships that faced people living on the prairies. It quickly did away with much of the desperate feeling of loneliness and helplessness that could easily develop on isolated farms. It also eliminated the potentially dangerous winter trips to town to enquire about supplies.

A private telephone service was initiated in many parts of the municipality at the turn of the century, and worked on a multi-party basis. Although rudimentary at first, it served its purpose, and all telephone users had their own private ring. This private line lasted until Bell Telephones came into Morris in 1902 and installed a switchboard in the post office.



The telephone construction gang putting in lines in 1910. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

Power

In the R.M. of Morris's early days, wind machines were a common sight on farms until the expansion of the electrical grid after the end of the Second World War. They served many purposes and were particularly effective in agriculture. Many pumped water for livestock and powered other farm operations, while others kept irrigation canals flowing, and ground grain. Before the days of widespread electricity, these wind generators were often a farmstead's major source of power in high wind areas. They were even able to power household appliances.



The wind charger on the Dickson farm. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

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Transportation

Many challenges faced the pioneers – transportation and means of travel to the settlement one of them. The first widely used transportation routes were the waterways – the Red River, and overland trails. In the 1840s, the Hudson's Bay Company brought supplies into the interior via the Mississippi River and then overland by Red River cart from St. Paul, Minnesota, where three main routes came into use. The use of the high-wheeled Red River carts, first built in the early 1800s, made this upper Red River area a "grand portage" from the Mississippi to Lake Winnipeg.

The only alternative means to the Red River Settlement was by the Dawson Trail, a national route from Lake Superior, surveyed by S.J. Dawson in 1858. First used by immigrants to the Morris area in 1871, the approximate 870-kilometre water and land route proved a long and somewhat tedious route, and many travellers still preferred the southern route.

Steamboats on the Red River

Much of the area along the Red River was settled by large numbers of people who travelled on the river by steamboats. The "Anson Northrup" was the first steamboat to ply the Red River in 1859, while the "Northwest," over 60 metres long, was the largest steamboat ever launched on the Red.

One steamboat, the "Pluck", was listed as carrying "three carloads of threshing machines, 2 ½ carloads of wagons, a

carload each of portable engines, salt, plows, two carloads of pork, and five carloads of miscellaneous freight."

The "International" paddlewheel river boat was known as holding the speed record between Fargo and Winnipeg and made the trip in five days and 18 hours. This is the boat on which Mennonite settlers came, on their last leg of their journey from Russia to settle in the Reserves in Manitoba.



The International anchored at Fort Garry with arrival of first Mennonite Settlers 1874. (Courtesy Mennonite Archival Image Database)

Stagecoach Days

It was by stagecoach that many passengers, as well as mail, was early transported. The trail, called the Stage Road, followed the Red River and became known as the Great Highway. There were two stage stops within the present Morris municipality, one at the Town of Morris (Scratching River), and one at Union Point. The first Morris-based coach made its maiden voyage in 1872, driven by a Mr. Turner.

The Railway

The railroad made development of the prairies possible, and the first railroad was the line from the United States completed in December of 1878. This was the main entrance to the province until the completion of the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, with branch lines to the north and south.



Train platform at Sewell. The station was the livelihood of the small community. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

The branch line to Morris (Scratching River) had an interesting start, when in 1882 the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) first started building the branch from Winnipeg to Rosenfeld. In order to abandon the projected route, and give Scratching River and the settlers along the Red River railroad communications, the CPR demanded compensation. In order to meet this requirement, both the town and the municipality had to share in the bonus paid to the CPR. And so it was – The Town of Morris was incorporated in 1883, and the southwestern branch of the CPR line was completed to Morris.

Highways and Roads

Rough prairie trails were in evidence all over the municipality in the early 1880s, but as the district became more settled, the need for better roads increased. One of the first acts of council, in 1880, was to appoint twelve Roadmasters to oversee construction of roads and bridges. It was the Roadmaster's duty to assess a road tax on all owners or occupiers of real estate. William Shewman was contracted to build many of the roads in the municipality, the first being in 1900. Bridges were needed as well, and at least eight were in operation by 1882.



Billy Shewman's road construction outfit in 1912. Mr. Shewman had a large barn for his 100 horses in Morris. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

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Commercial Development

Aubigny

The early settlers learned to get along with what they produced by their own labours, but nevertheless country stores helped in the supply of basic necessities. The first store in Aubigny belonged to a Mr. Desjardin, with the next one belonging to Joseph Perreault.

McTavish

Peter.T. Wiens, operated a store with post office, and gas station, at McTavish until 1961.



Peter.T. Wiens store, post office and gas station. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

De Wet (Sewell)

The first store in the Sewell District was built in 1920. It was called C.A. Recksiedler and Son, who was also the postmaster and grain elevator manager.

The store at Sewell provided practically all the provisions the local residents wanted, but it was much more than just a store. It was a focal point where the people gathered usually at the time the trains came. It was a place where the latest news might be heard and also where they could visit the neighbours, besides getting their mail and provisions.



Effie Mazur wrapping a parcel at the Sewell store counter in the late 1920s. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

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Manufacturing and Industry

As early as the 1870s, a hand-fired brick kiln operated at Russell's brick yard in Scratching River. In the rural areas, with the development of agriculture, and early commercial and service functions in place, the municipality also became active in industrial enterprise and manufacturing.

Cheese Factories

Small, privately-owned cheese factories played a great role in providing farmers with an agriculture staple, and at least three were located in the municipality in the period 1880 – 1900. At Silver Plains, where there were acres of hay land and a community pasture, farmers from near and far brought cattle and sold milk to a cheese factory. Near Aubigny, a site for a cheese factory was granted to Benjamin Ladenceur in 1907. And another cheese factory was located in the Mennonite village of Rosenort-Rosenhoff.

Oil Refinery

With the advent of the farm tractor came the demand for gasoline, lubricating oil and greases. As early as 1915, enterprising individuals ordered rail tank cars of petroleum products for sale to farmers, first under the name United Farmers of Manitoba, and later as the Rosenort Farmers Association. This business flourished, so storage tanks were erected at Trump Siding, three miles north of Morris. And after

a decade of successful operation, a Limited Stock Company formed to handle the petroleum business, with the prospect of operating its own refinery and lubricating oil blending plant. The refinery and the business at Trump Oil continued until the early 1940s.

Seed Service

There was a need for a seed cleaning plant in the district, where farmers who did not have their own facilities could have their seed cleaned. Friesen's Seed started as a new venture by brothers Jake, Frank, and Benny Friesen in 1957, and was situated south of Rosenort on the late Peter W. Friesen's farm.

While seed was exported out of province, the main bulk of the business was to farmers who lived within the district.



Johnny Dueck and Johnny Miller hauling seed from Friesen's Seed Service to the U.S.A. in 1958. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

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Agriculture

It was the lure of good farm land that drew many settlers to the area. And with the drainage of the Boyne Marsh – one of the first drainage projects undertaken by the provincial government during 1880-87, the land in the Morris area was perfect for farming. As early as 1890, advertisements depicting the Morris Municipality were placed in the *Manitoba Colonist* in the interest of wooing farmers to settle here.

Many of the settlers who came were progressive farmers in their own countries and regions, and brought with them the expertise with which to settle the land. Early on, some of the Mennonite settlers brought with them from Russia seed grain, and simple tools. Oxen were used mainly to break the land. They were preferred to horses because they were stronger, and much cheaper. As settlers had an acreage under cultivation, they switched to horses.

Initially, farmers grew only enough for themselves and their livestock, on their small acreages. But as more land was broken and more grain produced, goods became available to market. The first record of grain being shipped south through the Morris area was in 1851, when barley was sent down river. In 1876, a shipment of wheat from the Scratching River area went south on the river on the first leg of its journey to Toronto. However, it was the coming of the CPR railway that played a major role in the progress of agriculture in all parts of Canada, including the R.M. of Morris.



Hauling grain to Sperling elevator. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)



Henry Snarr and neighbour loading wheat at Swain's spur in 1911. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

Morris Agricultural Society

As noted in an article by Charles Covernion, “The people of the municipality wanted an organization that would bring them together on a mutual basis, whereby they could express their concerns for agriculture and exhibit the fruits of their labours. Hence, at a meeting held in the County Court House at Morris on June 29, 1895, it was decided on a motion by the late Dr. McTavish, seconded by H.R. Whitworth, that ‘An Agricultural Society for the Electoral District of Youville (east of the River) and the old municipality be formed.’

“The early exhibits were fall fairs, with the first fair held on October 10, 1895. The participation of the local people was encouraging with livestock classes, and grain and domestic exhibits. Plowing matches also became a popular event. The Society took affairs of agriculture and the community very seriously in those days, and in 1921 the fair became a three-day event.”

The Mennonites/Rosenort

Agriculture was the main source of livelihood and early settlers usually planted small plots of potatoes, oats, wheat and barley. They also owned some livestock, like cattle, chickens and hogs. Oxen, horses and man-power were their source of energy, using simple tools and machinery to aid them in the difficult task of working the soil. Seeding and harvest time was a family and community affair with everyone, young and old alike, pitching in. The first steam-powered threshing machine in Rosenort was jointly owned by a group of local farmers – P.D. Loewen, J.R. Dueck, and A.E. Eidse in 1910, with David Kroeker as engineer and John K. Friesen (also a preacher and

teacher), as threshing operator. They also had large crews of men assisting them. Harvesting consisted of cutting and binding the grain into sheaves, with the women-folk stooking the sheaves.



The Loewen Bros. harvesting gang in 1908. Peter, Abram, Cornelius and John owned a steam engine and threshing machine together. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

Lowe Farm "Early Days 1880-1895"

The story of Lowe Farm began in 1882 when three Englishmen—J. Lowe, Mr. Rose, and Mr. Hope, all apparently of means and influence—obtained large tracts of land at very low cost in the area west of the Town of Morris and immediately north of the Mennonite West Reserve. They established farms in the districts now known as Lowe Farm, Rose Farm and Hope Farm respectively. By 1885 both English-speaking and Mennonite settlers began to move into the Lowe Farm area.



Lowe Farm – Threshing on the Peter Falk Farm ca. 1910: (Courtesy Mennonite Archival Image Database)

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Spiritual Life

Like most pioneer communities in Western Canada, one of the first considerations of the settlers of the Morris area, once they had provided food and shelter, was to set up places of worship.

Aubigny

The parish of St. Antoine d'Aubigny, was founded in 1903 and given the name of Count Antoine d'Aubigny, a Trappist monk at St. Norbert, who had left money to help open a mission in Manitoba. In the spring of 1904, a church and rectory were built, the first church later used as a parish hall, while the rectory served as a convent from 1932 until 1967.

Union Point Church

Although the first settlers came to Union Point from Ontario in 1868, it was 1885 before the first church was established. The first church building was erected by the residents and was a small wooden structure which seated 80 people. The social life of the district centered around the church, with horses, buggies, wagons and sleighs being parked on the yard as activities were the mainstay of life carried on.



Union Point Church – A Reunion. For years this little church has been a landmark, the only Protestant church on PTH 75. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

The Mennonites - A People

As noted in an article by Peter Reimer, “When the settlers moved in, they held their worship services alternating in different homes each Sunday. Services were then held in the schools, as it was convenient to use the school benches for pews. Worship service was alternated in the two villages, Rosenort-Rosenhoff, because they were only one congregation. There was only one leader or bishop, who would be invited to baptise converts every springtime and officiate at communion. Peter M. Kroeker and Johann T. Enns were the ministers in this settlement, and in 1878, Jakob M. Kroeker was also elected.

Missionary and Aid Societies

Hard times seems to have been the reason for the origin of ideas of self-help organizations. And in the Lowe Farm district, this ultimately gave some sound thinking to the idea of a standard procedure whereby through group participation a pre-determined amount would be paid out as a burial aid in the event of a death to help pay for funeral expenses. In January of 1941 a general organization meeting was called and an official name, The Lowe Farm Burial Aid Society was chosen for the new organization. It was agreed that the death benefit be set at \$25.00 to begin with. The collection procedure was to levy 25 cents from every registered member after each death among the group.

In the Silver Plains and Carleton districts too, women organized in 1936 to help meet the needs of the community. Formed as the Silver Plains Community Club, the group gave of its time in kindness and readiness for 30 years.



Silver Plains women, Mary Elliot, Gertie Taylor, Jessie Pittman, Eliza Moffat, Mary Ann Elliot, Mable Earl. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

The Broadview Missionary Society

According to Dorothy Hamblin, “During its fifty years, the Union Women's Missionary Society of Broadview, as it was known in 1916, was a Society whose members were primarily farm women. The bulk of funds and work was for the Union Church of Morris, but many other causes and organizations, benefitted. The members worked hard, but also found time for fun and fellowship. A short resume of the fifty years, gives but a glimpse of these activities. In 1916 an Autograph quilt was made and auctioned to raise funds. This was the first of many quilts made as fund-raisers given to Hospitals, Fresh Air Camps, or needy families, and it continued until 1954 when the final quilt of beautiful appliqué and embroidery sold for \$50.00. Beautiful goose feather pillows were also made and sold or sent to Fresh Air Camps and Mission Hospitals. Money was always needed and it was raised in many ways, some of which were: a lunch counter at the Morris Fair, Bazaars, Chicken Suppers, Around the World Suppers, etc. held at the church, the school, and members' homes. Produce and bake sales proved popular and were held in many places in Morris such as the Jewel Store, Johnson's Hardware, Loving's Garage and Dr. Boyd's Office.

“The Society never had a large bank account because it was given away almost as soon as it was made. The recipients were many – the Union Church, The Missionary Society in Morris and Winnipeg, the Red Cross, Morris Cemetery, the Indian Children's School in Alberni, B.C., Home Economics Society of Morris, Broadview Sunday School, British and Foreign Bible Society, Morris Memorial Rink, Aid to Russia, Milk for Britain, Children's Aid Society, March of Dimes, Unitarian Relief in Korea, C.N.I.B., and wherever there was a need.”

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Education

Education for children was of primary importance for the pioneers and settlers, and early records show that the first school in the municipality was built in 1876 by W. Gallie. The building was a small one room structure, constructed of the yellow brick from Russell's brickyard in Scratching River (later Town of Morris). The building was short-lived and in 1880, money was borrowed for a new school. An issue of the *Morris Herald* of 1882 described this new school as "an unusually handsome and spacious building with ample accommodation for the requirements of education."

In rural areas it is thought that most likely the Mennonites operated one of the first schools in the district. When they arrived in the Scratching River settlement in 1874, federal authorities granted them the right to govern their own schools. It was required that children be able to read the Bible and the Catechism, and understand the German language which was used by the minister in church. They got that instruction at first in a private residence. As soon as possible, a small schoolhouse was built in each village, which was also used for Sunday morning worship and necessary village meetings.

Other pioneer schools in the municipality included Whitehaven No. 89, one of the first rural schools mentioned in the municipality in 1882, with Union Point and Carleton School districts formed in 1883. By 1915 thirty-one schools operated in the municipality.



Carleton School No. 35 in 1914. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

A School Marm's Memories

Anna Peters provides a fascinating account of teaching in the Morris area: "I, Anna Peters, taught school at St. Peter's School District, No. 1031, from October, 1917 to December 24, 1919. Equipped with a Grade X certificate, no teachers training, except the list my father gave me, I'll never forget:

1. Don't forget every child has his or her own personality.
2. Always try to see the other's point of view.
3. A teacher that teaches for money is no teacher.



Students at Carleton School. Ca. 1900. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

“Here, we came to the school. The nearest farm yard was 3/4 of a mile away. The large yard was void of fencing, trees or shrubs. In one corner stood the school, farther east a barn, two outhouses. I forget where we stored the coal and wood for our big heater. There was no water supply except in the deep ditch just north of school. We had a basin in which we once kept our toads for two days, to study their habits. Those days, we did not wash our hands (ha, ha). There was no playground equipment, except for an odd ball a fellow would bring to school. We played 'hit the stick', 'stealing wedges of wood' and 'hide and seek', (there was so few places to hide), racing, etc.

“The inside of the school was very plain ... three windows on the north, three on the south side. The teacher's desk and chair stood on a platform. The blackboard covered the east wall. A few small blackboards were between the windows. We had a very large stove, but in winter, when the fire had gone low, it was very cold in the morning and there were quite a few days when we did not start school at 9:00 a.m. I always had a pair of sheepskin shoes handy and wore them, often until noon, but the children didn't. So, I encouraged them to run around the desks.

“Teacher and pupils did the work of the custodian - our equipment, a broom and a little coal shovel. No electricity, no telephone, not even an oil lamp. We were at school only at daytime! The only books we had were the texts the children had, and a few of my own books that I brought along. We did not know a library. Those were the things we had to work with!

“I had a group of Grade IX students here this winter one day; they wanted to know what I teach - well first: 1. reading, 2. writing and 3. arithmetic. Did we have Physical training? Yes, we walked to school 1 ½ miles; some walked 2 ½ miles. Did we study geography? We learned the names of countries and their capitals, but not very much about the people and their way of life. Did we study history? I don't remember. Did we study science? Nature study; we lived so close to the things that grow and the creatures that surrounded us. What was my salary? I received \$50.00 a month the first three months. After Christmas it was \$65.00 a month and after that, I can't remember. One thing I do remember - the teacher learned more during the 2 ½ years than the pupils did!”

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Health Care

A Country Doctor

One of the first doctors in the area was Dr. Robert F. McTavish. He was one of the four McTavish brothers who settled northwest of Morris on homesteads there. The McTavish's lived in a house on Main Street from which the doctor practised medicine. It was reported that Dr. McTavish delivered his first baby at the age of eighteen, which raises some question as to when he received his medical training. Dr. McTavish also served as mayor of the town of Morris in 1885, during the famous "railroad controversy" years (see above).



Dr. McTavish at left and Dr. Ross at right. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

Dr. R.L. Ross, then well-known throughout the district, succeeded Dr. McTavish, and was the first medical officer in 1909. The first hospital was established by Dr. Arkin in a home on Charles Street, in Morris in 1936. It operated on a shoestring budget, but provided needed medical care for local residents. These facilities were not adequate and in the 1940s the Molloy home, a large two-storey dwelling, was remodelled to serve as a hospital, served by Dr. J.S. Holowin. In the early 1900s, a district nurse was hired and supplied with a horse and buggy to accomplish her duties in the district.

The greatest demands for medical skills were required of the midwives. These women, married with families of their own, gave of their time and experience. Doctors rarely attended women in childbirth until about 1937. Babies were born in the home and a familiar, dependable female figure was most desirable as an attendant.

Mrs. Helena Eidse (1861-1938) was the giant in her field. She delivered hundreds of babies (no records can establish the exact number), the last one on August 23, 1938. She never lost a baby and only one mother died in childbirth in 1910.

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Culture and Recreation

Social Activities

Long before the day of automobiles, television and modern-day social activities, fun and social interaction depended much on a community's own ingenuity.

At Aubigny, just down the river from Bourret School, fun and excitement took place every Sunday afternoon in the form of horse races, initiated in 1927, by Father Normandeau. Father Normandeau was a great sportsman in spite of the fact of being lame in one leg, and he was determined to create some pleasure and challenge for his parishioners. Four tracks were prepared on the ice of the Red River, by removing snow with a scraper pulled by horses. All the local people were involved in one way or another. Entire families well bundled up were the spectators who came in their sleighs and cutters to view the events taking place on the Red River. It was a time of socializing much sought after during the long cold winter months experienced in the rural areas.

In the Lowe Farm area, some of the first social activities around 1900 were brought about by the efforts of the Warnken and McLaren families who, with the co-operation of the school teacher, organized social gatherings. The first plays produced by the group were held in an old flax granary south of the railway tracks. And in the 1930s a number of plays were

presented by a theatrical group under the capable direction of Mrs. Phil Bourgeois.

Another activity, a debating group, organized a number of debates throughout the winter, which proved to be quite interesting to a number of the members of the community.



Young boys took part in the Aubigny area races with their dog sleds. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)



Participants in a German Play, 1949 (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

Baseball

Baseball was taken up in a number of communities and was organized in Sperling in 1910, with home games played in R. H. Waddell's pasture. In time, there was league competition between towns in the surrounding districts, and ball tournaments played at country fairs.



Lowe Farm baseball team around 1910. (Courtesy Furrows in the Valley)

Ice Hockey

Before rinks were built and hockey became organized, the region's first hockey teams played on open-air sheets of ice. Few people realize that during the early part of the century, Sperling had a pretty fine girls' hockey team.

Clubs and Organizations

In 1914, the Sperling Scouts were organized by George Millichamp. There were about twenty members and they did some of their cook-outs where the present United Church stands. On their hikes, they usually went to Myers Farm, J.H. Hooper's north of town, or some other close farm. The reasoning here was the delicious donations of pies and cookies given by the housewives.

Entertainment and Social Life

Dancing was a popular pastime, and Sperling dances were held for some years before 1924 in the hall above the store. When a dance was planned, six or eight men rode with Robert Davidson on his dray and brought the piano from the rink or school, and carried it up the long flight of stairs to the hall.



Sperling Music Group. (Courtesy Mennonite Archival Image Database)

R.M. of Morris Milestones

Timeline

The following collection of dates and activities has been drawn from the R.M. of Morris's excellent local history book: *Furrows in the Valley – A Centennial Project of the Rural Municipality of Morris 1880-1980*, R.M. of Morris History Book Committee.

A timeline is a useful way to establish a community's development, and a good way to note its highlights. All of this information can be used to develop the kind of content that is helpful in describing a community's history through short, effective and accurate texts that will be appropriate for educational support materials, plaques, website content, and countless other follow-up projects.

The dates and activities have been presented in a decade-by-decade format, which allows us to relive the past through the lens of the flow of time. It is important to note that pivotal events can also be broadly grouped by major chronological periods in our history attached to primary activities of a given era.

1800 – 1849

- By 1801, there were two fur trading stations at a settlement on the Gratiot River. One was owned by the North-West Company, which later amalgamated with the Hudson's Bay Company, and was operated by a man called Desmarais. The other was owned by the XY Company, operated by J. Dulford. The area had known many trappers, hunters and transients.
- Two settlements grew where these rivers joined the Red River.

1850 – 1869

1859

- The "Anson Northrup" was the first steamboat to ply the Red River in 1859.

1865

- The small settlement known as Scratching River was beginning to bustle with activity where a permanent village grew. The earliest records are from the Palliser expedition, in 1865.

1868

- The first settlers came to Union Point from Ontario in 1868; although it was 1885 before the first church was established.

1869

- Settlers started arriving overland from the east, travelling over the Dawson Trail that had been opened up, after the first Riel Rebellion had been crushed

1870 – 1879

(Early Pioneer Period)

Preceding the influx of settlers to the Morris area in the 1880s, the Scratching River settlement in the 1870s was by then a busy stage stop between Upper Fort Garry (present-day Winnipeg) and south. Klyn's Tavern, which included a store and post office, was a necessary stopping place for settlers. And with people moving in, changes began to take place. Challenges of the Scratching (Morris) River saw a wooden bridge built of local lumber, by which supplies were brought in by ox team or river barge. It was also during this time that settlement began to take place in frontier areas to the north and west of the settlement. Two Mennonite settlements became established, and first settlers arrived to the Aubigny area.

1872

- The first Morris-based stage coach took its maiden voyage, driven by a Mr. Turner. It was by this means that mail was transported, as well as passengers.

1873

- The Canadian government sent the German-speaking Wilhelm Hespeler to Russia to invite Mennonites to come to Canada. The church appointed Cornelius Toews, a brother of the bishop, and David Klassen, as delegates to come to Canada and inspect the land. These two men left their homes on April 14, 1873, on a long journey to Manitoba.

1874

- The first Mennonite group of 65 families started out with the leadership of the two delegates, from the Boroshenko settlement. This group of over 300 Mennonites arrived at this place July 31, 1874. Within a few years, a group of 30 to 40 families established themselves in two villages.

1876

- A small school was built of local brick by W Gaillie. It was situated just south of the bridge on the west bank (at Scratching River settlement).
- In the summer of 1876, less than two years after the first (Mennonite) settlers came, J.W. Down, a government official from Ottawa, came to take a look at the different Mennonite settlements in Manitoba. In his report to the Canadian Government, he was tremendously impressed with the progress they had made in less than two summers. He reported about the Scratching River settlement that "they live in two villages, each family living in a well built and in some cases even large, frame house."

1877

- The first settlers to Aubigny, the Chartier and Hebert families, arrived from New Hampshire.

1878

- The first railway, connecting St. Paul and St. Boniface, was completed in December 1878.
- One of the old historic windmills of the west - that of Abram Friesen of Steinbach, built in 1877 and churning out flour in 1878 - was dismantled and moved to Rosenort in 1879.

1880 – 1889

(Later Pioneer Period)

During this decade, there was an influx of settlers into the district. James Clubb, one of the early pioneers arrived, and the Lowe Farm area began to be established. One of the first doctors, Dr. McTavish – and who was one of four brothers who homesteaded – arrived to the area. Communication and transportation services began to be developed with the Canadian Pacific Railway completing a branch line to the area from Winnipeg. Also during the period, draining of the marshes for the purpose of lowering water levels and increasing areas for cultivation and hay was undertaken – one of which was the Boyne Marsh.

1880

- The county of Morris was formed in 1880, (according to the Statutes of Manitoba 1880) and "comprised all territory between the county of Manchester and the county of Provencher, and between the line between Range 2 and 3 West to the Lake of the Woods."
- One of the first acts of council was to appoint twelve Roadmasters to oversee construction of roads and bridges.
- In May, 1880, the *Morris Herald* came out, the first newspaper published in Manitoba west of the Red River.
- The four McTavish brothers—Robert, Ed, John and James—arrived from Ontario in the 1880s. James homesteaded; his was the influence that organized the passing of a petition for the railway to build a station at McTavish.
- James Clubb was one of the first pioneers of the Rose Farm area in 1880 when he emigrated with his brother George.

1881

- In 1881, the council undertook the immense task of completing assessment rolls to record the number and location of each person on each lot for purposes of taxation.

- Two ferries were purchased at Emerson for the sum of \$600.00, one to be placed at St. Jean Baptiste, and another at Morris (Scratching River). Later, there would be two more ferries, located at Silver Plains and Union Point.

1882

- In 1882, the Canadian Pacific Railway was completing its branch line from Rosenfeld to Winnipeg. To abandon the projected route and give the Scratching River and the settlers along the Red River railroad communications, the CPR required compensation. In order for both the town and the municipality to share in the bonus, provincial legislature was petitioned for the incorporation of Scratching River as a town. There appears to have been a great deal of controversy at the time, on the merits of the village becoming incorporated, but it was granted, and the village became the Town of Morris. The actual date of incorporation was January 9, 1883.
- There were at least eight bridges constructed by the spring of 1882, six of which were on the main highway on the west bank of the Red River.
- A letter in 1882, from the Registry Office, County of Morris, John A. Walker registrar, stated: "Drainage work done east of the South Branch of Scratching River at the Lower Mennonite Village, was completed."
- The story of Lowe Farm began. Around the year 1882 three Englishmen—J. Lowe, Mr. Rose, and Mr. Hope—obtained large tracts of land at very low cost in the area. They established farms in the districts now known as Lowe Farm, Rose Farm and Hope Farm respectively.

1883

- The first meeting of the Morris town council was held on March 1, 1883, with George A. Glines as mayor, and Ben Shorts as secretary-treasurer.
- Dominion land surveyors, Gilbert B. and Samuel Ebenezer McColl, were contracted to make a topographical survey of

the entire municipality, including drawing up plans, placing bench monuments, and other work specified.

- Union Point School District was formed in 1883, making it one of the first schools in the Rural Municipality.
- A school house was built on a site in the Silver Plains district
- A school board was elected at Carleton School District
- Jim Stevenson took a parcel of land south of McTavish, established Stevenson Nurseries.
- Approximately eight miles southwest of Morris on section 1-4-1 W, the flag station of De Wet was put up – a siding built when the CPR railroad was being built from Winnipeg to Gretna.

1884

- Notes taken from the books of the R.M. reveal that in 1884 a request was made for a ferry three miles south of Union Point. This first ferry, which was known as Mousseau's ferry, was moved in 1891 one mile south, opposite Chartier land.
- Armour School – S.D. No. 159 was built in 1884.

1885

- "Citizens present petition to Council asking them to use every means in their power to relieve the taxpayers from the burden imposed by the CPR By-law."
- The first post office in Aubigny was opened in 1885, with Henri Mousseau acting as postman.
- By 1885 both English speaking and Mennonite settlers began to move into the Lowe Farm area.

1888

- Local house representative took firm stand to try and get the Municipality relieved of the heavy and unjust debt placed on them by the legalization of By-law No. 5 (Bonus bylaw), and council pressed the necessity of having the government relieve them as soon as possible."

1889-91

- Appeal made to the Supreme Court -- seeking legislature to repeal the act affecting Bylaw No. 5. In February 1894 Council meets at City Hall Winnipeg, with London and

Canadian Loan Agency, and promises to pay the \$45,000, with the issue of new debentures of \$500 per year for 24 consecutive years. The balance to be paid at the end of 25 years with interest. Municipality received aid of \$15,000 from the Local Government in addition as a cash payment.

- In 1889, Rosenhoff church-school was built

1890 – 1899

(Establishment Period)

This time period saw the beginning of significant gains for people. There was an increased attention to the school system and hence the establishment of many of the school districts in the community. It was also a period of transition, with the start of road building in the community and increased transportation. And with the development of agriculture, people wanted an organization that would bring them together on a mutual basis whereby they could exhibit their labours and raise awareness.

1895

- At a meeting held in the County Court House at Morris on June 29, 1895, it was decided on a motion by the late Dr. McTavish, seconded by H.R. Whitworth, that "An Agricultural Society for the Electoral District of Youville (east of the River) and the old municipality be formed.
- The first fair was held on October 10, 1895, with the Fair becoming a three-day event by 1921.
- The School District of Flowery Bank, No. 837, was formed and the first school built in 1895 on the west bank of the Morris River two miles north of Morris

1897

- The flood of 1897 was accompanied by a storm. Warehouses, bridges and old landmarks were smashed with some loss of life.

- First steel scraper ordered for roads.
- Rose Farm School District No. 1577, and named for first settlers, was organized in 1897.
- The first school built in the present Sperling district was Waddell School No. 925, a one-room frame building constructed in 1897-98 on S.W. 32-6-2 West.

1898

- A ferry was installed at Union Point.
- Lowe Farm had one elevator. In the early years of the twentieth century there were several privately owned elevators along the track.
- Lea-Bank S.D. No. 958 organized. The School began on March 1, 1899, with J.F. Rose being the first teacher.

1899

- Settlers present at the first meeting for the Willow Heights School District
- The first school of the DeWet-Sewell district, St. Peter's School No. 1031 was organized
- On May 24th, 1899 the corner stone of Egremont Presbyterian Church at Sperling, was laid.

1900 – 1910 (Consolidation Period)

During this period many of the services in the area began to be developed. Post offices continued to be set up in some areas, and a private telephone service was initiated in many parts of the municipality. It was also the beginning of more sophisticated building in urban centres. In rural areas there was a gradual but steady increase in the volume and variety of business carried on. And it was the period in which many of the roads in the municipality were built.

1900

- William Shewman contracted to build many of the roads in the municipality, the first being in 1900, for which he furnished teams for two graders for \$52.00 per day. A considerable amount of road work was done that year by Mr. Shewman's teams.
- R.H. Wadell, Father of Sperling, came to Manitoba. Instrumental in starting a park east of the village.

1901

- Sperling Post Office was established as Mariposa.
- The village of Sperling started.

1902

- Queen Centre School District No. 1219 was formed.

1903

- Aubigny was so named after the Count Antoine d'Aubigny, a rich Frenchman who became a Trappist monk.
- James Miller came from Ontario to the area which is now Kane and farmed 31-4-2W. A railway siding was constructed. The CNR named it Kane, after Walter Kane who farmed a large scale spread between there and Sperling.
- The corner stone was laid for Methodist Church in Sperling.

1904

- Purchase of a dozen slush scrapers at a cost of \$97.00.

1905

- Beginning of constructing the mile roads.

1909

- Construction began on an impressive looking, two-storey County Court House, with offices on the main floor, and a jail.
- Dr. R.L. Ross, well known throughout the district, became first medical officer here in 1909, succeeding Dr. McTavish.
- The Consolidated School District of Sperling No. 1488 was formed and a four-room school was constructed in the village.

1910 – 1939 (Stabilization)

In these three decades, improvement continued in many of the services. School Districts continued to be formed, the first hospital was established in Morris, and power was extended to many of the communities. With motor transportation, improvements continued on roads with first major expenditures. And like most Manitoba communities, the various communities in the R.M. of Morris also felt the effects of World War I and the Great Depression

1912

- Neufeld School was built.

1913

- The Morris Automobile Club, represented by O. Gilman, Dr. Ross and J.P. Molloy, offered to take council members on a trip over the Stage Road, and the road to Lowe Farm, to show them what work was required. This resulted in the Stage Road being rebuilt.
- Between 1912 and 1913 a decision was made to get a post office for De Wet.

1914

- When the Rural Municipality of Morris became a member of the Good Roads Association in 1914, provincial funds became available to build and improve roads, particularly those that were links with other roads and municipalities.

1915

- By 1915, thirty-one schools were operating the Rural Municipality of Morris.

1918

- An elevator was built at Kane.

1919

- 1919 - Stage Road becomes Jefferson Highway.

1920

- The first major expenditure for the construction of roads was made, when it was assessed that \$110,000 was required for this purpose.

1921

- Jefferson Highway renamed Lord Selkirk Highway No. 14. Boyne Road becomes provincial road.

1924

- The Greenbank School District was formed.

1930

- The Women's Institute collected funds to establish a memorial for the war dead in the Morris district, and the cenotaph was erected.

1933

- The Great War Veterans of Morris and District met in the County Court Hall on Dec. 14, 1933 and decided to form a Branch of the Canadian Legion.

1934

- Road improvements continued. The first indication of gravel on municipal roads was in October, 1934, when Councillor Swain was asked to secure two carloads of gravel to be spread on the ferry road hill at Aubigny, on both sides.

1935

- The Manitoba Power Commission undertook what was considered at that time a major construction program. In that year, some 150 miles of transmission lines were erected to extend the system to include sixteen towns and villages, among them Altona, Gretna, Horndean, Letellier, Plum Coulee, Rosenfeld, St. Jean and Morris.

1937

- \$200.00 spent gravelling Aubigny Road to Sperling.

1938

- Road to Lowe Farm built by horse and slush scrapers as a relief project to provide farmers with much needed employment. Certificate of merit from Good Roads. Gravel Trump road for first time.