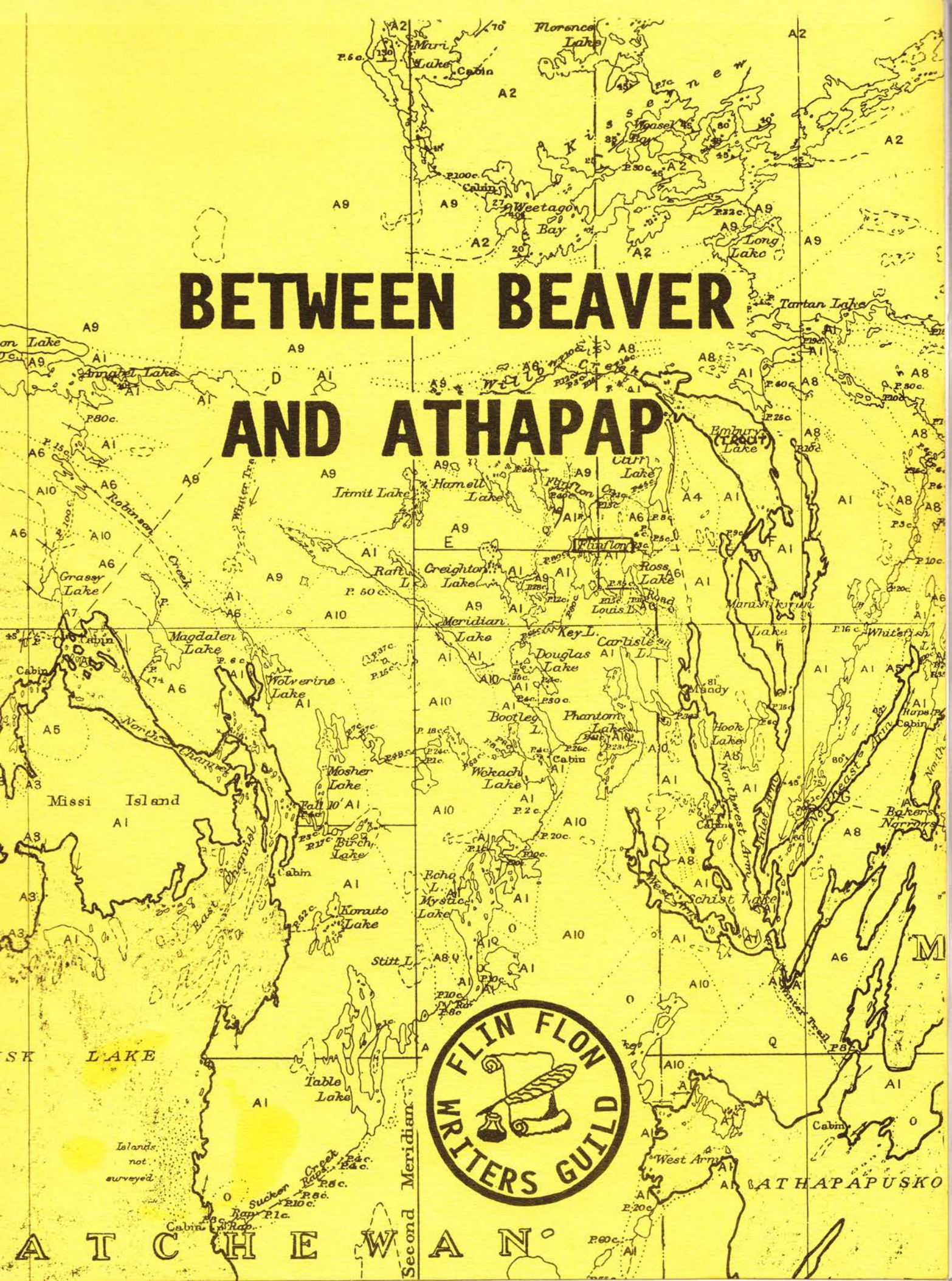


BETWEEN BEAVER AND ATHAPAP



ATHAPAPUSKO
ATCHEWAN

FOREWORD

I am very pleased to be able to write a few words of introduction to this book. I would like to thank all members of the Flin Flon Writers Guild for their support of this project. Without the dedication of all Guild members, this book would not have been possible.

This book is a result of many hours of work and some people deserve special recognition for their efforts. Past Guild member Ron Cairns suggested we publish a book, and his help with technical problems and the physical production of the book was invaluable.

Our editorial committee, consisting of Sarah Trevor and Myrna Guymer, has spent countless hours in typing, proofreading and layout. Joyce Henderson has provided help sharing her publishing and archival expertise. We also would like to thank our families for encouraging our writing endeavours.

We dedicate this book to the Flin Flon Public Library: to the Librarian, Gretta Redahl, together with all her Staff and the Library Board. Their support for writers, and enthusiastic promotion of the arts and culture of this community, is deeply appreciated. Without the help of former Librarian, the late Dorothy Bridges, and author Jake McDonald, the Flin Flon Writers Guild would not exist.

H. C. Hobbs
President
Flin Flon Writers Guild

Edited by Sarah Trevor and Myrna Guymer.

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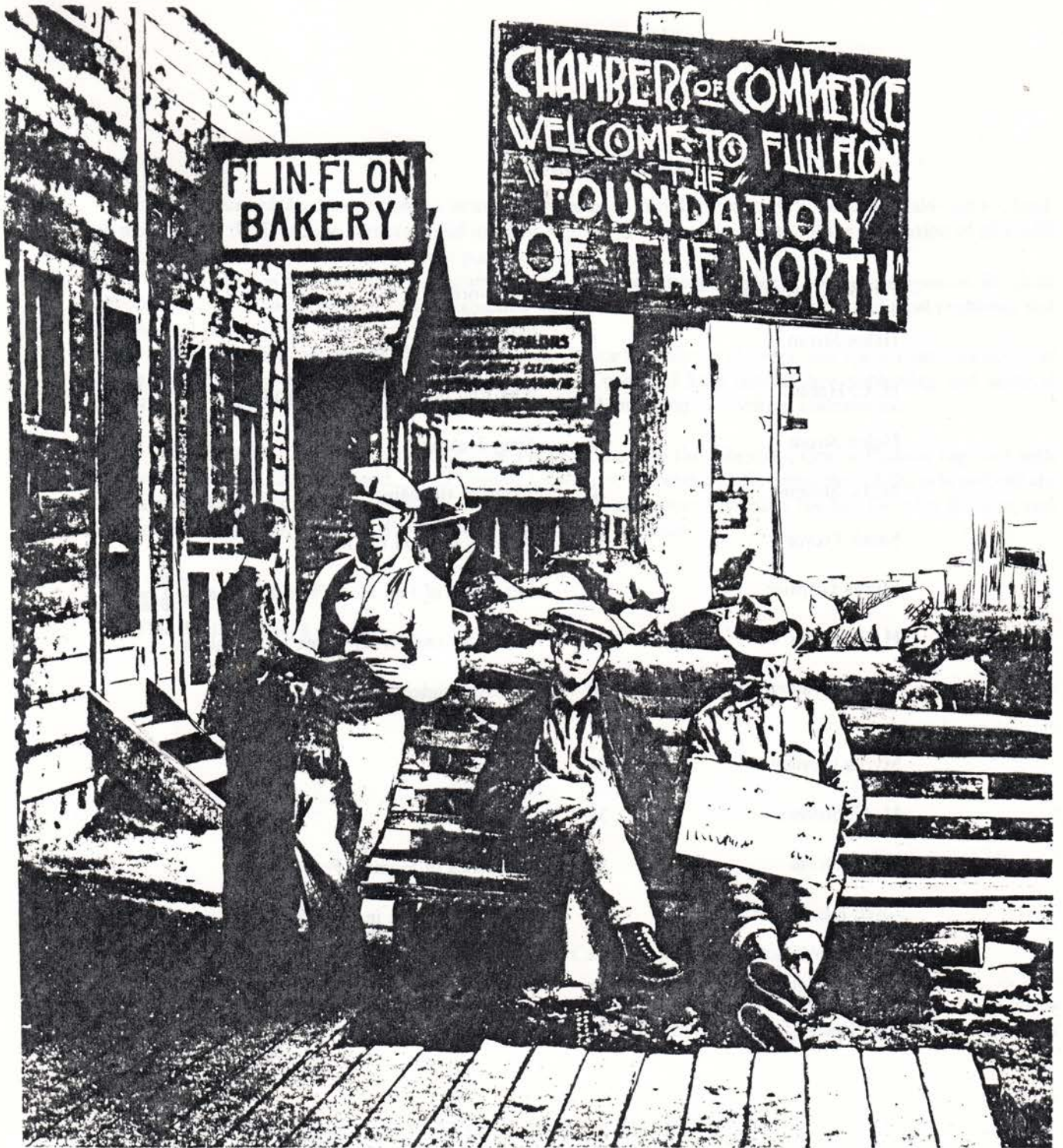
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*The Chamber of Commerce Tour to Churchill
September 1931*

DINNER AT THE KEG

We dine at leisure beneath the gaze
of faded men from by-gone days

men of the rails and summer

gallant in Sunday suit and tie
where did they live, love, die?

Old photographs and antique things
adrift in flickering shadows

almost forgotten except in this way
as chic decor from Grandma's day

cosily there midst salad
steak and sherbet.

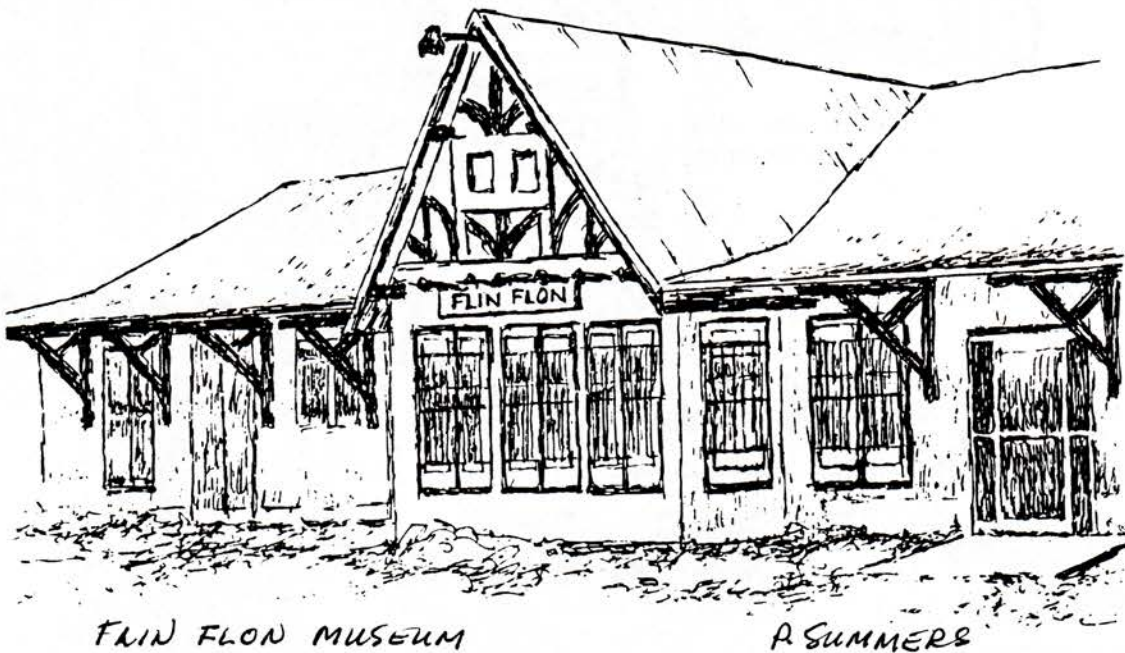
Nostalgia a pinch of pain
for summer anew and on the wane

ponderous pendulum swinging

already grey and fading we
press on through our obscurity.

Helen Strom

(This poem first appeared in the Copper Flame Column of The Reminder.)



FLIN FLON MUSEUM

A SUMMERS

THE END OF THE NORTHERN FRONTIER

The railway's part in the opening of the Canadian West is undisputed. Miles of steel track brought civilization to the remotest parts of the country. The clickety-clack of train wheels ended the Canadian frontier forever.

Western Canada was not alone in being transformed by the galloping iron horse of railway development. The great northern frontier also felt its impact. The mineral wealth of the Canadian Shield was ready to be ravaged by men who were aware of nature's bountiful gifts to this region. This wealth had to be extracted and the plunder carried off by rail.

In 1915, Tom Creighton and his guide, David Collins, discovered the ore body at Flin Flon. To make this mine viable, financial backing had to be found. Old-timers tell how Creighton rented the top floor of a hotel in Winnipeg, spread corn flakes on the floor and demonstrated the use of snowshoes. His efforts to impress succeeded. R.H. Channing from New York was convinced the mine was workable. Barges in summer and horse-drawn sleds in winter were primitive shipping methods. A railroad had to be built to satisfy the ore-hungry markets of the south.

Cranberry Portage and Flin Flon became places on the map. As a railway terminus, Cranberry overnight became a bustling town of tents and shacks. Small businessmen and entrepreneurs joined those seeking adventure. Some stayed on in Cranberry. Others followed the railroad north. Very few left. The darkness of the Great Depression was about to fall. For many, there was no place else to go.

Cranberry was fated to shine briefly during the construction period, but afterwards fade into a small town. The railway would continue its twisted iron journey forty miles north to Flin Flon.

In 1928, just thirteen years after the ore body was discovered, the railway came to Flin Flon. It went first to Channing, then to Mile 84 and eventually to Mile 86. Laying these tracks through rock and muskeg was an engineering feat. At first, the railroad came in to town from Cliff Lake but the way was later shortened. The railroad opened new vistas for the young community. Its age of rail had begun. The lure of the north became reality for many. The train provided the means.

Initially passenger travel was a risky business. Passengers travelling to Flin Flon were required to sign a form absolving the Dominion Construction Company of any responsibility for loss, injury or damage on the trip from The Pas. As improvements to the line were made, these risks decreased. For some, no doubt, any risk just added to the thrill of adventure.

Starting in August 1933, those people who had not been hard-hit by the Depression had the opportunity of visiting this new Canadian frontier. The Churchill Excursion, sponsored annually by Canadian National Railways and the Flin Flon Board of Trade, brought the curious, the adventure seeking, and the just plain bored in search of a new world. The train originated in Winnipeg and stopped in Flin Flon for twelve to twenty hours en route to the northern port. Connections could be made all over Western Canada, with passengers coming in via Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

Americans also shared the Canadian quest for adventure. Many passengers caught connecting trains in Chicago, New York and Minneapolis. In 1938, the Northern Miner boasted that most of the passengers were Americans.

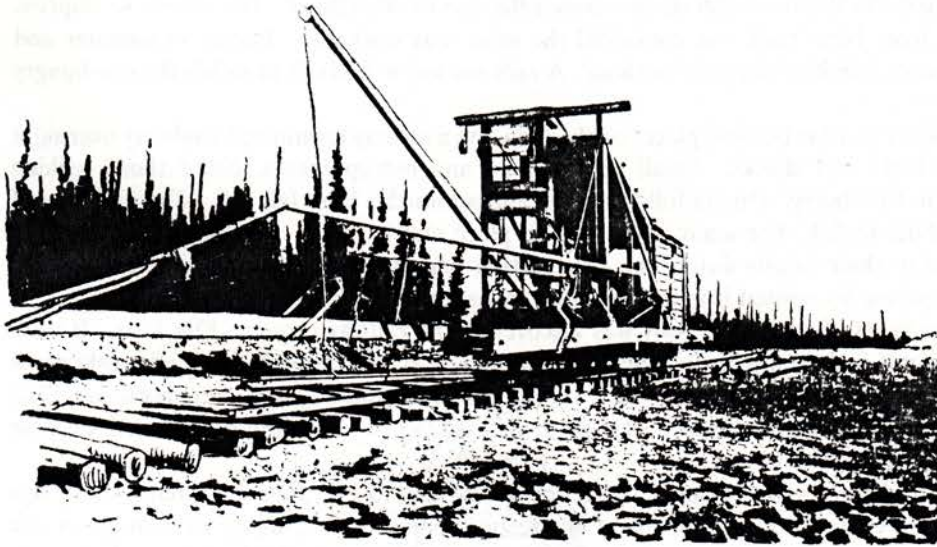
The idea of the excursion was to forget the economic worries of the time and just have fun. An orchestra played continuously during the trip. An entire train car was cleared out for dancing. A Master of Ceremonies kept the passengers entertained and pointed out the sights along the way. For those who wanted to keep in touch with what was going on in the outside world, there were news bulletins handed out at breakfast. Special arrangements were made to have news wires sent directly to the train. In 1933, you could have all this for the modest fare of \$12.05.

The arrival of the excursion was the main social event in the life of the young town. A tour of the mine was arranged. The visitors got to see the Open Pit, the Crusher, Copper and Zinc Plants and various departments of the Mill. Other activities included a trip to Denare Beach. The visit concluded with a dance at Jubilee Hall, now the parking lot for the Community Hall. After the dance, the weary visitors boarded the train.

The train in itself was impressive. It had two locomotives, five or six sleeping cars, a dining car, and six luggage cars. The train was so long that it stretched from the current location of the company cottages, along North Avenue to the upper edge of Ross Lake. They had to unhook cars to allow traffic through at the four-way stop on Church Street near the entrance to the Company. The sleeping cars were kept along North Avenue, as this was a quieter spot.

It was only the older, still well-established public who made this trip. Their resources had not been totally diminished by the Depression. The 1933 trip brought Premier Bracken, other members of the Cabinet and forty members of the Manitoba Legislature. The 1934 passenger list noted the names of Mr. and Mrs. John G. Diefenbaker. On the 1940 tour, Life and other major American magazines were represented. Many of the passengers from the United States were in their golden years. The "ladies of the evening" who had claimed North Avenue as their domain, found little trade aboard the Churchill Excursion.

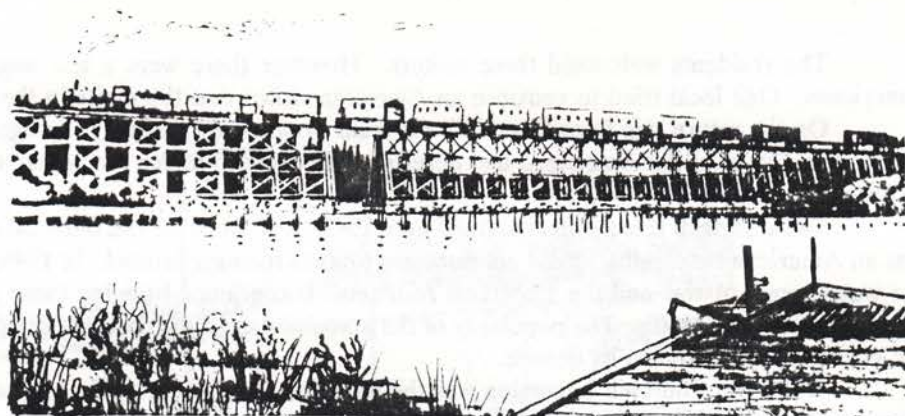
The American ladies were always in a quandary about what to wear. They certainly didn't want to show up the local lasses. The visitors were often surprised at how well the Flin Flon girls were dressed.



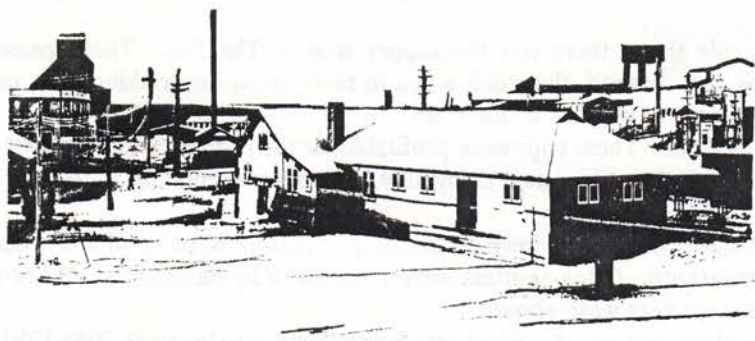
Laying rails on the line to Flin Flon 1928.



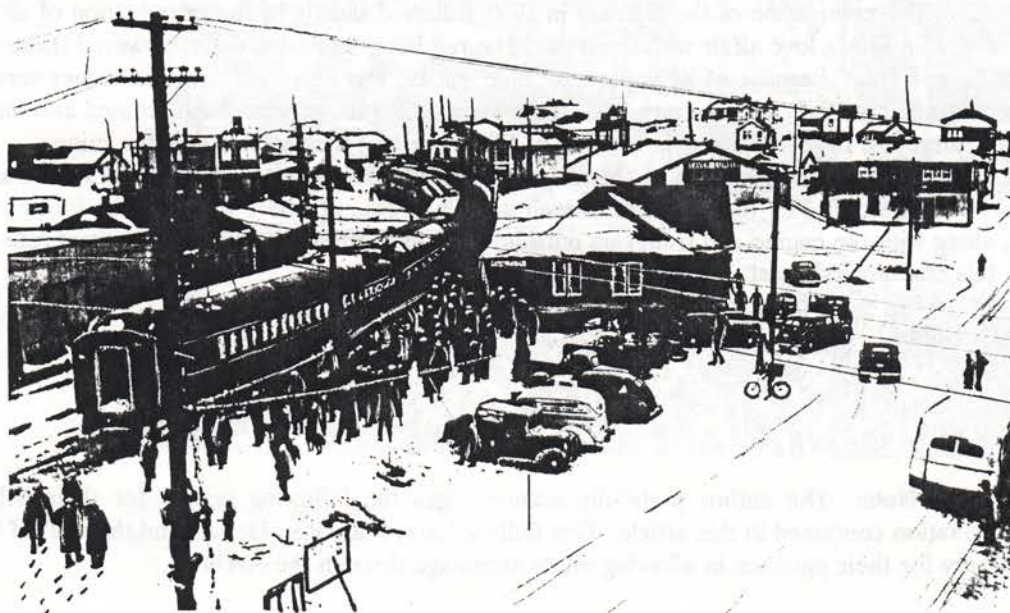
Premier Bracken driving the 'golden' spike to complete the rail line to Flin Flon. Mrs. McLean is holding spike while Mr. McLean looks on. October 1928



*First train over Limestone Narrows.
Flin Flon Railway 1928*



View of C.N. Station looking West.



C.N. Station looking East.

The residents welcomed these visitors. However there were a few wags willing to take in gullible Americans. One local tried to convince an American visitor that the pyrite in the rock was actually gold.

On the return trip from Churchill, the train stopped at Cranberry Portage. A picnic was arranged for the visitors. Most of the Americans had never seen anything to match the beauty of the rugged shores of Lake Athapap.

The Churchill Excursion continued until 1941. It stopped for the duration of the war because Churchill was an American base and they did not want any tourists roaming around. In 1946, people were eager to forget the weary years of war and the Excursion resumed. It continued bringing those seeking adventure and good times until the mid 1950's. The popularity of the automobile and the desire of people to drive themselves to see the country contributed to its demise.

While the Churchill Excursion was the most famous, it was not the only one. Excursions became the buzz-word of the times. There were excursions for curling, for hockey, and other sporting events. The CNR saw the opportunity to make money and cashed in. One of the most famous excursions was the "whisky train" which ran between Flin Flon and Winnipeg for Bomber games and got its name from the amount of alcohol consumed. For passengers requiring other services, the girls of North Avenue were quite willing to ply their trade.

The train stopped in Cranberry Portage so the thirsty could buy beer. The hotels ceased serving everyone else to satisfy customers fresh off the train. After all, they only had limited time to quench their thirst. Men bought cases of beer and took them back to the train. While the CNR never openly encouraged drinking, the train conductors looked the other way. In fact when the train reached Cranberry, conductors told passengers: "It's time to get more."

For passengers with an insatiable thirst, there was the supper stop at The Pas. These passengers wouldn't take their dinner in the dining car. Instead, they took a taxi to their favourite drinking spot, quaffed a few, and had the taxi pick them up in time to go back to the train.

The idea of excursions was to have fun. These trips were profitable for the railroad and it was not going to enforce any rules that would cut down on the passengers' enjoyment. On other excursions there was also a liberal use of alcohol.

After World War II, the CNR decided to crack down on drinking. Spotters were hired and while they curbed the practice, there was much resistance. Often spotters were recognized by passengers. Other times, the conductor tipped off passengers that spotters were aboard.

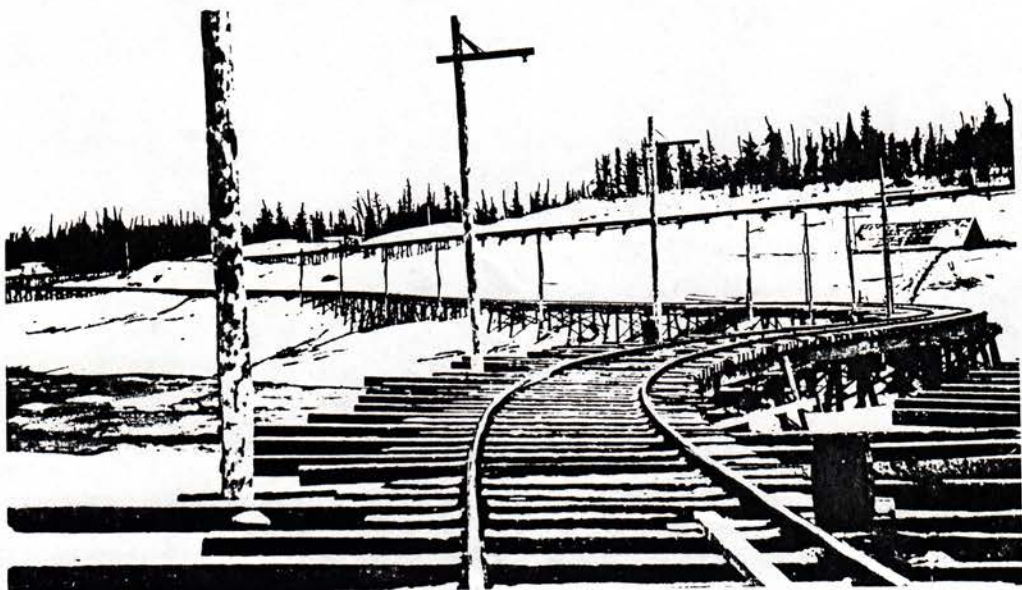
Another excursion of purely local interest was the "Blueberry Special", running between 1946-1950. This train, put on by Hudson Bay Mining, took people out to the flux pits to pick blueberries. Seats were set up in a box car, and there was no charge for the ride. Blueberry pickers were expected to bring their own lunch and it was a common sight to see them sporting the popular tin lunch pails. After a day of picking, the train would bring them back.

The completion of the highway in 1950, followed shortly by the introduction of air service, brought an end to Flin Flon's love affair with the train. The rail liner, a one-car diesel-powered train, affectionately called the "skunk train" because of its unpleasant blue smoke, was Flin Flon's last passenger service. This train was discontinued in 1963. In February 1981, freight service for the general public ceased and the station was closed. Now there are only two trains in and out of Flin Flon, and they service only the mine.

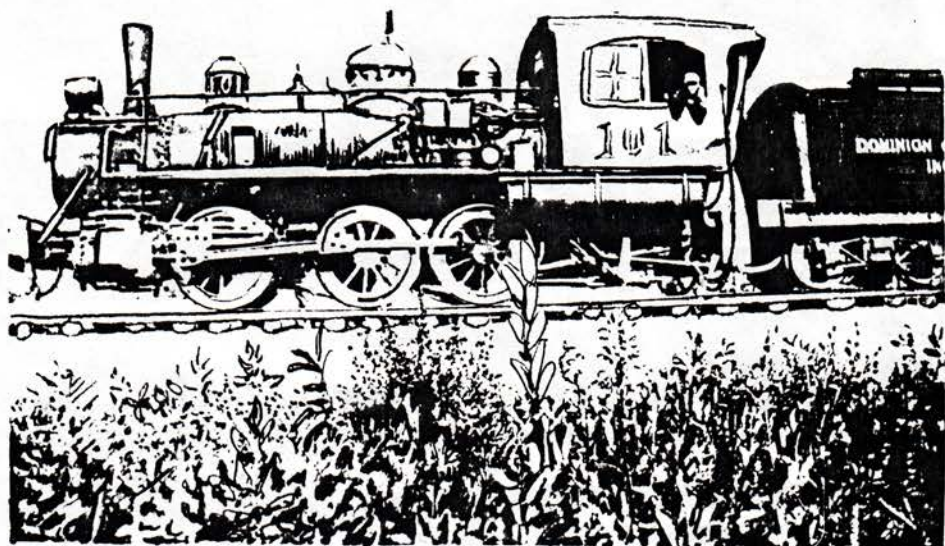
The remaining vestige of the railway era is the train station. Built in 1934, it was later moved to its current site at the Flin Flon Tourist Bureau and Campground where it is now the Flin Flon Station Museum. It, along with the engine and train cars outside, serve as a fitting reminder of the great role the train has played in this community's past.

H.C. Hobbs

Author's Note: The author gratefully acknowledges the following people for their help in compiling the information contained in this article: Gus Gillies, Larry Hall, Ron Dodds, and the staff of the Flin Flon Public Library for their patience in allowing me to rummage through the Archives.



*Hairpin curves on the railway to
Flin Flon. 1928*



*Bill Fuller engineer with
101 HBM&S 1928*



GREY HUNGER

He sweeps across
 a wash of misty-grey
 into my morning solitude,
 a grey-reclusive hero
 defying the gale
 that rattled windows
 in the night,

 lightly touching
 almost unseen
 into a weedy corner
 of the bay
 where rolling waters
 icy-grey, slap and tug
 at spindle-knees

high stepping,
 forward-thrusting,
 caution on the move,
 he stalks his prey
 then waits
 alertly there
 where the cold-grey rock
 dives into the foam

a grey-weathered stick
 with eyes primeval
 hungering for the
 gold-grey perch below
 oblivious of the chilling
 squall, lashing now in a
 flurry of sudden snow;

 behind a wall of glass
 secure in dawning grey
 I reach for a cup of coffee
 on the table near.
 Sharply he sees my erring
 move, greyly I regret it

 swiftly springs to
 unforgiving flight
 great wings resolutely
 beating, skirts the edge
 of the spruce-crag point
 and disappears,

 hungering still
 into the morning-grey.

Helen Strom

ROSES IN THE MINE

in subterranean silence
 beneath the deadly grip of northern ice
 where hardrock miners previously drilled
 extracting precious ore from drab grey rock
 new treasures flourish
 splashing colours onto painted walls
 of an abandoned powder magazine
 crosscut off eleven-seventy drift

Pre-Cambrian beauties to delight the eye
 whose fragrances obscure an acrid past
 they're growing roses in the Flin Flon mine

only memories recall
 the choking fumes from diesels roaring by
 cave-rooms adorned with glossy centrefolds
 where hungry miners sometimes hid for lunch
 today computers monitor afar
 the vital signs of flora underground
 while potting soil and fertilizer prompt
 agrarian explosions of their own
 vine-ripened red juicy without bounce!
 devoid of pests and weeds thus poison free
 they also grow tomatoes in the mine

no breezes blow
 nor soft pines whisper in these rugged halls
 blasted through the strata of the Shield
 yet micropropagation's leading edge
 spawns perfect cultured high-yield saskatoons
 with uniformity in taste and size
 and prophecies that markets soon may see
 orchids apples plums and blueberries
 spilling forth from greenhouses below
 they're growing berries in the Flin Flon mine

as once again ancient necessity
 combined with modern day technology
 elicits faintly from a dying earth
 the promises of rebirth

M.G. Stevens

(First appeared in Northern Lights, Summer 1991)



A WALK AROUND THE BORDER

The mining town of Flin Flon hugs the border between Manitoba and Saskatchewan. A circular walk starting midway between these two provinces makes a pleasant excursion and takes no more than two hours at a leisurely pace.

We walk towards Creighton, starting in the parking area at the south end of Main Street by the Super C Gas Station, passing the Northern Bus Garage on our left. The grating of steel you hear, is the diesel locomotive hauling ore from South Main shaft to the Mill. The rails follow the curve of the open pit, and were moved several times to accommodate the once-growing chasm. Nowadays, the locomotive often brings waste rock to fill the sides of the disused mine.

The Halfway, as early Flin Floners called this area, has been a transportation centre since Flin Flon began. In the days when horses toiled up our hills, Harold Leask had his draying service here. Over the road, on the right, the little 'pioneer' cemetery is a reminder of the frailty of human existence.



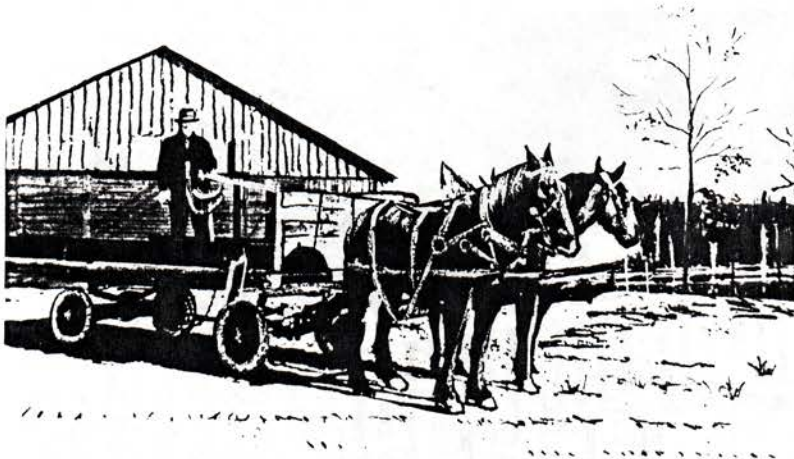
A baby girl buried here, died in a house fire while her immigrant parents were taking English lessons; a shaft sinker fell down Number One shaft in the hot summer of 1931; a father of young daughters fell through the ice on Ross Lake on Friday, November 13, that same year.

The grassy patch at the south end of Hapnot Lake provides a charming picture of our little city viewed across the bird sanctuary. Let us take time to notice the nuances of colour in the sky, and watch how mallards' wings catch the sunlight as they whistle overhead. We cross the grass diagonally toward the natural cleft in the

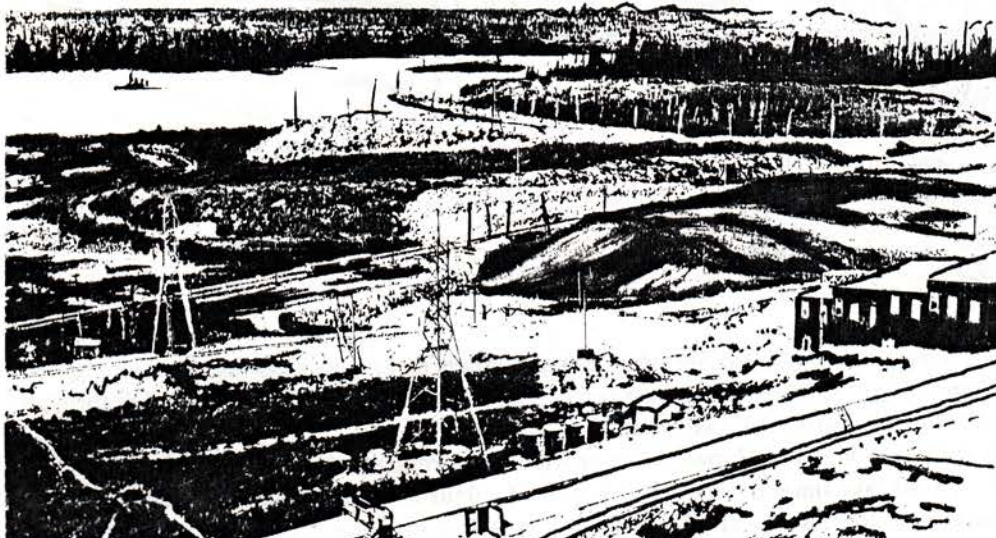
rock face opposite the road. Bearing left we find a path curving through rock-gnarled birch trees and follow it across the base of a little valley.

Perhaps this was the route David Collins took in 1915 when he showed Tom Creighton the interesting outcrop on Flin Flon Lake which became the open pit. From his summer camp at Bakers Narrows he would have come by water as far as Schist Lake where Jackson's Airways is today, and followed a track which passes Spirit Lake and joins with this one. To reach that point, we climb the stairs up the valley wall and emerge on Douglas Street. No doubt the old pathway continues under yards and houses, but we have to turn left and follow the road.

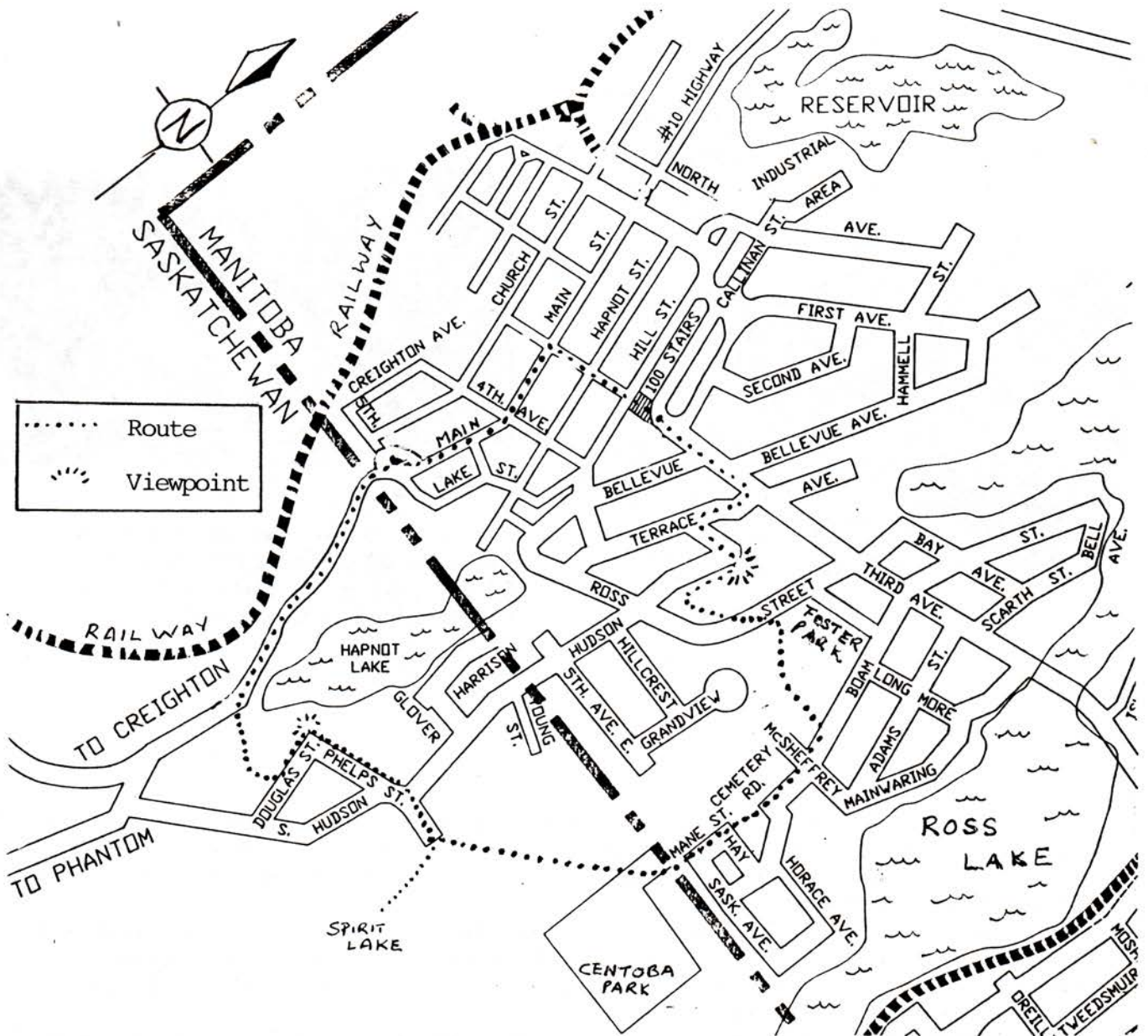
Before bearing right onto Phelps Avenue, we should stop and enjoy the view west from this exhilarating high point above Hapnot Lake. The horizon is fringed with a forest of spruce, jackpine, tamarack, birch and poplar. On the right is the HBM&S plant with Number One Shaft, the Mill, an old water tower on its trestle and the smelter stack dominating them all. On the left is South Main with its ventilation shaft and a hill hides the town of Creighton. Can you picture the curve of Flin Flon Lake which would have been directly in front of us, drained and lost now within the open pit and the tailings dam? Can you visualize the drifts, raises and stopes underground, which tap the wealth of our community? Imagine too, no matter what the temperature on surface, tomatoes and roses grow in a greenhouse 1170 feet underground.



Harold Leask - Draying Service



Flin Flon Lake looking west with Pilot Mill on right. circa 1929.



Where Phelps meets South Hudson, we cross over, and with the outdoor skating rink on our right, proceed to where the asphalt ends. Here two paths meet. The one on the right goes to Spirit and Schist Lakes while the one on the left, which we are taking, is called Tobacco Road. This anthology contains background on this roadway in Joyce Henderson's article, "Early Commerce in Flin Flön".

We can take our time and enjoy this section of the walk. The rocks, greenstone and granites, have wonderfully subtle colours. The upper part of the path is still corded, although snowmobiles take their toll on the old timbers every winter. Willows, alders and poplars create a dense wood as we descend towards Centoba Park. Now you can see the east side of Flin Flön.

Ross Lake Cemetery is soon on our left. Here lie such notable characters as Tom Creighton and Roderick McIsaac, but every gravestone marks an element in the history of our City.



Tobacco Road



Corduroy road between Ross Lake and Flin Flon. Photograph taken from the 1935 issue of the C.I.M.M., paper by R. E. Phelan on 'History of Flin Flon Mine up to Construction'.

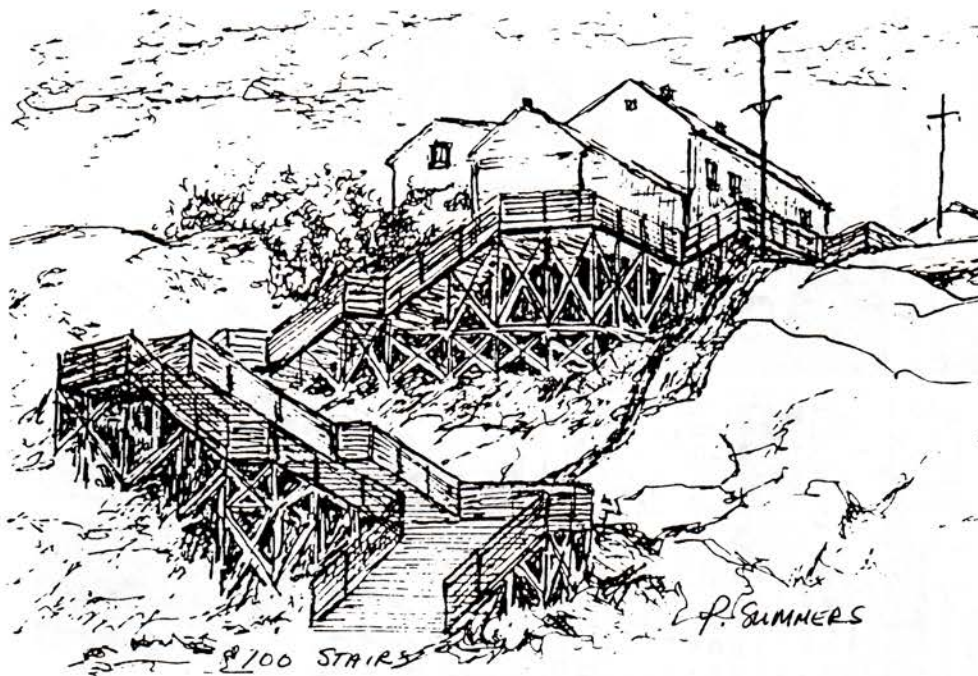
We curve left again to join the running track of Foster Park. Keeping close to the rock wall, we walk alongside a fine stand of willows and where they end, take the path left. This is a rough short cut onto Sippel Hill (Ross Street) but the more sedate walker may prefer instead to continue onto the lane behind the Candy Bar, turning left and left again onto Ross Street.

We cross over to the sidewalk and proceed up Sippel's Hill, a splendidly steep gradient down which of one of the early Doctors used to slide on a sheet of cardboard when in a hurry to make his house calls in the lower area of town. Halfway up the hill, the second fire hydrant alerts us to a particularly dramatic short cut, for the courageous or foolhardy only.

Ten paces beyond the hydrant, a path on the right disappears in dappled shade beneath poplars. Ascending steeply, our daring is rewarded by a pretty view of Ross Lake framed by rocks and trees. A scramble up the left of the rock face, leads onto the back lane of Hudson Street, on the east side of Ruth Betts School. The sensible walker will have reached this by continuing up Sippel's Hill and turning right onto Hudson. We proceed along the back lane which narrows into a path behind two houses, fortunate enough to have one of the finest views in Flin Flon.

Directly below, the west bay of Ross Lake shelters beside a steep cliff. In this marshy area, wild fowl raise their young right beside Third Avenue, the busiest road in Flin Flon. Layers of houses hug the rock on Second Avenue and Bellevue. They speckle The Island and spread beneath the water tower, now blue and gold, instead of the chequered red and white of yesteryear. Trees fill Birchview and Willowvale. Across the lake curves Manitoba Avenue and behind it, the steep slope of Hangman's Hill marks the site of many a youngster's death-defying leap into Little Cliff Lake.

The back lane emerges onto Hiawatha, a street named by someone who loved poetry. The glorious domes of St Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church, built in 1949, are second only to the stack for their dominance of the Flin Flon skyline.



We proceed right down Terrace and left onto Third Avenue and as we pass Rotary Park, notice colourful rock paintings.

Where Third Avenue curves to the right, we are confronted by tier after tier of steps up yet another rock face. This is penetrated by a mysterious wooden door. Some say this is the entrance to a vast bomb shelter, others say it was designed as a walkway to Main Street. It is kept securely locked, so with curiosity unsatisfied, we proceed up what are called the Hundred Steps. These were rebuilt in the summer of 1992. Are there still a hundred? See what you have counted when you reach the Cenotaph at the top of the stairs.

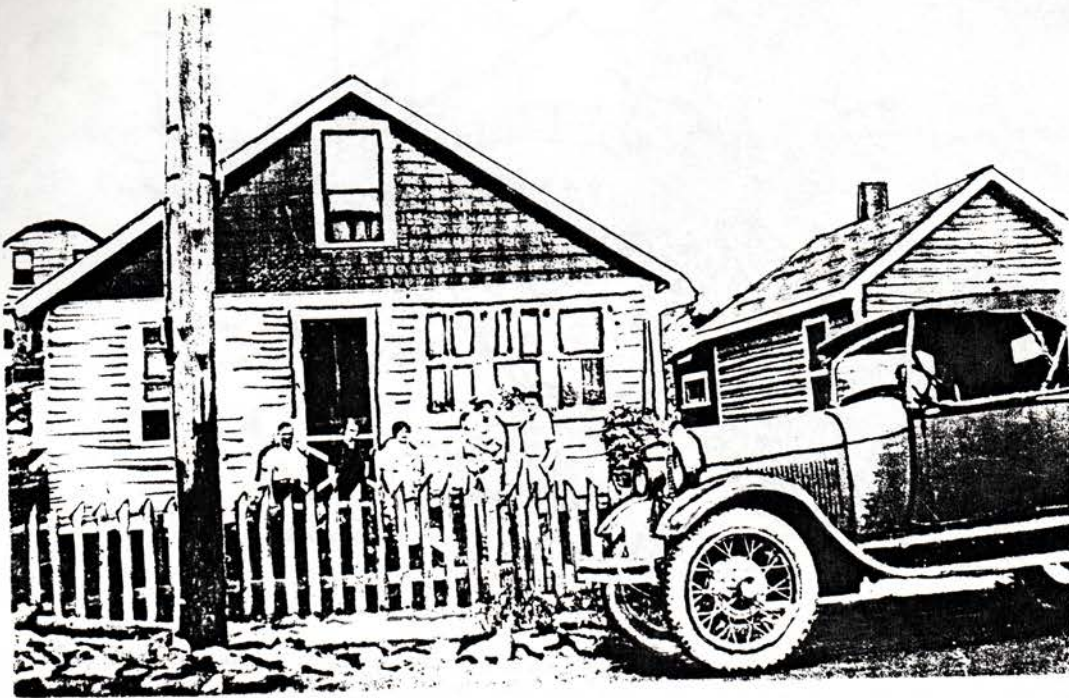
We cross Hill Street and walk down the slope of Third Avenue. Look left up Hapnot Street as we cross it and notice the coffin-shaped house which was once a funeral parlour.

Soon we are on Main Street. Flin Flon has no shopping mall but Main Street is the heart of its business district. Yes, that is the smelter stack, looming over us to our right, not two blocks away.

We head south, passing our biggest store, the North of 53 Co-op at the intersection of Main and Fourth. Now we find ourselves back in a residential neighbourhood and soon find ourselves in the parking area where we began. I hope you enjoyed your walk!

Sarah Trevor

SNAPSHOTS OF FLIN FLON FROM MY FAMILY ALBUM
1937 - 1945
(Part of a work in progress)
by
Myrna Guymer



47 Main Street

SNAPSHOT #1 - AN ACCIDENT - SEPTEMBER 1942

"Ernie next door said he heard that the driver wasn't going fast but the fellow was walking in the middle of the street," Marny hears Grampa say. Sitting at the top of the chilly stairway in her grandparents' home at 47 Main Street, Marny tucks the circle of warmth from her flannelette nightgown around her bare feet. Rubbing sleep from her eyes, she listens intently to the conversation in the living room below.

"Couple of guys standing on the corner near the Blue & White Store said they were right there when it happened. Fellow died on the road right in front of our house," Grampa continues.

"Didn't the driver have lights on?" Marny's father asks.

"Ernie said that he did. It was dark. Happened about 9:30," Grampa answers.

Marny starts down the stairs and conversation stops.

"Is somebody dead, Mom?" she asks.

"Yes, dear. A man was hit by a car last night."

Flin Flon Miner

"THE PAPER THAT GOES HOME"

Flin Flon, Manitoba, Thursday, October 1st, 1942

Subscript

Accidental Death

Gramma smiles sympathetically from beside the woodstove in the tiny kitchen. "Good morning, dear. Breakfast is nearly ready," she says. Marny's tummy growls at the sweet aroma of nutty-tasting porridge bubbling in the pot, but her empty stomach takes second place to curiosity.

"I want to go out and see," she says, running for the stairway to get her clothes. Adult eyes exchange what-to-do looks. In minutes Marny is down again, dressed.

"Come sit with me till the porridge is ready, Monkey," Grampa calls from his big brown armchair.

"I'll just sit on the step, Gramp." She opens the front door.

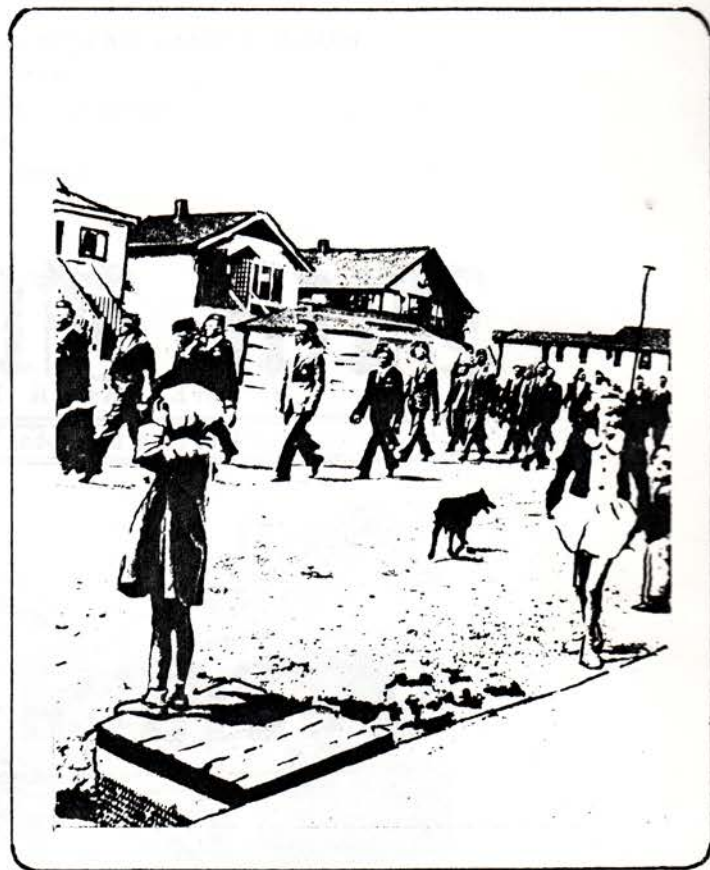
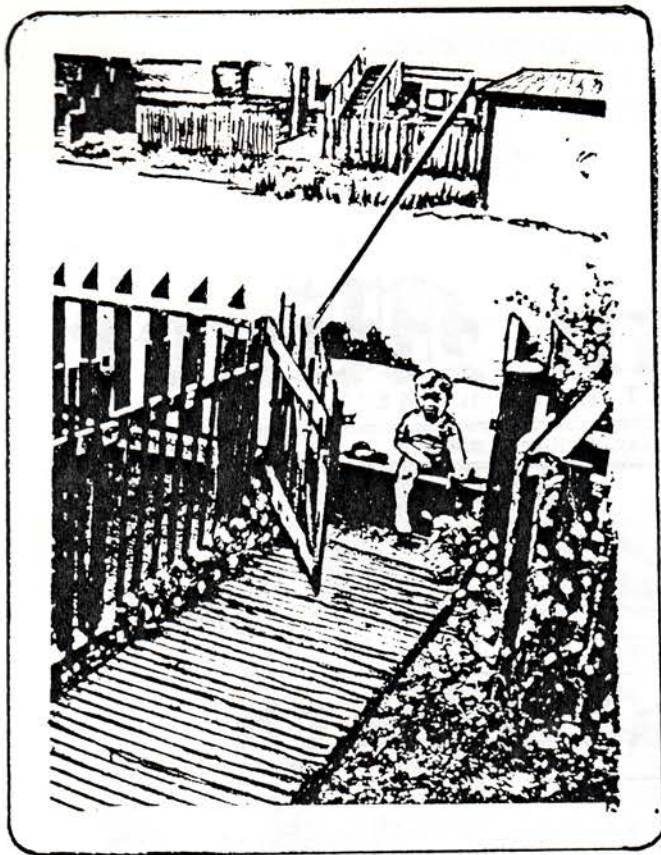
As though silence is necessary, Marny slowly closes the screen door. Stretching to her tiptoes, she scans over the picket fence onto Main Street. Her gaze settles on the small white building that sits in the middle of the road.

Such a strange place for a house - the Pump House, people call it. Maybe the man died beside it? Such a mysterious place with its padlocked door. Once she saw a man going in and she ran across the street to peer in after him. She saw a railing like a stairway and black all round the inside...blackier than night. Marny never saw the man come out. After that she stayed away from it and its sickening gutter smells. It makes strange burping sounds, too. Did that building have anything to do with the accident last night?

What might she see on the road? She could change her mind and go back in the house. Instead she walks the board pathway to the gate, clicks the latch open and steps gingerly to the gravel walk bordering the road. She glances back toward the house. What happens when someone dies? Where do they go? Her eyes widen and she peers at the street, inspecting, wondering. Nothing looks different.

A cool autumn wind brushes a wisp of blond hair across her eyes. Marny shivers. Her stomach rumbles. She turns and runs for the house, opening the door to a flood of warm air,

"Here you go, dear. Mind it's hot," Gramma says, setting a steaming bowl of porridge down on the open oven door. Its surface provides a small table, like a dropped shelf. The milking-sized stool that Grampa made fits just right. The fire crackles in the big old cook stove. Marny snuggles into its embrace. She plunges her spoon into the brown sugar and buttered cereal. Questions of death will have to wait.



SNAPSHOT #2 - MARCHING BOY

On a hot summer day in 1944, the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company Pipe Band assembles outside the Jubilee Hall for a practice march.

A soft breeze pushes the mine's grey smelter smoke over the town, mingling its pungent odour with the smells of bread and cake from the P & G Bakery. At 47 Main Street, the tiny yard doesn't leave much room for a rambunctious boy to explore new places, so he sits on the sidewalk edge pondering what to do.

His ears catch a sound. Unblinking, he drops a handful of grass and stands. He listens intently, hoping. Is it? Could it really be? Yes it is...the steady hummm, hum, pumping whine and rhythmic boom, boom that he loves. A marching band with bagpipes droning. It is coming down the street...boom, boom - the huge base drum is as big as himself. They will pass the house! Louder, the lively prancing notes trigger a longing to leave the yard.

Stepping to the street, he sits down on the wooden curb. He hugs his bruised knees. The band approaches. Boom, boom, hmmm, hmmm. The noise is deafening now. He loses himself to the excitement that erupts within his belly.

With cowlick bobbing, he jumps and runs into the herd of marching men. Around him kilts flap and pipers' knee-high tassels brush the wee boy in short pants. He is barely visible in the kicked up dust. With eyes in skyward wonderment, he tries desperately to keep in time with the giant marching steps.

Stretch, stretch, hop and run, run, run. Breathless, he is left behind.

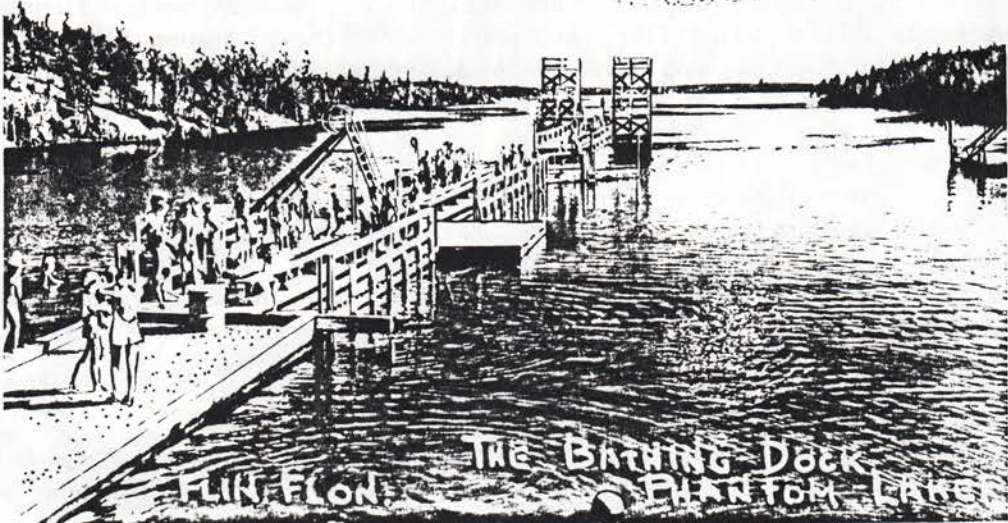
"Wesley! W..e...s..ley!" a voice calls. His mother, apron-clad, appears at the screened door.

Reluctantly he turns and marches home. Maybe the month he was born has something to do with the thrill of a marching pipe band. He had turned four in March.

In the yard again, the little boy sits on the narrow board sidewalk that is edged with pansies. The flowery faces watch as he drops blades of grass between the cracks.



*H.B.M. & S. Pipe Band in front of the Company Hospital 1942
 Left to right: Bill Burnett, Don Gunn, Rick Fraser, Bill Davie,
 Bill Duncan, 'Slim' Holdaway, Eddie Hammill, 'Pinkie'
 Davie. Frank Stewart, Bob McKenzie, Bert Kirkwood and
 Mascot 'Patricia'.*





SNAPSHOT #3 - GRAMPA'S CHAIR

Grampa's chair is a playground.

It is earthy brown...brown as his big felt Fedora hat. Soft plushy brown with swirls of sandy print rivers running through the velvet. It is so soft it tickles little fingers tracing up and down and around.

Grampa's chair is sun-warm like his hug. The fat seat cushion makes a springy landing mat for a one-year-old granddaughter to run and fall into, face down. A quick jump and bounce around and wait, teasing Gramp to come and pretend to sit.

High flat wooden arms of Grampa's chair make it a ladder for "what a little monkey!" Grampa says. First one knee up, then the other to the top of the cabinet radio beside his chair. Christmas 1938, with the 'mustn't touch' baubles lighting a cheery tree atop the radio, a nimble climber stands between branches gathering pretty things.

Grampa's chair is a cradle.

A new baby arrives. Big sister snuggling beneath Ivory-Snowed blankets in Grampa's chair, cradles her baby brother tightly. She plants wet kisses on his forehead. Grampa's chair is a deep secure bowl for little ones to get acquainted.

Mrs. Paylor arrives with her baby bundled in a huge wicker pram. It has a secret place in the bottom to store baby things. She lifts her baby out, opens the square lid to get something, then comes into the house and lays her baby in Grampa's chair. Moms have tea and Gramma's pound cake.

Grampa's chair is a treasure chest.

His baggy trousers with pockets deep as paper bags spill war-time pennies and nickels. The coins, sometimes maybe even a dime, jingle down into the bottom folds of the chair. Skinny little arms fit easily into the narrow crevices to retrieve copper and silver treasures...along with stale bread crumbs and dust balls.

Grampa raises bushy brows and feigns surprise when a little girl runs to Gramma squealing, "Look what I found in Grampa's chair!"

Grampa's chair is a lookout.

From the high back bleacher seat a little girl watches Main Street passers-by. Mrs. Eadie next door takes her WW2 coupons to the P & G for a loaf of bread. Gramma goes across the street and up the steep walk to Mrs. McWaters for eggs. Mr. Last swings his lunch pail home from his shift at the mine to find his younger son and the little girl next door have been up to mischief in the garage. They painted each other green.

Who is coming through the gate? The lady with the white hair and the blouse just like the lace curtains at the window. Mrs. Bell...Ma, Gramma calls her. She comes knocking about the same time as the Happy Gang. "Well, come onnn in. Keep happy with...," the radio sings. She stays for lunch and Gram serves her tea and soup. Sometimes she slops it down her lace blouse. Gramma says she can't see too well anymore.

Grampa's chair is a comforter.

Adults sit in silence on chair edges. Grampa and Daddy say all should be quiet when Lorne Greene or Matthew Halton broadcast. Grampa adjusts the biscuit-sized knobs of the RCA Victor radio to tune in the crackling BBC news - news of war and dread. Churchill or Hitler say things that make men stare at worn linoleum and women bustle about the kitchen with fear in their eyes.

One day, with the radio playing 'An English Country Garden', the little girl's father dresses in Air Force blue and flies over the sea, leaving only the comfort of Grampa's chair.



SNAPSHOT #4 - PHANTOM LAKE

Mom says let's go to the beach i wear
 my pink puckered bathing suit with all
 the bumps walking over high rocks and grey slag
 footpath i sit on daddy's shoulders home from
 war i hold on to his
 hair tight it doesn't hurt he says he runs and i
 bounce and laugh and yell daddy stop way up higher than
 anybody i see everybody before we get there diving
 boards too big for me merry-go-round round round til i'm
 dizzy swings that reach to the sky fat pink
 ice cream cones for a nickel at the long
 counter i can't see over

my brother grins puddling and slapping in the
 mining town's playground alive with
 happy faces and sunburned bodies put a shirt on
 your brother mom says or he'll get another
 blister as big as a fist or maybe - i tell mom
 as big as the boil i had on my
 bum and all the neighbours came in one by one to stare

mom packed a checkered cloth to put on
 the picnic table with lemonade and sandwiches and
 cookies we eat crunching with sand on
 our fingers from making castles and hiding
 daddy under mounds before the long
 piggyback ride home one last swim in
 my pink puckered
 bathing suit



SNAPSHOT #5 - A PIECE OF LAND

It is 1939. I am two. We live at 34 Scarth Street. This is the first home my parents own.

Our property is very big with about 100 feet at the front. Our yard is shaped like a piece of pie and goes northward all the way down to the shore of Ross Lake.

There are no fish or frogs in the lake anymore. Ducks, geese or loons do not live there either. But new people move to Flin Flon every week. Men leave their dried up farms, just like my Grampa did and come here to work on the mine. Soon they bring their families and have a better life.

We love our yard. It has tall trees and grass. I like the tall weeds best of all. They are good for playing hide-and-peek.

One day Dad cannot find me. He is afraid that I have gone to the lake and drowned. He searches all over for me but I have good hiding places in our yard. Because my hair is the same colour as the weeds it takes Dad a long time to find me. I like this game a lot.

Mom plants flowers in our yard just like Gramma's on Main Street. She grows delphiniums and hollyhocks, but I call them honey suckles because I suck the honey out of the funnel end. The plants are taller than me. I stand beside them for Grampa to take pictures.

There is a steep hill in front of our house and the road doesn't go anywhere, it's a dead end. Big trucks and wagons that deliver water and take the garbage away, have trouble turning around and doing their job. So Dad goes to see the Mayor.

Dad says, "Maybe I can help. I'll give to the town a piece of my land. Then you can build a road all the way around to Boam Street."

The Council is very happy and say they will write it into their records. They build a road all around and make a new little street. Most of our yard is gone now.

Dad thought the town might name that little avenue after his family. They were pioneers, miners, prospectors too, and had the first funeral home in Flin Flon from 1932 to 1935. They worked hard like many others, and my Dad gave a piece of his land - our yard.

Some people forgot, I guess. The town named the street for someone else. Maybe someday there will be another piece of land in Flin Flon that needs a name.



BASKETBALL

FLIN FLON COMMUNITY CLUB HALL

Thursday, April 12

FLIN
FLON



ALL
STARS

JUNIORS, CHAMPIONS NORTH OF 53, VS.

THE GAME OF THE SEASON, COMMENCING AT 9:45 P. M.

WALTZ NIGHT

Music By Norman Grove and His
Country Club Orchestra

You Can Always Have A Good Time At A
JUNIOR Girls' Club DANCE

DANCING AT 10:45 P. M.

Admission To Dance: 75 Cents Per Couple; Extra Lady 25 Cents

*Left to right: Jean Dow, Audrey Lasteen, Irene Marten, Jean Mainwaring,
Florence Gilman, Helen Hutchinson and Yota Schoberg.*

SNAPSHOT #6 - MY MOM A CHAMPION

on black November ice at Beaver Lake
 in her old skates
 i bend and glide for miles i see her
 a champion she wins prizes jewelry
 one set of blue stones i wear the oval ring
 dangly earrings i buy a new chain for the pendant
 too short like her life

she isn't a mom yet 1930
 she comes to Flin Flon goes
 to school in one of the churches then to Main School
 athletic she plays baseball sprains her finger and can't
 play for a big game coach Toots Thompson is proud
 they smile for snapshots good sport

in 1934 Winnipeg with her basketball team wins
 the Junior Girls Provincial Championship
 Flin Flon is proud snapshots again
 standing together beside their trophy the town
 hangs posters dances celebrates

middle names Mabel Doris she doesn't think much
 of those two til the day a letter arrives
 with initials MD after her name
 not in the middle
 good for a laugh she says

she never goes to university works for
 Wartime Prices and Trades Board scary times
 for women with their men gone to war always learning
 making doing anything
 she puts her mind to for me
 she sews pretty cotton dresses with
 matching panties early morning sunshine
 dust rainbows on the floor i chase them Mom
 laughs hugs me on her knee while the lady next door
 teaches her to smoke

she races very fast on her long speed
 skates a champion falls
 another skater stumbles over her leg cutting a big gash
 with the fifteen inch steel blade
 sharp cold

on these same blades i glide turn
 and turn through snow-powdered ice
 black mirrors of life speeding on



The author wishes to acknowledge that this story is based on "Bootlegging, Gambling and Blonde Annie" published in Undercover for the R.C.M.P by R. S. S. Wilson. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1986.

HOW LAW AND ORDER CAME TO CREIGHTON

Author's Note: This story is a work of fiction. While it recreates events that actually happened in Flin Flon in the early Thirties, the characters' names have been changed and events altered to suit the story.

My first encounter with a prostitute came when I was an undercover officer with the R.C.M.P. It was an experience I will never forget.

In 1930, I was sent to Flin Flon with two other officers. Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting was constructing a huge mining and smelting complex. The railway had been built into the mine in 1928 and a rough-and-ready frontier town sprang up along it.

Men came in search of the work they could not find elsewhere in those hungry Depression days. While they were ready to work hard, they wanted to play hard as well. An unscrupulous person found out that money could be made by providing alcohol, women and gambling for the men. This all happened at a place outside of the town, called The Halfway. By establishing this place on the Saskatchewan side of the border, the operator knew it was beyond the jurisdiction of the Manitoba Provincial Police.

Nor was it easy for RCMP officers on the Manitoba side of the border to intervene. The closest detachment was in The Pas and they had to go into Flin Flon by train, then travel out to The Halfway. The train ran only three times a week. Every time Charlie Smith, in charge of The Pas detachment, set out to investigate, a telegram would arrive mysteriously at The Halfway ahead of him. All the booze was well hidden and operations suspended.

It is true that red light districts were part of most frontier towns. Some positive things were happening at The Halfway. There was no spread of venereal disease. All the girls who worked The Halfway had to have a medical certificate to prove they were healthy. All the bootlegging and prostitution was confined to one area of town and that was certainly better than having it spread out all over.

However there were problems. Some of the pimps instructed their girls to put knock-out drops in the drinks. The pimps then stole the miners' bankrolls and other valuables. When the miners found out what had happened they went back to retaliate, equipped with crowbars and pick-axes. The situation snowballed as the pimps purchased firearms and shots were fired. The Mounties were asked to step in.

The C.O. of the Prince Albert Detachment, where I was stationed, summoned me and two other officers to his office.

"Your orders are to be on the train to The Pas tomorrow. Pack old clothes. Sergeant Smith will give you further orders."

We were informed that Magistrate Vanier of Saskatoon would also be going to Flin Flon. He would provide us with any necessary warrants and be around to deal with charges that might be laid. Our main task was to go and get the necessary information upon which search warrants could be issued and then be prepared to raid the place.

At The Pas we met Sergeant Charlie Smith who was in charge of the whole operation.

"Welcome, men. It's all arranged. When you get to Flin Flon, report to W.A. Green, the Project Superintendent. He will provide you with the necessary ID. Oh yes...there's one other thing. Each of you will be assigned jobs at the mine."

"But sir," I interjected "I don't know anything about mining."

"I hear you have a good arm for pitching."

"Yes, Sir."

"Good. You will be assigned the job of throwing rocks from the side of the Open Pit back in for crushing."

Smith wished us luck and told us he would come up when we needed him.

"But don't expect me any sooner. I've been to that muskeg hole. I don't want to spend any more time there than necessary."

The quagmire that greeted us bears no resemblance to the modern city. Because of the rock, all the sewers were above ground and these wooden planks served as sidewalks. We checked into the hotel - a two storey frame structure on the main street. I use the term 'street' loosely. It was just a mud hole. The horses pulling drays were up to their bellies in water. We were told that drunks often fell off the sidewalks and drowned. We were quite prepared to believe that.

Of course, to be able to get a feel for The Halfway and not to appear any different than any other miner, it was important we spend a fair bit of time there. It was just a ramshackle bunch of cabins. Larger ones housed the bootlegging joints where the girls went to meet the men. Once they had made their pick-ups, they would lead them on a small trail through the bush to smaller shacks. Each of these shacks housed two or three girls and were partitioned with blankets strung up on clothes wire. After all, each miner deserved a bit of privacy.

There seemed no evidence of any gamblers when we arrived and certainly no evidence of violence. At first, we wondered if there had been a tip-off. Or, were the reports we had received somewhat exaggerated? Still, our orders stood. "Get enough information to close the place down." We soon realized we would not witness any larceny or crime on a grand scale.

By downing our share of whiskies at The Halfway, we were able to determine that the liquor served had the seal of the Liquor Control Board of Manitoba. It was illegal to take liquor across the border and resell it. That combined with the prostitution was sufficient reason to close the place down.

To be convincing miners we had to interact with the girls. But this caused problems. The order of the day was for a miner to get reasonably well inebriated and then go to bed with one of the ladies. Even if we had been so inclined, this would have been impossible. You can well imagine what would have happened should it

come out in court that one of us Mounties had behaved in a manner not beyond reproach. The girls never stopped trying to interest us. While having our drinks, they would sit on our laps, put their arms around us, kiss us on the cheek or make other advances.

Not that most of the girls were all that great looking. There were about a dozen there. One was named 'Web-fingered' Alice because her fingers were partially joined together. However, before I sound like Saint Cop, there was a particular girl I took a shine to and she seemed attracted to me. Let's call her 'Janey'.

She was just a kid really - not more than twenty, I would think. She had long blonde hair, blue eyes and a smile that could win over the hardest of hearts. During my evenings drinking at The Halfway she told me how she came to Flin Flon.

"I was working at Eaton's mail order department in Winnipeg. At a party I met this guy who told me he was a trader at Island Falls. He gave me a real romantic picture of the North. You know, about dog teams, canoe rides, uncharted rivers, the whole works. He told me his wife needed help and he'd give me double my current pay and free room and board. I went back with him. He had a business O.K! He and his wife ran a whore house and a bootlegging establishment. I was no virgin but wasn't prepared for this. After I entertained a few clients, the Missus took most of my money. One night I snuck away with a trapper. He brought me to The Halfway and I've been here ever since."

It seemed we waited forever for Magistrate Vanier to arrive and when he finally got here we thought we would get on with this case. However it soon became evident that Vanier was determined to have a good time and was not in any particular hurry. He was an ardent camera buff, so came posing as a photographer. He went around to each of the shacks buying drinks and taking photographs. We were afraid he might blow our cover.

When Sergeant Smith arrived from The Pas, Vanier was pressured into getting on with the case. The raid was set for Saturday night. At the hotel we donned our uniforms which I must confess were pretty creased after being in a packsack for two weeks. While we polished up our brass buttons, we discussed our plans. We would go to The Halfway around 10:30. We knew that some of the girls had sleepovers - men who spent the night. We 'miners' would pose as sleepovers and enter the different cabins. In some ways I was sorry that I had to raid Janey's cabin. But it seemed logical since I had befriended her.

I tapped on her window and said: "It's me, Roddie." I could see her in the half-light and her flimsy clothing revealed to me a good deal of cleavage. My heart stopped. No, duty must prevail.

You can imagine her shock when she opened the door and was confronted by a scarlet-tuniced miner saying:

"RCMP. You are under arrest."

Her horror was compounded when we heard screams and breaking glass from an adjacent cabin. Sergeant Smith had been locked out and broke down the door. The inhabitants were scattering. Trying to conceal the booze, they were pitching bottles out the window, smashing them against the rock. There was chaos as people from town ran amok.

Back in Janey's cabin, I calmly wrote down all the names of the girls and their customers. One was the frantic manager of the hotel in which we were staying.

"Please, Sir. Don't tell my wife. If you do, you'll be coming into town to investigate a murder. Mine."

"Go home," I told him. We had no intention of charging anyone found on the premises.

The girls all pleaded guilty to soliciting and to having Manitoba liquor for sale in their houses. There was no sense messing around with a trial. Vanier simply fined all involved, giving them the maximum penalty. None of the girls had any money. I started to have nightmares about how we could escort all these ladies back to jail in Prince Albert. But this night of surprises was not over.

"What's all the commotion?" In walked a heavy set man with a bankroll in his hands. As Vanier read out the sizeable fines, the burly man peeled out the bills and each prisoner was released. When all the fines were paid, he pocketed the rest of his bankroll and departed with an abrupt "goodnight".

I felt badly about my part in the arrest of Janey. I said as much to her.

"Don't worry," she said, "You were only doing your job." Then she turned to me and kissed me full on the lips. I'm sure it must have been the first time a Mountie was ever kissed by the person he had just arrested.

Back at the hotel we got the red carpet treatment. Especially me. I hadn't told my fellow officers about my encounter with the proprietor and I was enjoying their bewilderment. The next morning we all got room service. A full course breakfast: bacon, eggs, toast and coffee 'on the house'.



West side of Main Street 1929.

While my brother officers were puzzling over this surprise, a bigger one was in store for us all. There was a knock at our door and an envoy from The Halfway appeared.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Just to prove there are no hard feelings about last night, you are all invited to The Halfway for a steak dinner."

We were assured no customers would be there and no soliciting would take place. We Mounties were pretty uneasy, but Vanier overruled us:

"Nonsense, the case is closed. What's the harm?"

What an evening! The steaks were marvellous. There was as much booze on the table as you could ever want to drink and more than we could. I have to confess we Mounties were a tad derelict in our duty. No one even thought to check the labels to see what seal was on the bottle. After all, Vanier had said the case was closed.

Our visit to Flin Flon resolved nothing. We felt certain, but could not prove, that the proprietor had footed the bill for the evening and was probably feeling he would get his investment back ten times over once we had gone.

But we had our trump card. Back in Prince Albert we recommended that a RCMP detachment be established right at The Halfway. Once this was done, the place was never the same again. The Super C Convenience store is currently at the site of that detachment.

It was a great adventure but bitter-sweet. Through the years I have often thought about Janey. I remember her smile, our chats together, and that final kiss. I have wondered what might have happened had we met at a different place or under different circumstances. It was one time the Mounties did not get their man.

H.C. Hobbs



NEIL ALEXANDER 'DOWNIE' McLENNAN

The Neil A. McLennan Building stands on a hill overlooking Foster Park. The laughter of children, past and present, echoes throughout the building. In a corner of the Flin Flon Station Museum are a Scouting hat and a trophy inscribed with the words 'Neil Downie McLennan'.

These things are memorials to a man who gave much of himself to this community.

Neil Alexander McLennan was born in Glengarry County near Lancaster, Ontario on February 2, 1902 and moved to Basswood, Manitoba with his family in 1904. He attended Brandon Normal School to obtain his teacher's certificate and taught school in Arrow River, Newdale, and Brandon before coming to Flin Flon in 1933.

When asked why he chose to come north, he replied:

"I had a sense of adventure. Besides, I always liked living in the bush."

Neil taught Grades 8 to 10 at the old Main School. He served as the principal of Main School (1937-1942), Birchview School (1942-1943) and Ross Lake School (1943-1946). During 1945-1947, he took a leave of absence to work as Secretary of the Saskatoon YMCA.

After he returned to Flin Flon in 1947, Neil became principal of Willowvale School. In 1950, he returned to Ross Lake as principal and also taught Grades 7 and 8 until his retirement in 1966.

In 1967, the Flin Flon DeMolay organization, a youth group affiliated with the Masonic Order, decided to create an award for Teacher of the Year. Neil was the first teacher chosen for this honour and he always regarded it as one of the highest honours paid to him.

Neil's first concern was always for the children and that they do their best.

John Wilson, former principal and superintendent in Flin Flon reported: "You could always tell when a boy got to Neil's class. He took his boots off at the back door and helped his mother with the dishes without being asked."

One of Neil's favourite tricks was to mention the prowess of his nieces in their academic achievements in the hopes of encouraging his pupils. At the same time, he bragged about his Flin Flon pupils to his nieces.

In later years, when a niece met one of his former pupils, she was shocked to hear that woman tell her: "You're one of his nieces? I know all about you and I used to hate you!"

One of Neil's obsessions was spelling. A student who scored a hundred percent on a test could fail because of marks deducted for spelling mistakes. Spelling followed a military routine: print each word once, write it twice, dot the 'i's', cross the 't's', check the definitions, write the spelling test on Friday, and above all, know the spelling rules.

One winter, when a student announced that he had forgotten his spelling homework, he was sent home to fetch it. After some time, the student failed to return. Neil donned his parka and went outdoors to search for the boy. He discovered his pupil sitting cross-legged in a snowbank frantically writing out the spelling.

When funeral processions to Ross Lake Cemetery passed the school at recess, all activity on the playground ceased. Pupils stood to attention as a mark of respect for the deceased.

Another pupil helped her younger brothers and sister get ready for school as well as assisting her mother with household chores. Unfortunately the young girl frequently slept in and was late for classes. Neil's solution was to buy her an alarm clock of her own.

According to one source, Neil concerned himself with the safety of the children crossing Third Avenue at Boam Street, especially following the death of an adult. He approached the city council and consequently, traffic lights were installed at the intersection.

When Walter Dinsdale, then the Federal Minister of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources, visited Flin Flon, Neil proudly introduced his former Brandon student to his class at Ross Lake School. Neil often reminisced that having his class meet someone of the calibre of Dinsdale was one of the rewards of being a teacher.

On summer holidays with his family, he involved his nieces in his grade seven science project. He and the girls spent many hours catching grasshoppers in jam jars and preserving them in tobacco juice. (His brother-in-law obligingly provided the cigarette butts.)

Neil helped start Camp Whitney and spent many of his summer hours there. He served on the Camp Whitney Board before and after his retirement.

Neil's other love in life was the Boy Scout Movement. He helped found the 2nd and 3rd Scout Patrols in Flin Flon during the 1930's. Over the years, he served as Scout Master, Patrol Leader and a District Commissioner.

In the summers, Neil could be found at Camp Whitney helping to run a summer Scout Camp for boys and leaders. Lessons were given in scouting methods, woodlore and first aid.

One former Scout, Gale Lynn, suffered a severe cut while out in the woods on a hunting trip. His companions used the knowledge gained from Neil's first aid class to apply a tourniquet. Lynn still credits Neil with saving his life.

One summer, the boys and leaders took Neil's beret and ran it up to the top of the flagpole at Camp Whitney. When they felt the joke had gone on long enough, they asked Neil what kind of a bird was sitting on top of the flag pole. Neil told this story for years afterwards.

Over the forty years he was active in Scouting, Neil received many awards, including the Distinguished Service and Long Service Bars. In 1965 he was awarded the Silver Acorn by the Governor General of Canada for distinguished services in scouting. Neil was very proud of this award but would joke:

"I guess this officially makes me a nut."

The honour that meant most to Neil was the Neil A. 'Downie' McLennan trophy which was presented to him in 1960 by the Flin Flon Boy Scouts Association in recognition of his twenty-five years of service in the Flin Flon area (1935-1960). This trophy was put up for annual competition for general proficiency among scouts in the Flin Flon district which included Channing, Creighton, Island Falls and Sandy Bay. In later years, after the trophy was retired, it occupied a place of honour in Neil's home at 77 Green Street and was the first thing shown to visitors.

When asked about the nickname Downie, he always claimed:

"It's because of my resemblance to a downy woodpecker. See the down up here."

He would then grin, run a hand over his bald head, and recite an old poem:

"As the organ pealed potatoes,
Lard was rendered by the choir
As the sexton tolled the church bells
Someone set the church on fire
"Holy smokes," the preacher uttered
As in the rush he lost his hair
And now his head resembles heaven
For there is no parting there."

Even after he retired, Neil still showed his concern for children. A strict teetotaler and non-smoker, he believed students should not be exposed to drinking or smoking. His copies of Maclean's would be donated to Hapnot Collegiate with the liquor or cigarette ads either ripped out or with the offending pages glued together.

Neil also spent many hours at Northminster United Church. He served on the Church Board, taught Sunday School and even donated an organ.

Even after he retired, Neil kept busy. He could often be found helping a neighbour or dropping in at Northminster to see if anything needed doing. He would whip out his jackknife and use it to tighten a screw or dig an exasperating dandelion out of a neighbour's lawn. Among his inventions were the first shower at Camp Whitney and a clock rigged up to ring the bell at Ross Lake School. Neil could be found in the Community Hall at the Hobby Club. He served as its president in 1972.

The City of Flin Flon paid to tribute to Neil by awarding him an honorary citizenship in 1974.

Despite all the honours and recognition, a silent enemy dealt him an unbeatable blow and started to destroy his life.

Flinonians began to notice changes in Neil - the worsening absent-mindedness - the sudden aging - the proud-walking straightness bent. People that Neil had taught now looked out for him. It is a tribute to their caring that he functioned independently as long as he did.

In 1980 Neil was hospitalized in the Assiniboine Centre in Brandon, Manitoba. He was diagnosed as having Alzheimer's Disease. He died in June, 1982.

The Flin Flon Teachers Association created the Neil A. McLennan Bursary which was first awarded at the 1982 Hapnot Collegiate graduation. It is awarded to a student who plans to enter education and who has shown a high degree of community involvement. The bursary was first presented by Brian Wallace, his long-time friend and neighbour.

After his death, the residents of the Ross Lake area, led by Milt Laing, requested that the former Ross Lake School be renamed the Neil A. McLennan Building. The building currently serves as the headquarters of the Flin Flon School Division.

The official dedication ceremony was held on June 30, 1983 to coincide with Flin Flon's Fiftieth Anniversary celebrations.

A plaque with Neil's picture and an inscription are displayed in the lobby of the building. The plaque reads:

NEIL A. MCLENNAN
1902-1982

Neil A. McLennan Building
in Honor of
Neil A. McLennan, Teacher and Principal with
The Flin Flon School Division No. 46
September, 1933 to June, 1966
He faithfully served the children and the Community
Dedication Ceremony - June 30, 1983

The building and museum hold tangible memories of this man, but the real memorial is in the memories of the people whose lives he helped to shape.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The author wishes to thank those residents of the Flin Flon area who have shared their memories of Neil McLennan with her.

Glenda Walker-Hobbs

OLD MAN

call him neighbour
 friend, teacher
 but call him Sir

forty years of
 helping,
 inventions
 silent support

assist a child
 build a house
 fix a leak
 bandage a pet

light a campfire
 catch a fish
 take the time
 for cookies and tea

his only enemy:
 age

receding hairline
 encroaching forgetfulness
 the soldier-straightness
 bent

the final bludgeon
 a disease

destroys the dignity
 erodes the mind

man-child now
 generations of this town
 still call him
 Sir

Glenda Walker-Hobbs

he
 who
 cuts
 his own
 firewood
 is warmed
 twice said
 s o m e o n e
 since ancient
 times when man
 first discovered fire it
 has taken the fuel of his own
 body to keep it going and ah the
 powerful warmth as he bends over red
 flames and feels a soothing sensation
 ooze into his cold bones that comfort
 is unchanged in summer heat or autumn drizzle
 when mosquitoes nibble and blackflies blind the
 chainsaw roars and old backs strain under heavy loads
 eyelids roll grinding sawdust over itchy eyeballs and ants
 swim in sweaty shirts home is below the curling smoke
 where oven door invites noses to whiff puffy loaves
 water boils for foamy bathing love waits with
 cosy embrace for whoever makes his own
 fire the task is not a chore but
 a peaceful retreat into the
 past and one's self

WARMED

Myrna Guymer

THREE POEMS BY M. G. STEVENS

MOVING DAY

one grey morning in the mid '30s
 along the north-west slope above Ross Lake
 they came to take away our meagre homes
 roughly hewn log cabins cardboard lined
 soon were loaded onto giant sleighs
 and perilously hauled across the ice
 to be resettled at Mile 84
 safely beyond the powder magazine
 projected by the mining company

today a bustling peripheral highway
 transects a site where pioneers once dwelt
 and mutes the echoes of that bygone time
 when happy children of the pipeline romped
 upon the rocky hills and grassy knolls
 sprawled beside a placid boreal bay

THE ICE WAGON

amid Flin Flon's oppressive heat
 we laid in wait along the dusty streets
 for that special vehicle
 canvas flapping in the wind
 star painted on the door
 with its tell-tale cargo
 water dripping from the tailgate
 silver crystals flashing in the sun
 until
 iron tongs clamped around shiny blocks
 the iceman struggled down the road to fill
 neighbourhood iceboxes
 while we kids scrambled for the elusive chippings
 left by his flying pick
 delectable



MR. BUMBLEBEE

it stood for many years at 73 Green
 a rickety old shack
 tarpapered patterned with stripping
 possessed of a tiny window or two
 tin stovepipe protruding through the roof
 its mysterious occupant rarely seen unknown
 often the subject of morbid curiosity

repeatedly we neighbourhood children were admonished:
 "stay away from the shack!"
 entrenching the conviction that sinister forces
 lurked behind the shiplap door
 of the tiny hut

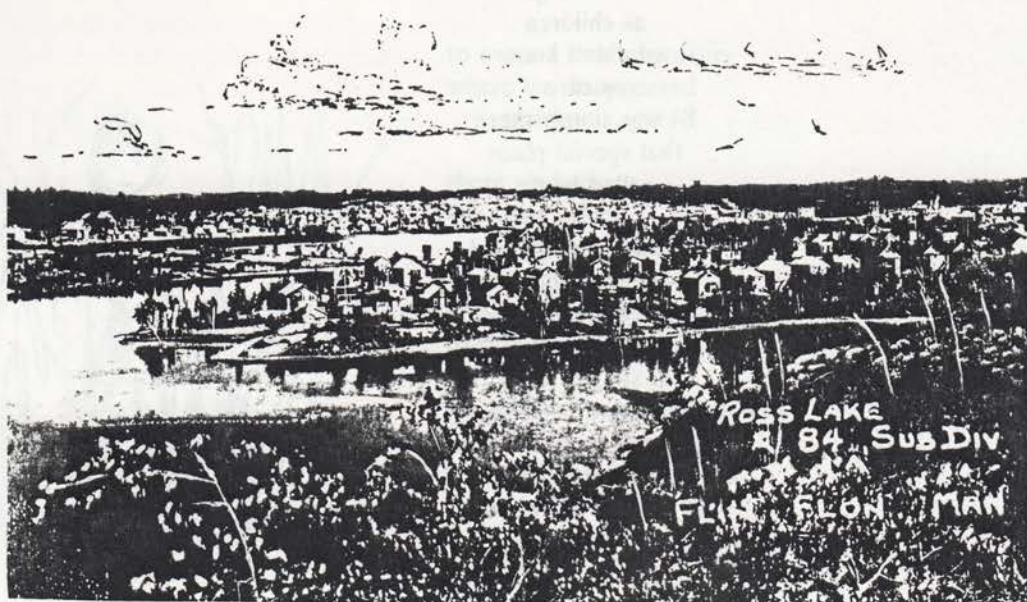
one day the door opened we saw him
 elderly stooped he slowly walked
 to the back of his lot
 retrieved an armful of wood
 turned and smiled

later emboldened to creep closer
 we sat atop a rocky outcrop in his yard
 listened
 to hear melodious humming from within
 in future we were to hear it often
 from our stony parapet

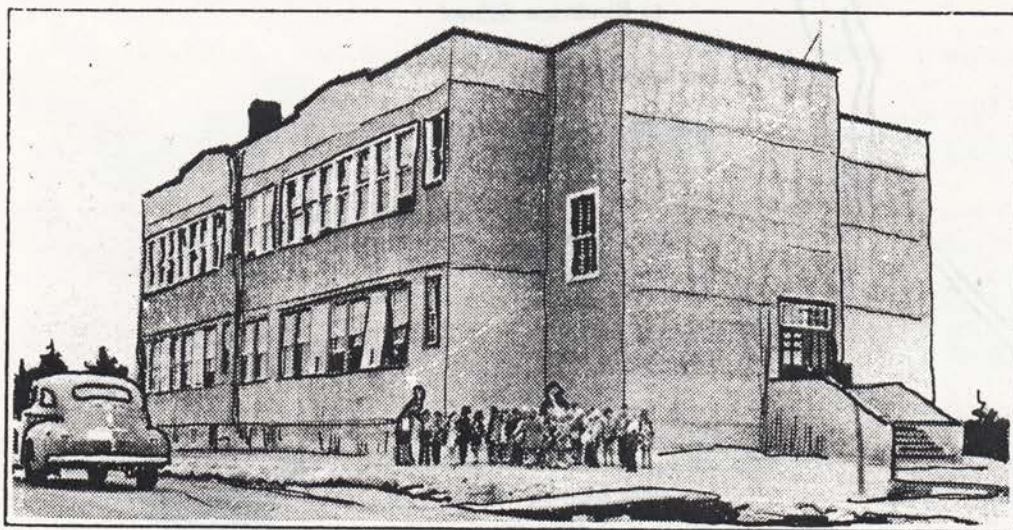
we named him 'Mr. Bumblebee'

a time came when the humming ceased
 the old man disappeared

they finally demolished the decrepit old shack
 all that remained were questions emptiness
 and memories



Ross Lake in foreground, 84 in the distance.



Birchview School. 1945 enrolment was 283 pupils.

MEMORIES OF HOME - FOUR POEMS BY HELEN STROM

MILE 84

84 miles from where?

as children
we didn't know
or care
84 was simply there
that special place
called home

seasons of childhood
swift in the passing
leave memories
lingering long
of simpler days
and gentler ways

when we lived
84 miles from where.



THE LONG MARCH

Autumn colours
rally the troops

we march long blocks
to Birchview School

timorous sixes and sevens

along the way
lives Jack

we fear him more
than anything

they say he will
beat our heads in

hurry the narrow way

days leap
winds sweep
leaves begin to fall

we march
more bravely now
and never do
see Jack at all.



SUMMER PLAY

Disguised as children
we went there
into a shoreline thicket
of green

to enter a land of sorcery
where we disappeared
unseen

there we became
our truer selves
six-gunned and
tough as nails
crossing the rim of reality
to ride the cowboy trails

the old-west was all around us
as real as the sun
with stagecoach chase and
guns ablaze and
outlaws on the run

astride fiery steeds of valour
we posse'd the rustlers-cold
lassoed that son-of-a-sidewinder
who stole old Rusty's gold

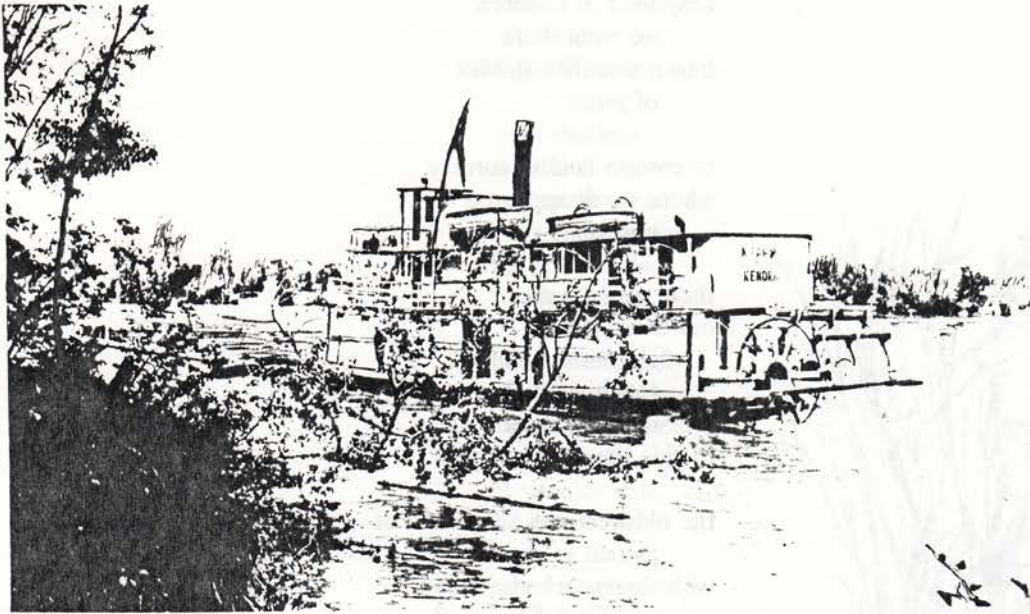
rode tall in the saddle
into town
the boldest of the bold.



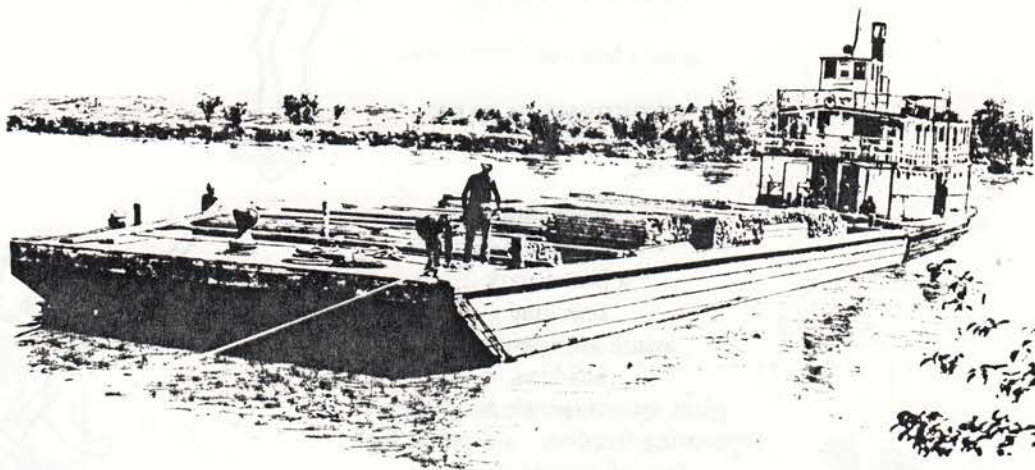
TWEEDSMUIR PARK

I
found
a pastel park
one day
awash with cool blue
shadows
giant spruce gentle wind-sigh
rope-swing-freedom swept me high
face of joy to the sun
lost in an hour of solitude
park
and
child
as one.





Paddle wheeler Nipawin near The Pas. 1929



The Nipawin with barge in front. Loading to travel to Flin Flon. 1929

EARLY COMMERCE IN FLIN FLON

Retailing in the early days of Flin Flon was not a simple matter. Storekeepers could not pick up the phone, place an order and expect to have it delivered the next day. It took much longer and the goods transported were handled several times before they reached their final destination.

In 1926 merchandise was shipped north to The Pas by rail. If it was summer, the goods were loaded onto a large barge attached to a forty-eight by thirteen foot Ross Navigation steamer with a stern paddle wheel.

The first stage of the journey was up the Saskatchewan River and into Cumberland Lake through the Tearing River. After a stop at the old Hudson's Bay post at Cumberland House, the steamer with barge continued on its journey through Sturgeon Lake (or as we know it today, Namew Lake) to the Landing at the mouth of the Sturgeon River. Here the freight was unloaded at Hayes' Stopping Place.

The next stage of the trip was with heavy wagons drawn by teams of horses over a sixteen mile portage made of logs laid over muskeg. This 'corduroy' road followed the Sturgeon River rapids, then branched north-east along the Goose River to Camp Two, located on the south bay of Lake Athapapuskow.

At Camp Two the freight was unloaded from the wagons and onto barges for travel across Athapapuskow, the 'Lake of Many Rocky Islands', through a chain of narrows - Tincan, Mink and Bakers, up Schist Creek, where a channel had been cleared of boulders and into Schist Lake. The barges travelled up to the Northwest Arm, past Mandy Mine, to Ross Creek and into Ross Lake. At that point the freight was again unloaded and hauled to the Mine site by teams of horses.

The freight underwent seven transfers - by rail to The Pas, team, steamer and barge, team, boat and barge, team to the Mine at Flin Flon, the final destination. Many times the transfer was delayed due to rough water on the big lakes.

In the winter the freight was not handled as often. It left The Pas on huge horse-drawn wagons owned by Ross Navigation. The route was more direct and if the snow was not too deep, the ice was solid and the trail well laid out, they made better time. However there was always a waiting period for ice to freeze or break up at the start and end of winter.

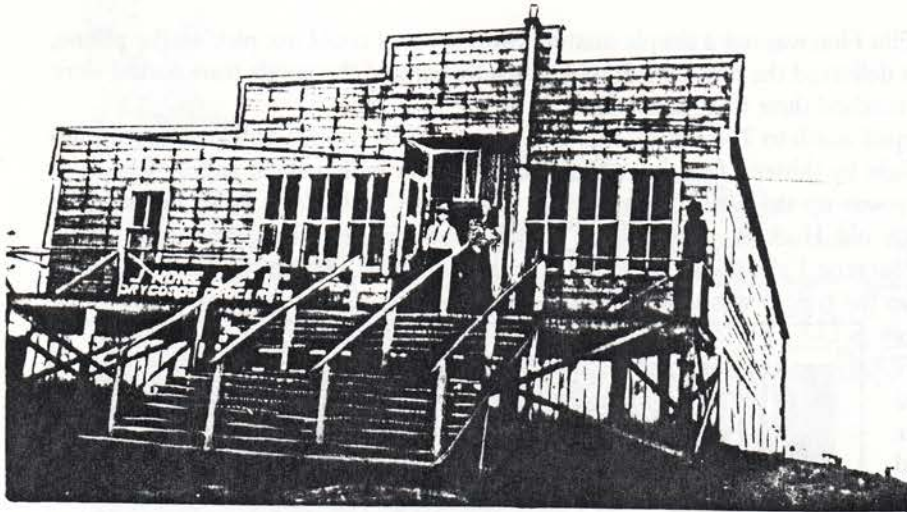
One of the people who received freight in this manner was Jack Hone, who established Flin Flon's first store in September 1926. The store was a little log building that had been erected several years before. Great cracks in the floor gave free access to visiting mice and weasels. A pot-belly stove, which had to be constantly fed, provided the heat.

Jack's wife Louise remembered: "There were dog houses all along one side of the building and Jack took them apart and made benches and things to use in the store."

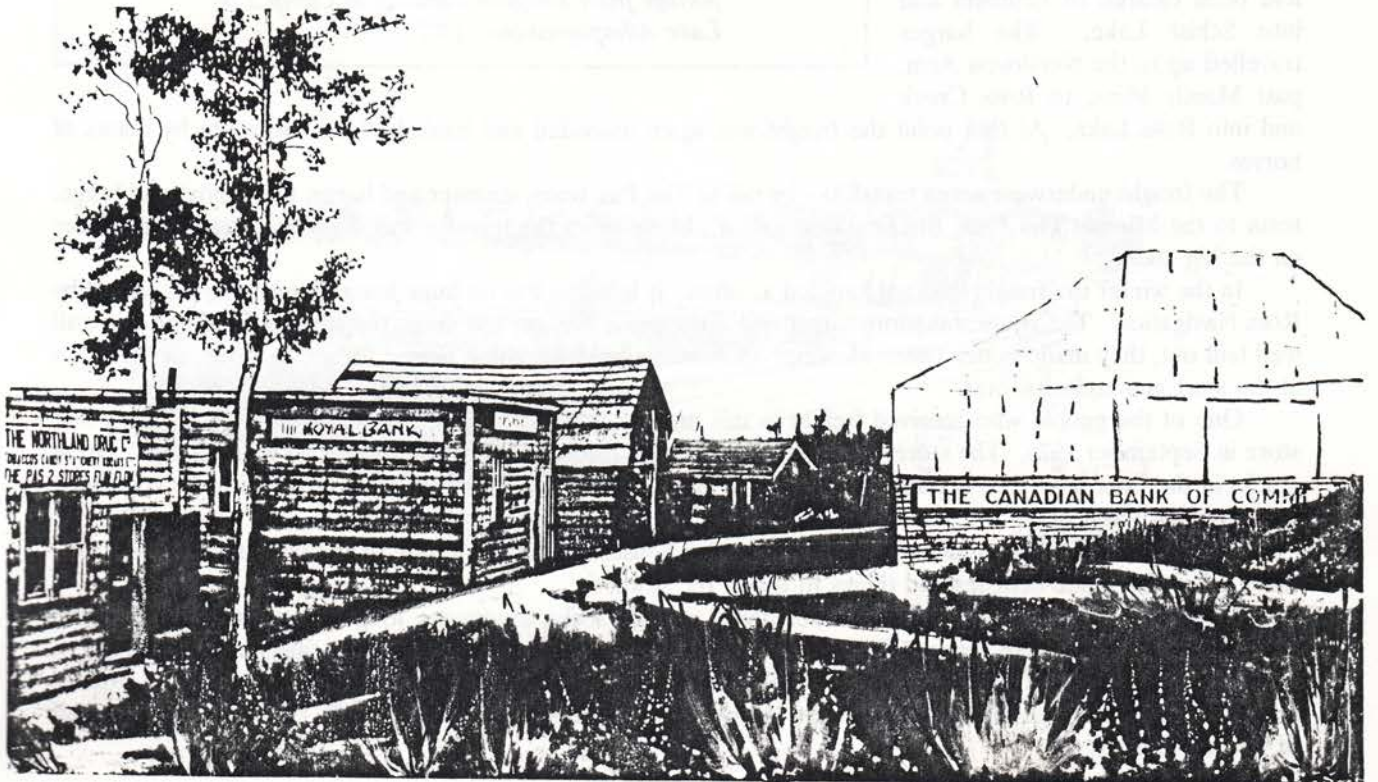
Hone's stock consisted mainly of rubber boots, woollen socks, moccasins, long underwear and eiderdown sleeping robes which were ordered fifty at a time. Since liquor was not permitted for sale on the plant site, it had to be ordered from The Pas in code. Subsequently 'underwear' became a best seller, especially in sizes 26 and 40. Business was good and Jack had few worries as payment was guaranteed by R. H. Channing on behalf of his employees.



Teams of horses carry freight over the 16 mile portage from Sturgeon Landing to Camp 2 on Lake Athapapuskow. 1927



Jack Hone's 'new' store. 1929



View showing The Northland Drug Co.,
The Royal Bank of Canada,
Hone's Store and
The Canadian Bank of Commerce 1929

The following year C. B. Hutchinson of The Pas Northland Drug Company, established a branch store in Flin Flon, managed by druggist Robert Maguire. Hone's store and Northland Drugs were the only two businesses on Company property prior to December 1, 1927.

The Royal Bank of Canada radioed Hone at the mining camp, asking if he could provide temporary accommodations for the bank in his store. J. P. McCurdy arrived in mid-December 1927 with two huge suitcases stating: "I am the manager of the Royal Bank and these two suitcases are full of money. Where's the vault?"

Hone calmly told him, "Put the suitcases under a bunk and join me for coffee." Security was not required - there was no place to go.

On March 19, 1928, A. T. Heyland opened the Canadian Bank of Commerce in a frame-bottom tent opposite the now established Royal Bank and Northland Drugs, south of the old Company office, along the shore of Flin Flon Lake.



The sinking of the North Main Shaft (centre) with Hone's Store to the right. Tents housed the construction workers. Flin Flon Lake can be seen at the extreme left. 1929

Excavation and construction at the mine began the following spring, and Hone's little log store, situated on the site of the proposed North Main Shaft, had to be relocated. He erected a new store built of lumber, just west of the staffhouse - across from the little parking lot behind the carpenter shop. Hone had hired George Sanford, Fred Hollier, Pat and Mel Lamont, and Don Hay who was the accountant.



*Beginning of the sinking of North Main Shaft
- Just out the front door of Jack Hone's log
store. 1929*



The Northland Drug Co. 1929

The two banks, also forced to move from the shaft sinking area, were later dragged by Lin tractor to their new site west of Hone's larger store.

The Northland Drugs was relocated on Main Street, north of the Royal Hotel. Bob Maguire remained with the drugstore until October 1932 when he opened his own business - the Copper Drugs.

The survey of business lots by the Community Development Company was completed in late 1929, and all businesses on Company property were required to move.

Jack Hone sold his store to O. H. 'Pat' Lamont and Company, who dismantled it and rebuilt at 96 Main Street.

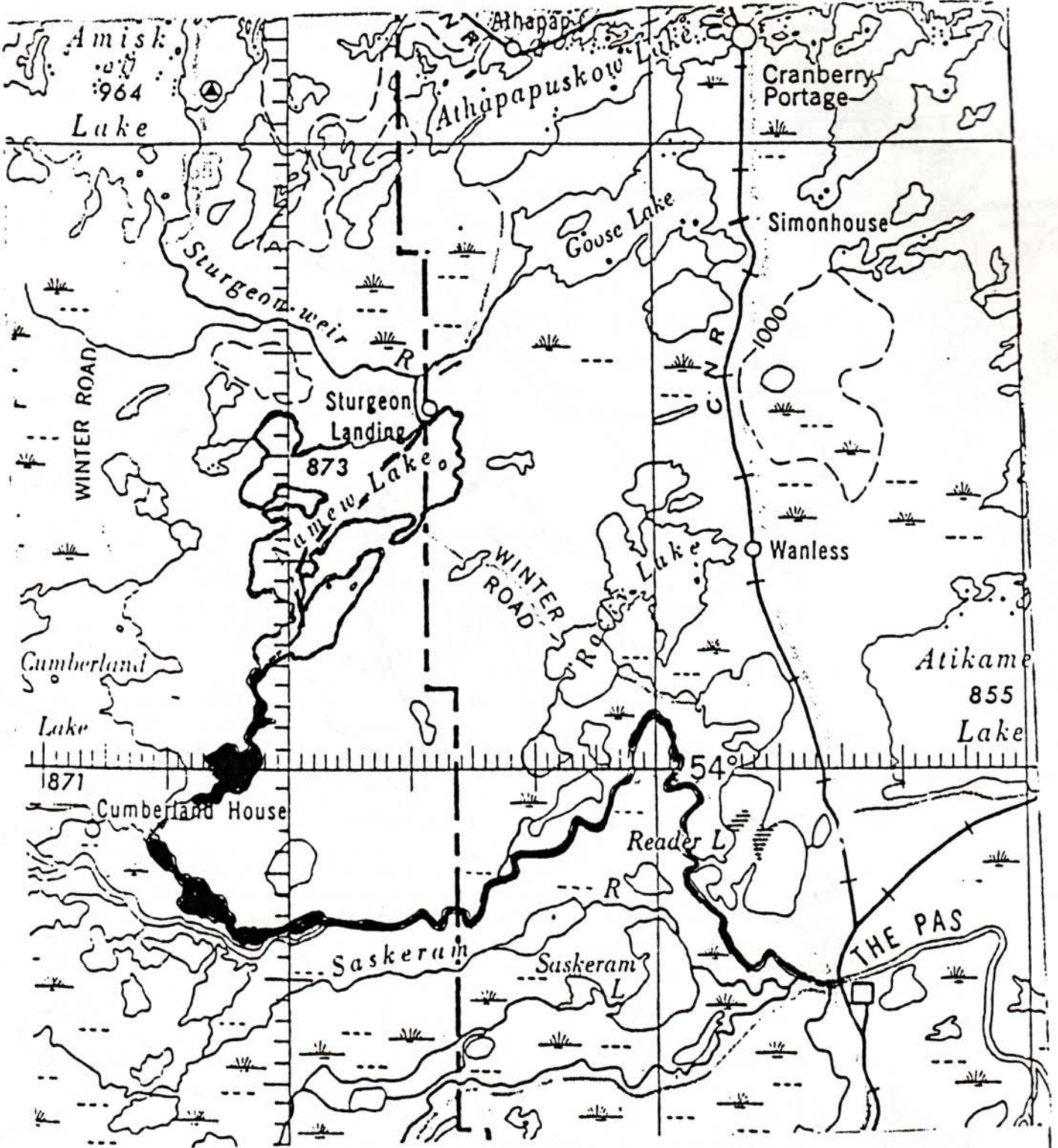
The Canadian Bank of Commerce, still operating out of a tent, built a new structure on Main Street, two doors south of the Northland Drug Store. Tommy Heyland stayed on as manager until his death on July 30, 1952.

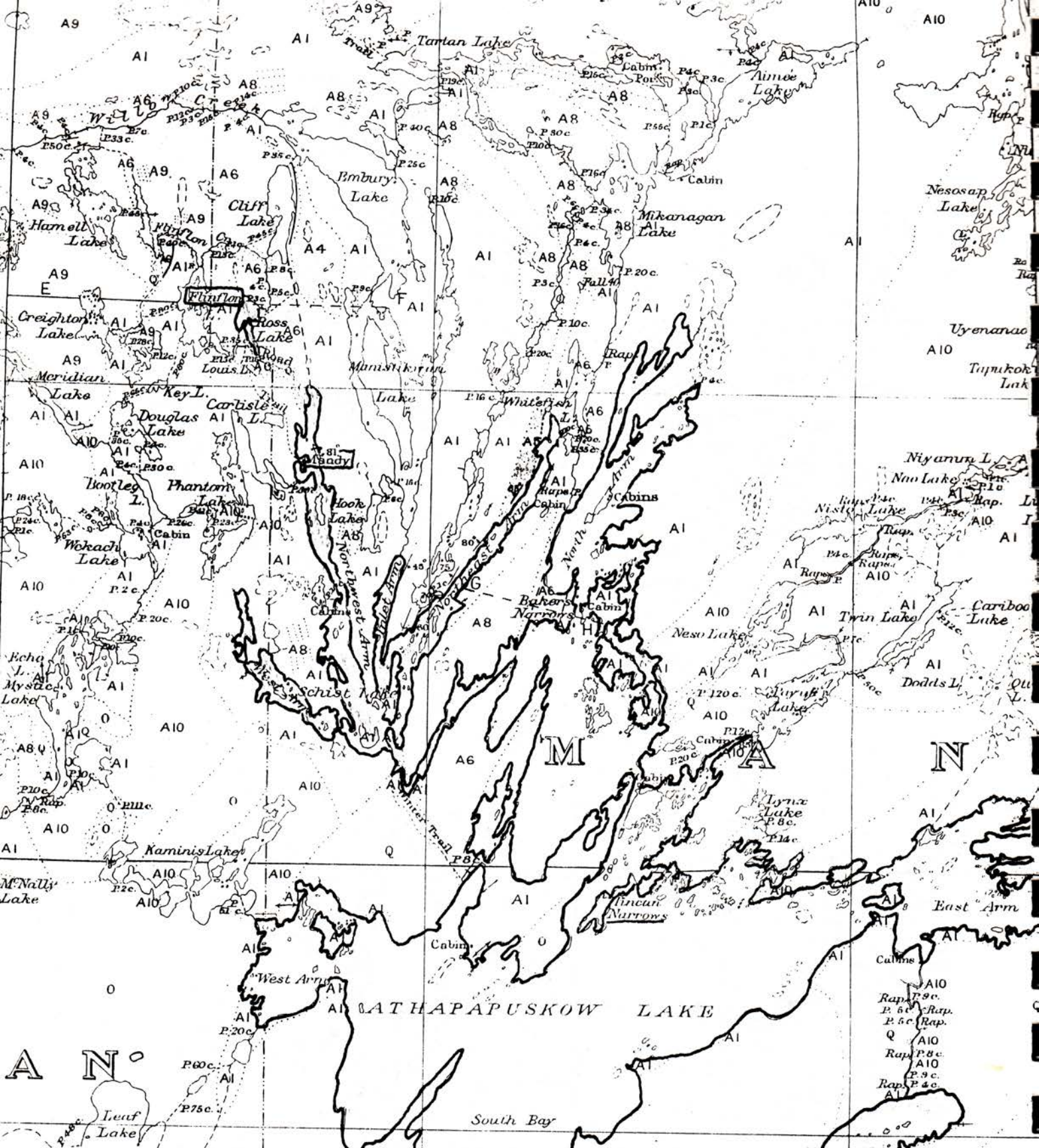
The Royal Bank moved its building to the corner of Main Street and Second Avenue, the site it presently occupies. It was given a cover of shiplap siding and a coat of paint. In October of 1929, Otto Bergman arrived to assume the position of manager. He held this post until his retirement in 1962.

By 1937 the Royal Bank had grown enough to warrant the construction of a new building. The old bank was sold to Harold Leask for \$300.00 and moved to its final resting place, a warehouse in the industrial area.

Of the four original business, Hone's, Northland Drugs, the Royal Bank and the Canadian Bank of Commerce, the two banks are the only ones to remain in business in the same location as they were in 1929. Not a bad average.

Joyce Henderson





Canada
Department of Mines

M. MARTIN BURRELL, MINISTER; R.G.M^cCONNELL, DEPUTY MINISTER

GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

WILLIAM M^cINNES, DIRECTING GEOLOGIST

Issued 1919

FOUR WORKING WOMEN

Today it takes less than three hours to drive from Flin Flon to The Pas and back. In 1926 it took three days to travel from The Pas to the Flin Flon property over a passage of waterways.

One of the first working women to make this trip was Louise Hone. She was born Louise Anne Bestard April 21, 1902 at Harding near Brandon, Manitoba. She received her teaching certificate through Brandon College. When she was twenty-two she was offered a teaching position at Herb Lake, but her parents had heard stories about the Wild North and only consented to her going if her cousin, who was also a teacher, went with her.

Louise remembered being told by the people who hired them: "We should decide between ourselves who was going to teach. They could give us one salary only - fifty dollars. So we both taught up there for one year for fifty dollars, twenty-five dollars each."

It was during her year at Herb Lake that Louise met Jack Hone, who was operating a fur trading post. He gave Louise her first dog sled ride. They fell in love and were married on September 10, 1926.

Jack had been granted permission to open a store on the Flin Flon property, and shortly after the wedding he left Louise in The Pas while he went on ahead. Louise followed later with Jenny Lamb and Jenny's nine month old daughter, Sheila. They followed the same route as the freight for Jack's store.

They left The Pas on one of the Ross Navigation boats. There were cabins, a dining room and even a cook on this boat, so the trip up the Saskatchewan River to Cumberland House, an old fur trading post, was made in relative comfort.

On the rough corduroy portage along the Sturgeon River rapids and the Goose River, Louise was piqued to find herself treated like fragile goods:

"We were tied on the bed springs that were on the wagon - this was our stuff going up - our personal things, and I was very indignant to be tied on the load. I came from a farm and I knew about driving horses and riding them and things other than nice soft seats."

However, they arrived at the Flin Flon camp safe and sound, along with thirty dozen eggs Louise had carefully guarded on her three-day trip. The men also delivered the Lambs' baby carriage to the store - a joke they played on the newly-wed couple.

Jack and Louise ran the store until 1930, when Jack turned his skills to operating a flying service out of Schist Lake, and sold the store to his partner, Pat Lamont. The Hones spent the rest of their lives in the North, in Wabowden, Sherridon, Cold Lake and The Pas, where Jack eventually opened a sporting goods store. Jack passed away in November 1976 and Louise in December 1984.

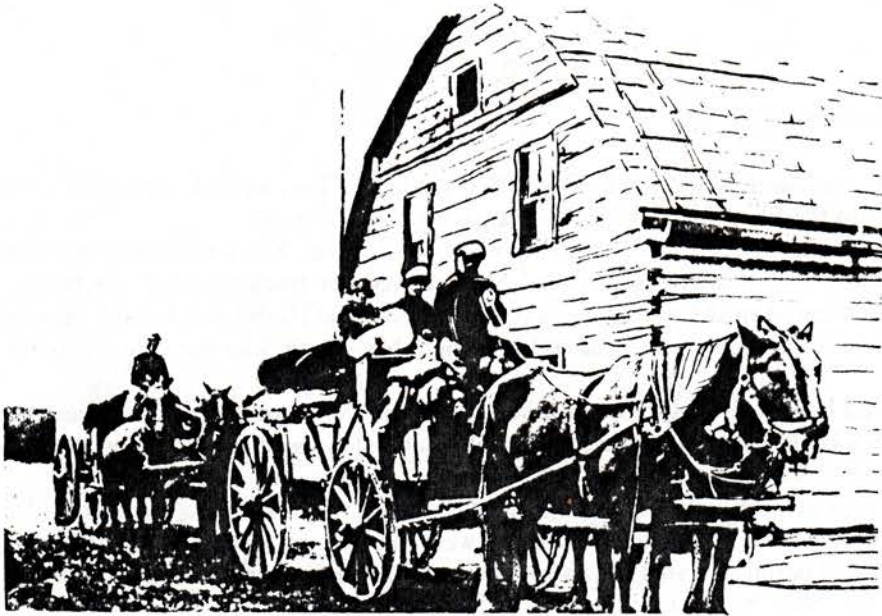
The first female stenographer at Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting, was 'Babs' Ballantyne McCormick, a pert, dark-haired Scottish-born lass who came to Canada with her family when she was six years old. She rode the first train to Flin Flon in October 1928 to visit her two brothers who were working for Jack Callinan.

The train ride was more like a ride on a roller coaster than a railroad. She was amazed to see the engine almost meet the caboose on hairpin curves.

While in Flin Flon, Babs found her talents as a stenographer could be put to use. The only other steno in the camp was Charlie Spence who handled all of the General Superintendent, W.A. Green's correspondence. Babs hired on with the Engineering Department on November 27, 1928 at \$45.00 a month.

Babs was a very popular girl and was encouraged to enter the 1929 Queen Contest, part of the The Pas Winter Carnival. Points obtained from selling tickets won her the title of Queen for 1929 - Babs had a total of 202,777 ballots, each vote having cost a penny. Being one of the few single women in the area, the men had rallied behind her. This was the year Emil St. Godard won the gruelling 200 mile dog race, non-stop from The Pas to Flin Flon and back.

Babs lived with her brothers on Callinan Point on Flin Flon Lake, until she moved into the newly renovated Ladies Staff House. This building had been Tom Creighton's storage shed and contained a kitchen, living room and a lean-to bedroom. Two planks lead to the outhouse, perched like a teeter totter on the rocks behind the building. This was soon replaced by an indoor flusher. Babs shared these accommodations with Lila Judd until September 1930 when she returned to Weyburn, Saskatchewan.



*Louise Hone and Jenny Lamb with baby Sheila,
on the way to Flin Flon over the 16 miles
portage - September 1926*



Louise Hone, member of Flin Flon 27 Club. 1951



*Babs McCormack, Queen of The Pas
Winter Carnival 1929.*



Ladies Staffhouse 1929



*The Pas Winter Carnvial Queen
and her Court 1929. Babs in centre with
Chaperone "Ma" Bell to her right.*

Lila Mariah Judd, five foot two, with black hair and flashing grey eyes, hailed from Portage la Prairie. A newspaper article about job opportunities in the North prompted her to write to The Pas, and she was offered an office job in a general store.

Lila claimed the train trip from Portage la Prairie to The Pas 'spoiled two days'. "You got on at noon and travelled all night until six o'clock the next morning. I just got into bed. They shook you to pieces all the way up. I was sick on every turn - it was an awful trip."

When she arrived at The Pas she found her job far from ideal. "Oh what a place to work," she said. "He (Mr. Sclow) hadn't opened an envelope in the office for ten years. Everything was a jumble. I don't like writing by hand - if he had a typewriter to do all that stuff I would have been fine. Anyway I was just getting ready to head back home again and sit on the farm, when Bill Hughes came and said he had an opening - typing at the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company Office [then based in The Pas] - so on December 10, 1929 I moved over." This was four days before her twenty-sixth birthday.

"It was an interesting office in The Pas. Everybody had to come there before they could get on the train. They had to get permission through the radio - there was no wire system at that time - no telegraph. As soon as the railroad took over on July 27, 1930, we closed the office in The Pas.

"Mr Hughes put me on the train [to Flin Flon]. I was on as a cook so I came up free. It took from six in the morning until nine at night. That spoiled another whole day. We stopped at everything. Even the conductor Mr. Anderson, got off at one place and picked wild strawberries. At Cranberry, a booming place at that time, the conductor said, 'You have half an hour to get lunch.' So we flew off the train over to this place to eat; they had good food but we bolted it down and flew back to the train. Two hours later we were still sitting there.

"For a change of scenery I would go back to the baggage car and sit on my newly purchased typewriter box. After we left Cranberry the brakee, Mr Marsden, put me in the cupola in the caboose; boy, was that a good place to sit. You would think that the engine and you were going to shake hands. It was really a wild trip."

In Flin Flon Lila was Warehouse stenographer. Her hours were 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., seven days a week. Her salary was \$125.00, \$75.00 of this was docked for Staff House room and board.

In September 1937 Lila married Harvey Stevens, an employee of Lamont's (formerly Hone's) store. Lila continued to work until the birth of their first child, but her employment did not stop there. She was called back every time there was a special job to do. She left the Company a total of twelve times before she was officially pensioned in 1966. Lila still resides in Flin Flon.

While Lila was working in The Pas, Dr. Stephan Stephansson asked her if she knew of a nurse who would be willing to go to Flin Flon to work in the hospital there. Lila replied that her younger sister Irene was a nurse.



Lila (left) and Irene Judd



Company Hospital 1929-1930

Irene Florence Judd recalled: "I had my trunk all packed. I was going back to Sioux Lookout where I had been nursing. I got the wire on Friday and had to leave Saturday. That was the beginning of June 1929. I stayed overnight with Lila when I got to The Pas, then came up on the night train with Bob and Mrs. Maguire. He was the druggist here then. The next day I went to the hospital where I met Dr. Guttormsson and I stayed at their place the first week. Then I moved to the nurse's residence, Room Five in the Company Hospital." The twenty-four year old Irene (nicknamed Judy) was Flin Flon's first resident nurse.

That spring an act of Legislative Assembly was passed making compulsory, inoculation for typhoid and vaccination for smallpox. Henry Montagnes, the radio operator, noted in his diary on the 25th of June: "The par doctor and nurse were swamped today. They have done over one hundred patients since supper time. Another doctor is coming up the first of next month to help out. There are about 1400 men on the payroll. The doctor told me he has to make a physical examination of every man also."

Irene and the Doctor had additional problems when some of the big husky men fainted after taking one look at the needle.

Irene remembered the first operation in the Hospital. A young man working on the Lang and Ross Transmission Line to Island Falls, had his arm amputated at the elbow when it was partially blown off by an explosion. He had been trying to scare off a bear and lit a stick of dynamite to throw at it. The stick caught in the man's glove and went off.

Accidents were common at night, as construction was carried out under huge flood lights. There were also stabbings, usually from drunken brawls. Sometimes it would be in the small hours of the morning before Irene got to bed.

Irene worked at the Hospital for about eight months then returned to Sioux Lookout until her marriage to David "Mac" McGilvray in November 1930. She and Mac, who had been with the Company since 1926, set up house on Company property.

Irene returned to "Special" nursing during World War II when nurses were in short supply. She continued this practice until Mac retired in 1966. Irene is now widowed and resides in Winnipeg, spending some of the summer months in Flin Flon visiting her daughter.

These four women who came North to earn a living, were not rich or famous, and two of them did not reside in Flin Flon for a long period of time. However they, together with wives and mothers, all helped lay the foundations of Flin Flon.

Joyce Henderson

NORTHERN REFLECTIONS - FOUR POEMS

by
Glenda Walker-Hobbs

SONG OF SOLITUDE

rocks
lake
untouched by man
song of solitude
song of the loon

man
hurts
runs
log cabin built
song of solitude
song of pain

song of the loon
prayer of the soul
songs of solitude
psalms of the heart

SPELL OF THE STACK

825 feet
guard
dominate
the city
a landscape

a Spell
of fear
fascination

this column
dictates
regulates
movement of ore
pollution,
life, birth, death

its shadow
engulfs
those
who live beyond the shafts

smoke fingers
beckon, titillate,
crush with vapour demons

WHITEFISH MEDITATIONS

we walk by rapids
 watch water hesitate
 by a beaver dam,
 hurl itself over rocks
 into spray curls

we kneel by a stone fireplace
 watch sunset across a lake
 beaver guerrillas glide
 through green-black waters,
 disappear with slap of tail

tree sentinels disappear

embers
 reflect warmth of
 friendship
 coffee
 shared in one small room

stars watch our sayonaras
 we know not when we meet again

white enemy conquers,
 obliterates Precambrian rock
 snow-covered lake
 Rocky Mountains
 Ursa Major, Orion
 witness

wordless bridges
 between friends



WRITER'S BLOCK

thoughts
 like black butterflies
 struggle
 to escape
 the dormant winter
 of my mind

concrete blocks and rusty cans
 lie
 half-hidden
 in the murky creek

a red-winged blackbird
 rasps
 its rusty cry
 a chain saw

shatters my solitude

AFTERWORD

We hope you have enjoyed this glimpse of our community as seen through the eyes of members of the Flin Flon Writers Guild. These are but a few stories. No doubt there are many others waiting to be told.

Members of the Guild are not professional writers. They are men and women who have developed their writing skills with the encouragement and support of their fellow members.

The Flin Flon Writers Guild meets the second Wednesday of each month, except during the summer, downstairs in the Flin Flon Public Library. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in writing.

H. C. Hobbs
President
Flin Flon Writers Guild.

