

A SESSIPPI VILLAGE

The Asessippi Saw Mill

The Shell River Colonization company had located in the Parkland Belt of Manitoba. Parkland is usually of scrub, poplar, and scrub oak, but the Shell River drains the land between the morainic uplands of Riding and Duck Mountains, which have fairly good stands of spruce, fir, and jack pine as well.

The belt of woods containing merchantable timber may be said to commence at Riding Mountain, extending westerly to Duck Mountain and the Pasquia and Porcupine Hills crossing the Saskatchewan a little north of Prince Albert and covering in a great measure the watershed between the Beaver and Saskatchewan Rivers and passing to the northwest along this line, including large tracts of prairie country in the Peace River District...

The character of the timber throughout the portions of the Territories which may be classed as timber land, and including the sections on the head waters of the Saskatchewan and Athabaska, consists of fir. In other portions of the Territories – that is to say, distributed over what may be considered more properly the prairie region – the timber is principally poplar, but in many parts is of excellent quality, fit for making lumber. No true pine is to be found in the Territories; but the construction of the Pacific Railway will enable a supply of building material be brought from the country between the Red River and Lake Superior for the purposes of house finishing.¹

But Asessippi, in 1883, was still three years and sixteen miles away from railway connections. Timber was needed for lumber, so the early settlers had to make do with what trees were available.

The surveyors had found that in Township 23, Range 28 “The Shell River runs ... in a valley more than a mile wide with banks 200 and 300 feet high and clothed with thrifty poplars.”² Township 24-28 had only timber along the Shell and some burnt timber and windfall in the northeast.

The balance of townships on the Shell up to Township 29-28 had small poplar and scattered timber. Settlers could get timber to the east, but this necessitated hauling by team and sleighs. Township 24-27 was “all timber, the land is good ... McKay’s trail

passes through about the centre of the township.”³ This is the township of C.A.

Boulton’s timber berth. Trails ran from here north and the settlers did use them, for the surveyors in 1903 and 1904 reported little timber left, and that only in isolated swamps, or being cut by Hanbury of Brandon.

There had been considerable activity in the timber district of Shell River, and several berths were being worked on the Bird Tail River and in Riding Mountain. Parcel No. 1 of the Shell River District was issued June 23, 1880 to Peter McLaren of Perth, Ontario, who was part of the group of Ontario timbermen of John Shields, John Haggart, Thomas Nicol. A Mr. T.R. Stevenson had also applied for a berth of 100 square miles on Boggy Creek, but due to confusion about big or little Boggy Creek, and poor versus good timber, it was assigned to H.B. Mitchell of Shellmouth by 1885 (see map). He moved to Millwood, and also cut timber on Berths 26, 26A and 26B, and 48.

C.A. Boulton of Shell River and Shellmouth had been granted a license to cut timber in Townships 24, Rge. 27 and Twp. 24-28 east of the Shell (see map) in 1881, for a ground rent of \$5.00 per square mile and 5% Royalty on sales of all products of the berth. Cutting on this berth was to conflict in Tp. 24-28 with the later Shell River Colonization grant for settlement, and so the berth was cancelled after 1884.

In the indenture between the Crown and the Shell River Colonization Company, section 14 states:

The Company may, subject to such regulations as may be established in that behalf by the Governor in Council and without payment of dues, cut timber upon the lands forming the subject of this agreement for the *bona fide* building purposes of the two settlers per section required to be placed by the Company as herein provided, and also a sufficient quantity of firewood for the *bona fide* use of the settlers of the tract. And the Company may, subject to the regulations as aforesaid and to payment of such dues as may be fixed in that behalf by the Governor in Council, cut timber upon the said lands for all *bona fide* building purposes within the tract of land forming the subject of this agreement...⁴

A breach of this clause could cause the termination of the agreement with the Crown as to the settlement scheme.

The year following the signing of the colonization agreement the Crown also granted a license to the company to cut timber on a forty-eight square mile berth, on the west half Tp. 30 Rge. 21 and all Tp. 30, Rge. 22 W1, excepting sections 8, 11, 26, 29 in each townships.⁵ This berth was on the east slope of the Duck Mountain, with the drainage flowing east towards Lake Winnipegosis. This area, north of present day Ethelbert, had only muskeg, grass, and scattered bluffs of spruce and tamarac. Some of this was cut for ties during the railway construction of 1898 in the area, but in 1883 it was too out of the way for the Shell River Colony, so the berth was cancelled by Order-in-Council, July 18, 1887.

Using local trees and likely purchased logs, the Company did quickly establish lumber manufacture, as seen by the reports of the Colonization Company Inspector.

In 1883 he states that a portable saw mill had been in active operation “for some length of time past”⁶ and that the Shell was an easy and cheap way of procuring the logs. The Company was putting in a turbine to run the saw mill, and had “one million feet of logs ready to be sawed lying in the river,”⁷ and a planing mill. In 1884 the Inspector reports “a considerable quantity of lumber has been sawn, sufficient for the settlers, and the neighbourhood, which is sold at reasonable prices ... and also a Shingle Factory where fair prices are charged.”⁸ The saw and shingle mill were still in working order in 1886. The 1887 report states:

A new saw mill, fitted to cut 10,000 feet board measure per day is about completed and is fitted up with lath, shingle and other machinery requisite in a well appointed establishment to meet the wants of the people in that section of the country, but I am informed that there is likely to be difficulty in procuring logs to operate the mill, in the future, which if such be the case will be a serious thing for the settlers resident within a large section of country, of which Asessippi is the recognized centre. The size of the saw mill is 38 x 55 feet, power water turbine wheel – 62 inch saw. About 100,000 feet of excellent lumber suitable to the requirements for the settlement, have already been turned out here, by the old mill, up the presentative. The prices per M have

been \$20.00 for 1st class and a much lower rate for inferior grades. Shingles are sold at \$2.50 and \$3.00 per M.

It, therefore, is my opinion it would be a hardship to this section of Manitoba if this local industry were under almost any circumstances to be unnecessarily hampered in any way. To the progress of this district, it is without doubt a most important factor.⁹

The Company had expended \$5,000 for the saw mill, and \$2,000 on a furniture factory,¹⁰ reported also as being a pump and cabinet factory.¹¹ To keep these supplied arrangements were made to survey timber berths near the Shell River. Much of the land has been worked over for timber, but by 1889 R.J. Jephson of Wolverine, N.W.T., had been able to survey Timber Berths 27, 27A, 29B, 28, and 28A (see map). License #140 was issued April 30, 1890 to David Gilmour, James Richardson and Henry Gill. In October of that year John F. Wooley replaced David Gilmour and the three local men, the Asessippi Milling and Manufacturing Company, continued operations until 1899.¹² According to Jephson the 47 1/16 sq. mi. of berths could yield about 91,000 to 96,000 logs. The Company did manufacture 785,804 board feet of lumber, and 5,750 feet of lath, and there were still logs to sell to J.A. Christie, and later John Hanbury at the Brandon Mill. Hanbury worked Berths 27A to about 1906, but the other berths were relinquished between 1899 and 1903.

The accompanying chart shows the production and sales reported each year. The price per thousand board feet varied from \$15.19 to \$8.77, the later price being for some fairly old lumber. The greatest sale period was that of 1892-94, when the last houses were being built in Asessippi, and the laths, which sold in 1892 for \$4.00 a thousand feet, were likely used in the Worley House, build in 1890, or to refinish the Hotel interior.

W.F. Baker, the original promoter of the area, ran the portable saw.¹³ Then the Shell River Colonization Company, under Henry Gill, likely had a succession of people operating the turbine-run saw. The new saw and machinery of 1887 continued in

operation, and in 1893 John Pettigrew is listed as the sawyer, and Fred Richardson the foreman.¹⁴ John Worley attempted to keep the operation going after 1899, but it is doubtful if any sawing had been done since 1894. Some old-timers mention the machinery went to Brandon, to Hanbury's mill, but this has not been confirmed. Log drives still came down the Shell until 1911, passing Asessippi on their way to Brandon. The building (see accompanying diagram and photo) was likely dismantled soon after 1900. Reports tell of a turbine still embedded in the east bank, north of the bridge. This would need to be confirmed by later exploratory excavations, and could serve as the beginning for reconstruction as part of the village of Asessippi.

Part B
Asessippi Mill
September 1969

At the time Part A was written, this researcher had to reconcile reports of a vertical water wheel with the reports that a turbine was the motive power for the Asessippi or Shell River Roller Process Flour Mill. Since then an interview with Fraser McLennan of Russell, son of the last owner of the mill, plus a week's excavation has brought new evidence.

The mill was run by a turbine, which is still in the channel cut on the west bank of the Shell River. The turbine is approximately 4' 5" in diameter, and is at the bottom of a 56" shaft, whose exposed top gear was the clue to its location. The water, entering from the channel to the north, passed the control structure and struck the 13" high vanes, causing them to move and make the shaft rotate. The twelve curved vanes produced 40-50 horsepower, which turned a main upright shaft, with power transmitted to the machinery by belts and shafts (see photos and diagrams).

The building can be examined in more detail from the accompanying photographs and the drawings that have been composed from them and from foundation measurements at the mill site. It appears that the mill, which was in the process of being dismantled in 1913, had been vertically sided with board and batten, and was shingled with the uneven Asessippi shingles. The windows have the same style of casing as other buildings, but have six panes top and bottom (in contrast to the usual four). It must have been fairly dark in the second storey, for it only has three windows, two on the east and one on the south side. The small one under the eaves on the west side would have given some illumination to the upstairs of the fanning operation.

The grain was brought in bags and emptied into a bin inside the west door. It was raised by elevator and cleaned in the fanning mill upstairs (note ventilator on the

roof), and by a hammer-on-a-rotating-drum cleaning screen. It then was given its first break through the mill stones, which likely sat near the power shaft, to the right of the south door. The grits then were passed through the rollers that sat along the north wall on the main floor and the meal was elevated to the upstairs for bolting and bagging. The bran and shorts were often kept as part of the price of grinding and the bins for them were in the back part of the west shed. The materials were moved by wooden slats on a belt and by horizontal screws made with wooden shovels set in a spiral down the shaft (see diagrams of machinery).

The east end shed, with its elevator shaft visible on the end wall, was the chop house. Here the second set of stones were used for grinding oats or barley for cattle feed. This, according to the 1884 advertisement, was only done on Fridays.

The mill, which was built and improved at the height of the mill-building scramble¹⁵ was, as previously mentioned, soon to suffer from competition of large merchant mills.¹⁶ These, with their greater volume of business, could put flour into the area at a lower price, while Asessippi lacked the railway for shipping their produce.

The mill did continue to serve the area until 1911. People from west of Dauphin and Grandview came over the Russell trail to get gristing done at Asessippi, and there are newspaper reports of grinding corn for the lumber camps in the Duck Mountains. The corn was hauled from Russell railway station, ground and taken on to the Duck Mountain area, likely by team and sleighs.¹⁷

The Asessippi Milling Co. had problems in maintaining water for their power. The dam (see photos) was washed out by spring ice several times, one of the times being 1893. At that time the Shell River Municipality granted them money to rebuild the dam, the money coming from the sale of debentures, which would be paid back from local taxation. In return the Company conceded the following advantages, set down in Bylaw 116:

1. The construction and keeping in a good and serviceable condition for industrial power a solid and substantial dam with a head at least twelve feet and having a waste weir gate twelve feet in width.
2. A maximum charge to resident ratepayers of the municipality of ten cents for each bushel of wheat gristed or for each bag of grain chopped.
3. A free site to any one person, firm or corporation that will erect a building for industrial purposes requiring machinery power with convenient access thereto on the west side of the Shell river between the mill dam and the iron bridge commencing at a point fifty feet east of the south east corner of the present grist mill, thence southerly one hundred feet, thence easterly to the Shell River forty feet, thence northerly one hundred feet to the dam, thence westerly forty feet to starting point.
4. A supply of water power from said dam to operate such industrial machinery for the use of such mill or industrial enterprise of a minimum volume equal to the maximum single power utilized by the said parties of the first part during the months of May, June, July, August, September and October, and all the surplus water power not required to operate the grist mill during the remaining six months of the year provided that the said parties of the second part or their assigns utilize said power for a manufacturing industry operating plant and buildings of a value of not less than three thousand dollars.¹⁸

Even with this aid, business declined, and the assessment was lowered on the mill property to \$2,500 and the land assessed to J.F. Worley.¹⁹ The municipal taxes each year paid off the debentures. The mill finally was bought by Thomas McLennan, the Reeve, and was operated until the dam was damaged in 1911. The balance of the mills' history is contained in Part A.

The Asessippi Store

This building was another focus of the village and community life. Prior to its construction supplies had to be freighted from Fort Ellice (at St. Lazare) on the Assiniboine, from Fort Pelly (on the upper Assiniboine), from Moosomin, after 1882, or from small towns east along the North Saskatchewan Trail. William Deumark had set up a store on this homestead on 22-21-28 in 1881 and brought his supplies in by steamboat to Shellmouth.²⁰ This store was on the Shell River Trail, and became Shell River Post Office, but Russell, with the railroad, in 1886 took it over. Shellmouth was also a good trading centre, but Asessippi had the advantage of being on one of the Shell River crossings of the Pelly Trail which served the territory north to Duck Mountain. Therefore, its location, plus the mill, drew trade to its counters.

Mr. W.F. Baker had set up the first store on section 3-28-29, the present site:

The said William F. Baker had a store upon the said section well supplied with goods suitable for settlers and the Company has secured by subsidy the establishment of a weekly line of stage from Moosomin to "Asessippi" the name given to the proposed town.²¹

The same petition also lists "a store and post office with a Public Hall above, at a cost of \$1,400."²²

Rufus Stephenson had reported that:

In connection with this Colony there is a store well stocked with all the staple articles – dry goods, groceries, and hardware requisite for the Colonists who are supplied these at as low a price and in some cases, at even lower prices than the same quality of goods are obtainable at many of the points further south.²³

Freighting goods in from the C.P.R. to it also provided extra employment for those with teams.

The Town Hall, or upstairs part of the store, was built free of charge for the municipality.²⁴ It was the meeting place for the Reeve and Council of Shell River

Municipality for several years, and the Court of Revision for municipal taxes usually met there. The building also served as a hall for church services. The store and stopping place were a great accommodation to the many who visited or resided in that section of the country.²⁵

Henry Gill was the postmaster and land agent, and his sons, John A. (Jack) and A.B. (Doc.), ran the store after W. Baker. They became Gill & Co., as can be seen in the accompanying photograph. They kept the store and post office until 1903, when they moved north to Roblin on the new railway line.

The store was a supply centre, but it also was a trading centre for furs and fish. The Indians and Metis that lived on the flats at the mouth of Bear Creek traded there, and an advertisement reads:

J.A. GILL
GENERAL MERCHANT
complete stock of goods always on
hand at lowest prices.
Highest Prices paid for furs.
We are always up to the Times.
Asessippi²⁶

After the Gills moved, the store and post office were then operated by Thomas McLennan until 1914, when they were closed due to financial problems in the community.²⁷

The building sat vacant for several years, and was finally torn down and the lumber used for buildings around the Amice Robin homestead. The foundation is still there, west of the mill site, and measures 20' x 40' with a back extension 14' x 20'9". The photo of Gill & Co. shows a shed to the west also, which was likely for storage. The store was distinctive in that it had a large boardwalk in front, and a balcony and outside stairway on the second floor. The front windows were large, similar to city store windows. It can be noted that the south-east window was later altered to regular size, as seen in the photo of the store in ruins. The building, like others in the village, was of

frame, with board and batten siding. It was likely heated by two or more stoves, judging by the two chimneys.

PICTURE CREDITS

1. *Russell Country Illustrated*, Russell: Canada Siftings, c. 1898.
2. Manitoba Archives "Water Survey Collection #303".
3. Negative from Mrs. S. Burroughs, Shellmouth, July 1969 (also the picture of the Blacksmith Shop).

The Blacksmith Shop

The blacksmith shop was on the west side of the river between the bridge and the hotel, or approximately 80 feet east of the hotel. It was a cement building, with a frame gable and roof, built about the same time as the cement house that is still east above the bridge.

Mr. John Hall was an apprentice blacksmith in Minneapolis and came to Asessippi to put in the mill machinery. He remained to serve the district, building his house and shop in 1885. He made the curling rocks for the Asessippi Curling Club, and helped in bridge building and other iron work in the community. He was known as a valuable friend to all the youngsters who used sleighs on the slopes of Asessippi.

He and his family, many who began school in Asessippi, moved south to Foxwarren in 1897.²⁸ It is said that a frame lean-to on the house was also moved at that time (see report on Hall-Johnson house). With his departure the people of Asessippi had to go elsewhere for their blacksmithing.

The Shell River has eroded the bank next to the blacksmith shop site, but stones and rubble still mark the spot. The accompanying pictures and diagrams describe this building further.

APPENDIX

TIMBER BERTHS

SHELL RIVER DISTRICT

T.B. XXVII R.J. Jephson D.L. Surveyor Wolverine N.W.T. Millwood P.O.
Area = 5 1/16 sq. mi.
South – East of T.B. 26A, on the Shell River
For H. Gill of Asessippi, and sworn to before D.T. Wilson J.P., Asessippi
May 11, 1889
Report to the Minister of Interior, Ottawa
- See attached xerox.

T.B. XXVII A
Area – 11 ½ sq. miles
East of T.B. 26B and T.B. 15A
Report to the Minister of Interior – Ottawa
- See attached xerox

T.B. XXVII B
Area = 3 ¾ sq. mil.
South of T.B. 27A =
- See attached xerox

T.B. XXVIII R.J. Jephson Wolverine N.W.T. Millwood P.O. May 5, 1889
For Mr. H. Gill of Asessippi and sworn before Mr. D.T. Wilson, J.P. at
Asessippi, May 11, 1889.
Area = 24 ¾ square miles
Between T.B. 26 and T.B. 25
Report to Minister of the Interior, Ottawa
- See attached xerox

T.B. XXVIII A
Area = 1 sq. mil.
On south side of T.B. 26
See attached xerox of report to Minister of Interior

The Church in Asessippi

Religion, as in many pioneer villages, was a major part of the settlers' life and the Asessippi pioneers were no exception. They embraced the Methodist Presbyterian, Anglican, and Roman Catholic creeds, and took turns, or one Sunday a month, holding services in the hall above the store. If a minister was not available the elected representative, elder or lay-reader, took the service. Thomas McLennan served in this capacity for the Presbyterians, John Hall the Methodists, and Henry Gill was lay-reader for the Anglicans. It is reported that all attended the services irrespective of denomination.²⁹

The congregations of Asessippi were part of the west central field for most of the travelling ministers with the only resident minister listed as being Rev. Bartlett, of the Church of England, in 1900.³⁰ Evangelists of other denominations also visited the area. Mr. O.C. Fish, builder of the Fish-Roblin home, was one of those who was influenced by them, having converted to the Plymouth Brethren, and he became influential in this denomination's founding in Brandon.³¹ Of the itinerant ministers there was Rev. G. Gill from Binscarth, Anglican; and in 1895 "Rev. Mr. King of Binscarth, Presbyterian, preached at Asessippi; organ fund raising netted \$10."³²

About this time Presbyterian and Methodist fundraising for a church building was also in progress. In 1896 a church was erected by volunteer labour on land deeded to Thomas McLennan and Archibald Gilchrist, trustees of the Presbyterian Church.³³ This church was quite plain, but its location above the village added a charm of its own (see sawmill photo). It was used until after World War I, when this Union church was moved to Inglis, 1923.³⁴ It was used there for church services, and even acted as a school for the first few months until a proper school building was erected. Later when the United Church³⁵ was to be enlarged by an extension, it was found that it would then be out of proportion,³⁶ so a new structure was built, and the old building was sold to A. Pentilchuk,

who moved it out to their farm on NE section 1-24-28 W1, seven miles north of Inglis.
Their married son has now taken over the farm and is still using the building as a farm
home.³⁷

Special Report on a Church at Asessippi

The Pentilchuk Home

This building, on NE 1-24-28, is the former Asessippi Church. It was moved to this location from Inglis, where it had been placed in 1923.

Mr. A. Pentilchuk had put in a second storey floor, gable windows and a dormer, and insulation. There are likely interior walls downstairs and some alteration has been done around the back door (see photo A). The original siding is still in use, as is the original chimney. The interior was not viewed.

In the reconstruction of the village this building could likely be obtained and moved and restored to its original plan. Some of the original foundation is still on the site, but would need replacement for the back two-thirds. The dormer and gable windows would need to be removed, as would the interior structural changes. A project such as this would likely mean the cost of a new house to the present occupants, the expense of carpentry work, plus the cost of moving.

In view of this, depending on the philosophy of the Asessippi Historic Wayside, I thereby submit a report on another United Church, which will need a decision at your earliest convenience, plus a brief statement on reconstruction and restoration.

The Lennard United Church

This church is 1 mile north and 2 miles east of Lennard. It was constructed by Mr. Bezan on its present site, SE 29-23-27 W1, shortly after the turn of the century. His son, Jim, now owns the building and farm.

The structure was visited by Mr. Lawrence Bezo, of Asessippi Park staff and myself, on August 22, 1969, and pictures and measurements were taken. It has a spire and vestibule, and the interior is finished in beautiful varnished tongue and groove fir – on the floor, wainscotting, walls and ceiling. The raised platform, pulpit rail are still there, plus a stove with pipe to the chimney at the left front corner. The pews have been removed, but all the windows have glass, and it is a beautiful little church.

This building can be obtained now for the price of a steel grain bin (approximately \$335), for the son would like to use the building as material for grain bins, whereas the father would like to see it preserved. The only additional cost would be moving, which could be done quite reasonably, as there are very few power lines to be cut between this site and highway #83 which is 6 miles straight west and 3 1/2 miles south to the village site.

It would need little repair – only cleaning the interior floor where baby chicks were kept, and likely some repair of holes in the outer shiplap (bees were observed front and back, they may have a hive in the wall). A new foundation would be needed at the site of the original church in the village. It could be set on the same rise, with the spire and door end looking west over the bridge and mill site.

If we are interested in placing a church in Asessippi, as opposed to the original church, I suggest that we enter into negotiation with Mr. Bezan as soon as possible. These negotiations would be for the building in return for a steel grain bin, plus maintenance of the building on its present site until it is moved (in two or three years). In this way we have our structure, and he can go on with this harvest season. Your comments on this would be appreciated.

Other Industries in Asessippi

The Cheese Factory

An industry that enjoyed a period of local interest was that of cheese making. It had been promoted in many of the villages as a means of using milk in centres far from large cities. The pioneers near Birtle, Russell, and area each tried to establish cheese factories, and it is reported in the "*Moosomin Courier*", April 5, 1888:

"A cheese factory is to be erected at Asessippi this spring by the farmers of that neighbourhood who have formed a joint stock company."³⁸

The next spring the Shell River Municipal Council was granting one hundred dollars to the Asessippi Cheese Factory as a bonus, which would be granted "when factory had been one month in operation."³⁹ It is reported that the factory was built on the hill above Asessippi, south of the latter school site. Bill Adams ran it, but circumstances such as the distance to bring milk, and the distance from market did not allow the factory to become a success. The next year the Council voted to cancel the \$100 grant.⁴⁰ The factory closed soon after this, and this phase of local industry ended.

The Brick Factory

The making of local bricks and the burning of lime was also a part of early pioneer endeavours to provide their own building materials. Several lime kilns are reported along the hills, where a hollow in a bank would provide a chimney. Lime burning took several days of constant firing but many felt the product well worth the long, tiring work.

Certain areas had clays that were also suitable for firing. Along Bear Creek was one such location, just above its confluence with the Shell River. Here during the early 1890s John A. Gill, the storekeeper at Asessippi, had bricks made. Jim Munro was his

foreman and Billie Hall and Cecil Harvey were his helpers. The bricks were advertised in 1893:

MISSISSIPPI BRICKYARD

BRICKS FOR SALE

For Terms Apply

J.A. GILL

MISSISSIPPI - - MANITOBA

It is reported that they were used for the chimneys and basement floor of the Fish (Robin) house in Mississippi, and for several buildings in Russell – the Graham Boulton home (photo) and the W.J. Doig store, which later became Russell Hardware.

For this industry the market also changed, and all that remains are bricks and fragments in humps along the bank of Bear Creek, and numerous bricks scattered across the Mississippi townsite.

September 12, 1969

Some Thoughts on the Philosophy of Restoration and A Possible Plan of Development for the Asessippi Wayside ad Historical Area

Restoration and reconstruction may be done on structures that have historical or cultural significance.

“Such significance can be found in structures in which cultural, political or social history of an area are well exemplified; structures identified with the lives of prominent persons or important events; and structures that have unique architectural characteristics.⁴¹

When this significance has been established by adequate historical research, documentation, and a preliminary structural survey, the restoration may be carried out for cultural, educational, recreational, and economic purposes. The restorer must then establish the terminal point of restoration, that period when the structure was at its best, or the point at which the whole area and its activities were most eventful. Exceptions may be made in terms of later additions that could become staff and maintenance areas, but on the whole authenticity should be the criterion in the major structures being utilized.

Restoration involves the repair and preservation of existing buildings, while reconstruction means to rebuild the former structure. Both need to be done with due respect to materials and work techniques of the period. New work should blend in with the old. At all costs the bogus antique must be avoided for that which is not authentic is easily detected by the viewing and the paying public.

Once the restoration has been done maintenance must be kept up; that is protection against damage by vandals, by decay and loss by fire and theft. The area will suffer wear and tear by the visiting public, so repair facilities must be included to fix and clean the site. The location of fences and buildings and vegetation can aid in traffic control as well as set the mood. Sanitary facilities will be required for public and staff, and these can be provided within the existing structures without spoiling the authenticity of the project.

With these points in mind, the situation of the historical area at Asessippi Provincial Park is presently as follows:

- 1) Asessippi Village has historic significance as the centre for the Shell River Colonization Company, and was the service center – mill, store, post office, etc., for the surrounding townships. Asessippi is part of the pioneer history of western Manitoba and the village is similar to many other pioneer centres. Yet it is unique to that area in that it had a water driven grist mill and saw mill, and a flourishing trade without the aid of the railway, that lifeline to so many other villages. Few of its inhabitants gained country-wide fame, but they did form the backbone of the area's local government and cultural endeavours, and their descendants are making their mark across the province. The architecture is not unique, but it does serve as a good example of Ontario settlers' ideas modified by local materials and local conditions.

On these points alone the area should be protected from vandalism and maintained in a condition that would allow future restoration of the village as an interpretation area for our cultural heritage. The maintenance may be by adequate fencing, boarding up, and occupancy of the area on a year-round basis. The present depreciation of the existing structures through decay and vandalism must be halted.

- 2) If restoration and development is to be proceeded with in the near future, the following factors should be considered:
 - a) The plans to date state "Wayside & Historical Area – future reconstruction of the original bridge and grist mill". The reconstruction of the mill and bridge in conjunction with a wayside is a modest beginning, and a good way to tell the history in a relaxed and educational way. A small trade in souvenir bags of flour or millstone type paper weights could be attempted. But the public will ask to know more, as there was more to the village than mill and bridge. More buildings and services will be needed to tell that story. In this case, a complete historical village should be the ultimate goal – a distinctive part of the Parks system, a project worthy of putting forward Manitoba as an important link in a cross-Canada chain of historical interpretation area. Manitoba could then rightfully take its place with Fort Steele, Fort Langley, and Barkerville in B.C.; Heritage Park at Calgary, Alberta; the Western Museum at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; Black Creek Village north of Toronto, Upper Canada Village near Morrisburg, Ontario, and other points east. The project would have the benefit of the original site and many of the original buildings, and in being a quality product, backed by adroit advertising and the word of satisfied tourists, traffic could become that which should yield a good return on Manitoba's investment.
 - b) The completed report will contain the history of Asessippi as it is presently known and this should act as an adequate basis for restoration and display. Quite a number of leads are still being pursued, and these may yield additional details in areas of scanty information. A beginning survey of the existing buildings has been done, but more skilled advice would be needed on the procedure for restoration. The project would also benefit by an intensive archaeological survey, that would give exact foundation locations of former buildings, plus giving artifacts that can become part of the interpretative display. A small start for this exists in the artifacts now on hand from the grist-mill turbine excavation.
 - c) The restoration could be done to show the village at its most flourishing period – 1890 to 1902. Once the restoration is begun, one has two possible courses to follow: (1) to reproduce *the* Asessippi of that period, or (2) to create a historic village. Both of these will of course be dependent upon available materials, workmen, and funds, but care will be needed to produce a feature that is authentic, and worthy of the high standards of the Manitoba Parks Branch. This decision is now needed in view of the situation with the Asessippi church (see this report).
 - d) Restoration involves related problems such as traffic control, maintenance, and servicing the area. In considering traffic there is presently an overlook of the village on the grade of Highway #83. Access to the village is presently by the road allowance to the north-west of the site, outside the present park boundaries;

and via a road that enters the village from the east, at the bridge on Highway #83, opposite the Asessippi Beach. The latter approach has the disadvantage of a left turn at the bottom of a steep grade for north-bound traffic. The present policy of one park entrance from the top of the hill near the Inglis corner would alleviate this problem if the village was considered a part of the internal scenic drive. This would need a road that entered the village from the southwest, leaving the scenic drive, as it is presently drawn, from near the old #83 bridge, north of the park gate. This route provides a blind approach to the village, and parking would be possible on the area southwest of the Fish-Roblin house. Entrance would then be on foot, allowing the pedestrian to set the mood of "a step back into history." Tolls could be collected at this area. The use of this approach would necessitate some re-education of the community who have the habit of entering the site via the old road from the east.

Within the village there would need to be guides and maintenance staff, one of which should live there year-round for security. Staff hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. would allow maintenance to be done each day before the village opened to the public at 10 a.m. Movement within the village would be kept consistent with the times if oxcart or democrat were used or even the Shell River Stage which served the area from Moosomin during the 1880s. Judiciously placed native vegetation, fences, and sheds could help channel the foot traffic around the displays and over the bridge. The general impression should be of rough pioneer life, as seen in very little paint, scythed grass, and hidden modern day conveniences.

These modern day aids will be needed. Public and staff washrooms, and septic hookup could be inside old frame buildings. Each building should have at least 200 amp. electrical service, hidden in back rooms, for cleaning appliances, emergency lighting, for electrical heat as part of climate control for certain exhibits, and for the curio and gift and snack shop. This latter building could be the Fish-Roblin house, which would serve as entrance house, and wintertime center of the ski-run operations.

- e) Interpretive displays could begin with the early Indian and fur trade, and move through first settlers, and colonization company venture, the municipal era of roads, bridges, aid to the mill, etc., the struggle for railways service, and the decline and farmstead era of the site. Most of these topics share a common background with other western villages. Variety can be achieved in picture and text, illuminated maps, wax displays – such as the Shell River R.M. Council at a meeting in the hall above the store, and museum displays.
- f) The advertising and promotion of this project can be greatly aided by a good curio and gift shop. Here is an opportunity to promote Manitoba Parks and crafts. This could be a leased concession. It should carry a good line of mementos – such as small bags of the local flour, packages of cheese, or preserves from local wild fruit, done up by the local women's group. There could be paper weights of local brick or stone (as small mill stones), key chains, and decals. Even the paper bags, tickets, letterhead should have a distinctive emblem, such as the store, mill, or abstract design, that would act as the park symbol. The mill, because it was powered by a turbine as opposed to a more picturesque water wheel, is not as good a symbol, but a bag of flour, a shell, or

some other design would serve the purpose. Other items that could be carried are Manitoba books, Manitoba Tartan, Portage pigskin crafts, local pottery and gemstones, and Indian crafts. Pictures, postcard and film are, of course, a must.

The foregoing is of course only a preliminary inventory, and each aspect can be expanded as working plans are developed. Your comments and suggestions would be appreciated.

D. McDowell

Transportation to Asessippi

During the fur trade era, the movement in the west was on foot, by horse (after mid 1700s)⁴², and by canoe. Land travel was aided by the Red River cart, that noisy carry-all of the buffalo hunt and the fur trade, and it soon became the supply vehicle of the first settlements. During the last half of the 1870 decade, steam driven boats plied the Red, the Assiniboine, the Saskatchewan and the lakes.

The upper Assiniboine was part of the fur-forest-and-pemmican-plains meeting area. Here were many trading posts, especially during the era of intense competition, prior to the amalgamation of 1821. Then the main posts between Fort Garry and Carleton and Fort Edmonton were places like Fort Ellice (presently St. Lazare) and Fort Pelly. Major trails between these posts were cut, and they became well marked lines across the prairie. Between 1872 and 1885, as the townships and section lines were laid out across the land, the surveyors found these trails and recorded them. The first settlers used these trails, branching off to their new homesteads, returning to them to get to the Hudson's Bay posts and other stores that were established along the trails. Others came into the area on the river boats, along with the supplies needed in a frontier community.

In the Asessippi area the main trail was a branch north from the Saskatchewan or Carleton Trail at Fort Ellice, the branch being known as the Shell River Trail or the Pelly trail (Map 1).

The trail crossed the Shell near its mouth. Beatrice Wainwright gives a good description of the North-West Mounted Police, under Colonel French crossing the Shell on their way to Livingstone Barracks.⁴³ In about 1875 she traveled this route when her parents were posted to Livingstone. The ford at the river was slightly improved by the N.W.M.P. to ease the crossing.

After the influx of settlers in 1882-83 the trail was detoured over the 1882 bridge of the Shell River Colonization Company⁴⁴, just below the dam at Asessippi. This route became an important one, being a stopping place for travellers going south to Fort Ellice and Shell River, and later Russell, or going north to Boggy Creek and the timber berths in the Duck Mountains, or northwest to Fort Pelly. Asessippi had a stopping house or hotel, and a good livery barn, as did most settlements at that time.

The upkeep of the road down the steep hill into the hamlet, and the replacement of the bridge after spring flood damage, occupied the municipal council and the residents of Asessippi for many years. In 1884, T. Gerrard moved and H. Teulon seconded:

“That a notice be posted on the bridge at Asessippi forbidding parties to ride or drive faster than a walk over said bridge or from hauling logs with a chain over same under penalty of \$5.00. Councillor Nixon to post said notice.”⁴⁵

In 1885, R. Jephson, the surveyor for the timber berths was to:

“survey a road allowance across that Portion of Sec. 3, T. 23, R. 28 south of the Shell River commencing at the bridge across the Shell River and take an easy grade up the Asessippi Hill as shall appear most competent to him and prepare a plan giving levels and also giving an approximate estimate of the cost of making the said road each plan to be prepared in duplicate.”⁴⁶

Before bridges were put in at Asessippi and Shellmouth, scows or ferries had served the travelling public. The building and repairing of these was also the responsibility of the Municipal Council. The fares for using the ferry at Shellmouth were:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Conveyance drawn by two animals | 40¢ |
| Conveyance drawn by one animal | 25¢ |
| Horse with rider | 15¢ |
| Ox, cow or horse without vehicle | 10¢ |
| Swine, goat, sheep or calf | 5¢ |
| Unless conveyed, therefore free | |

Hours – sunrise to sunset Monday to Saturday

- double rates after hours

Sunday – to divine service – single fare for the double journey.⁴⁷

The Shellmouth swing bridge was constructed in 1885-86, with the aid of Dominion and Provincial funds, as they considered the bridge on the border of Manitoba. The bridge was over navigable water so the bridge had to be moveable to allow boats to pass. W. Denmark and others, under the supervision of Councillor Tod and Clerk A.B. Callin, constructed the bridge on a piled stone pier in the center of the river. It had a turntable that allowed the bridge to be swung aside for boats. It is reported that the bridge was moved two or three times before river navigation ceased. The bridge cost \$13,000, a considerable sum for a seldom moved bridge. It was replaced in 1908 by the present iron span at Shellmouth.

As in other Manitoba areas, much of the work was done by Statute Labor- each tax payer working out his share at the going rate and time, or to pay to have his work done:

T. McLennan moved, M. Whaley seconded “That three days’ road work be considered the necessary amount for one man and a team.”

M. Whaley moved, H.I. Teulon seconded “That a clerk be authorized to correspond with the Shell River Colonization Co. with reference to the location of a road leading into Asessippi from the South East.”⁴⁸

That October, the bridge approaches needed repair:

T. McLennan/M. Whaley

“That a sum not exceeding \$50 be expended upon the bridge approach at Asessippi and that Councillor Nixon be authorized to let the lowest bidder, money to come from Statute Labour Fund.”⁴⁹

The Asessippi bridge continued to occupy the Councillors. There was a definite need for a road to the bridge. Much of the bridge was built of poplar which rots quickly, so it was constantly being repaired. The hill into Asessippi was a real hazard, for it was

steep and winding, and the culverts were constantly needing repair. By 1887 Council asked Thomas Tod to look out a new road on Asessippi hill. In 1888, with Henry Gill now the Reeve, it was decided:

Wallace/McDonald

“That Mr. Richardson of the Asessippi Milling Co. finish the bridge over the race and replank the Shell River Bridge for the sum of \$100 and the commutation of the Milling Company’s statute labor, all to the satisfaction of the Roads and Bridges Committee.”⁵⁰

In 1890, R.J. Jephson surveyed the Asessippi hill road and by 1892 the local residents were being paid for cutting and grading the road.⁵¹ The bridge over the mill race was repainted by A.B. Gill for six dollars, and the Committee set out to improve the bridge which was in danger of collapsing. They tried building a stone filled breakwater to stop erosion of the western pier, and finally had a new bridge surveyed. The 1893 minutes deal largely with this undertaking, that had to be financed by government grant and debentures.⁵²

McPhillips Bros. surveyed the bridge site for \$72.20, and it was laid out in line with the street past the store. Central Bridge Building Company of Peterborough was given the contract for the steel superstructure, and A.B. Callin’s contract for the stone piers was accepted at \$8.00 per cubic yard on condition that the width of the stones not be less than fourteen inches.⁵³

By July work was progressing, but the line had to be altered so as to set the piers at right angles to the river. A coffer dam and grillage was erected, but argument arose over portland cement and rubble, or stones and lime mortar. The latter was used upon the command of Mr. Livingstone, the engineer from Winnipeg. By September the bridge was being decked by spruce lumber, stones were being cleared from the center of the river, and approaches were being graded. The Johnstone and McLennan family alternately supervised and worked on the bridge, with everything being completed by December 22nd, 1893.

The following spring A.B. Gill was paid ten dollars to tear down the old bridge and one dollar to erect fences at each end of the old road. Over the next several years small sums were expended to maintain the bridge and its approaches. The bridge served the area until it was damaged in the early 1960s.

The pictures of the span show it when it was in use and then shortly after it was damaged by a truck in the fall of 1968. It was moved off the west abutment by the 1969 ice, and presently rests on the island in the river. The west span over the mill race is still good, and ready for re-decking. The diagram of its location, and measurements are included in the chapter on re-construction.

Transportation changed quickly in the area. Over the trails and roads, stagecoaches, carts, wagons and buggies had gone their way. After 1886 railways brought materials as far as Russell. By 1908 the railway served Shellmouth and north and west of the Assiniboine River. The railway to Roblin served the area north and east of the river after 1904. It was not until 1922 that the extension from Russell came to the present site of Inglis. This line is the nearest Asessippi came to service by rail. Cars made their appearance about 1914, and recently the roads have been improved. The area is now served by good market roads and the hard-surfaced Highway 83, which crosses the Shell River on the north side of Asessippi.

Appendix A

Petition to the Minister of Public Works for the Dominion of Canada, 1893.

Whereas the present bridge spanning the Shell River at the village of Asessippi built in the year 1882 under the direction of the County Council of Russell is now in a very unsafe condition owing to the abutments, centre pier and stringers being built of poplar wood now rotted beyond remedy and whereas the said bridge is situated on the principal thoroughfare to the north it is utilized to a large extent for a traffic of heavy loads from and to points outside of the Municipality and whereas the Shell River drains the large expanse of timber lands in the Duck Mountain district the consequent driving of logs each year causes great injury to the present piers and unprotected abutments and render a single span necessary and whereas the Municipality of Shell River is on the boundary line between the Province of Manitoba and the North West territory and is cut up by the two deep valleys of the Assiniboine and Shell Rivers it is sparsely settled and cannot meet the demands upon it to provide the means for your petitioners and the German Icelandic and other colonists residing in the North West territories who use the bridge to cross these deep valleys and rivers.

And whereas it is proposed to build a permanent steel bridge with one span upon stone abutments at an estimated cost of \$4,000.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that you will take into your favourable consideration the circumstances in which they are placed and grant to the Municipality of Shell River such sum of money as will enable them to undertake the construction of the bridge and your memorialists will ever pay.

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- ¹ J.S. Dennis, Deputy Minister of the Interior "Memorandum to the Honourable Sir A.T. Galt, High Commissioner for Canada, London England", April 7, 1881.
- ² W.D. Beatty, D.L.S Survey Report, 1880.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Canada Department of the Interior Agreement A-35626, June 6, 1882.
- ⁵ Canada Privy Council Order 215/1883, February 3, 1883.
- ⁶ R. Stephenson – Report to the Minister of the Interior, November 1, 1883.
- ⁷ C.A. Boulton – Letter to Henry Gill, December 22, 1883.
- ⁸ R. Stephenson – Report to the Minister of the Interior, December 10, 1884.
- ⁹ R. Stephenson – Report to the Minister of the Interior, December 7th, 1887.
- ¹⁰ D. Gilmour – Letter to the Minister of the Interior, November 28, 1885.
- ¹¹ Shell River Colonization Company – Petition to Governor General re sale of Section 3-23-28, April, 1884.
- ¹² See Timber Berths, Appendix.
- ¹³ Shell River Colonization Company – Petition to Governor-General, April, 1884.
- ¹⁴ *Henderson's Gazateer & North-West Directory*, 1893.
- ¹⁵ Storck and W. Teague – *Flour for Man's Bread*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952, p. 252.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267-68.
- ¹⁷ *The Russell Chronicle and Free Trade Advocate*, December 25th, 1897.
- ¹⁸ Shell River Municipality Bylaw 116, September 16, 1893.
- ¹⁹ Shell River Court of Revision, April 15th, 1897.
- ²⁰ *Banner County* 1967, p. 25.
- ²¹ Shell River Col. Co. Petition to the Governor General, April, 1884, p. 3.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ²³ R. Stephenson, "Report to the Minister of the Interior", November 1, 1883.
- ²⁴ R. Stephenson, "Report", December 10, 1884, p. 6.
- ²⁵ R. Stephenson, "Report", January 22, 1886.
- ²⁶ *The Russell Chronicle & Free Trade Advertiser* Vol. 1 #3, July 20, 1893.
- ²⁷ Interview with J. Fraser McLennan, Russell, August 18, 1969.
- ²⁸ The Hall children moved, according to the Asessippi School register, yet Hall is still listed as blacksmith in the 1899 Hendersons Northwest Gazateer & Directory – obviously an error on Henderson's part.
- ²⁹ Mrs. Amice Robin, *Banner County*, p. 42.
- ³⁰ *Henderson's Manitoba & North-West Gazetteer & Directory*, 1900, p. 205.
- ³¹ O.C. Fish letter to G. Johnson, Marchwell, 1950.
- ³² *Russell Chronicle & Free Trade Advertiser*, Vol. 1, #33, December 30th, 1895.
- ³³ Neepawa Land Titles Survey Plan 4883, EX. 3, CT 9045.
- ³⁴ *Banner County*, p. 127.
- ³⁵ United Church of Canada as of June 10, 1925.
- ³⁶ E. Bryant, Russell, Interview, June 12, 1969.
- ³⁷ Please see attached report on Pentilchuk home, and Lennard United Church.
- ³⁸ *Moosomin Courier*, Vol. 4 28, April 5th, 1888, p. 4.
- ³⁹ Shellmouth Rural Municipality Minutes, May 29th, 1889.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, January 14th, 1890.
- ⁴¹ Mario E. Campioli, "Restoration Principles and Guidelines", *Building Research*, Vol. 1, #5, September-October 1964 p. 27.
- ⁴² The horse came into the region by trade and warfare through the various tribes between Manitoba and the Spanish-Mexican region, appearing at the Mandans between LaVerendrye's visit and the visit of his sons to the same region 1738-41.
- ⁴³ Richards, Mrs. Beatrice (nee Wainwright) "Reminiscences of a N.W.M.P. family, Shell River and Fort Pelly District (c. 1875) M.S. in Manitoba archives. Settlement and Pioneers.

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- ⁴⁴ Canada Department of the Interior Papers RG 15 B-1a Vol. 27 File 35626 (1) – the S.R. Col. Co., contributed \$500 to the bridge, built by A.B. Callin for \$1590 (see also *Banner County* p. 25).
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, October 10th, 1884.
- ⁴⁶ R.M. Shell River, *Bylaw 22*, February 18th, 1883.
- ⁴⁷ R.M. Shell River, *Bylaw 9*, 1884 (note that it paid to go to church)
- ⁴⁸ R.M. Shell River *Minutes*, February 8th, 1884.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, October 1884.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, October 6th, 1888.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, December 6th, 1892.
- ⁵² See Appendix A for typed copy of the petition.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, May 25th, 1893.