THE HISTORY OF CAMPERVILLE

Around the early 1800s, it would seem that no such place as Camperville existed. What did exist was a lake quite full of fish, woodlands plentiful with game, and forests abundant in lumber. The map that follows shows exactly the area along the shore of Lake Winnipegosis where Camperville is now situated.

Gradually, from 1800 on, people began to migrate from southern Manitoba northwards, especially along the lakeshores, the rivers, etc. Many of these people found their way to the shores of Lake Winnipegosis. Some of the people were Indian and others were Metis. The Indians who migrated northwards were Ojibway (now called Saulteaux in Manitoba). In the woodland areas north of Lake Winnipegosis, other Indian people lived and had their own lifestyle. These people were Cree, and to be yet more specific, "muskegos" or Swampy Crees. Lake Winnipegosis, on its northern shores at least, also held an economic attraction for these people. They gravitated southwards very slowly but gradually nonetheless, to take advantage of the fishing and rich hunting the area provided. It is possible to see that Lake Winnipegosis was slowly becoming a migratory centre for economic reasons. It is interesting to note that at least three, and later four distinct ethnic groups were emerging on the scene. Each of the groups contributed various things towards the total lifestyle of the community that evolved.

From this point on, this paper will follow a time line approach. The major dates and events will be recorded in more or less chronological sequence with details and commentary accompanying these. It is hoped that in this manner it will be possible to give the subject some direction without rambling needlessly.

The starting point of the community of Camperville seems to find root in a man

from eastern Canada, by the name of Father Darveau. It will be recalled that the people had begun to conglomerate in the area of Camperville and that this was due mainly to economic factors. The land was of course not developed and the Roman Catholic Church looked upon all undeveloped areas in which resided substantial numbers of people, as possible "missions". Father Darveau was no exception. But, he had an even greater reason for coming west to the area as a missionary. At one point shortly after his ordination, his mother became critically ill. He made a vow to dedicate his life to the missions should the Blessed Virgin intercede and restore his mother's health. His mother rallied and Father Darveau left almost immediately for his mission. It is unclear how he chose the Lake Winnipegosis area for the work he wished to carry out, but it seems likely that Mgr. Provencher chose the area out of concern for the growing number of people living in the area without the word of God. In any event, 1840 saw the arrival of Father Darveau to the Camperville area.

As part of his duties, Father Darveau was to look after the missions north of Camperville, as well as the local community. This of course meant carrying the Word to the settlements on the northern shores of Lake Winnipegosis to the people more or less settled there. On one of these expeditions in 1844, Father Darveau was killed. He was allegedly shot by a Swampy Cree person who desired his rifle. The story is that the Swampy Cree people had been told that the priest was spreading disease. Another story has it that the priest had been running guns into the area. Who spread the stories, if they are stories, or why, are all questions which have never been answered. Father Darveau's guide, a young Swampy Cree boy named Jean-Baptiste Boyer was taken captive and never seen again. The Metis people of the Camperville area let Mgr. Provencher know, and the body was removed to the St. Boniface Cathedral where it was interred.

This incident left the people in the area once more without a priest. Although it has never been said out loud, it would appear that the Roman Catholic Church was reticent to send anyone else for fear of a similar incident reoccurring. Some say that this also left a bitter taste in the mouth of the Saulteaux and Metis people who lived on the south shore of Lake Winnipegosis, and for a number of years there was no love lost between the two groups. Today, however, none of this rivalry remains. There is a monument marking the spot where Father Darveau was killed and one at the church, but these are now historical landmarks and not cause for dissention.

The area was without the services of even a visiting priest for the next 16 years. It wasn't until 1860 when the Oblate Fathers began residing in St. Laurent, that another priest visited the Darveau area. (After the tragic incident of 1844 the area took on the name of the slain martyr). One of the priests at the St. Laurent mission would travel up Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis by canoe in the summer and by dog-sled in the winter, bringing his message to the people scattered along the shores. It would seem that things went without incident, for finally in 1886, Father Dupont, an Oblate priest, began to reside in the Darveau area once again. One of the undoubted reasons for the Church's decision to allow a resident once again was the fact that law and order had to a certain degree arrived in the area. It was not in the form of the police or militia, but rather under the guise of the Indian Affairs Branch, for in 1871 the Pine Creek Reserve had been created. It can only be assumed that with the emergence of a formal reserve, the emergence of bureaucracy, forms, rules, red tape and order was also present. And all this it is presumed had a settling effect on the people involved.

With the advent of religion in the form of a resident priest came education as

well. In 1887 a day school was built out of logs. It would appear to have been unsatisfactory. The families in the area were well scattered and no village had yet sprung up. Inevitably this meant great distances for students to travel, and often they were absent. Add to this the fact that the industry around Darveau centred on fishing, hunting and trapping and one quickly realizes that family mobility was not only a very real facet of early life in the area, but one of absolute necessity for survival. The end result of this was, of course, a great dissatisfaction with the attendance of the students. This dissatisfaction started the priests worrying until Father Adelard Chaumont thought of building a residential school.

School and education must have been a priority with the people of the area, for in 1898 Father Chaumont began construction of a massive residential school. The lay brothers organized the help and Father himself secured permission from the chief to haul stones from the reserve land. Obviously the explanation of education was not completely clear, for at one point about halfway through the construction, the chief disallowed the quarrying of any more stones for the building. Father Chaumont is alleged to have confronted the chief and asked him whether or not he wanted a school to which he could send his children. In the final analysis, the chief capitulated, the stones were hewn, and the school was completed.

The construction of the school must be viewed as the single most important factor in the development of the community of Camperville. It is the construction of the school which began the family movements which would culminate in a village community setting.

The completion of the school was supposed to alleviate the problem of poor attendance. In so far as the Indian students were concerned, it was successful. The problem however, arose with respect to the Metis students. Only treaty Indian students were allowed to avail themselves of the residential aspects of the school. Metis students were allowed to

attend as day students, but not as boarders and so, the complexion of their problem was not changed. They still had the terrible distances to travel and the seasonal work problems to contend with. The Metis/Indian ruling, though not a very logical one, seems to have been based on two ideas. The first one was that the Oblate Fathers were missionaries to "les sauvages" and not to the Metis as much, the reasoning being that the Metis, by virtue of their mixed blood, probably had a little better chance of saving themselves. The second one was that the Metis were not interested in attending school. Unfortunately that opinion was reached by studying the previous years' attendance and without taking into account the actual causes of the problem.

The new school acted as such a magnetic force, because this was a "real" school. It was no longer the little log cabin, cramped, overcrowded and either boiling hot or freezing cold. It was an enormous stone edifice, two stories high, with windows and tables and chairs, and classrooms, and several teachers. At least real education seemed to have come to the Darveau area, and all these trappings were testimonial to the fact.

Whether or not real education had arrived, one thing is for certain. The people (especially the Metis people) thought it had. And, if this was really it, they wanted to be in on it. Yet, there was only one way to really be in on it, and that meant moving closer to the school.

It was this moving closer to the school that culminated in people living in such close proximity to each other that a village community was established. It should not be taken however, that the community sprang up over night, immediately following the construction of the school. This migration from points distant to within reasonable distance of the school was one that took a number of years. However, after ten to eleven years, the

move must have been quite noticeable, for a government survey of the land was performed in 1909. It would seem to be more than coincidental that the government surveyed in 1909 and the Roman Catholic Church built its huge church the following year after ascertaining the priests' property. Conjecture has it that the priests instigated the government into surveying the land. It would seem that the population at the time was sufficiently small to warrant only nine lots being surveyed. However, it must be realized that these lots were exceedingly large ones measuring approximately two and a half miles in length and one sixth of a mile wide, resulting in a fair amount of land being surveyed.

Apart from the Church being interested in having its land defined, the larger stores such as the Hudson's Bay Co. were also concerned about the people moving into the area. Their land had been staked out, but never surveyed and legally registered. Hence, as people moved in, it seemed to be a protective measure to have the government come in once and for all and define the limits of each concern's respective territory. As can be noted on the map that follows, the original owners of the nine lots were as follows: Lot 1 - Roman Catholic Church; Lot 2 - Pierre Pangman; Lot 3 - Napoleon Pangman; Lot 4 - William Guiboche; Lot 5 - M. Beauchamps; Lot 6 - Hudson's Bay Company; Lot 7 - Alexandre Ferland; Lots 8 and 9 - unable to locate original owners. However, the original owners of lots 8 and 9 did not hold the land for very long as the Roman Catholic Church took both lots over prior to 1949. Local speculation is that as more and more people settled the area, more and more new ideas accompanied them. Amongst these ideas was one particularly odious to the Church; namely that perhaps there was room for another church or churches in the community. As a move to prevent this from occurring and to maintain influence over the community, the Catholic Church paid the tax arrears on lots 8 and 9 and made them part of

the Church lands. They, of course, could now control how that land was to be used.

Moreover, before gaining complete perspective of the land situation in the Pine Creek Settlement (for such was it now called by the government due to its proximity to the Pine Creek Reserve), it is necessary to return to 1910, the year following the initial survey. In that year, the Roman Catholic Church was built. Its architectural style resembled closely that of the St. Boniface Cathedral and reflected contemporary thrusts in the Catholic Church in Western Canada at the turn of the twentieth century. Its acceptance in the community was without question as the priests received permission to hew all the stone necessary for its construction from the quarry of the Pine Creek Reserve, and this time - with no interruptions.

Shortly after this, the Indian Affairs Branch started taking an active look at the land question for the Pine Creek Reserve. Because all of the land which was relatively close to the school and church was by now surveyed and assigned, Metis people began impinging on reserve lands merely to be closer to the amenities offered by the Church. This of course could not be tolerated by the Indian Affairs Branch and so negotiations with the Federal Government, the Provincial Government, and the local people began, concerning the question of land and who should be allotted what. The agreement finally reached in 1915 called for enlargement of the Pine Creek Reserve on its northern boundary by four miles. In return for this, the settlement of Duck Bay, 12 miles to the north of the church and school was to be for the specific use of the Metis. As well, the area south of the boundary of Lot 9 was designated as "La Reserve des Metis" or the "Halfbreed Reserve". This meant that the lots could not be subdivided and sold, unless it was to Metis families.

It wasn't however, until ten years later, in 1925, that the government surveyed the "Halfbreed Reserve" into lots running perpendicular from lots 1 to 9. Unfortunately, once

the land was surveyed and the lots finalized, no one was informed of what had taken place. Consequently no one bothered to lay claim to any of these lots, and in 1956, the local government district of Swan River relinguished these lots and with them, the entire, "Halfbreed Reserve" back to the Crown. Consequently, any and all families living there now are only squatters and entitled only to squatting rights.

Now that the land questions were settled, there was a definite group of Metis people living in close proximity and to the south of the Church and school, and a good number of Indian people on the reserve to the north of them. This settlement of Metis people received a visit from Mgr. Langevin in 1914, and he suggested that as a town had more or less formed, a new name would be appropriate. His suggestion was Camperville, after Father Camper who had been quite revered by the people of the town when he visited and delivered his eloquent, if not short, sermons. The name remained with the town from that day forward. It must be noticed what extreme influence the Church possessed over the people to even be able to dictate the name of their new town. The assumption is that Mgr. Langevin was concerned with obliterating the memory of the martyrdom of Father Darveau, and it was for this reason he renamed the town.

The period which has just been discussed is one which saw a boom in the economy of the community. In 1908, Joe Desrochers had opened up a store and dealt in everything from soup to nuts. By 1915, the competition of local merchants made the Hudson's Bay Co. store an unviable proposition. It sold out to Adrien Rodier. In 1917, J. Cottyn started a store as well. By 1918, businesses seemed to be booming. In that year, Bruno Flamand opened up a barbershop, Bob Jones started the Pool Room business, while even the priests started a sawmill.

It is one thing to realize that the businesses existed, but it is another to understand the scope of these businesses. The J. Desrochers enterprise was not only a general merchandise store. He was also a fishing outfitter. He owned a number of boats which he chartered out. He supplied living provisions as well as nets and all the necessary paraphanalia for fishing. The cost per fisherman to be completely outfitted was between $2000.00 and $3000.00 which was an impressive sum in those days. As well as the store and outfitting aspects of the business, he operated a net factory in which he hired women to make the nets with which to outfit the fishermen. No doubt this person was a very enterprising individual, but it would appear that the other business people of the town were the same way.

Other industries developed and will be mentioned as they come up. However, some of the most noteable were the spring fur-trapping industry and the seneca root digging. The women would usually dig the root on the islands while the men would trap the furs. Furriers and buyers from pharmaceutical companies would not hesitate to come out to buy the materials these people produced. The same was true of the blueberry-picking industry of the fall. Buyers would come and haul out all that was produced. In the fishing industry, the biggest buyers were Boat Fisheries of Winnipegosis, and independent companies in Winnipeg and New York City.

Another interesting facet of the Camperville economy at this time is that industries sprang up, designed specifically to support other industries. The most obvious example of this can be seen in the development of the sawmills. The main products of such mills were boxes for shipping fish, and berries out of Camperville.

Economically, things moved along fairly smoothly for Camperville at this time. People worked long hours at small wages, but a general air of prosperity seems to have

existed around the community. People peeling logs were being paid $3.00 a cord, while those cutting wood were making 75¢ a cord. It must be remembered however that butter could be purchased at 10¢ a pound in those days and that the entire cost of living was scaled down accordingly. This prosperous period was unfortunately to be a short lived one.

The year 1930 seemed to strike the beginning of the decline of what might be called Camperville's "Golden Age". Almost as an omen, the church burnt to the ground in that year. The cause was never ascertained, but there are two popular beliefs surrounding this incident. One is that some of the sanctuary candles were never extinguished and they burnt down, causing the holocaust. The other is that a boy from the residential school, unhappy about his treatment there, set fire to the church by way of retaliation. Whatever the cause, the fire was a great blow to the religious and social aspects of the community. But at least the economy seemed stable.

Unfortunately, this was not to be the case. Apart from entering that period known as the Depression, Camperville began suffering a collapse in its fishing economy. Not only could the fish produced not be sold through the country due to economic reasons, but now it was getting exceedingly difficult to produce the fish. The lake was yielding more and more rough fish. The very real danger of being unable to support their own families seemed to threaten the community.

In 1932, a sure sign of hard times presented itself. The Church sold its residential school to the Department of Indian Affairs. This was of course no great improvement for the Metis students. In fact it was apparently worse for them because the Federal Government didn't mind supporting Indian students, but what with hard times, budget cuts, etc., they certainly didn't want to have to pay for the Metis students as well. Fortunately the people of

the community had for some time been attempting to get more satisfactory educational arrangements for their children. These came through in the same year with the help of Inspector Peach. A school was built six miles south of the community. No one seems to know what logic or lack of it prompted the authorities to build a school so far from the town. The end result of this was that the school was never used to full advantage because of the distance. It slowly faded into abandonment.

From this time on until the early 1960s, Camperville lived in a state of suspended animation. Not much seemed to happen in any area. A few feeble attempts at various types of industry were made, but these were mainly industries of a local nature, geared to supply a few local needs. An example of this would be the lime kiln built in 1932 and which remained in operation for two to three years. The stones were brought in and fired until the limestone broke down. The lime was used to make whitewash and disinfectant. Another industry was Pelletier's sawmill. This met with a fair amount of success, but once again it was basically local and nothing comparable to the great fishing industry of earlier years. Times indeed must have been hard as can be witnessed by Joe Desrochers' sale of two hundred head of cattle at this time. He received all of $7.00 per animal. Very little was to change for ten years.

What did happen ten years later was not any big boom of business. It was merely the first inklings of an economy beginning to stir very slowly after having been knocked senseless by a depression. It started with the introduction of new, but extremely small businesses. No longer were the business ventures of the town geared towards the whole community, but rather, they were enterprises designed specifically to support family units. For this reason, businesses such as the Fourchette Taxi Co. presented themselves around

1944, and have continued to crop up even to the present day. The necessity of such small business ventures is witnessed by the burning of the sawmill in 1946. The burning was not looked upon as any great tragedy, for the mill had already been closed due to the lack of timber in the immediate area. Later pulp mills opened, run by people from Camperville, but these were located at fair distances in locations such as Pulp River and Pine River.

Very little of a social or economic nature developed in Camperville from 1946 to 1960. The most noteable achievement during these years was the construction of the town gymnasium (under the auspices of the Church) in 1949. This allowed the community a recreational site in which it was possible to view movies, hold bingos and other events of a social nature. In 1952 Camperville suffered a flood which did not seem to change a great deal of the community's way of life. Of course, there was very little going on which could have been dampened by this event. In 1957, the year after the "Halfbreed Reserve" had been relinquished to the Crown, a part of that same land measuring 250 feet by 200 feet was surveyed and sold to form the Local School District of Camperville #2030. A school was built, as well as accommodations for the nuns who taught there, and these facilities were used up until 1971. The Duck Mountain School Division #34 who had since taken over the school, sold the land to Philip Flamond along with the buildings. Mr. Flamand converted these into a restaurant, pool hall, and apartment units. The school division purchased a piece of Lot 6 to build the new school upon.

Up until the 1960s Camperville was considered to be unorganized territory by the government. It fell under the jurisdiction of the Swan River Government District. In the early 1960s however, a provincial thrust was made towards local government committees, and Camperville organized on a similar basis. This state of affairs continued until 1968

when the first mayor and council were elected. The catalyst for this change came about through the inception of the Northern Affairs Department of the Provincial Government in 1967. This body took over most of the policy and administrative matters pertaining to unorganized territories such as Camperville. The effects of this change were felt and are still being felt today.

It was through this change in administrative power that Syd Green was convinced of the value of the MANWAP program presently in existence. This program allows people from the community to learn various trades while doing the work within the community. The participants earn a salary, the members of the community get services otherwise unavailable and yet at reasonable costs, and in the end, more human resources become locally available.

It was also through the provincial government that the local building project run by Maurice Richard was started. This project sponsored by the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation, is designed to supply houses for people with low incomes. Some of these houses are placed in Camperville, while others are shipped to various remote communities. The project provides employment for several people and improves the housing conditions within the community.

During the past ten years, many projects have been started. The Student Temporary Employment Program enabled a day care centre to be run in the community. Through a Local Initiatives Program grant, the Metis Educational School Services were formed. This enabled a lot of local input to be placed in the school. By means of a Provincial Employment Program grant, the community has been able to construct a skating rink and conduct a clean-up of the town beach area. The one drawback to these programs is

that they have all been temporary. When they have expired, it has been necessary to renegotiate new programs. The result has been that Camperville has had to constantly struggle to progress. This may not be all bad as some of the side effects would indicate. One of the things to have come out of this constant struggle is the number of ongoing organizations which have been formed. The most noteable of these are: The Manitoba Metis Federation Local, The Camperville Metis Women's Group, The Church Auxilliary, The Metis Women's Association, Family Planning, Home Economics Advisory Service, Alcoholics Anonymous, and the Camperville Home and School Association.

1974 saw the advent of the Indian and Metis Project for Careers Through Teacher Education in Camperville. This program is designed to produce fully qualified Metis teachers from the local community.

In viewing the history of Camperville it is noticeable that it is a progressive history regardless of the hardships that have been faced along the way. Camperville today is far different from twenty-five or fifty years ago. Some of the amenities enjoyed in the community are: T.V., Radio, Newspapers, Restaurant, Pool Halls, Stores, a Liquor Commission, Hydro, and Telephone. Some of the drawbacks are no running water, poor roads and lack of industry. If the past history is any measure, it seems likely that things will continue to advance in Camperville.

This paper has attempted to give a factual account of the historical development of Camperville. It has purposely left out descriptions of the old lifestyle and many personal experiences of the contributors. This has hopefully allowed for a clearer account to be rendered. Accounts of the old lifestyle and the like can be read in such publications as ?Six Metis Communities? and ?Hey Are You Metis?? Some aspects of early life such as salt

mining and sugar making turned out (after research and inquiry) to be very romanticized events which were not significant in terms of a contribution to the development of Camperville. These have been omitted as it has been impossible to ascertain whether such events ever took place in Camperville or not.

It is this writer's hope that this paper will be looked upon as a skeletal history of the evolution of Camperville through its main phases. It is realized that it is by no means a full account of all the small yet important facets which altered the course of the town's development. It is hoped that perhaps someday, someone will add to what has been written, correcting the errors, filling in details, and in all rendering a more meaningful and useful account.

In closing, the author would like to acknowledge all of the people who spoke with him, shared their histories, and made him most welcome in their homes.

CONTRIBUTORS

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