

# Beginnings in the R.M. of Argyle

A Brief History



By

Ken Storie  
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Presented by the Argyle Museum

A Souvenir of **Baldur Homecoming 2012**

## The R.M. of Argyle



### The First People

When the first Euro-settlers arrived in Argyle it was obvious to them that they were not the first inhabitants of this land. Aboriginal people often passed through and evidence of past inhabitants was more visible in those days, be it in the form of burial mounds or prairie trails. Stone projectile points found in the Avery Mound (SW 14-3-13) near the northeastern corner of Rock Lake, show that an early culture called The Lake Shore Culture occupied the territory about 1500. BC. The discovery of well-made spear points in other area locations is evidence that hunters seeking the now long extinct giant bison were in the region up to eight or ten thousand years ago. As years passed more advanced and cultured people left evidence of well-crafted pottery, and more importantly, a clear picture of burial practices in the form of the readily identifiable mounds that dot the region. Although settlement by the Dakota, Algonquin, Plains Cree and Assiniboine people was intermittent as befitted their dependence on the roving herds of bison, it was ongoing and substantial. Absence of any written record is of course a challenge as we try to understand the times, but thanks to archaeologists, like Argyle's own Chris Vickers, we know the region was then, as it is now... a home.

### Place Names

I'm sure that the region's lakes and landmarks have carried various names given to them over the ages by the inhabitants of the time, but of course when our ancestors arrived they often (but not always) had their own ideas about names. A 1754 map based upon LaVerendrye's notes refers to Rock Lake as "L. du Brochet" (Pike Lake). Peter Pond on his 1785 map refers to it as "Rib Lake" and the Pembina River as the "Rib River". These were the names in use by native tribes of the time and referred to the whole Pelican – Swan Lake system, which curved like the flat ribs of a bison. Today's name dates from the correspondence in 1845 of Father George A. Belcourt of Pembina in which he describes as the "Lake of the Rocks", and it became official on an 1872 township map by dominion land surveyors.

### District History

Anticipating the great boom of the 1880's a trickle of adventurous souls lead the way into this land in the late 1870's. Perhaps the first were a small group of Metis from Red River who came to the western end of Rock Lake after the Riel resistance and backlash that

occurred there against their people. They likely knew the area well as the annual buffalo hunts, only recently abandoned, took hunters right through the area.

The Rural Municipality of Argyle represents an extensive and diverse landscape stretching from Rock Lake northwards through gently rolling terrain between Glenora and Baldur, over the patchwork of steep hills and lakes north of that town, to the very edges of the sandy prairie south of the Assiniboine near the town of Glenboro. There were several routes that newcomers might use to get here.

Many followed the well-traveled Pembina or Boundary Commission trail from Emerson to near Manitou the pushed westward into new territory. Later others followed the Assiniboine westward from Winnipeg, often on overload flat-bottomed steamboats, and after unloading near Cypress River or Millford, they walked into the northern parts of the region.

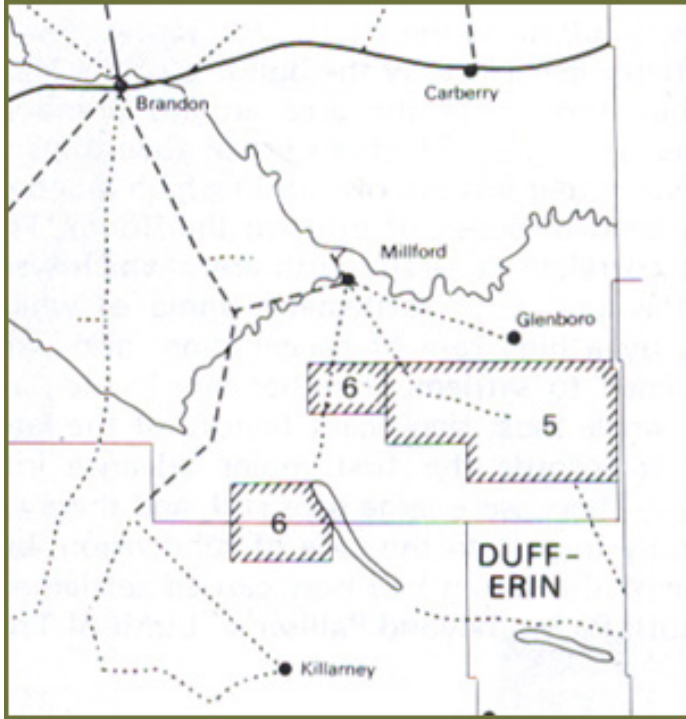
The settlement of the region began in earnest with the arrival of John Wilson and his family who crossed the Pembina River between Glenora and Pilot Mound and homesteaded in the Marringhurst region in 1879. Other settlers, including Peter Strang, soon appeared in the Moropano district at the west end of Rock Lake, while the Cramers and Playfairs began farming at Otenaw a few kilometers northeast of Baldur. The districts of Bru and Grund were founded by Icelandic settlers from the recently established colony at Gimli, while William Craik was the first to homestead at Dry River between Greenway and Glenora.



*Marringhurst School – preserved as a link to one of the earliest settlements in Argyle.*

By 1881 the first council of the newly created R.M. of Argyle was in place and by 1886, 15 school districts had been established. Land was being broken. Crops were grown.

IN the 1880's there were no towns in Argyle as we know them. Settlements were known by the post office sometimes accompanied by a general store, with perhaps a school or a church nearby contributing to the sense of identity. Services such as gristmills and sawmills opened to serve very local needs but were not usually associated with an identifiable village or settlement. Because of the relative isolation of the region in the middle ground between the Boundary Commission Trail and the Assiniboine, they avoided the speculative boomtowns that blossomed then disappeared along those routes.



Postal Routes in the early 1880's

**Pilot Mound.**

ises to be a very popular institution.  
 Improved mail facilities have been put in operation here, and the mail is for forwarded to Marringhurst, Otenaw, Rosebery, Glenora and Glendening on Monday instead of Wednesday.

*Winnipeg Daily Sun - Dec 3, 1884*

As in all parts of the province in pioneer times the communication and population patterns evolving in the pre-railroad days were to undergo a big change once those rails arrived. In those pre-railway days the recognized "centers" in the municipality set about organizing to various degrees. Marringhurst may lay claim to being the earliest recognized community. While never even aspiring to the status of town or village the newcomers there nevertheless established a community whose identity has survived until the present day. A school, church, and cemetery were created. Community activities were organized. The district is readily identifiable today partly because of the strength of those early efforts at community building, and partly because the actual towns that sprang up with the rail lines came after Marringhurst was well established and weren't so close as to overshadow that identity. And of course the fact that the school and several notable buildings such as the Marringhurst Heritage House are still standing has helped.

Contast that with the Otenaw community. It too was an important first center. It had a post office early. Its settlers became prominent in the region. But when the rails arrived the town of Baldur was just too close to allow it to retain the same level of identity. That

along with the fact the no physical links such as schools, cemeteries or heritage sites remain, has rendered Otenaw a somewhat forgotten first settlement.

## Glenora

Glenora followed another pattern. One also repeated throughout the province. It had an identity and some services, including an important grist and sawmill, and was able to transfer that identity when the rail line located within a few miles of the original site. Glenora is the one spot in Argyle where there was an attempt to create a speculative town based on hopes and predictions that a railway would soon arrive. In the Manitoba Boom of 1881 numerous such "cities" were surveyed and promoted as the next big thing. All were touted as important railway centers of the future. False claims of services and buildings were common. Examples include Manitoba City (Near Manitou) Manchester (Near Melita) Souris City (Near Wawanesa) and my favorite - Moberly which, contrary to the promotional drawing depicting a steamboat landing, a town square, and a lakeside promenade, was actually located on swamp land at the west end of Whitewater Lake. With almost no exceptions these towns never came into being.



*Winnipeg Daily Sun - Sept. 13, 1881*

The Glenora claims however were somewhat less extravagant, modest even, but ads were placed in Winnipeg papers and lots were sold, and money was lost. And it did beat the odds – it became a thriving village that still exists!

And it thus may claim however to be the first "town" in Argyle in that there was a half-hearted effort to promote the original site of Glenora by the usual method of selling lots to speculators. The site, unlike the many other wonder towns did have both some potential and some actual commercial activity. Thomas Rogers was operating a store. The building later uses as a house it rests, somewhat the worse for wear today, on a farm about a kilometer from its original site. Nearby was a sawmill was built in 1879 and a flourmill started in 1882. It was the mill that is credited with providing Glenora with its

name. It was named after an Ogilvie Co. mill near Montreal that was called the Glenora Mill and produced "Glenora Patent" flour.

George Lawrence, later an MLA for Killarney, operated an agricultural implement business for the Massey Manufacturing Company at Glenora in 1883 likely out of his homestead.

Interestingly, although the ad in the Winnipeg Sun from September of 1881 has clearly identified the townsite of Glenora at least one pioneer recalled that "I never heard any name except "Mill and Store" for that village". Named or not it was the commercial centre of the region for a short time and is recalled in several pioneer reminiscences. Both mills burned in 1885 and it appears that the store may have closed soon after, but the name was well enough established to be resurrected when the railway finally arrived a few kilometers to the northeast. The millstone from that mill has been carefully placed on grounds of St. George's Anglican Church, in that new Glenora.



*Mill Stone from the Glenora Mill - now on the grounds of St. Georges' Anglican Church in Glenora*

The area surrounding Glenora is also rich in pre-settlement history. Chris Vickers, in his archaeological work in the 1940's found evidence of nomadic hunting groups dating back to 1500 B. C. and identified many village sites and mounds in the Rock lake vicinity.

A large number of lots have already been sold by private sale, and one of the finest Steam Grist Mills in Southwestern Manitoba is located in this Town.

The Manitoba Southwestern Railway will be running to Rock Lake early next summer, when Glenora will likely become Sportsmen's Headquarters for Manitoba, and a fashionable summer resort.

*Winnipeg Daily Sun - Dec 3, 1884*

Elsewhere in Argyle post offices also put Dry River and Moropano on the map (literally) and while Dry River did retain its identity for decades Moropano was absorbed by the creation of Neelin.

## Grund



*Frelsis Church (Grund)*

But the most unique settlement in Argyle, indeed one of the most unique settlements in the province would be the Icelandic Settlement in the Grund and Bru districts.

In the early 1870's a combination of economic factors and natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions prompted increased, and large-scale emigrations to North America. On the advice of a Missionary named John Taylor a large group of settlers arrived there on the west side of Lake Winnipeg in the late fall of 1875, establishing a settlement that has shaped the culture of that part of Manitoba through to the present day.

A combination of bad luck and bad weather nearly put an end to that experiment as a smallpox epidemic, harsh winters and wet summers made life extremely difficult for the first years. The colony persevered and eventually thrived. For those that preferred fishing over farming the location served them well once they adapted. But it wasn't great farm land and that likely prompted some to try their luck elsewhere.

Everett Parsonage, a pioneer of the Pilot Mound district, had worked for John Taylor in Ontario and through him had contacts with some of the Icelandic settlers at Gimli. He advised them to visit Argyle. In August of 1880 Sigurdur Kristofferson and Kristian Jonsson set out to visit Mr. Parsonage and he showed them a largely unsettled area in the rolling country in the northern part of the Municipality an area we now know as Grund.

As soon as he could Sigurdur filed on SE 10-6-14 and called his new home Grund". An Icelandic word meaning grassy plain. More soon followed with two more men taking homesteads that fall. In the spring of 1881 four families arrived at their new homes, by winter there were eight families, then 17 by the next year. By 1884 they had "650 cultivated acres, 60 head of cattle, 62 oxen, 60 sheep, 9 work horses,,,,," and more. Six schools and a church were built by 1900. Before Baldur was established a strong community was in place, and although the store and post office established at Sigurdur Kristofferson home didn't evolve into a village, the name Grund has lived on.

## Baldur Established – But it was a close call!

In 1890, after several unsuccessful efforts to secure a much-needed rail link, the Canadian Northern Pacific Railroad (a branch of the American company, completed a line linking Morris with Brandon and passing through the center of Argyle. The sites of Greenway and Belmont were quickly planned. But that left quite a stretch without a station and farmers felt they deserved better service.

While the surveyors came were busy grading the line farmers in the Otenaw district lead by A.W Playfair, succeeded in convincing the railway company that another station was needed. The first site chosen was three miles west of the present town and again citizens including Jesse Chester, Reeve Peter Strang and Sigurdur Christopherson, rallied in support of the current location. The surveyor reconsidered and chose a location a few miles further east. This still wasn't what the locals had in mind and Jesse Chester apparently carried the surveyor's equipment himself to the current site. His persuasion won out and in the spring of 1890 land was purchased from M.T. Cramer and Mr. Taggart for \$7.00 per acre.


Given that beginning, the name "Chesterville" suggested by a railway official Mr. Lehorn would have seemed appropriate, but Sigurdur Christopherson's daughter Carrie has been given credit for the suggesting name "Baldur" the Nordic God of innocence and summer sun. A vote settled the issue and Baldur it was. Carrie herself was recognized in the name of the second avenue of the new town.



## **NEW TOWNS FLOURISHING**

### **The Name of a Mythical Icelandic God Given to a New Manitoba Town.**

Mr. S. G. Simpson, townsite agent for the N. P. & M. railway company, has just returned from a trip over the Morris-Brandon branch. He reports business to be in a flourishing state in all the new towns along the line. He also gives glowing accounts of the condition of the crops in all parts of the country through which the line passes. A new town plot has been surveyed in Argyle municipality, on sec. 13, tp. 5, range 4, south of Grand, and has been named Baldur, after the Mythical Icelandic God of Justice. The site was surveyed on the 8th of May, and already twenty-five lots have been sold to parties who will erect buildings for business purposes this year. A station house and a grain warehouse will also be built forthwith. Mr. Simpson says that there are about 9,000 acres under crop in the district contiguous to Baldur.



*The Brandon Sun, Jun 5, 1891*

Before all this was settled Mr. A. E. Cramer had moved his creamery from his farm to the site of the new town. It was in turn sold to G.W. Griffith as a general store in the spring of 1890, still before the town site was settled. The main street was named Elizabeth after Mr. Griffith's wife.

In the fall of 1889 Mr. G.W. Playfair had moved his grain buying business (which he conducted for Bawlf & Co.) to the new town site in a building he also moved from its previous location on his farm. Once the issue of the town site was firmly settled he moved the building to the front street and began a lumber, furniture and coal business.

Jesse Chester's house became a sort of unofficial restaurant for railway workers and he was soon persuaded to open a boarding house that became known as the Chester House.

Other businesses soon followed. Sigurdur Christopherson, who had taken the role of Icelandic Immigration Officer, opened an office. William McKnight build a carriage and blacksmith shop. Thomas E. Poole erected a store for his hardware and tinsmith business. A.E. Cramer build a two-storey building used as a saddlery shop by C.W. Watson. G.W. Cramer built a blacksmith shop, which was operated by Harry Goodman.

Thus the names we have come to know as Baldur pioneers established themselves in the very early days of the town. By 1898, when Frank Shultz purchased the town site from the Northern Pacific Railway, the population was around 400 and townspeople could choose from four general stores, a hardware, three fruit and confectionery stores and a host of other businesses.

The growth of the town created a population shift that quickly necessitated a change in the local school districts. The new school district of Baldur was carved out of existing districts. As the name "Baldur" was taken by a school district in Hnausa, north of Gimli, the name Simpson was chosen for the district and the new two-story frame school that was soon erected. Simpson was the name of the surveyor who obtained the school site from the Northern Pacific. The first classes were held in 1891 in the upper room of the building where C.W. Watson operated a saddlery shop with Miss Jeannie Wells as the teacher. When the building was completed in 1892 the upper floor was used as a lodge room and public hall but as population grew additional classrooms and two new teachers were required. By 1905 a new school, a much larger brick-clad building was needed. The old one was sold and moved to first street. In 1915 the trustees of Baldur School district at Hnausa were convinced by Department of Education official to relinquish the name "Baldur" allowing for its use in Argyle's leading town.

As with schools, churches and congregations had been established throughout Argyle with notable buildings at Grund and Marringhurst. The formation of towns and the population shifts involved caused a flurry of church building. In Baldur Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and Lutheran Churches were built between 1898 and 1907. All but the Presbyterian are still in use!

## Business Growth

Baldur's first elevator, the Manitoba Elevator, was a horse-powered structure built in 1891 by W.O. Fowler and operated by his son Alex. This was soon replaced by the Farmer's Elevator with a 12 horsepower engine. Other elevators followed. Today the Baldur Pool Elevator, built in 1927 by the Canadian Elevator Co. for the newly formed Pool, remains.

In 1893 W.O. Fowler built the first two-storey brick building on Elizabeth Avenue in Baldur. Over the years this building, demolished in 1981, served as a post office, a bicycle shop, an IOOF Hall and a pool room and barber shop.

The oldest building on Elizabeth Avenue in 2010 is the Fowler Block built by Alex Fowler and it is still in use as retail outlet. Originally Mr. Fowler operated his harness, saddlery and shoe business from the eastern segment and the west side was rented to by J. Smith and Sons for a grocery. In 1902 R. Rollin took over the J. Smith business. After a long run it was taken over by Karl and Lily Bjarnason (1938-60) then Marcel Fransoo operated it until the current owners, Joy and Earl Johnson purchased it. It is a municipally designated heritage site.

Percy F. Curtis bought out the business of George Griffith on the corner of Elizabeth ab Second Street about 1895. It had been the first store in town. In 1901 he completed a new brick two-storey building with a distinctive corner entrance and a second level balcony. The new building would stand until 1957 a prominent fixture on the corner location. Over the years it has been known as The Playfair Brothers, the Neil McDonald Store, Frederickson's Cash Store and more recently it was operated by W.G. Kilgour and

the Co-op. The upper level was called the Victoria Hall after Queen Victoria. It was home to various public gatherings and entertainments, including movies in its later years.

Baldur's first drug store opened in 1894 under the supervision of Dr. Irving M. Cleghorn. In 1900 he purchased the building vacated by J. Smith & Co, (they moved to the new Fowler Block). His son Raymond took over in 1930 and the building was Cleghorn's Drug Store until it burned in 1963.

Thomas E. Poole moved to Baldur in 1890 and established himself as a hardware dealer and tinsmith. In 1901 he built the brick building that in 2010 houses the Argyle Museum. This designated municipal heritage site has been the site of Hardware business operated by Hunter and Gemmill, Hunter and Sons, Wm. Burton (as a Mashall Wells Store), and Joe Januska. The interior retains some of the original metal ceiling and elements of trim and wall coverings.

Baldur's first bank was privately owned by Frank Schultz and opened in 1893. In 1897 he built the building that served Baldur until it was replaced in 1977. It became a Union Bank (operated by Mr. Schultz) in 1903 and in 1925 the Royal Bank absorbed the Union Bank.

Mr. Lee Foon, who purchased a restaurant business from Charlie King in 1916, built a new building in 1924 which houses his store and café and ice-cream shop. It remained in the family until 2010.

## Dry River

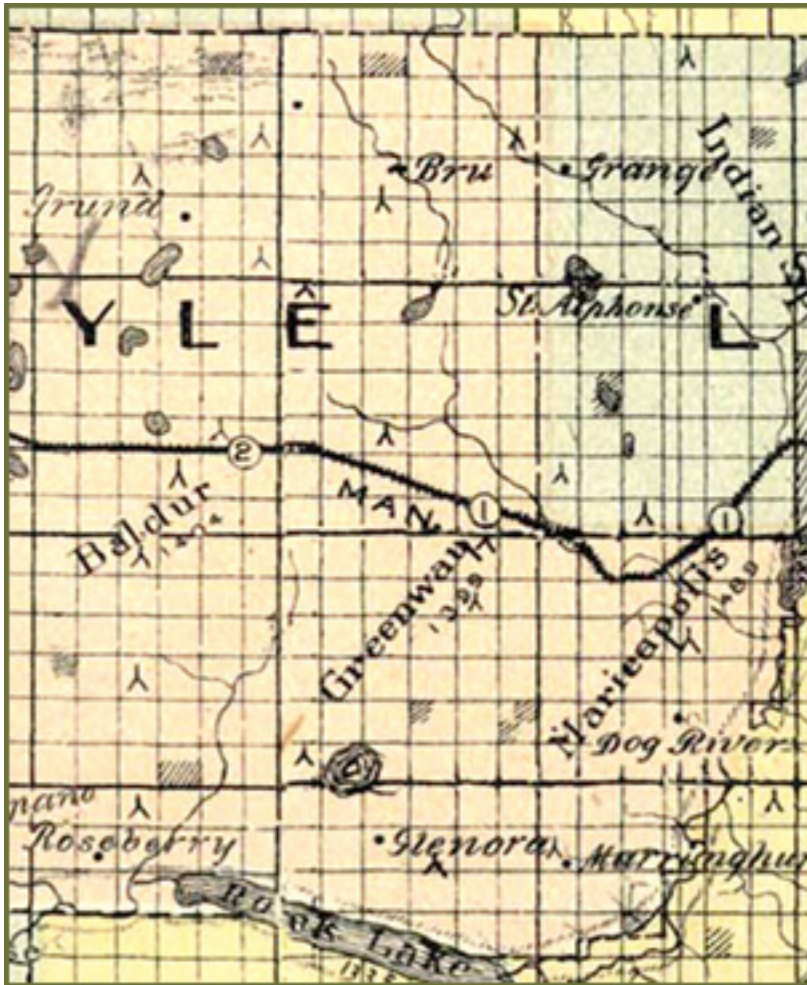
Dry River has to be my favorite place name from the Argyle district. I've been intrigued about it since hearing my Grandfather Young speak of it when I was quite young. Perhaps its just a perfect "prairie" name, or perhaps because there were no rivers that I knew of in the vicinity of our farm, I wasn't surprised that the first one I did hear about was dry!

To identify the place I can do no better than to introduce you to May Graham and let her explain:

"Dry River district is about 10 miles north-west of Pilot Mound as the crow flies and approximately 4 miles south-west of Mariapolls. It is bounded on the east by the Pembina River. The Pembina River derives its name from an Indian name - Pembina meaning "native cranberry". The old school district ran as far north as Township 4 for a short distance and at it's beginning it stretched west to the west side of rthe township On the south it goes as far south as the township for a part of the way. Then it reaches the Pembina River which it follows. Later on in 1907 when Zephyr school district was organized, some land. was taken away from the west side of the district.

This district was not settled quite as early as the land to the south and east of it owing to the fact that the Pembina River had to be crossed. At one point there was a ford in the river and at a place north of the ford the Diedrick Bridge was built. The name Diedrick was the name of a man who lived in the valley not far from the bridge. It is now known officially as the Creamery Bridge. In 1885, the Fairplay Creamery was built and the Creamery Bridge was erected. This gave the residents of Dry River two crossings over the Pembina River. A man by the name of S.A.Johansen came from Denmark to run this creamery. He also helped to build it."

The first settlers came via Emerson along the Boundary Commission Trail. In 1882, the Canadian Pacific Railway came as far as Manitou, and in 1885 it was extended to Pilot Mound, shortening the journey considerably.



*The region about 1900 – showing both the “new” towns along the rail line and the older communities. Note that they got the name Dry River wrong!*

Mrs. Graham offers an explanation for the unusual name.

“west of the road which is now known as Highway No. 440, there is a divide. “Ash Creek runs down from the north and runs west while the Dry River comes from the south and runs east to Swan Lake. There is a piece of land between the two creeks which is a little higher than that surrounding it. This is where the Indians used to cross and J. Flannagan Sr. named it the Pass. Not only the Indians used this as a pass, but when buffalo roamed this district, they used it also.”

Pioneers included Alex McQuarrie and Tom Frey who came from Ontario in the year 1881, followed in the spring of 1882, William Robinson and his brother-in-law George Stewart. Mrs. Grahgam tells us that arrivals from 1882 to 1885 included Archie McAuley, William Apperley, W. Wardman, I. Bentley, W. Davis, Ike Tealing, A. Bonnan. J.

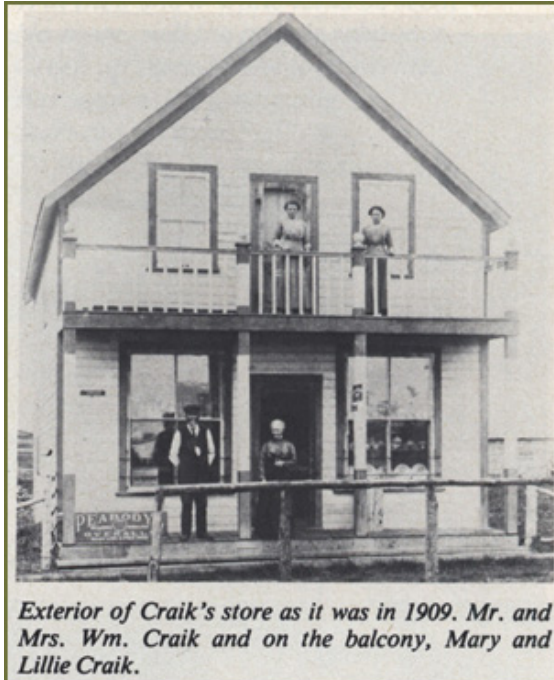
Flanagan, Joe Sauders, W. Cressard, John Elson. T. A. Andersen, James and William Baird, Jack Baird, W. Tisdale and William Craik.

Dry River School District No. 339 was organized in 1885. The post office was opened in 1884 in the home of George Stewart, then moved to Eason's, Craik in 1904, followed by S. Robinson who had it until his death in 1948 when it was closed. The first religious services were held in the school by Rev. H. Cain Presbyterian minister. Church was held in the school for many years and also Sunday School.

Greenway



It seems that subsequent events may have proved that the Baldur "Boosters" of 1889 were right in holding out for a rail station and the town that would follow. The site prospered and expanded. Had the Northern Pacific Railway had its way Greenway would have been its only stop as it passed westward through Argyle (Belmont was in Argyle at the time but that was soon to change). Named after no less a person than the Premier himself who had pioneered in the Crystal City area to the south, it would logically have been an important commercial centre. The creation of Baldur, followed by a change in boundaries which placed the upstart village in the centre of the revised and growing municipality, meant that Greenway would never grow beyond its small hamlet status. The towns were just too close together.



Even so, Greenway, as the focal point of a vibrant and energetic community, had an important role to play in Argyle. Before its appearance locals would have got their mail at the W. Craik residence, the address being Dry River. If you lived in the eastern part of that district you might go to Mariapolis for mail and supplies. But as of 1889 the railway company had determined that Greenway was the place.

The town site may never have grown beyond the 3-street – three avenue grid that was originally surveyed, but it quickly developed the basic commercial, educational, recreational and spiritual facilities that would carry it through most of a century. For a short time its inhabitants might have hoped for more, especially around 1903 when a the Wakopa Subdivision which created the new towns of Glenora and Neelin made Greenway somewhat of a transportation hub. But there was just no need for more people or more services and Greenway remained on of those tiny villages whose importance and far outstripped its modest size.

#### Neelin

Neelin, the town, didn't make an appearance until the Canadian Northern built the Wakopa Line – which left the main line at Greenway and angled southwest toward Wakopa, an early settlement south of Boissevain. The route veered sharply southward for the first few miles, recognizing the need to serve the growing district of Glenora (it didn't hurt that MLA George Lawrence's family had extensive holdings there) and then skirted the north shore of Rock Lake in search of a suitable place to cross the deep valley between Rock Lake and Lake Louise. It found such a place on 19-3-14 a site that Joseph Neelin had recently purchased and a town was born.



Grading the line near Neelin (James Wall Collection - McKee Archives)

The community though had been there quite a while. Mr. Neelin had settled just east of the future town site in 1881. John Cumming, former soldier and ship's captain, who first came to the Marringhurst area in 1879 had moved to the Huntly area northwest of Neelin in 1882. The region was soon served by the Moropano Post Office. In 1887 Roseberry School was established on SW 33-3-14. Before long, however, both the school and the post office were located in the new town while the building of commercial, residential and community building was underway.



A "street" in Neelin

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## Other Argyle Museum Publications

The James Wall Photo Collection

1899 Baldur Gazette Historical Edition Re-Issue

1940 Baldur Gazette Special Historical Edition Re-Issue