

Images of Baldur and Area



1901 – 1906

By Ken Storie

Photos from the James Wall Collection
S.J. McKee Archives - Brandon University

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In 2004 a collection of photos of Baldur and region were donated to the S.J. McKee Archives at Brandon University. The origin of the photos is unclear, but they were acquired by James Douglas Wall in his capacity as President of the Southwest Branch of the Manitoba Genealogical Society.

Identification on the frames indicates that the prints were the work of at least three different photography operations:

“E.L. Lane Glenboro, Man”

“J.G. Macdonald, Moosomin, Assa.” (Assiniboia – Saskatchewan was not yet a province)

“Steel Co. Limited, Winnipeg & Calgary”.

Of course they could have originally been taken by a single photographer and processed or framed by these businesses. We know that Baldur had at least two professional photographers during that era. Walter Jackson and S. Frederickson had a studio above Fowler’s Shoe Store in 1905, but, as yet, we have no evidence linking them to these photos.

The prints, though marked with age, are of a very high quality and when blown up give us a good look at both architectural detail and facial expression. Many are unidentified except for a few penciled observations, but comparison with other existing photos has brought a few facts to light. Alterations to the original included some digital cleaning of background (skies) in outdoor photos and a slight alteration of the sepia tones.

Ken Storie, 2012

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Elizabeth Avenue

The town of Baldur was created in 1890 when the Canadian Northern Pacific Railroad completed a line linking Morris with Brandon, passing through the center of Argyle.

In 1890 D.W. Griffith operated the first general store in Baldur. He bought a building that had been moved to the site by A.E. Cramer. It had served as a creamery and was sometimes referred to as the "Cheese Factory". Before the town site was settled Mr. Griffith was operating a full-service store and when settlement began, the street which fronted the store was named for his wife, Elizabeth. Mr. Griffith was bought out by Percy Curtis in 1895, and the building was moved to the back corner of the lot when Mr. Curtis built his new building in 1900.

In the fall of 1889 Mr. G.W. Playfair had moved his grain buying business 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 know 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 built 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 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.

This photo, taken prior to 1905, offers a good view of progress to that point.



Elizabeth Avenue

In this crop from the previous photo of Elizabeth Avenue we see the Fowler House, on the left, followed by Chris Johnson's Implement Shop and a shoe repair shop. The Union Bank and the Cleghorn Drug Store begin a row of business blocks followed by the W.O. Fowler Block (1893) on the site that would become Lee Foon's store (1924), and another that would become the Poole Hardware Building in 1910. The next lot would be home to Lee Foon's new Grocery Store. The corner site is taken up with the Fowler Block (1899) standing at Elizabeth and 2nd, with The Curtis Block across the 2nd street from it.

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.

Future Changes

Thomas E. Poole moved to Baldur in 1890 and established himself as a hardware dealer and tinsmith. In 1910 he built the brick building that in 2010 houses the Argyle Museum. Mr. Lee Foon, who purchased a restaurant business from Charlie King in 1916, built a new building in 1924 which housed his store and café and ice-cream shop. It remained in the family until 2010.



Elizabeth Avenue West

Note the Simpson School to the left and the Cleghorn House to the right.

The Simpson School

In the early days of the village the children attended Tiger Hills School, then situated about three kilometers to the southwest. As the town grew, a new district, formed from parts of Tiger Hills and Otenaw districts, was created for the town of Baldur in 1891. It was named the Simpson School District, in honour of the surveyor who obtained the school site from the Northern Pacific town-site company. An existing school at Hnausa Mb (North of Gimli) had already taken the name Baldur.

At first, classes were held in various locations with Miss Jeanie Wells as the first teacher. The building in the photo was erected in 1892. The bell was donated by the Hon. Thos. Greenway, the Premier of Manitoba. For the first years only the main floor of the new building were used for classes with the upper story used as a lodge room and hall. It was soon full however, and by 1902 the Principal's class was moved to rooms over a commercial building, and a third teacher (Miss Annie Playfair) was added to the staff.

In 1905, after considerable debate regarding the site, the second Simpson School replaced this structure, which was moved a short distance and converted as a residence. In 1915, after the closure of the school at Hnausa, the name was changed to the Baldur School District. Baldur High School, as it was later known, served until 1976.



Baldur

This view from the southwest at some distance shows the extent of the townsite.

After several unsuccessful efforts to secure a much-needed railway connection, a line was surveyed and soon built, linking Morris with Brandon and passing through the center of Argyle. The towns of Greenway and Belmont were quickly established. But that left quite a stretch without a station and farmers felt they deserved better service.

While the surveyors who came were busy grading the new rail 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 Chistopherson, 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 Chistopherson's daughter Carrie has been given credit for the suggesting "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.



Elizabeth Avenue East

This view offers a good look at the east end of Elizabeth Avenue business district. The Curtis Block built by pioneer Baldur businessman Percival Curtis saw a wide variety of uses until it was demolished in the late 1950's.

Beside it is Mr. Griffith's store – the first store erected in Baldur – moved back from the corner spot it had originally occupied.

Continuing eastward is Mrs. Rankin's Confectionary and the Playfair furniture and lumber store. The next small building is the Harrower & Price real estate office, followed by Dr. John Tisdale's Drug Store and the Sexsmith Building.



Curtis Block / Victoria Hall

Percy F. Curtis (1860 – 1936) bought out the business of George Griffith on the corner of Elizabeth and 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. Proprietors included the Playfair Brothers, Neil McDonald, Frederickson's Cash Store, 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.



The Curtis Block and Residence



Percival Curtis

Mr. Curtis, one of Baldur's most influential businessmen, was active in a variety of ventures. The rear portion of the Curtis Block remains near the corner of Second Street and Elizabeth Avenue. It was incorporated into the service station that occupied the site after the original building was torn down.

Some excerpts from the Baldur Gazette, Special Edition, March 14, 1899 on his business endeavours:

- "Mr. P. H. Curtis, General Merchant ...bought out the business and property of Mr. Geo. Griffith about four years ago. This store was the first one opened in the town. The residence is built in connection with the store and has a beautiful lawn bordered with very handsome maple trees. "
- "Mr. P. F. Curtis, (in 1907) purchased the Gazette. ... Mr. Curtis, remained in that capacity ... until February 1909 the ownership passed from Mr. Curtis to Miss Annie Playfair, ..."
- "We also find a private line constructed by Curtis between his stores in Baldur and Greenway, using the Canadian Northern Telegraph poles for this purpose."

On the community level Mr. Curtis was very active in civic, recreational and church affairs. He was influential in having St. Mark's Anglican Church built. On an interesting personal note, Percy married Alice Lea, the daughter of R.N. Lea, noted Manitou pioneer, in the historic St. Luke's Anglican Church at Pembina Crossing.

The Curtis family moved to Victoria BC in 1908.



A wide view from the south, dated Sept. 13, 1903. That is snow on the ground!

From the September 17, Baldur Gazette; "This is one of the worst falls our farmers have had to contend with. All unstacked grain was saturated through and through by Saturday's big rain and snow storm, and it is feared that a great many of the stacks have let in the wet."



The Business District

A flouring mill conducted by Band and McDonald, was erected in 1890, the only one in Argyle. It was a vital service. According to information in the Baldur Gazette, the mill building seen here (between the elevators) was moved from St. Leon in the late 1890's.

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. By 1899 there were three elevators, seen in this photo from right to left; the Northern Elevator, the Roller Mill, the Dominion and the Winnipeg Elevators



Alex Fowler

Alex was born in 1868 at Seaforth ON, the son of W.O. Fowler. In 1891 he came with his father Baldur and operated the Manitoba Elevator, started by W.O. He then operated a saddlery business which he bought from C.W. Watson. In 1895 he married Margaret Playfair.

After building the Fowler Block he initially 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. Rollins took over the J. Smith business. There was a dressmaker's shop above the Rollins Store at one time.

Alex was appointed Postmaster in 1904 and served for 43 years. He operated it from this building until 1927 when he had the new post office built. Mr. Fowler served on the school board and was very active in community and sporting events.



The Fowler House – hosting Students and Staff from the Simpson School

W.O. Fowler came to Baldur in 1891, from the Wawanesa area. He built a flour and feed shop, and a bakery. He was a major shareholder in the Manitoba Elevator Co. He also served as Postmaster. This fine home, built in 1897, remained in the Fowler family until 2010. It is a Designated Municipal Heritage Site.



The Fowler Block

The structure is a Municipally Designated Heritage Site and the oldest building on Elizabeth Avenue. Harry Haskill, the “Glenboro cyclone bricklayer” (A quote from the Baldur Gazette) is credited as builder. It has housed a Grocery / General Store since it opened in 1899.



Canadian Northern Pacific Train Station

In the early years the Argyle settlers faced long journeys for supplies, and to market their crops. By 1885 the rail had reached Glenboro to the north and Pilot Mound to the south, but that was still quite a trek with horse or oxen. In 1889 after many pleas and promises, the Manitoba government contracted with the Northern Pacific Railway Company for the construction of a line from Morris to Brandon. This was built right through the heart of the municipality, and the four towns of Greenway, Baldur, Belmont and Hilton were established within its borders. (Strathcona was part of Argyle at that time). One can only imagine how much easier this made life in general.

The Baldur Gazette, on June 9, 1904 reported that, "Mr. E.J. Arnold of Methven Junction is the new C.N.R agent here. Mr. J.I.S. Hurst, who has been the agent here for the past three years, will be taking over the agent's position in Wawanesa." The gentleman in the photo would likely be one of those men.

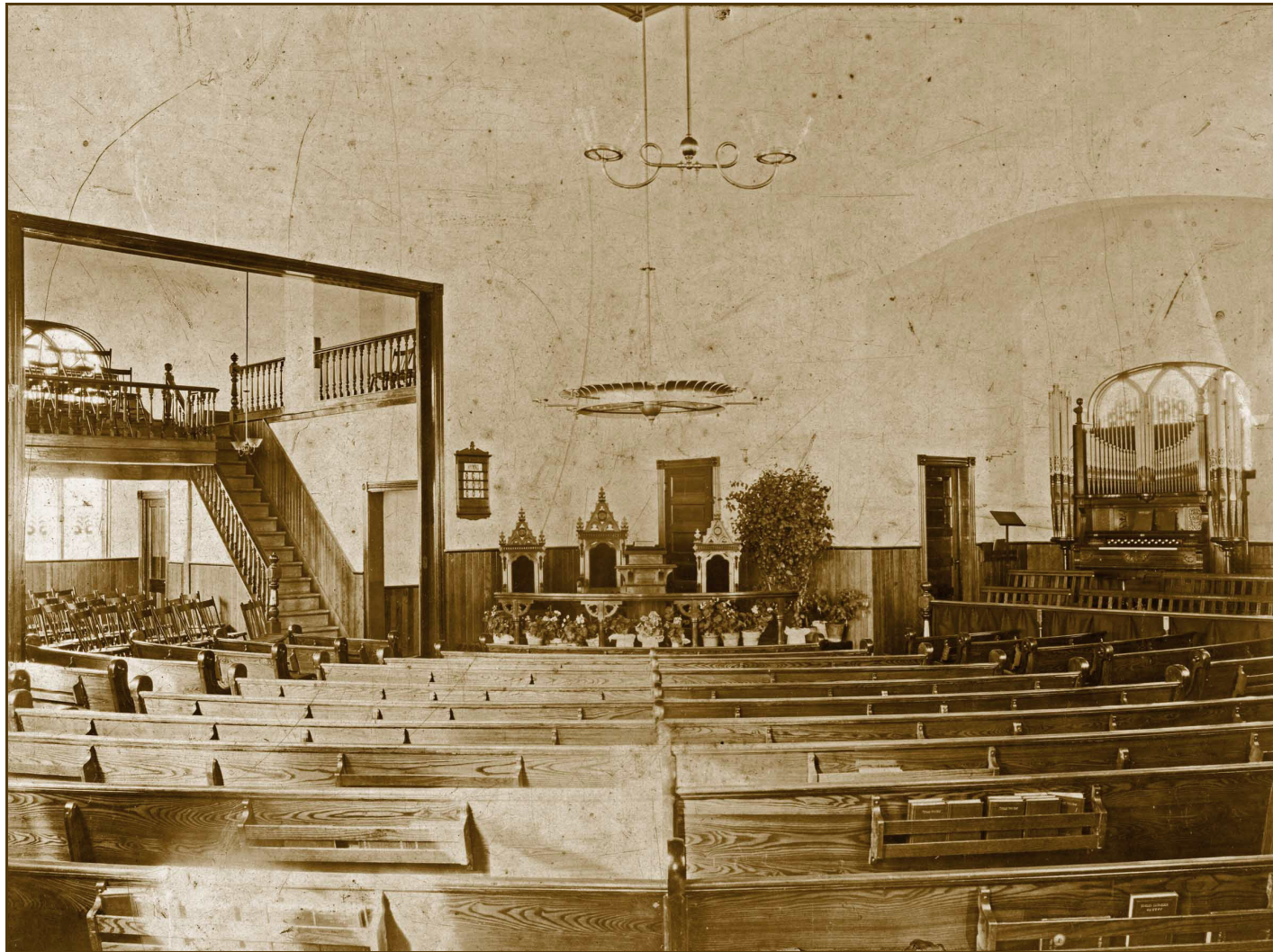


Construction of the Baldur Methodist Church in 1904.

From the Baldur Gazette: May 26, 1904:

Corner Stone Laid

A ceremony of more than usual interest to the Methodists of this town and district, took place on Monday afternoon, May 23 at 3 P.M., when the corner stone of the splendid new church was laid with befitting ceremony. The Pastor of the church, The Rev. H.J. Miller, presided. The distinguished honor of laying the stone being bestowed upon Mr. C. Couzens, a venerable and esteemed member of the congregation.



The interior of the Baldur Methodist Church

Surviving examples of good interior photography from pioneer times are hard to find. The James Wall Collection has several notable examples including this finely detailed photo. There have been renovations over the years and this shot provides an important record of the original design.



Baldur Drug Store

Dr. Cleghorn

Irving Cleghorn who was born on Aug. 22, 1862, in Moffat, Dumfriessire, Scotland. In 1894, after graduating from Medicine from the University of Manitoba, he married pioneer school teacher Katherine Ann Murray from Belmont. Doctor Cleghorn was Baldur's first physician. He operated a Drug Store as well. In 1927 he was elected as the Liberal M.L.A. for the constituency and served until his death in 1929





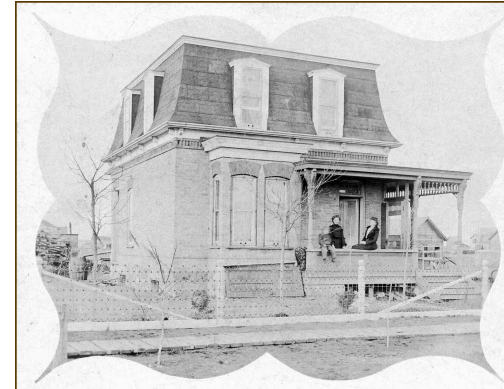
Baldur Drug Store

More than just prescriptions and aspirin, the modern drug store in 1904 seems to have stocked quite a variety of merchandise. The soda fountain contributed to its popularity as a meeting place.

It was quite normal for a Doctor in Pioneer times to supplement his income through the operation of a drug store. Dr. Cleghorn had the town's first telephone installed in 1899 to connect his house with his store.

The Manitoba Government telephone office was located in the downstairs of Dr. Cleghorn's office in 1904; then later in 1910 moved upstairs until the Telephone building was built in 1928.

Note the partially obscured sign near the top right of the photo. It appears that it may say, "SURGERY".



Cleghorn House

The Cleghorns built a modest, but stylish house on the corner Elizabeth Avenue and Oak Street, a short walk from the Drug Store.



Get your books and Stock Food here!

Just a sampling of the wide selection of goods on display!



Mrs. George Playfair

This photo is identified as Mrs. George Playfair. Baldur had at least three Mrs. George Playfairs, and the only one that fits the time frame is Grace Van Alstynne who married George William Playfair (the son of George Playfair) in 1895. The Argyle History says that they "lived in Baldur briefly before retiring to Victoria." Where they still here in 1903-04, or perhaps visiting?



Benedict Anderson

Born in Iceland in 1882, Benedict (Bendikt) Anderson came to the Bru district in 1887, where he soon established himself as a carpenter and contractor.

Note the embossed inscription in the bottom right corner: "E.L. Lane, Glenboro"

Photography in Baldur

Photography at the turn of the previous century was a matter for professionals. At least one of the photos in the James Wall Collection is in a frame bearing the inscription, " E.L. Lane", but most are unmarked. These excerpts from the Baldur Gazette help explain how and when such portraits as these might have been taken.



May 28, 1903; "We are pleased to welcome Mr. E.L. Lane, Glenboro's well-known photographer, to town for a few weeks. He has a beautiful large tent on Second Street, where he will be pleased to see you.

May 5, 1904; "Messrs. S. Frederickson and M. Jackson intend to engage largely in photography and about the end of the month will inaugurate a tour of the towns of Manitoba. For this purpose, a large tent has been ordered, costing over \$800, which on arrival will be pitched for a time in town."

May 26, 1904; "The specially made photography tent for Messrs. Frederickson and Jackson has arrived from Winnipeg and is pitched on the lawn of W.S. Jackson. The firm will do business here for a while and all desiring pictures taken may be accommodated. Prices run from 25c up."

Oct. 5, 1905; The Gazette ran an ad for "W.M. Jackson – Photographer."

Harold Bateman and Jack Johnson in the back row.
Clyde Playfair in the front left.

Some of the same faces...





Unidentified Threshing Gang

These workers may or may not have been local men. Threshing was very much a group and/or cooperative activity. Prosperous farmers would be the first to buy an expensive steam engine and threshing machine, often helping to pay for it by working for other farmers. Speed was vital in the short harvest season and to supplement the workforce the railways provided specially commissioned "Harvest Excursions". These excursions operated as "Employment Facilitators", keeping track of need and dropping workers where the jobs were available. Local histories are full of family histories that begin with the male householder coming from the east on a Harvest Train and staying to settle down.

Back at the farm house, keeping all these men fed was a full time job. Farmers seeking workers were judged on the quality (and quantity) of food provided and no farm family wanted to fall short in this capacity.



The “Invincibles”

This photo was identified only as a “Hockey Team on the road”. The Baldur Gazette of Feb. 27, 1902 mentions that the highly successful Baldur team was called “The Invincibles”.

Sports Enthusiasts

The pioneers knew how to work, and they knew how to play. It may be true that for the first few years they were pretty busy, breaking land, fighting with the elements, and getting “established”. But even then they found time for holiday gatherings, Church on Sunday, and social events. Sports activities were informal at first. Picnics would feature a variety of games and competitions. Bicycling was very popular, with races and excursions often reported.

It wasn’t long before formalized sports leagues were organized. By around 1900 we see the beginning of several local sports clubs; Football (1899) Lacrosse (1899), Tennis (1901), Cricket (1899), Curling (1899), and of course , Hockey, 1898. The first skating rink was opened on Dec. 8, 1898, and quickly became a focal point for the community in the winter months.



The Bateman House

The girl by the fence is Mildred Bateman, born Sept. 24, 1897. Her teaching career in Baldur and area touched hundreds of lives over several decades. She lived most of her life in this modest home.

The Jonsson / Snyder Family



There were four Snyder Sisters; The lady on the left is Ella. Dora is on the right. Is it Lilja Jonina (Lil) or Jennie Violet in the centre?

Eyolfur and Karolina Jonsson, came to Canada with one of the first groups of Icelandic settlers to arrive in New Iceland (Gimli). There they endured the smallpox epidemic, inadequate shelter and cold winters that defined that early settlement. Two children died during the six years they spent there before moving to the Grund district in 1882 and homesteaded on SE 2-6-14.

While Eyolfur and his brother Sigurjon was visiting the nearest Land Titles Office, at Brandon, they were insulted by a clerk who asked if "every S.O.B. from Iceland was the son of Jon?" Both brothers were so upset by the remark that they changed their names to Snyder, which means "snowy dale" in Icelandic. To further complicate things for future genealogists Sigurson used the spelling, "Snidal" while Eyolfur chose, "Snyder".

In 1898 Eyolfur passed away unexpectedly leaving Karolina with seven children to care for. The courage she displayed, as well as her physical and spiritual strength in facing hardship were an inspiration to others. She rented the homestead and moved to Baldur where she put her knowledge of midwifery to good use and over the next fifty years attended countless births, many without benefit of a doctor.

Her children were Haldora (Dora) , Jon, Gudlaug (Ella), Baldwin Benedict, Lilja Jonina, Halfstein and Jennie Violet.

Ella and her sister Dora became seamstresses, working out of the upper floor of the R. Rollins Store (Fowler Block). Ella married Clyde Playfair



Alex Fowler on Oak Creek

Mr. Alex Fowler, in addition to being one of the town's influential businessmen, was also a leading sportsman and nature enthusiast.



Grading the "Wakopa Branch" near the site of Neelin, with Lake Louise in the background.

An item from the Baldur Gazette, April 23, 1903: "The proposed railway from Greenway to Wakopa is in a fair way of being built. Mr. McLeod, the chief engineer, arrived hereon the 15th with his staff and full equipment of tents. They have camped at Mr. R.B. Watson's, west end of Rock Lake, to ascertain what kind of crossing can be had."

And from Nov. 17, 1904: "Surveyors have been engaged in staking out the new town site at Mr. Jas. Neelin's"

The "Wakopa Branch" offered farmers in the southern reaches of the municipality much better service and created the villages of Glenora and Neelin.



Oak Creek



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Presented by the Argyle Museum