

Assiniboine River: **Brandon**

N4985112 , W99.94189



(Archives of Manitoba)

Brandon's Ferry, in 1881, was the only connecting link between the north and south banks of the Assiniboine.

Traffic from the north side approached the ferry through Assiniboine Park. The first ferryman was Harry Koester. The boats which ascended the river landed their passengers and freight on the south shore opposite Fifth Street.

By September of 1881 Brandon was booming and a bridge was being planned.

According to "Brandon: A City", in 1883...

"a splendid bridge has been thrown over the Assiniboine, the private enterprise of our provincial member, Joseph E. Woodworth Esq., while approaches to another bridge connecting the country north of Brandon with Eighteenth Street are rapidly nearing completion."

Pile driving will be commenced this week for a temporary bridge across the Assiniboine at Brandon. The company are preparing plans for a substantial iron bridge to be erected next summer.

Winnipeg Times, Sept. 7, 1881

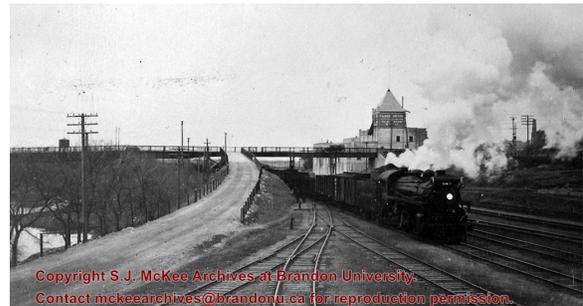
The first bridges on 1st Street and Eighteenth were privately owned and financed by tolls. Both were later purchased by the city. (S. Brown was a toll-collector on the First Street bridge),



The First Street Bridge, built in 1882.

The second version of First Street Bridge was an elaborate structure that spanned the CPR tracks and the river.

Traffic from the North End accessed the bridge by this ramp from Assiniboine Avenue.



The first 18th Street Bridge was built in 1907 as the "King Edward Bridge." It was replaced the following year by the second 18th Street Bridge. The third 18th Street Bridge, called the David Thompson Bridge opened in 2010.



The second 18th Street Bridge

Assiniboine River: **Brandon East Crossing**

East on Richmond Avenue N49. 82807
W99.82395

Another personal story...

There are several places in Brandon to launch a canoe, If you want to travel downstream towards Spruce Woods, there is a good spot east of town on Road 57N (Richmond Avenue East)

It looks like this...



Notice that the river must be shallow here. There are little gravel bars in midstream.

As I was putting my canoe in the water one day in the late 1990's when the water was quite low I noticed that there were a series of metal culverts set crosswise in the stream. It was like there had once been a road over the stream.

That memory came back as I started research for this story. I checked the site recently and all traces of such a crossing had vanished.

I checked Google Earth...



The appearance of roads approaching a river from each side is generally a sign that there was once a crossing of some sort. I checked some local histories and found that in 1990 a causeway was indeed built at this shallow spot.



Building the causeway.

Back in the 90's In low water, I've seen a series of culverts visible at this site when the river was low.

Today, even in low water - there is little evidence. Two years of record breaking flooding and the passing of time has eliminated the crossing

Assiniboine River: Hwy #1: Kemnay Area N49.86838, W100.09957

When the Trans Canada highway bypassed Brandon in the early 1960's a crossing was selected in the wide valley several kilometres west of the city. It has seen upgrades, and as with all upgrades and re-builds, one goal was to make them flood-proof.

I took this photo of that bridge at the height of the "Century Flood" of 2011. It was a close call.



Although the bridge remained open during the flood, there have been extensive renovations since, to make sure it is ready for the next challenge.

Bridges - and Floods

There are three things that will end the life of a bridge.

Wear and tear over years is inevitable, but also incremental and predictable. We can plan for it and all jurisdictions try to anticipate problems, set priorities, and upgrade as necessary.

When those precautions are neglected we see instances of bridge failure and collapse. Usually there are signs and the bridge in question is condemned or closed to traffic.

You will notice that bridges on the less travelled grid roads will often have a posted load limit. A few bridges in this survey collapsed when those load restrictions weren't followed.

And then there are floods. The floods of 1976 and 2011 took their toll on a number of bridges in the Southwest Manitoba,



This bridge over the Assiniboine River north of Alexander (N49.89929, W100.3014) was constructed in 1946 and is another example of a bridge that has stood the test of time. The bridge and the Highway through the valley remained open during the 2011 Flood.

The combination of sturdy construction, design choices, and the location of the crossing, saved the bridge. The river passes through a wide flat valley bottom and the floodwater was able to disperse.

Bridges built in a narrow steep valley like this one in Wawanesa are much more vulnerable. It was damaged in 1976, repaired and damaged again in 2011.

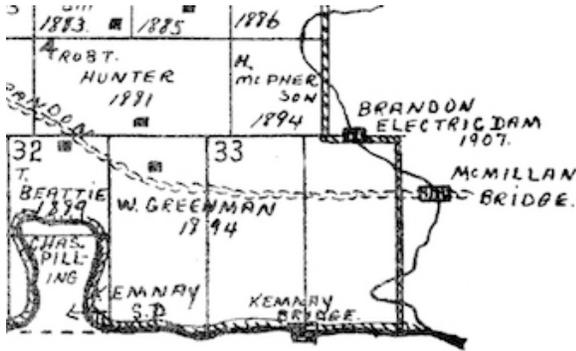


This used to be the access point to Wawanesa from the southwest.

Assiniboine River: Kemnay Bridge

N49.606052, W99.441808

Sometimes one thing leads to another - literally. While doing research for my chapter on the Little Saskatchewan I was using a map found in the Kirkham's Bridge history. Near the bottom I happened to see this...



Even though I am very familiar with the region, I had no idea that there used to be bridge near Kemnay.

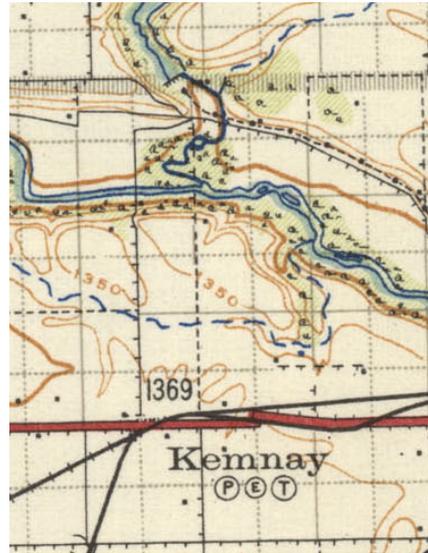
I should have guessed.

It is interesting to see how quickly traces of roads, bridges, rail lines and other man-made structures can fade away. I've driven down that road west from the Daly Bridge many times, beginning in about 1995. I'm always on the lookout for abandoned trails, and I missed this one.



I'll forgive myself for missing the road, but the sign should have been a clue! It obviously leads right towards the river. If I had ever noticed the sign, I'd certainly forgotten about it.

So I checked another map and sure enough there appeared to be a road that crossed the river.



(From my favourite Survey Maps from 1922)

After checking with Google Earth I was pretty sure I could find the road access from the south.



Straight north from Kemnay, the maintained road ends with the last rural dwelling.

After that it is a pretty rough, overgrown trail to start with, but clearly a roadbed. After a few 100 metres it begins to wind its way down the valley wall and becomes a fairly pleasant walk - the underbrush and willows give way to tall grass.



The road to the Kemnay Bridge site offers some nice views along the way.



The Kemnay Bridge 1922

As you can see, this bridge was pretty substantial, and the Assiniboine at this spot was wide. It has an interesting base. It looks sturdy.

In its time it was a valuable asset to the region. The bridge allowed for mingling of families who had connections on each side of the river. As with other bridges it was a popular picnic site.

Cattle were taken across the bridge to pasture each season. Children could attend the school closest to them.

During the summer the two Greenman children would cross the bridge to get the mail at Kemnay. Mrs. Greenman always dressed them in white so that she could see when they had safely crossed the bridge over the Assiniboine

River.

Until the early 1920s the Canadian Pacific Railway maintained a well and pumping station near the southeast corner of this bridge, which pumped water through a pipeline to a locomotive watering tank at Kemnay.

This bridge was condemned in the late 1930s but cyclists continued to use it until it was torn down (approximately 1940)

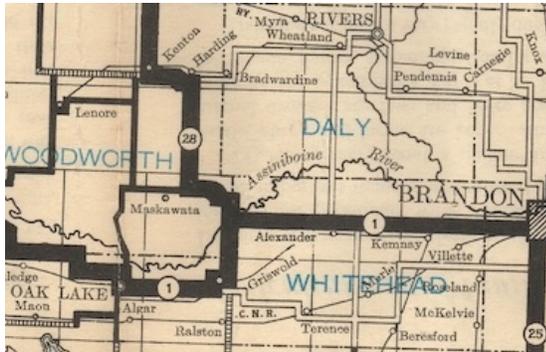
With rural depopulation, larger farms and faster trucks we can assume that the cost of keeping it outweighed the advantages.

It was nice having it there, but ...times change.

Assiniboine River: **Sioux Valley**

N49.89929, W100.30146

The Trans Canada Highway, established in 1926, used to run directly west from Brandon to a point that is now in Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. There it intersected Highway #28 (Now #21) which crossed the Assiniboine heading north, while #1 turned south taking one to Griswold.



Near that crossroads a bridge known as "Hall's Bridge", also known as the "Griswold Bridge", was built in 1897. Today a more modern bridge has taken its place. The fact that another crossing nearby, north of Oak Lake was also known as Hall's Bridge caused this researcher a bit of confusion. That crossing was known as William's Bridge back in the early days. Times change, names change.



This photo of Hall's Bridge as taken during a Spring Flood in 1954. (Griswold: "Bridging the Years 1867-1967")

In 1966 a dance hall was built on the corner of the farm close by Hall's Bridge, which provided entertainment for those within a radius of sixty

miles for a period of ten years and was known as "Halls Bridge Dance Gardens". A friend remembers going to dances there.



At Hall's Bridge - such locations were often popular as recreational sites.

From the Griswold History we learn that...

In 1944 R.J. (Bob) Campbell purchased 19-10-22, a portion of the property known as the Hall Estate, just east of Hall's Bridge. The move to this farm proved quite profitable. It was in a good location as the main No.1 Highway passed by the door until the highway was rebuilt four and one-half miles south in 1948.

For a period of time George Mawer was the operator of the ferry, which was the only means of crossing the Assiniboine River in the vicinity where Hall's Bridge was later built. He was working for Bob Hall. The location was just west of the present bridge.

Stories

In 1910 a steam engine, used for threshing, fell through the bridge into the Assiniboine River. The engineer, Bill Storey, jumped for safety, caught the bridge railing and got back, hand-over-hand to safety.

Assiniboine River: **Skinner's (Kennedy) Bridge**

N49.79677, W100.50760

Sometimes Google Earth is our best friend when it comes to identifying abandoned river crossings. By zooming in and following the stream, you can see some obvious signs. Sometimes it is just remnants of a trail that seems to meet on opposite sides. Sometimes you see even more evidence



On this stretch of the Assiniboine northwest of Griswold we see bridge supports - but no bridge. What's the story here?

Check out this map from 1920 and you learn more...



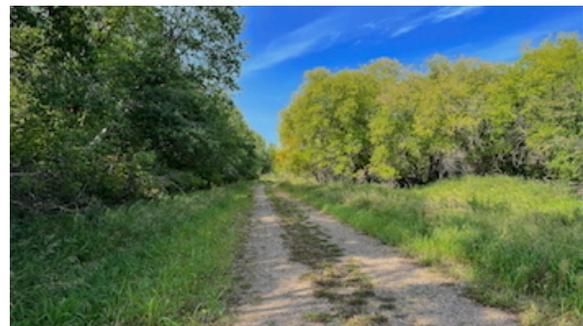
There were two crossings north of Griswold. The one heading straight north is now known as Highway 21.

A quick search through the Griswold History offers some this account...

"...This discussion about building an elevator in Oak Lake went on for many years. As always, the local paper took an active part in the affairs of the community and very interesting letters to the editor, concerning this issue, were often published. In the meantime, a Grain Growers' Elevator was built in Griswold. The farmers from the Harvey and Ryerson districts now could haul their grain over Skinner's Bridge to that elevator and eventually the idea of building a second one in Oak Lake was dropped."

Another clue...

"In 1883 the first ferry operated by a Metis named Kennedy, began service at the Assiniboine River crossing near the present Kennedy (Skinner) Bridge. In 1884 Tom Harvey, Dougal McDonald and Duncan McDonald bought a steam-threshing outfit. To cross the Assiniboine they loaded the machine on the Kennedy Ferry."



The approach from the east. Drivable right to the site, but also a nice walk!

The good news is that if you try to trace the route from the old map, you find that much of that road is still a maintained road, and that the last few hundred metres is still passable in good weather.



The remains in 2025.



The first bridge at the site - which was replaced in 1939.

The Griswold book was published in 1970 and makes no mention of the closing of the bridge so we can assume it was still operating into the 1970's.

A school memory...from "Bridging the Years" p17

No field trips then, only the day several boys played "hooky" and ended up at Skinner's bridge having a snow ball fight, and Makowski proclaimed they were playing "Horatious at the Bridge".



Mr. & Mrs. George Spears and Willa Haycock taken on the Skinner Bridge



The Assiniboine River adjacent to the bridge site. This would have been a good spot for a ford from late summer on.

Assiniboine River: **Harrison Bridge**

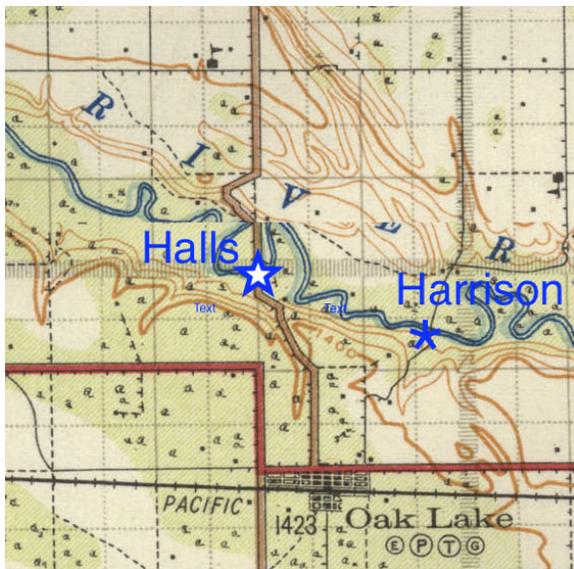
N49.78773, W10061

In the early days the settlers north of Oak Lake crossed the river on the ice (a dangerous and difficult route) and in summer they were forced to use ferries operated by the people who lived at strategic crossings.

The first Harrison Bridge was built in 1897 on land was donated by George Harrison Sr. and the project was funded by Oak Lake merchants, Sifton and Woodworth Municipalities, and the Manitoba Government.



Harrison Bridge, replaced in 1930, seen here in 2025



These two bridges, still functioning today, are about 3km apart, and have to be the closest Assiniboine bridges outside of an urban setting.



The first Harrison Bridge

Assiniboine River: **Hall's (Williams) Bridge,** N49.79446, W100.64370

Enoch Williams operated a ferry across the river north of Oak Lake for several years until it was outdated by the building of Williams' Bridge in 1897. This was later called Hall's Bridge.



The first Hall's Bridge

The local history mentions that the first bridge at what was then called the "Williams Crossing" was just east of the current bridge. From a Google Earth image it appears that there was also a bridge or perhaps a ferry, to the west. A site visit confirms that the path is quite visible.



Hall's Bridge today just about 3km west of Harrison's Bridge.



The path of the earlier road to the west of the current approach is still quite recognizable.



The view from above...

About 1913 and '14 the Councils began to realize that the bridges and the grades leading to them were too low and they began discussing the replacement of William's, Harrison's and Skinner's Bridges. It was some time before this happened but in 1921 the William's Bridge was replaced.

The early old bridges weren't designed for the loads involving large heavy farm machinery.