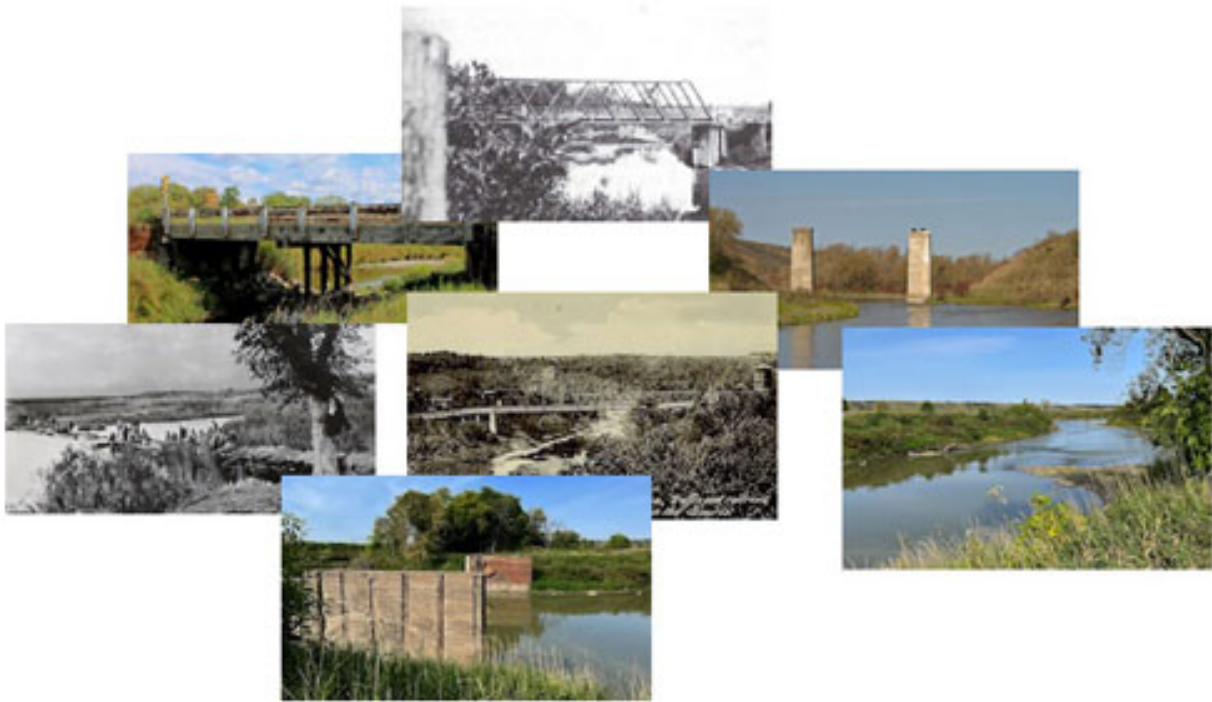


Crossings

Fords, Ferries & Bridges in Southwest Manitoba



By Ken Storie

Presented by the Municipality of Grassland

2026

Crossings



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Presented by the Municipality of Grassland support from the Manitoba Government Heritage Grants Program.

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My choice of the boundary of what I have called Southwest Manitoba is arbitrary.

This is an exploration, as opposed to an inventory. I have paid special attention to the main waterways affecting our region: The Assiniboine, Souris and Little Saskatchewan Rivers, and have documented the historic crossing sites on those streams. I have chosen only a few selected representative sites on the smaller waterways.

The site photos are mine unless otherwise credited.

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- Chapter 2: The Assiniboine River
- Chapter 3: The Souris River
- Chapter 4: The Little Saskatchewan River
- Chapter 5: The Boundary Commission Trail
- Chapter 6: Here and There - Selected Examples

River Crossings: Fords, Ferries, and Bridges

Welcome to our examination of River Crossings in Southwest Manitoba.

This is a work of personal exploration that took decades to take this form. It started with the rivers...exploring them in a canoe. Finding access points for day trips led to an interest in the bridges that are often convenient places to access the river - so I saw a lot of them. Inadvertently I learned about towns that used to exist along the rivers, and crossings that used to be used. That led to searches through local history books for more information. That process was very much aided by the advent of Google Earth, which allowed discoveries that I hadn't found in person, or in books. That brought me out to look at more sites.

Through archival images, contemporary photographs, and local history research, I hope to connect this survey of crossings to the larger story of prairie transportation since 1800.

Some crossings became villages and towns, while other sites have been forgotten. Routes changed, always aiming to connect to the busy places. The places that were important in 1900 were sometimes forgotten by 1950.

But traces of the old routes sometimes remain.

Aboriginal travellers followed long-established routes across the prairies that were dictated, in part, by convenient or safe places to cross streams. European explorers and fur traders, and the very first European settlers, made good use of these established trails and fords. As traffic increased, and as settlements grew, ferries were established. Once traffic warranted it, bridges were built. These were simple at first and usually had to be replaced once or twice as we moved into the era of highway transportation.

Prior to the building of railways, a traveller had few options. Many walked. "Shanks Mare" was the descriptive expression for that. If you had a horse, that made a trip much faster. If you had oxen, the trip would be much slower, but they could pull quite a load on a wagon or a Red River Cart.

Whatever your circumstance, much of your travel throughout southern Manitoba was relatively smooth going. There are no real mountains, and few marshes or swamps that couldn't be bypassed. Flat land as far as the eye could see, most days.

Mosquitoes could be alarmingly voracious according to all accounts. Fierce lightning storms, prairie fires and even grasshoppers could slow you down. But compared to crossing the Canadian Shield or the Great Divide, prairie travel was not too bad.

Fords

Thankfully, quite a few of the pioneers that came west in the years around 1880 left diaries, letters, and various communications through which we can learn about the conditions they met on their journeys. Many such reminiscences were saved through the efforts of local historians as they looked back many years later and saved that body of knowledge in Local History Books.

Virtually all of those newcomers came from Ontario or through Ontario. The first part of the journey often involved Great Lakes steamers, which got you as far as Duluth. The Northern Pacific could provide railway travel as far as the Red River near Fargo. From there riverboat service took one to Winnipeg. After that you were on your own.

Those heading for the southwest corner of Manitoba (it was actually still the Northwest Territories until 1881) would disembark at Emerson and made their way westward along the Boundary Commission Trail, often in wagons loaded with as many belongings and supplies as they could afford to bring.

It was a long, slow, journey, but the trail first blazed by the expedition to mark the Canada - US Border in 1873, was well travelled and several "Stopping Houses", pioneer versions of the roadside motel, had been established in homes along the trail. If the weather cooperated, and the wagon didn't lose a wheel or break an axle, it might well have been almost an enjoyable trip. Preferable in some ways to the crowded steamboats, and uncomfortable railway cars they had just left behind.

Except for creeks and rivers!



A shallow bend in Souris River south of Melita. The river banks are low, crossing here might not be too difficult.

Pioneer reminiscence is full of tales of crossing the streams. It could be a tricky procedure. But here again, nothing quite like the raging mountain streams to the west or the muskeg and rapids of the Canadian Shield.

Although our rivers could be quite deep in places, there were also places that were shallow with a firm bottom - places you could walk across, or take a team and wagon across.

Springtime was a special challenge. Currents could be strong and dangerous. There were mishaps. There were also innovative ways to tackle the problem. Wagons were converted to makeshift boats, horses forced to swim.

An account by Fannie Clark Clench, in *Sipiweske - 100 Years of Wawanese and District*, offers a glimpse.

Westward Bound in '79

"On reaching the Souris River we found the only means of crossing to be a hollowed out log that the Indians had been using. This we turned into a ferry by tying a rope to each end, and in this way conveyed ourselves and our goods across. The wagons were towed across the same way, while the stock had to swim. The river here was about six feet deep; one boatload upset and part of a sewing machine was lost. Along the bank of the Souris we found some wild plums which gave variety to our bill of fare for that day."

Ferries

Of course, floating across a river in a boat was a much more comfortable and safe option,

especially if you were bringing in supplies to start a homestead. But who had the resources to bring along a boat? The Mandan people living along the Missouri River solved that problem by designing what was later called a bull boat. These were round wooden frames covered with hide stretched across the bottom. They could be built as needed. Metis hunters and early European settlers sometimes used wagon boxes - strung together as makeshift raft.

As the population of a given area grew, and traffic increased, some enterprising soul would establish a ferry crossing, effectively helping the traveller cross the river ...for a fee. For several decades a network of such crossings were an essential part of our transportation system. Even as railway lines and improved roads made travel much easier, bridges were expensive to build and the use of ferries continued well into the automobile era. In fact we will visit Southern Manitoba's last working ferry in the next chapter.

A big advantage of established ferries over various improvised methods of crossing a river was the ability to transport heavy loads. A wagon could be taken across without unloading and re-loading. Herds of cattle could cross safely. Ferries were essential for getting grain to market.

They were soon established along all the well-used trails.

The first ones were basically rafts, powered by poles or long paddles, but most soon used a cable attached to a support on each side of the stream. Some were towed across by oxen or horses. Some were set at an angle so the current pushed the ferry across (one direction anyway), later steam, and eventually gasoline engines, did the work.

Designs varied - some had guardrails, and metal hinges to facilitate a smooth exit and entrance.

Choosing a suitable location was important. Steep banks were avoided, but marshy areas and areas prone to flooding were not good either. Strong currents were a problem, and one had to make sure the stream was deep enough - even late in the summer. Many sites that are ideal for fording the river might not make a good ferry site.



One of some 150 ferries that once operated in Manitoba. (An unidentified photo from the Archives of Manitoba.)

With the creation of provincial and municipal governments, grants of up to \$200 were offered to people willing to establish a ferry. Eventually municipalities took over, or established, ferry services.

Although established ferry crossings generally became the site of a bridge, this didn't always happen. Some sites just didn't mesh with the evolving settlement patterns and transportation routes.

Bridges

As soon as a town was established alongside a river, (as many were) thoughts would turn to building a bridge.

There were a few missteps along the learning curve as newcomers had to learn that the seemingly innocent trickle of a stream you encountered in the fall, transformed into somewhat of a torrent in the spring. Rivers on the prairies are seasonal and also cyclical. Just as the great migration into southwestern Manitoba was getting underway in 1881 and 1882, we experienced an extremely wet cycle. Bridge builders adapted.



Crossing the Souris River at Sourisford in 1873. (Archives of Manitoba)

The Boundary Commission erected the first bridge built in Southwest Manitoba in 1873 over the Souris River at Sourisford, south of Melita. It was a temporary structure and was gone by the 1879 when the first settlers arrived.

The first bridges were made of wood, starting with a series of pilings sunk into the riverbed. A platform of planks provided the roadbed. I once found this example on the Souris River south of Wawanesa.



The village of Souris City was located along the river at this spot for a short time in the 1880's. As the site was abandoned in favour of Wawanesa in 1889, I can only assume that these piles have been there a long time.

Many early experiments with bridges had a short life span. But second efforts were more long lasting.

This bridge over Black Creek, north of Wawanesa is a good example of the second stage in bridge building. Substantial abutments on each side of the stream set the bridge high above the water line. Sturdy planks carried the weight, with supports as necessary. It is a simple

design but many have lasted into the modern era.



An abandoned bridge over Black Creek, north of Wawanesa.

The second generation of bridges over Manitoba streams involved the use of concrete and iron. Our project will mention various styles as we proceed.



The second bridge over the Souris near Treesbank showcased the use of concrete for style and durability. It lasted nearly 100 years before the flood of 2011 took it out.

Chapter 1: The Assiniboine River

The Assiniboine rises in east-central Saskatchewan. For much of its length in Manitoba it flows through well-populated farmland. Many fur trading posts, ferries, crossings, and landings have been located on its banks.

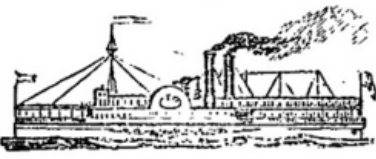


For centuries it was the primary water route westward from Winnipeg. It is noteworthy for being navigable by shallow draft steamboats. Such vessels were introduced on the Red River in 1857 and started regular service on the Assiniboine in 1878. Their use coincided with the first wave of European agricultural settlement in Manitoba. A survey of local history volumes produced in Southwest Manitoba will uncover numerous accounts of settlers taking the steamer from Winnipeg on the way to their new homes.

Steamboat travel flourished for only a few years before the railway took over, but between 1879 and 1885 traffic was constant during the spring and early summer. One can only speculate at the amount of profit these journeys generated. The cost of a ticket from Winnipeg to Brandon at \$10 seems reasonable enough by today's standards, but it was quite high in relation to the dollar's purchasing power at the time. Surely the owners and operators could see that the coming of the railway would effectively kill their business. The profits must have been large enough to justify the expense of purchasing these boats?



The "City of Winnipeg" at Grand Valley (Photo - Archives of Manitoba)



North-West Navigation Line.

FOR FORT ELLICE.

THE STEAMER
MARQUETTE

Will be put on the ASSINIBOINE as soon as the ice goes out, and she will run as long as navigation continues, to

FORT ELLICE,

Calling at

- Portage la Prairie,
- Cypress River,
- Souris **River,**
- Grand Valley,
- Oak River,
- Arrow River, and
- Bird Tail Creek.

Immigrants for Rock Lake vicinity will save time and money by taking this route to Cypress River.

Freight for all points on Little Saskatchewan will be warehoused at Grand Valley.

For Freight and Passenger rates apply at office, Merchant's Bank Block.

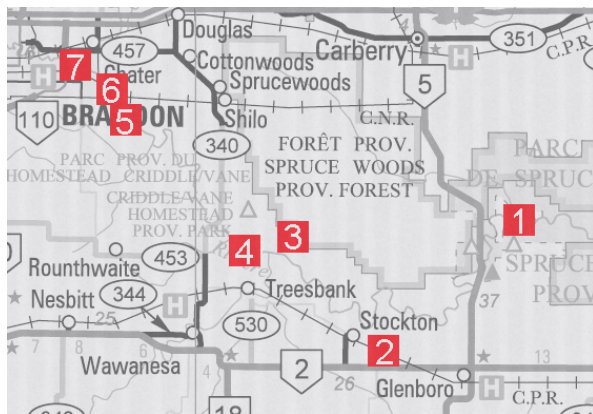
A. McARTHUR,
Agent.

April 7

This ad was in the Winnipeg Times on April 27, 1880

An Overview:

Part 1: East of Brandon



1. Steel's Ferry - N49.69538, W99.20630
2. Stockton Ferry - N49.60605, W99.44181
3. Souris Mouth Ferry - N49.66643
NW99.569585W\
4. Treesbank Ferry - N49.66386, W99.60142
5. Currie's Landing Ferry - N49.80390,
W99.79460
6. The Brandon Rapids Crossing - N49.818202N
99.808192W
7. The Grand Valley (McVicar's) Ferry -
49.84879, W 99.89484

Part 2: Brandon And West of Brandon



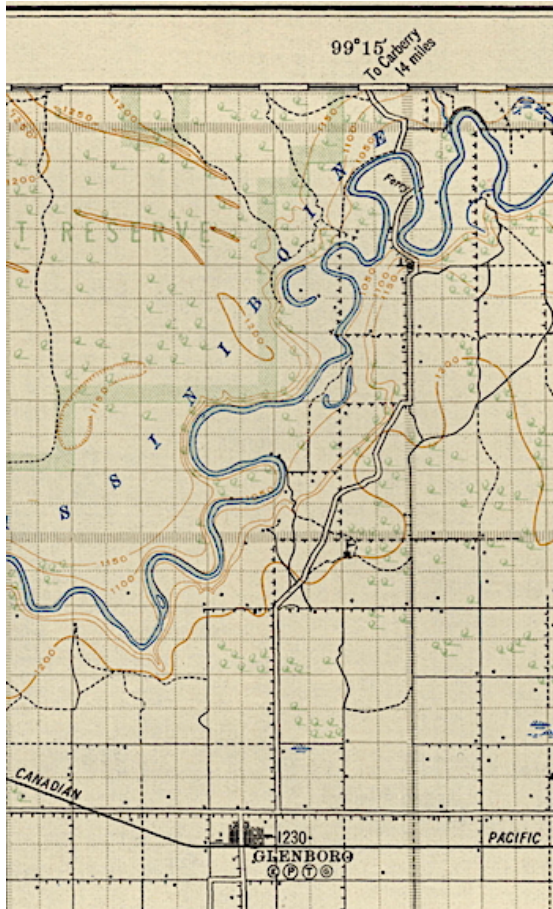
8. Brandon Crossings

9. Highway #1 - West of Brandon - N49.86843.
W99.10000
10. Kemnay Bridge - N49.79677, W100.50760
11. Highway #250 - N49.89919, W100.30151
12. Sioux Valley - N49.89929, W100.30146
13. Skinner's Bridge - N49.796771. W100. 50760
14. Harrison Bridge - N49.78773, W100.60662
15. Hall's Bridge - N49.79446, W100.64370

Assiniboine River: **Steel's Ferry**

N49.69538, W99.20630

Before 1965, if you were heading from Glenboro to Carberry by car, you would start by heading straight north for five kilometres. Then the road angled to the east, twisting a bit until it straightened and headed due north again.



Three kilometres later the road takes a steep dip into the Assiniboine Valley, and after another kilometre or so, there you are at the Assiniboine River, ready to cross on Steel's Ferry.

The road and ferry are clearly marked on this map from 1922. On the next clip, notice that another trail crosses the river about 8 km directly east of Steel's Ferry. As no mention of a ferry at this location appears in Local Histories we assume it was a convenient spot for a ford. There are many shallow spots on the Assiniboine from mid summer on.



Steel's Ferry Road - A great place for a hike.

The site is now in Spruce Woods Provincial Park. A branch of the Great Trail passes nearby. Alex Steel's house and barn were still standing when I last visited. The road was passable, but we prefer to walk.



Steel's Ferry served as the main link for travellers heading north for over seventy years.

When it was established, in 1892, it was called Johnson's Ferry. That was before Alex Steel, who had farmed in the region for some years, built a house nearby and moved in. For a time it was known as Nairn Crossing and was located a few 100 metres south of the Steel Farm.



The view from the Steel's Ferry Overlook - the ferry would have been in about the centre of this shot.

Bill Snart worked on the family farm nearby and also was in charge of the ferry for nineteen years beginning in 1923. It was a busy crossing on a well-travelled route.



Bill Snart and Jack Abernethy at the cabin at Steel's Ferry in 1928



Chevrolet Coupe driven by Bill Snart on the ferry in 1928.

Lyall's Ferry

For a short time another ferry operated in the same vicinity.



Around 1910 William Lyall bought the SE Quarter of 14-8-14 for pasture. We have no information as to the dates Lyall's Ferry operated, but as it wasn't on the main road northwards from Glenboro, it likely served a local need.

The First Bridge

By 1942 a bridge replaced the ferry but that effort was short lived, as a flood washed it away in 1943.



The short-lived bridge at Steel's Crossing. Quite a few bridges had short life spans!

In 1965 the "Ernest Thompson Seton Bridge" spanning the Assiniboine River was officially opened. With the opening of the bridge, Steel's Ferry was taken off and demolished.

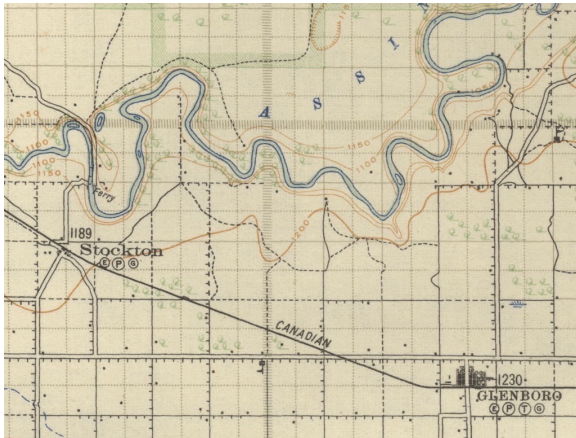
Assiniboine River: **Stockton Ferry**

N49.60605, W99.44181



The Municipality of South Cypress opened a ferry on the Assiniboine River in 1887, a year after the Manitoba South Western Colonization Railway reached Glenboro. It consisted of a wooden scow attached to a movable cable, which was angled across the river, allowing the current to pull the scow across. From mid-April to mid-November, it provided everyday transport for local residents and allowed grain to be hauled to the railway. An ice bridge replaced the ferry during the winter.

At that time the crossing, near where Stockton would soon be located, was on the most direct route to Brandon.



The crossing might well have been upgraded to a bridge if not for the fact that the Sunshine Highway, established in 1921, avoided a river crossing by taking a route through Wawanessa. It became the more popular route. When the time came to build a bridge north from Glenboro, a direct route to Carberry and Highway #1 was chosen.

In the spring of 1966 the Municipality purchased an electrically operated steel ferry, from the R.M. of Morris and had it moved to Stockton where it replaced the wooden ferry then in use

When the Treesbank Ferry upstream ceased operating that vessel was moved in to replace the older vessel. As of 2025 it is the only Municipal Ferry in southern Manitoba.

In 1989, the Manitoba Heritage Council placed a monument at the site



The site viewed from the west side.



The ferry crossing to the NE side to pick up a passenger.



Operator Henry Hutlet at the controls in 2021.

A Personal Note...

In 2021 the Stockton Ferry was the subject of a feature article in the Winnipeg Free Press. I had been to the site several times over the years - it is starting point for a great paddling expedition through beautiful country to Spruce Woods Provincial Park.

What I learned from the article was that the man currently in charge of the ferry was a person I knew from my school days. That prompted another visit, and I had a chat with a guy I hadn't seen in 50 years. We crossed on the ferry and explored the back roads that took us home to Brandon.

Although much of the traffic today comes from the farms north of the river, grid roads do lead all the way to Road 340, where a paved highway leads south to Wawanesa and north to Shilo. It a beautiful drive taking one past a number of Historic Sites - including Souris Mouth, the Criddle-Vane Park, and the original site of HBC Brandon House.

Assiniboine River: **Souris Mouth**, N49.66643, W99.56959

Near the junction of Road 43N and 93W a "Wildlife Management Area" sign alerts you to a trail through the woods heading south. That will take you to an overlook with a view of the mouth of the Souris River.



It is an iconic spot. Henry Youle Hind passed that way in his epic fact-finding mission in 1858.

His diary records this observation:

"June 24. - Directed course towards the Assiniboine and Souris Forks, reaching the Assiniboine opposite the mouth of the Little Souris, 146 miles from Fort Garry at 5:40 a.m. Halted to make observations, graze the animals, and breakfast. Warned this morning to prepare for an attack by the Sioux. The smoke of two fires in the valley of the river indicating their presence. Grasshoppers very numerous and destructive to baggage and harness. Effected the crossing of the Assiniboine, after completing observations; swimming the horses, ferrying the baggage in canoes, and towing the carts and wagon over. Proceeded up the left bank of the Souris, camping four miles from its mouth. Mounted guard during the night to avoid a surprise by the Sioux."

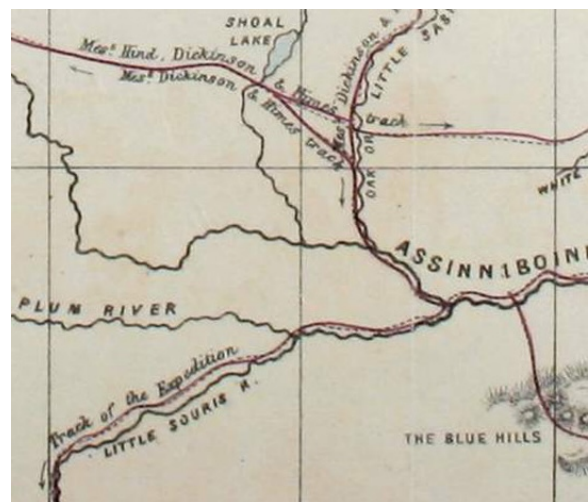


The confluence of the Souris River with the Assiniboine. H. Hime, 1858

His party included a photographer and a sketch artist. A person familiar with this image, who happened upon the spot by chance today, would know it instantly.

According to Hind's map they crossed the Assiniboine just upstream from the mouth of the Souris.

This was an important intersection for those travelling to homesteads in Southwest Manitoba. Whether on foot, by oxcart, or on the riverboats, they would often need to stop at the Land Titles Office located just to the southwest of the mouth of the Souris. A ferry was soon established near the Land Titles Office.

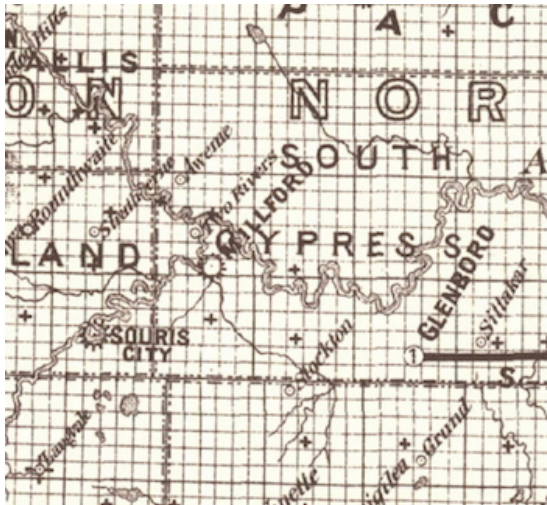


Hind's map, 1858

The crossing is mentioned in most of the region's Local Histories.

An example:

"This anxious and impatient party's appreciation of natural beauty had worn thin by the time they reached the Land Office. The ferry across the river was a rickety, insecure affair; and during the shuttle service which it provided for the crossing one yoke of oxen found that being hauled across the swift stream on an few wobbly planks was more than their wavering bovine morale could endure, so they plunged into the water, almost overturning the ferry. Tom Leith was thrown into the stream but he was able to catch one of the oxen by the horns and throw himself across its back, as the frantic beast struck out for the shore, which they reached safely, cold, wet and thoroughly shaken but otherwise quite unharmed." (The People of Souris and Glenwood, p33)



The Land Titles Office site was home to the first Post Office south of the Assiniboine, called "Souris Mouth", and later changed to "Two Rivers."



*A view from the north side of the Assiniboine.
Photo by Dave August, 2001*

The banks across from the mouth of the Souris are steep, but a more gentle approach is available to the right where the ferry took one across to the Land Titles Office - somewhere on that cultivated field.

Travel patterns changed quickly. By 1882 settlers could take the train to Brandon and the Land Titles Office soon moved there. The riverboat service ended in 1885, and the route was then even much less travelled. In 1887 the building was moved to a nearby farm. The ferry remained for a few more years as the only crossing in the region, before being moved just a short distance upstream directly north of Treesbank.

Assiniboine River: **Treesbank Ferry**

N49.66388, W99.60192

People on the south side of the Assiniboine in settlements such as Millford, Souris City and Glenboro used the ferry at Souris Mouth for the first decade until the railway created the town of Treesbank in 1891. Now mail was delivered to Treesbank, instead of Two Rivers. The ferry was moved upstream to NE17-8-16W and known as Clark's Crossing. In 1898-1899, the Municipality of South Cypress constructed a road, built a new ferry, and took over its operation.



*The Treesbank Bank Ferry (Palmer's Ferry),
1913*

Before the ferry was established "crossing on the cable" was the only possible way, a method not advised for the faint-hearted or weak-muscled types.

An alternate, crossing on the ice, was equally precarious - perhaps more so, and required good judgment and agility, as the person crossing while the river broke up had to jump from one ice cake to another. Landing too near one edge could tip the person into the icy water. As the ice was constantly on the move, changing position in the river while also moving downstream, this method proved a challenging sport for the daring.

The ferry, or "scow" as it was usually termed then, provided its own share of hazards. On one occasion, a farmer taking a load of cattle across on it, met with an unexpected problem when the cattle moved suddenly over to one side, thereby unbalancing the ferry and throwing cattle and men into the river. All got ashore safely..



*"Crossing on the cable" at Treesbank Ferry,
1917. Photo by Norman Criddle*

Percy Criddle who lived a few kilometres north of the river (Now the site of the Criddle - Vane Provincial Heritage Park.) urged the Municipality to build a bridge at the site. He felt the bridge would benefit the communities on both sides of the river. The ferry approaches had to be constantly repaired and improved. Flooding spoiled them annually. Someone was needed to operate the ferry.

One new "scow", built and put in during the year of 1899, received the nickname of "Ferguson's Folly", as it was apparently urged on by a man of that name. It was built too short for its purpose, and caused much trouble before it could be corrected, and the ferry made operational again. Such measures, and the constant upkeep made Percy Criddle even more convinced that a bridge would have been the better answer. But it wasn't to be.



Soon a serviceable, reliable, ferry was in operation.



In 1971 a new wooden ferry was built and electrically operated to replace the old Treesbank Ferry.



The site today.

When the bridge opened 2½ miles upstream, in September 1989, this long-established crossing closed after 109 years of service.

Treesbank Ferry - Through the years.



Indeed you could move almost anything on the ferry!



This last version of the Treesbank Ferry was moved to become the Stockton Ferry

Assiniboine River: **Curries Landing**

N49.80390, W99.79460 / SE 1-10-18

About ten kilometres east of Brandon on the Trans-Canada Highway, an alert traveler might see a sign noting “Currie’s Landing Rd.” marking a gravel road heading south. That trail has a bit of a story to tell.

In 1880 William Currie, who had come to Rapid City from St. Mary’s Ontario in the previous year, bought a quarter section straddling the river east of Brandon, just below a well-known set of rapids.



These islands mark the end of the Brandon Rapids. Mr. Currie's property was to the top left. (2001)

Mr. Currie, initially for his own convenience, decided to establish a ferry. Two “dead men,” consisting of two logs, were buried deeply in each bank. To these were attached wires for a pulley and a scow.

The area was soon to see a rush of settlers and his ferry became a vital spot on the trail west. His location at the foot of the most lengthy and challenging rapids on the Assiniboine also presented another opportunity. Here, the Assiniboine, which gently twists and turns for most of its 1070 kilometres, makes a steep decline of over three metres in about a kilometre. For the first steamboats to ascend the Assiniboine it was the end of the line. And although enterprising captains did find ways to force their craft through those rapids, in lower water it remained the head of navigation.

That meant that it became the entranceway to the new land.



Winnipeg Times, August 18, 1880



Taken from near the site of the NE landing of Currie's Ferry (2018)

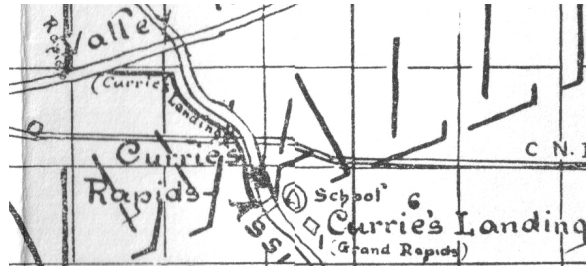
The family remained on this farm and operated the ferry until 1893 when Mr. Currie sold farm and ferry to Mr. Bill Coxe and moved his family to Brandon.

Ferry:

In 1884, the Municipality of Cornwallis subsidized Wm. Currie (1-10-18) to the amount of \$40.00 for maintaining and operation of the Ferry; providing he kept the fees at the following:

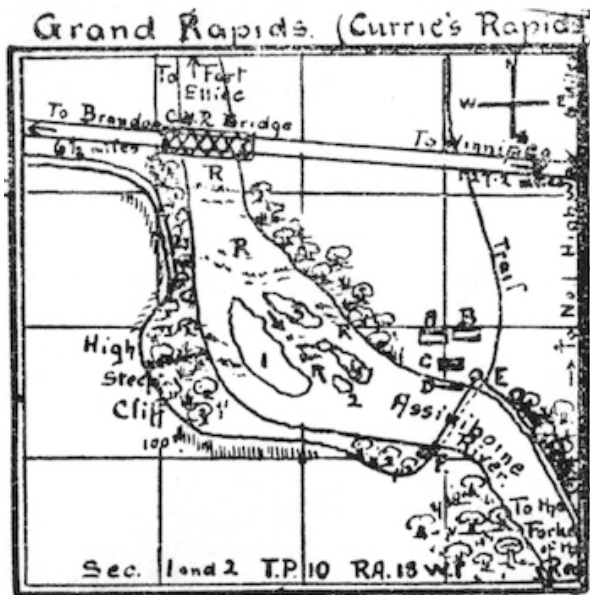
Team of horses and one man	- one way - .25¢
	- return - .35¢
Buggy	- one way - .15¢
	- return - .25¢
Foot passengers	- each way - .10¢
Animals — all kinds — running loose	- each way - .10¢ for one
	each additional animal - .05¢

(A clip from the Cornwallis History)



This clip shows a section of old trail from Brandon that ran along the southwest side of the river and crossed at the ferry. Such trails were never built up with a road bed. It would have been used until the ferry closed in 1893. I've walked along there a few times without ever seeing a sign.

Brandon School Principal, Martin Kavanaugh created some excellent maps for his book, "The Assiniboine Basin".

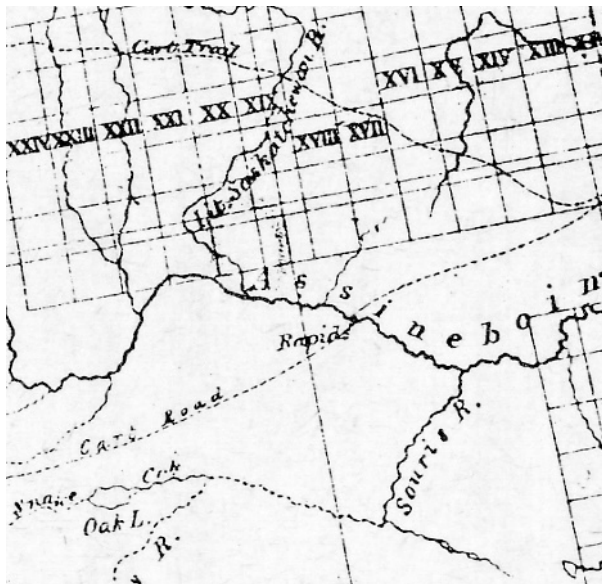


This overview of the rapids shows the trail to and from Currie's Ferry. The islands in the middle of the rapids are depicted, likely as Mr. Kavanaugh would have seen them in the 1940's.

Assiniboine River: **Brandon Rapids Crossing**

N49.81820, W99.80819

In the later 1700's as the competing fur trade companies established a series of trading posts across the prairies, a network of trails naturally developed. Substantial traffic moved the fur eastward and the necessary supplies westward. As with the building of the railways that was to come later, selecting places to ford streams and/or establish ferries was done carefully.



In the Pre-Railroad days a network of cart trails served as the highway system.



The beginning of the Brandon Rapids.

There is often a shallow point with a solid bottom just before rapids slip downward to the next river level. It is at points such as this that rivers can be

readily crossed.



The old trail crossed just below the railway bridge.

The Brandon Rapids, formerly called the "Grand Rapids" don't appear on modern maps but they are identified on virtually every map of southern Manitoba published in the nineteenth century. They were important then. They were a beginning point for Aboriginal and European traders heading south to trade at Mandan villages on the Missouri River. For Hudson's Bay men and Nor'Westers, the mile long rock bed and intermittent sand bars that composed the Rapids had to be negotiated by batteau crews as more traffic developed between the Forks and points further up the Assiniboine like Fort Ellice.



The boundary between Treaty 1 and 2 Territories.

By mid century buffalo hunters from White Horse Plains were also crossing the Assiniboine at the Rapids on their route to the killing fields southwest of the confluence of the Souris and Assiniboine.

In 1871, the Rapids were deployed as a pivotal point on the boundaries of Numbered Treaties One and Two with First Nations negotiated by the Ottawa in 1871 to gain title to Aboriginal land for settlement. The original description of that boundary describes a line that "cuts in a diagonal angle to the "Rapids on the Assiniboine" and south to the 49th parallel."

The opening of the western prairies to Canadian settlement after 1870 gave the Rapids a new life. Dougald McVicar, the co-founder of Grand Valley in the late 1870s, liked to talk about the sound of two hundred Red River carts approaching the crossing at the Assiniboine Rapids.

For a short time the lower end of rapids was the end point for steamboat traffic. Soon a means of negotiating the Rapids was found and steamboat traffic continued past the Rapids to Fort Ellice at the mouth of the Qu'Appelle River.

In short - the rapids were a busy place.

The main trail from the Red River Settlement (Winnipeg) to Fort Edmonton followed a route similar to that of today's Yellowhead Highway. Near Portage, a branch headed west-south-west through to southern Saskatchewan via the Virden area.

The story of the Rapids comes alive in the film, "Before Brandon - The Grand Rapids of the Assiniboine" by Brandon historian and filmmaker, Tom Mitchell.

*It is available online at:
<https://irbu.arcabc.ca/islandora/object/irbu%3A5221>*



Another look at the region.

Assiniboine River: **Grand Valley**

N49.848787, W 99.894836



The Assiniboine River, near the site of. McVicar's Ferry.

When Dougald and John McVicar came west from Grenville Quebec in 1878, most settlers in what is now the Brandon region were selecting lands to the north of the Assiniboine in the Little Saskatchewan Valley. Here they were close to the Carlton Trail, the main highway of the northwest, and nearer to the proposed CPR Route which many assumed would follow the old fur trader's route. Rapid City was an established town and was soon to experience some rather reckless land speculation based on the hope that the main line would cross the river there. The McVicar's chose, however, to travel due west from Portage on the less traveled path, and selected land on the banks of the Assiniboine, a few kilometres east of present day Brandon.

By the spring of 1879 the population was over thirty. As usual, newcomers were drawn by glowing accounts they had heard from friends and relatives. A town was forming on the corner of McVicar's land, and by 1880 there was a collection of tents, shacks, and a few log and lumber buildings. The arrival of the McVicar's coincided with the beginning of steamboat traffic on the upper Assiniboine, before long traffic on the river was increasing as more settlers followed.

Dougald McVicar built a ferry in 1880. The year before the Brandon Hills settlers had to cross the river by caulking a wagon box, which they used as a boat.

A settler has this memory...

Simon McKay being a strong swimmer, agreed to take a rope across the river and to tie the end to a tree. This rope was used to guide a wagon

box, which had been caulked with mud. The box would serve as a ferry. On May 24th the party moved their possessions, including the oxen and the horses, to the south bank of the river across from the site, which became known as Grand Valley. (p25 - The Brandon Hills Story)

A FERRY has been established at the Grand Valley crossing of the Assiniboine River. This will give people visiting the Souris country from the north shore better travelling facilities. Another ferry is projected at Brandon crossing 15 miles further down the river.

Winnipeg Times, April 4, 1880.

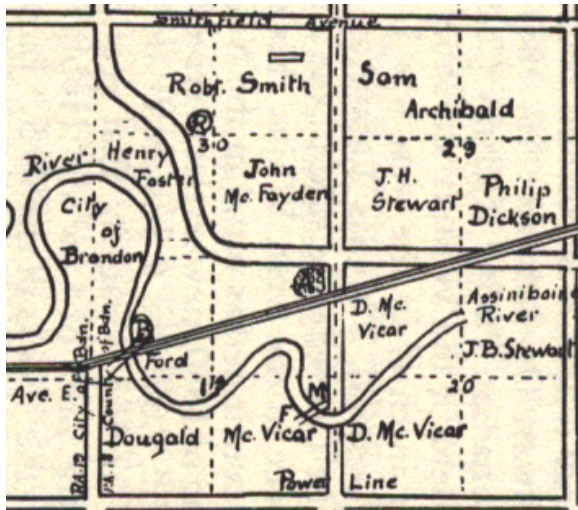
Note that the second ferry mentioned for "Brandon Crossing" is not about the City of Brandon, which did not exist in 1880, but about the region near the old site of Brandon House, at Souris Mouth.



A: The site of the Grand Valley Cairn.
B The site of the village and the ferry.

The ferry service at Grand Valley soon faded as the site that became Brandon was chosen instead of the Grand Valley for a station and bridge. Grand Valley was abandoned by 1885.

Martin Kavanaugh's book, "The Assiniboine Basin" is a great place to start digging into the history of Grand Valley and all of southwest Manitoba. His maps offer a visual aid to understanding where things were. The following map of Grand Valley is a good example.



For instance, note the location of the railway bridge... so close to the Grand Valley but so far *in terms of the impact of choosing that place to cross the river.*

A Key Decision

There are two factors that influenced the decision of the CPR to select Brandon over Grand Valley as the site of a station and town site.

One Story...

One evening General Rosser of the CPR offered John McVicar \$25000 for his property. Spurred on, some said, by locals who insisted he could get more, he held out for \$50000. Rosser declined and soon purchased land from D.H. Adamson who was squatting on a parcel of land that lies from Victoria to Pacific Avenues, and from First to 9th Street in present day Brandon. It was about two km west of Grand Valley and that became the divisional point for the railway. After losing out on a chance to be major railway centre, two consecutive years of floods sealed the fate of the community.

Or....

It is interesting to note that this version of the story, which appeared years later in the memoirs of CPR Surveyor, James Secretan, who was there when it happened, was not widely circulated at the time and contemporary reports focus more on the floods that made the site unattractive in the spring of 1881 and of 1882.

The flood of 2011 must have been similar to those ones.



The site of Grand Valley (near the centre) in May of 2011.

I will make this observation. Had the evidence of the flooding been readily apparent in mid May of 1881, why would Rosser have offered even \$25000?

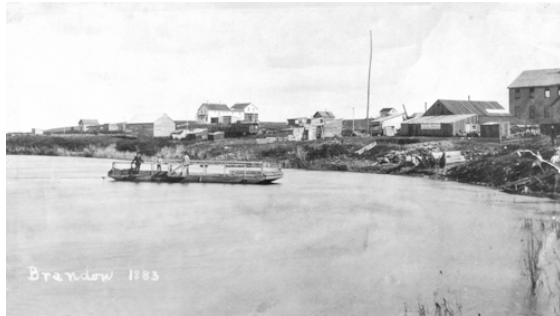
A final note...

This item from the Brandon Sun, June 5, 1884 is a good introduction to our look at Brandon.

Some of the people to the north of the river are complaining of having to pay toll on crossing into the city. To get over this not a few are driving to McVicar's crossing; which is said to be very good. There should be something done to remedy this as soon as possible and the owners of the bridges can scarcely be blamed.

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

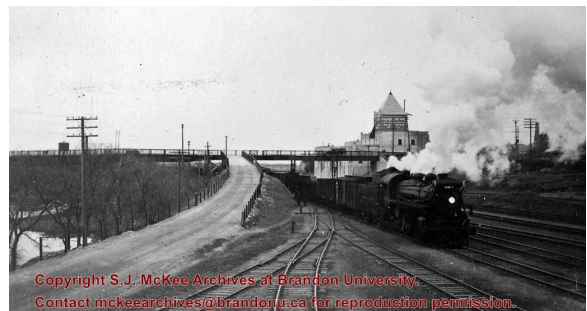
The first bridges on 1st Street and Eighteenth were privately owned and financed by tolls. Both were later purchased by the city. (S. Brown was a toll-collector on the First Street bridge),



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.

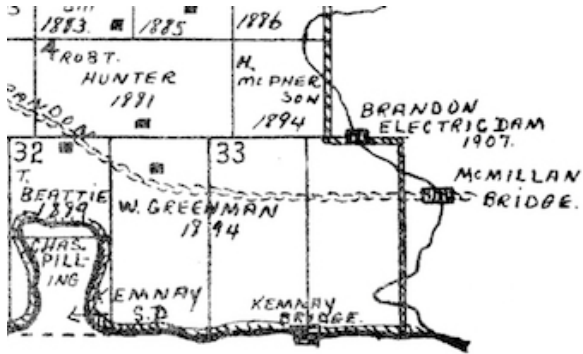


This used to be the access point to Wawanesa from the southwest.

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.

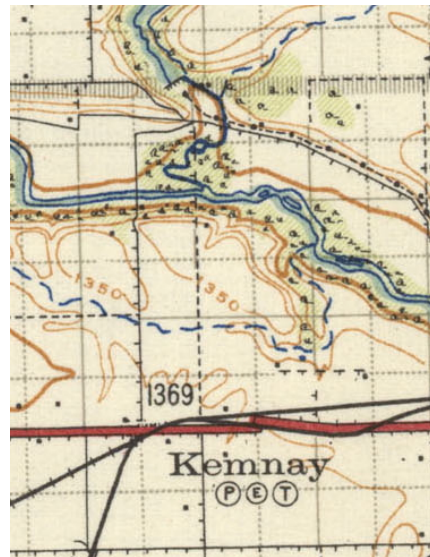
I should have guessed.

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)

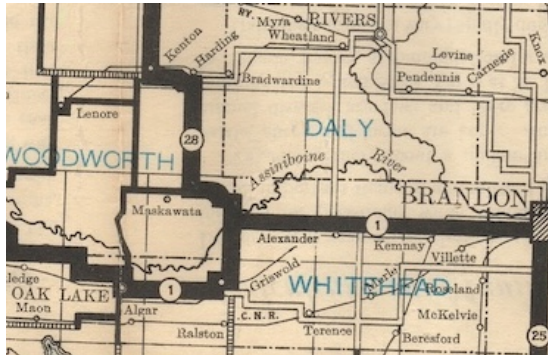
With rural depopulation, larger farms and faster trucks we can assume that the cost of keeping it outweighed the advantages.

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**

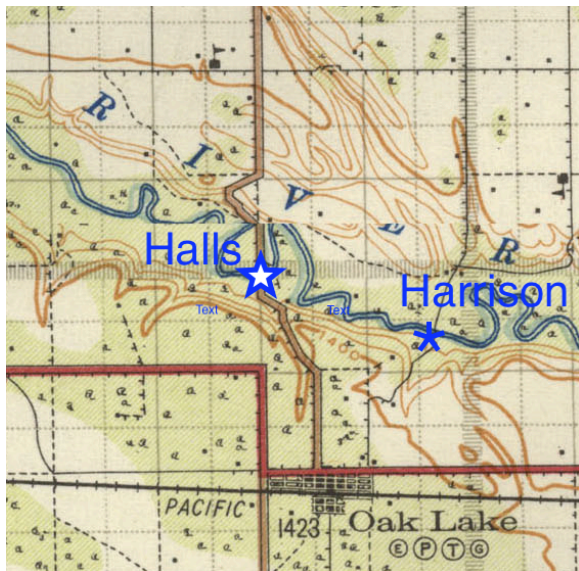
N49.78773, W10061

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

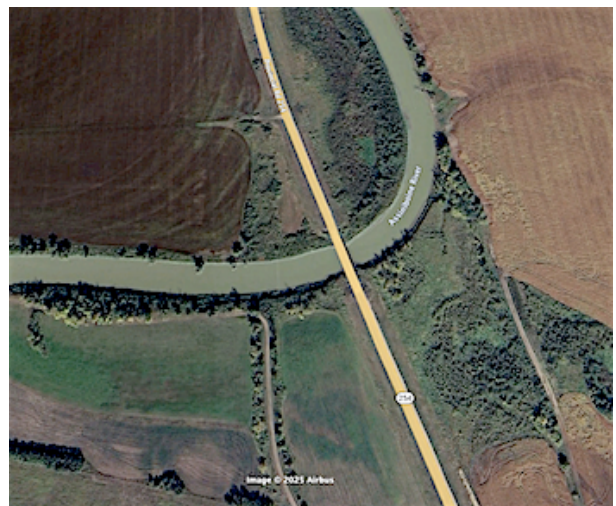
The local history mentions that the first bridge at what was then called the "Williams Crossing" was just east of the current bridge. From a Google Earth image it appears that there was also a bridge or perhaps a ferry, to the west. A site visit confirms that the path is quite visible.



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...

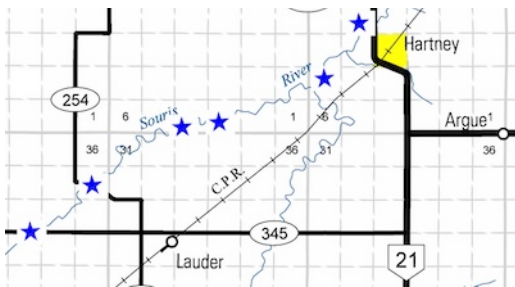
About 1913 and '14 the Councils began to realize that the bridges and the grades leading to them were too low and they began discussing the replacement of William's, Harrison's and Skinner's Bridges. It was some time before this happened but in 1921 the William's Bridge was replaced.

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

The Souris River

The Souris has its origins near Weyburn, Saskatchewan, dips into Montana and North Dakota before entering Manitoba south of Melita. What we in Manitoba see of the Souris is only the final 1/4 of its length. From the Manitoba / North Dakota border to the town of Souris the stream is gentle with wide meanders as it snakes its way through the Souris Plains. This makes crossing it relatively easy and bridges span it often.

A short stretch of the river between Lauder and Hartney has six bridges, each of them still in use.



The Lauder & Hartney area bridges.

From Souris to the spot near Treesbank where it empties into the Assiniboine, it often travels in a deep wide valley. Its path includes the Souris Bend Wildlife Management Area, a huge tract of uninhabited land between Margaret and Wawanesa.

That makes crossing it a bit more of a challenge. First, you have to climb in and out of the valley. On the other hand crossings are a bit less necessary with the lower population density. There are no riverside towns between Souris and Wawanesa.

Today, between the town of Souris and the Assiniboine River, there are only six bridges in use, with two of them being at Riverside, where an old bridge is kept for local use. Two other former bridges were damaged in flooding in 2011 and haven't been replaced.



One of dozens of great places to overlook the Souris River Valley in the Souris Bend Wildlife Management Area near Lang's Crossing.

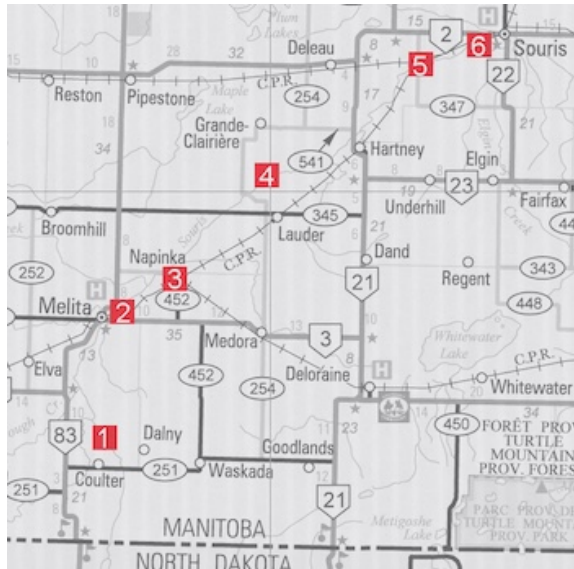


The Souris entering the Assiniboine. The photo was taken from an easily accessible point in the Assiniboine Corridor Wildlife Management Area.



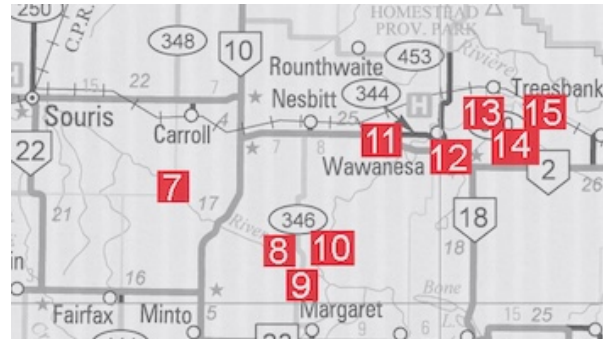
The Souris River entering the Sandhills north of Lauder. Taken from the bridge on Rd 254, (See the map in the previous column.)

Contents: Part 1: Sourisford to Souris



1. Sourisford: Boundary Trail Crossing and Bridge Site
2. Melita
3. Napinka: Former Bridge Site
4. Lauder Area Bridges
5. Menteith Area Bridge and nearby Fords
6. Souris: Ferries and Bridges.

Contents: Part 2: Bunclody to Millford



7. Bunclody: Ferries, Road Bridges & a Rail Bridge Site
8. Riverside: Three Bridges & a Ferry site
9. McKellar's Bridge
10. Lang's Crossing: Ford
11. Souris City: Ferry & Bridge site
12. Wawanesa: Road and Rail Bridges
13. Treesbank Bridge
14. Millford Village Crossings
15. Millford Rail Bridge

Souris River: **Sourisford**

Ford and Ferry Site:

N49.15129, W101.00775

Bridge

N49.15169, W101.00782

The highways of one era can be forgotten in the next.

The convenient river crossing that came to be called Sourisford is near the crossroads of ancient trading routes. One, which passed from the Turtle Mountain westward; the other, the Yellowquill Trail, angled southwest from the Portage La Prairie area.

In this place, a gravel bottom spans the width of the stream.



Find the right spot to cross and - no problem!

The soft banks on either side were worn down by herds of bison over years of migrations. The spot was a popular camping place for First Nations and near the location of a recently discovered site with evidence of pre-contact agriculture. That indicates a rare, more permanent type of occupation, for the northern prairies.

In 1873 the Boundary Commission spent three days building a makeshift bridge to make this natural crossing even more convenient. When the NWMP reached the spot in 1874 the bridge erected by the Boundary Commission was found in good condition.

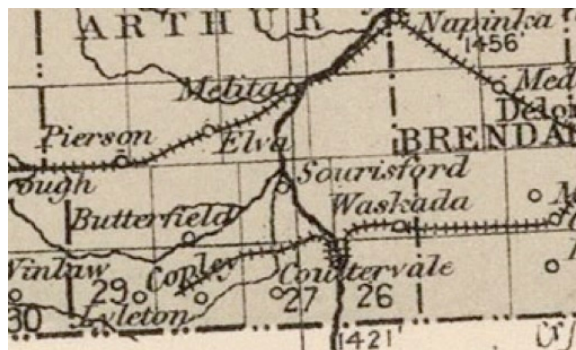


The path the bison took down the east side of the Souris Valley.

That bridge had disappeared by the time the first European settlers began to arrive. Walter Thomas was one of those settlers in 1879 and his property included the crossing so he saw an opportunity. He decided to build a boat. He had no boards but enquired around among the new settlers. He finally got two wide boards, 16 feet long. These he paid \$8 for, and with a few smaller pieces from here and there, he built the first boat.

It was not very stable, and the trip was sometimes perilous, but by swimming the ponies and loading the buckboards carefully on to the boat, it served the purpose and sometimes produced as much as \$5 for a trip, which soon repaid the original outlay.

The Sourisford Crossing, which was so important for the many centuries, was no longer important when nearby Melita, received a rail connection in 1891, but it continued to serve a local purpose for some time.



Sourisford – between two railway lines. From Atlas of Canada #19, 1904

The community that grew up around the crossing is long gone, but the story lives on. As new towns began to thrive along rail lines and highways, the pioneers took steps to commemorate the location through the creation of Coulter Park and the conservation of this important site.

In 1897- 98 a bridge called the Souris River Bridge was built just to the north of the old Commission Trail. Many bridges built in that era were replaced in the 1920's, and in 1925 a contract was awarded the construction of the "Sourisford Bridge". It was destroyed by fire around 2001.



The bridge at Sourisford



The remains of the bridge are visible just to the north of the old crossing site



The Survey Map from 1880 shows the trail through the property of Walter Thomas. Walter went on to become a leading citizen of the community.

A few of his adventures have been related in the Vantage Points Series published by the Turtle Mountain Souris Plains Heritage Association.

More info on their website:

www.vantagepoints.ca

Souris River: Manchester / Melita N49.27648, W100.96330

The village of Melita, first known as Manchester, was established a short distance from the Souris River and a river crossing was essential to be viable as a commercial centre.

A ford, known as Livingston's Crossing or Morrison's Crossing, was located between Sections 5 and 6, Township 4, Range 6, just east of the new village, was impossible to cross until midsummer.



An early homesteader recalled:

"When they got to a place north and east of where Melita now is, they found the Souris River flooded; they must have had considerable supplies and equipment, for it is reported that it took nine trips by ferry to move them over the river at a place called "Old Man Morrison's Crossing". P742, "Our First Century"

The community decided to establish a cable ferry at or near the crossing. Mr. G. L. Dodds, Mr. James McCannell, and others took an active part in soliciting subscriptions, and nearly every farmer who did his trading at Melita contributed.

Don Maxwell built the ferry.

James Duncan, a Melita Pioneer, writing in "Melita: Our First Century" tells the story well...(p221)

The lumber, hardware, rope, pitch, oakum, etc. were finally teamed from Deloraine, and Mr. W. H. Clapp, who claimed to have some experience in boat building, was engaged to build a scow,

while blacksmith, James Duncan made the bolts, rings, cranks, blocks, etc. The scow was capable of taking over two loads of grain or three empty wagons and team each trip.

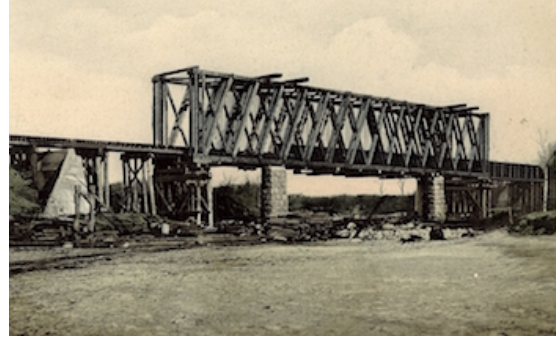
A young man, Innis R. Melvin, was engaged to run the ferry and he made his first trip on May 20. His salary was \$35 a month and he paid his own board. He was instructed to charge 25¢ for taking a team across, and 15¢ for a single horse, while foot passengers were taken over in a row boat. The best day's receipts brought \$12 with 48 teams having crossed and re-crossed during the 24 hours.

So late at night were the teams in returning from Deloraine, that the ferryman had to get a tent and sleep close to the crossing so he could be available when wanted. As anticipated, the water remained high until mid summer and the service was not discontinued until July 19 with the old ford again used.

The running of the ferry was not without incident, some grave, others ludicrous. The late Mr. John Dobbyn, crossing with a gang plough tied behind his wagon with only a foot to spare in length, had his team back up and the plough disappeared in ten feet of water. Another day, George Sketom's oxen with a load of grain, brought disaster to navigation. They went down the hill too fast and before they could be stopped, went clear over the boat and into the river. The boat was put out of commission and traffic delayed. One man tried the ford. He was newly married and could not wait to have the boat bailed out. The result was a trunk full of lady's wedding finery fished out of the river while he himself was like the proverbial "wet hen." The late Dr. Livingston, who had been taken over in his buck-board in the morning, returned while the boat was being bailed out and noticed the mark of wheels at the ford. Rather than wait, he decided to try the ford. Melvin called out that it was too deep, but his call was too late. The horse was drowned while the doctor, clad in his fur coat, was rescued by the ferryman in the row boat.



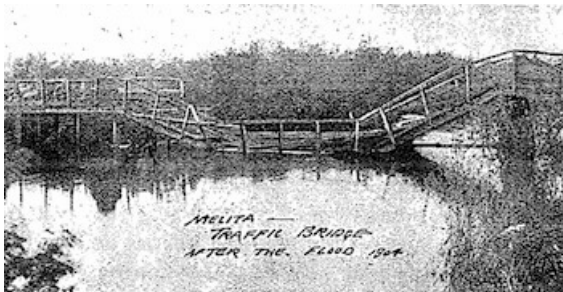
Three times since that date, the water has been as high and two times much higher, but with good grades and a bridge, crossing has not been the spice of adventure it was in the early days.



The first railway bridge.



The first bridge, seen here in 1892 was likely a temporary solution, some distance from town. It was also likely the site of the ferry. It was taken from the railway bridge.



This bridge, built in 1904 fell victim to a spring flood.

Souris River: **Napinka**

N49.33278, W100.85020

The first homesteaders arrived in the Napinka region in 1881. A post office was established in 1884 putting the community on the map so to speak.

In 1891, with the arrival of the CPR line from Brandon railway the village was established a short distance west of the Post Office. To get to the new village from the north or west, the Souris River had to be crossed. Eventually there were two access points. The one on the left exists today; the one to the north has been abandoned.



The bridge north of Napinka was built around 1892.



This photo from prior to 1910 would be the first "north" bridge. It was replaced in 1950 at a cost of \$18430 and was taken down in the 1970's after an overweight load of grain caused it to collapse.



The site of the "North" bridge.



The north side of the bridge site.

Slight traces of a roadway are evident, but fifty years has erased much of the evidence of what was once a busy road.

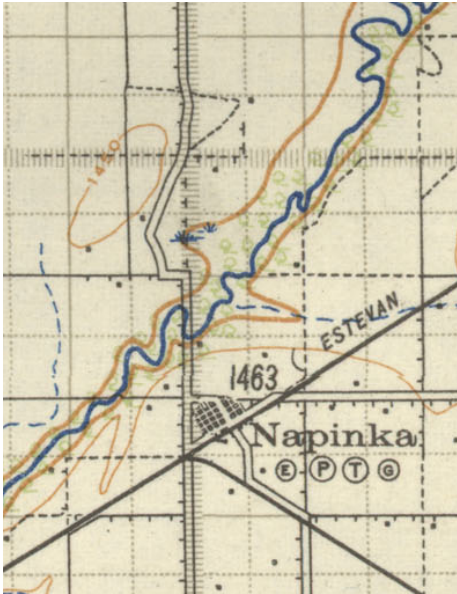
Everett Thompson remembers...

We also enjoyed swimming at the C.P.R. dam in the Souris River only a short distance from town. All the kids gathered at the only good swimming place in the area. When the Souris River was deep enough we would even dare to dive off the bridge that crossed at the road a little further up stream. (p1171, Bridging Brenda Vol. 2)

Sources

I got my information about this site from my friend, Bill Warren, who used to live in Napinka. He told me he used to take this route on his way to pick up his girlfriend, who lived north of town.

Today he would have to detour to the west.



This map from 1922 shows no road access from the East.

At some time after that date a bridge was constructed to the west of the village. This was likely before Highway #3 was developed 6 km to the south and became the most convenient route to the larger towns of Melita and Deloraine. That bridge is still well maintained and is a convenient access to Highway 83.



Western access: N49.32574. N101 86411

About Napinka

A visitor to Napinka today might be surprised to learn that it was once a busy place. Note that it was at the crossroads of two railway lines. It therefore had good service northeast to Brandon and east to Winnipeg, and all the towns in between.

The town had a full slate of the usual services and amenities including two hotels.

The following photo from about 1910 shows a typical thriving business district.



If you look closely you will see that the photo was credited to the "Winnipeg Photo Co". For reasons lost to time that company was located in Napinka. Over a short period they produced a selection of fine photos of the towns in the region, providing us with a very useful look at the times.

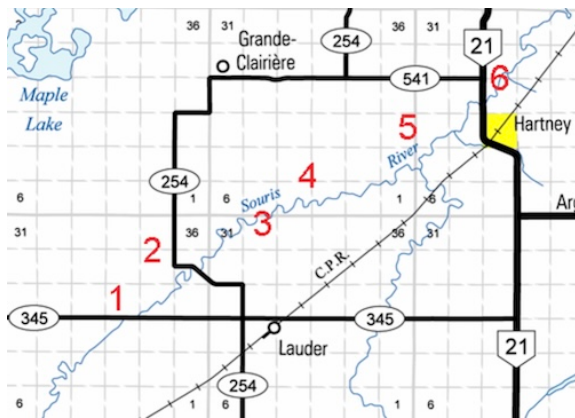
That a professional photographer would choose to locate in Napinka tells us something about what the town's prospects.

It is another good example of a location that was perfect in the railway era, while the nearby towns such as Melita and Deloraine (both now on major highways) were able to grow in the automobile era.

Size isn't everything however. While most of the businesses have gone, the community thrives.

Souris River: **Lauder / Hartney Area**

From Napinka through to Souris the Souris River passes through a generally flat countryside bordered to the north by the Lauder Sandhills. Beginning with the Bridge over Rd 345 west of Lauder and continuing to Highway 21, near Hartney, there are a total of six bridges. That's a lot, compared to the other segments of that river. It could be that the low valley and gentle approaches make bridge building relatively inexpensive. The flat countryside allows the spring floods to disperse over a wide area and thus bridges don't have to be as elaborate. It could be that the settlers simply demanded (and paid for) convenient crossings.



Either way, we'll take a look at each bridge - most of them simple structures that have withstood the test of time (and occasional high water).

1. Road 345 west of Lauder N49.39937, W100.75965



The first bridge over the Souris River near Lauder was built in 1903. This bridge - of modern design - survived the flood of 2011. Flood water surrounded the nearby fields for some distance.

2. Road 254 north of Lauder N49.44326, W100.66966



3. Drummond Bridge - Rd 52 north of Lauder N49.44331, W100.66960



Note the plank roadbed, the wooden support structure and level approach.

#4 Hicks Bridge N49.45207, W100.62434



Compared the Drummond Bridge this has a more substantial support structure - built to handle heavier loads.

The paved roadbed is also a more modern touch.

5. Hardy Bridge

N49.47395, W100.56669



This one also features a slightly more substantial support structure.



There is clear evidence of the earlier bridge adjacent.

6. Highway 21 at Hartney

N49.48790, W100.56432

In the fall and winter of 1979-1980 the Department of Highways of the provincial government replaced the traffic bridge north of town on Highway No. 21. It was named "The Galbraith Bridge", in recognition of the years of community service by Mr. Arthur Galbraith.



A new bridge erected after the flood of 2011 destroyed the earlier structure.

The Ferry

We know that there was usually a ferry in place before someone got around to building a bridge.

In the extensive series *Lauder History, The Rise and Fall of a Prairie Town* by G.G. Phillips there is only one mention of a ferry, but it does come with some description and some related stories about river crossings.

We'll start with this one by pioneer Robert Logan describing a crossing they encountered in North Dakota in 1881.

"We had heard considerable about the floods in the west but it was when our eyes first rested on the Souris that we had any idea of its extent. They had built a bridge of logs four or five logs wide, bored holes in the ends and roped them together like a boom, and fastened them securely to large trees. They had swam all their horses and mules and carried their other stuff across on this primitive structure and had got underway on their journey on the other side of the river."

Vol1. P3

Elsewhere in this 5 volume series we learn about the ferry.

"The ferry was a raft made of trees and timbers and was big enough to hold a team and wagon. It was located on the Baker farm, W 30-5-24, and was operated on a rope and pulley system rigged on trees on opposite sides of the river. Jim Beattie was one of the operators. It was in operation only in the spring of the year as the river was usually low enough by June to be forded. It was built in 1892 or 1893 and was in operation for only a few years, perhaps only for 2 or 3 years." Vol 2. P 44

A little more info...

"The ferry crossing on the Souris River was on their Samuel S. Baker farm and in 1893 Samuel sold a right-of-way over 25-5-25 to Council for \$100."

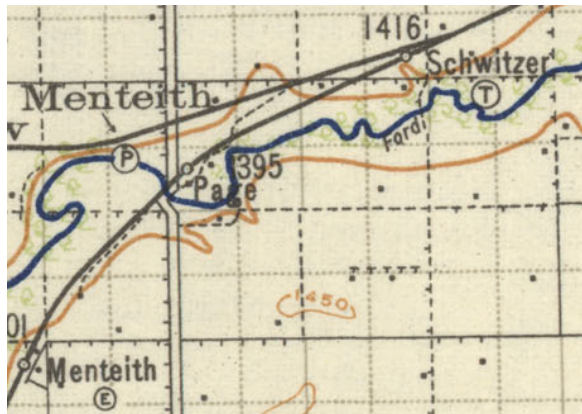
Section 24 is today the site of a bridge on Rd 254. (Number 2 on the previous map.)

Souris River: Menteith Area

N49.57852, 100.41812

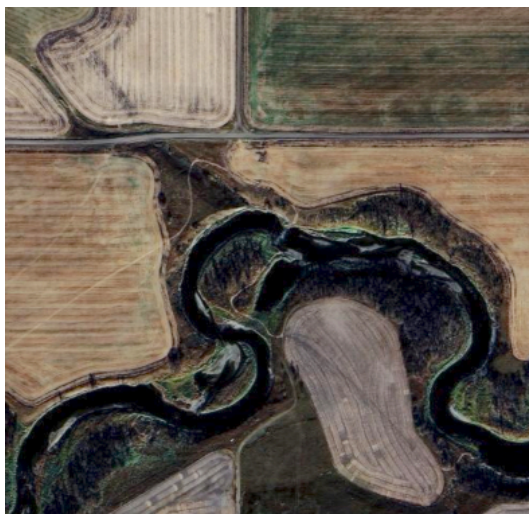
Menteith Post Office, noted on the following map, was opened in 1881. There is no record of a ferry at the location. Prior to the settlement era the main fur trader trail followed the NW bank of the Souris.

There were a few convenient places nearby to ford the river for those travellers heading south towards Turtle Mountain.



This map from 1922 documents one site, just south of Schwitzer Siding.

This is what it looks like on Goggle Earth...



N49.59037, W100.37105

Traces of the old trail are visible in places.

Google Earth reveals this interesting image a bit farther downstream...



Possible Crossing: N49.57770, W100.40871

As elsewhere on the first leg of the Souris in Manitoba, several crossings were generally available from mid summer on.

Today an active CPR Branch crosses here alongside a modern traffic bridge. Traces of an earlier traffic bridge are still evident a short distance to the west of the current bridge.



CPR and traffic bridges in the Menteith area.

Souris River: Plum Creek / Souris

On a cold late November day in 1797, David Thompson, cartographer and explorer in the employ of the North West Co. set out from the post on the Assiniboine River just east of where Highway 340 crosses north of Wawanesa. His mission was to visit the Mandan villages along the Missouri River in the Dakota Territory.

On this trip, he knew where he was going.

LaVerendrye had made a similar trip fifty years earlier. There had long been trading relationships and other connections between the Mandans and the First Nations of the Canadian prairies.

Thompson spent two nights where Plum Creek entered the Souris River. He left a detailed account in his diary. On his way south he camped in Victoria Park or perhaps a little to the south. His diary has this entry for Feb. 2nd, 1798 (on his return trip): "...a mile beyond it (Plum Creek) to a gully close to the river and put up at 3 p.m."

Over the next 80 years there would be other visitors, but the spot was more of a way station than a settlement for those years.

The first settlers from Ontario came in 1879, but it was the Millbrook Colonization party, led by Squire Sowden and also from Ontario that really put the place on the map.

By the fall of 1884 there were fifty buildings in the town site. There were three stores, and four hotels and numerous other enterprises.

All that was well in place long before a railway line reached the town in 1890 and made its future development a certainty.

As the most significant service centre in the region its customer base straddled the river and ferries, and then bridges, were essential.

Homesteader of 1882 - by Warren Belfry.
(Souris-Glenwood history)

"E. H. Belfry, came west from Ontario in the spring of 1882 when they were building the main line of the CPR. He walked out from Brandon,

the end of the railway at that time, crossing the Souris River on a rough sort of ferry at Plum Creek, Souris."

By 1882, most newcomers heading for the southwest corner, the Antler Country, were using the railroad to Brandon instead of the old Boundary Commission trail to the south. One of the first settlers, Captain Wood, built a large scow and employed John Cummings to ferry them across Plum Creek west of his farm.

This was rather a hazardous undertaking at times and they had many narrow escapes from drowning.

In 1882 Sowdon built a wooden traffic bridge near the ferry landing. It required a toll charge of 15 cents for each animal. The next year the council purchased both bridge and ferry from the Squire for the sum of one thousand dollars. Mr. James McPherson, who ran a stopping house nearby, above the west bank of the river, was put in charge of both bridge and ferry. The toll charges for Glenwood residents were then set at 15 cents for a wagon and team, 10 cents for a single rig, and 5 cents for each animal.



This photograph was taken from the riverbank and shows the steel bridge in Souris, MB. A second wooden bridge is visible behind the steel bridge. The residence of Dr. W.A. Sherrin can be seen to the right of the bridges.

Some people preferred the ferry for taking cattle across the river, but this was difficult if they became nervous and jumped out as they did on occasion

In 1888 a wooden bridge was built south of the village on 28-7-21. After lengthy negotiations

with the government the iron bridge at Souris was built in 1891.

The flood of 1902 carried away both the eleven-year-old iron bridge and the fourteen-year-old wooden bridge south of town. The iron bridge in the village was rebuilt, but not the one up-stream.



The bridges of Souris - in 2001

The Swinging Bridge

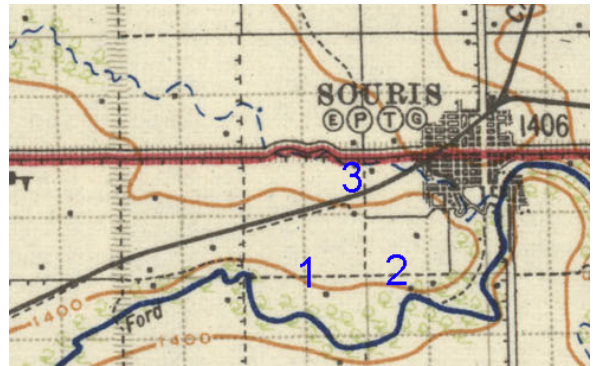
In 1904, Squire William Sowden built his now famous Swinging Bridge, to allow easy access to his property across the river. In 1907 the Swinging Bridge was repaired by private subscriptions.

The bridge became an iconic symbol for the town. It was damaged by a broken cable in 1961 and swept away by the floods of 1976. Its cables were cut intentionally during the flood of 2011 to prevent further damage but it was later replaced by a new bridge.



The Swinging Bridge - 2018. A part of the previous bridge remains on the north side as a Heritage Display.

Before the Bridges

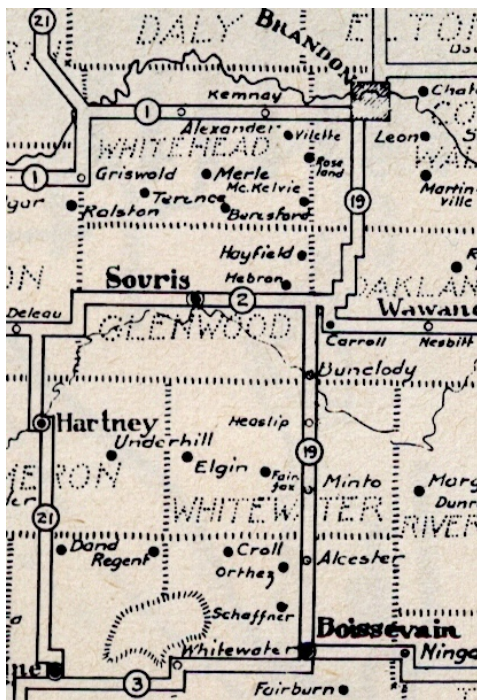


1. Site of Kirchoffer Ferry (1884)
2. Site of the Wooden Bridge (1888- 1892)
3. Captain Woods Ferry & Bridge (1882 & 1884)

A series of maps produced by the office of the Surveyor General in 1922 provide a wealth of information. On this clip from the Turtle Mountain Section Map we note that a ford is marked a few kilometres west of Souris.

Souris River: Buncloody

Sometimes a town or village is on a main route... then it isn't.



Main roads in the mid-twenties.

Transportation patterns are always subject to change. Many of the pioneer towns in Southwest Manitoba were on rivers. Water and wood were essential and on the Souris Plains both were in short supply, except along the rivers. So the first prairie roads connected the new settlements. The next revolution in transportation was the railway. Railway builders didn't care about connecting the new settlements. In fact most railway companies preferred to establish stations where the land was cheapest - away from the new pioneer villages. They created towns.

When the time came to build the first highways, however, their purpose **was** to connect established towns.

That helps to explain why the main road from Brandon to Boissevain (Highway 19 on the map from 1926), passes through Buncloody, and today's Highway 10 takes a slightly different route.

Towns didn't always survive.

The community had its beginning when George McGill and James Copeland settled with their families along the banks of the Souris River in 1881. A school was built in 1884 and George McGill, the Secretary-Treasurer was given the privilege of naming the school. He chose the name of the district he left in Ireland.

The first church services in the Buncloody district were held in 1883 in the home of Mr. James Copeland and later moved to the school in 1886 and held there until the church was built in 1908.

There were two ferries in operation in the 1880's. Like so many settlements of the time, it started as a Post Office in a farm home. Soon a School and a Church were established. It wasn't a commercial centre with a grid of streets - it was a community.

But it was near a place where travellers crossed, on a direct route south from Brandon to the Deloraine area.

The Osborn Ferry: 49.535990, 100.056085 ...or a bit east. 49. 538508, 100.052341



From this aerial shot it looks like the road from the north used to keep going straight right up to the river. Old crossing, ferry site, or the temporary bridge mentioned below? Or all three?

In 1893 the first bridge was built, this was a pile bridge. In 1902 the river was very high and all the bridges from Souris to Wawanesa were taken out with the ice flow in the spring. In 1903 the first span bridge was built. It had to be rebuilt a few times, but was used until 1937. Up until then its plank floor had to be replaced every few years. There were generally one or more loose planks that rattled every time a car crossed.

The bridge that followed was built in 1937. The design was the same as the last one, but treated timber was used. The deck was made of "two by eights" spiked together and then covered with asphalt. The river was quite low that summer, and east of the present bridge a temporary bridge was built from the north bank over to the island, and a grade from the island to the south bank. This was used while the new one was being erected.

In the winter of 1959-60 the present cement bridge was built. This was erected on the east side of the old bridge. In that way they were able to use the old one until the new one was finished. Before the railing was put on, the old bridge was moved over onto the new one, and then it was pulled off, one half being moved each way.



High water in 2012 exposed the abutments of the previous bridge.

By 1901 when nearby towns of Souris, Minto and Wawanesa had railway stations and elevators, Bunclody might well have disappeared from the map.

But the community had been given a reprieve when the Brandon, Saskatchewan and Hudson's Bay Railway, a subsidiary of the US Great Northern, built a line from St. John North Dakota to Brandon. They selected Bunclody as a place to bridge the river. Then a station and an elevator were established. So when the province started designating highways in the 1920's, it was logical to put the southern route from Brandon through Bunclody.

This a good example of the way railroad decisions impact settlements, and thus, transportation patterns.

There was a long-established crossing east of where the Highway 10 now crosses the Souris River. (See the Sheppard Crossing story in the next chapter.) The railway surveyors rejected that site where the valley is both deep and wide.

Upstream a few kilometres the southern lip (right side in the photo) of the valley, although steep, brushed right up against the stream, while the gentle slope on the north side could be crossed with a modest embankment. To get there, the line bends westward as it approached the Souris and follows the curve of the river.



The abandoned rail bed and the centre support footing of the bridge were readily visible from the air in 2001.

The elevator and station established on the south side of the river was called Bunclody, a name already in use for a nearby School and Post Office.



Crossing the Souris at Bunclody - it was a better crossing but it was also a major project.

So Bunclody was on the highway. Here's what changed.

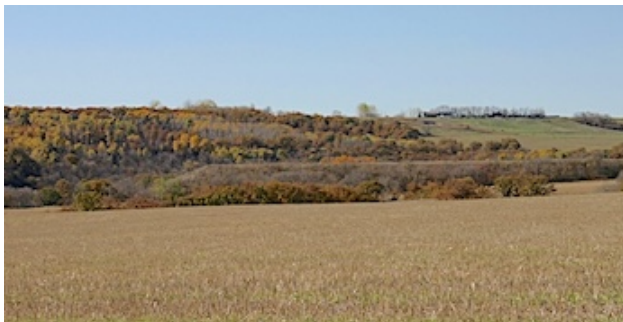
The rail line, built in the days of rather unrestrained expansion and optimism, never did make any money. The depression worsened the situation and only pressure from the government

kept it open until 1936 when a mail contract ended. It was simply no longer a viable enterprise, if it ever was. The tracks were torn up in 1937 after there were no offers for the purchase of the line.

The last train ran on June 14, 1936. Brandon railway historian Lawrence Stuckey remembered, with apparent feelings of nostalgia, the day when he and a friend waved to the engineer for the last time.

Bunclody once again became merely a pleasant scenic riverside location on a grid road.

It made sense to reroute highway traffic between Brandon to Boissevain to the crossing at Riverside where a new traffic bridge was built in 1929. That route became the Highway 10 we use today. You can still take a short detour and turn west off of Highway 10 at Highway 2 and turn south on Bunclody road (Rd. 114) and drive the old route along grid roads. Bunclody is still worth a visit. As you begin the descent towards the river stop and look west.



This is just of many places near the Bunclody site where you can get a look at what is left of the old rail embankment on the north side of the river. Stop at the park on the south side of the bridge and see the heritage display. Wander up the hill to see where the rail line crossed the road and see the site of the elevator and the station.

The McGill Ferry was three kilometres upstream
49.54625 100.08618

The next image offers two possible sites of the McGill Ferry.



Souris River: Sheppard's Ferry and Bridge

N49.49828, W99.98280

When railway service reached the new town of Brandon in late 1881, transportation patterns in the Southwest Corner changed abruptly. For those travelling from the US and heading for places like Deloraine and Melita, it was worth your while to proceed past Emerson to Winnipeg then take the train to Brandon. It was a bit out of your way but it saved several days, compared to taking the Boundary Commission Trail.

New routes meant that new services were required. Someone with an entrepreneurial frame of mind would see that. Stopping places, stores, post offices and ferries would all be something a traveller might need. John Sheppard saw that right away.

The crossing at Riverside - directly between Brandon and the Turtle Mountain Settlements - became an important and busy route.

In the late summer and fall there are lots of shallow crossings, but spring was the best season to start a new homestead, and although there were adventurous souls who floated wagons and swam horses across - this was tricky. A ferry was the best solution, and there was money to be made by setting one up.

John Sheppard knew just the spot - almost directly between Brandon and Wakopa - near a place we now call Riverside. He and his family came to the region in 1882.

The ferry he established not only helped settlers make that first trek but, but perhaps more importantly, also made shipping grain and transporting supplies to and from Brandon much more viable.

Early pioneer accounts often mention the crossing.

"... there were ferries, one at Souris City on 16-7-17, three miles upstream from the present site of Wawanesa, and one first called Sheppard's Ferry, later Heaslip's Ferry, on 21-6-19. When the river was high, one corner of the ferry was let loose from the bank and the current carried the ferry across. In low water it had to be pulled all the way, hand over hand on a cable. Quite often

travellers had to wait a day or more until the ferryman could take them across. (Trails and Crossroad to Killarney, Garland, 1967)

Beginning in 1885, one by one, the communities in the Southwest Corner got their rail service, and by 1910 almost every farmer was within ten kilometres of an elevator. Life was transformed. What had essentially been an almost subsistence existence became viable agribusiness.

At the same time it ushered in a new era in terms of lifestyle. What had once been a four or five-day journey was now a day trip by train.

The introduction of the car brought another revolution in transportation freedom. With the development of a system of roads, the trip to Brandon became even easier. No waiting for the train, you came and went at your convenience.

There was still the Souris River to cross, but when bridges began to replace the ferries, they cut more time off of the trip.



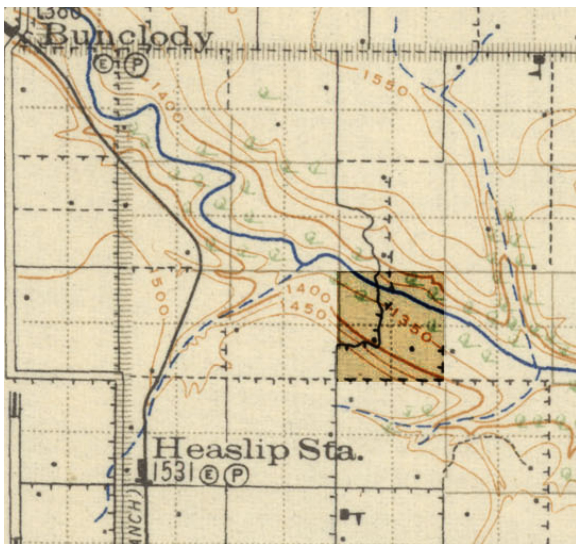
The bridge at Sheppard's Crossing

A wooden bridge was built in 1904, right near where the ferry had operated, just a short distance downstream from today's crossing.

There appear to be three trails leading south from the river. The bridge road was the one on the left. In the centre of the river there are remains of a bridge support. The abutments on each side are readily identifiable today. My recent observations at the site found a few spots to the right (east) of the bridge that would be suitable for a ferry landing.



The road, which would become the first route of Highway 10, appears to go a bit out of its way to use the crossing. Was the bridge built there because there was already a road to the ferry site? Or was the main factor the suitability of the crossing?



The bridge site in 2014.

The bridge was a pretty elaborate design for the time, with substantial abutments allowing good clearance.

In this case it wasn't the river that led to the abandonment of this site. It was another issue with those first wooden bridges. The builders couldn't have anticipated the loads they would bear as farm machinery evolved.

The bridge was damaged when Tom Nesbitt's steam tractor fell through while crossing in 1928. As the tractor started to break through, Tom was able to jump off and watch from the abutment as his tractor sank into the stream – where it stayed. Boissevain resident Keith Tufts, whom I interviewed a few years back, remembered the site as a good swimming hole in the 1930's and 40's and that the tractor was still visible.



Another view of the site, highlighting the abutment on the south side.

This was a well built example of a bridge from the early 20th century. I recently walked to the site from the existing Riverside bridges in the winter and found it very easy to trace the route of the old roadway leading north,



The road north

A new concrete arch bridge was completed in 1929. This crossing became a popular recreation spot with a dance hall, ball diamond, a store and gas station. The Old Highway #10 crossed the bridge and proceeded straight up the hill running parallel to the current Highway, which runs a bit to the west.



The Riverside Bridge - built 1929

The current bridge was built in the late 1960's, leaving the old bridge and the access to it in place. The former bridge is still in pretty good shape and held up well in the floods of 96 and 2011. One suspects that the newer bridge was not about safety, but more about upgrading Highway 10. finding a more direct spot to cross the valley.

Liskum Campbell Park was created on the site. The next time you're passing by, stop and take a walk around – it is a beautiful spot.



To Recap...

1. Sheppard's Ferry site.
2. First Bridge
3. Trail south to Boissevain
4. Second Bridge, Riverside Dance Hall
5. Old Highway #10
6. New Bridge

Souris River: McKellar's Crossing

N49.46201, W99.87377



Alexander Henry Jr., on his way back from the Missouri River in 1806, crossed the Souris at a spot he called "The Grand Passage" and indicates that it was a few miles above "a considerable bend". If you stand upon the Margaret Bridge and look west, I believe you are looking at the crossing he mentions.



A good place for a ford can be a good place for a bridge. Especially if established trails are already there.

A bridge at McKellar's Crossing was first considered by Riverside Council in 1894, but was delayed for lack of funds. \$1000 was set aside with plans to erect the bridge in 1897.

That bridge was carried away in an ice jam in 1902. Council approached the province for aid and a new bridge was built in 1909.

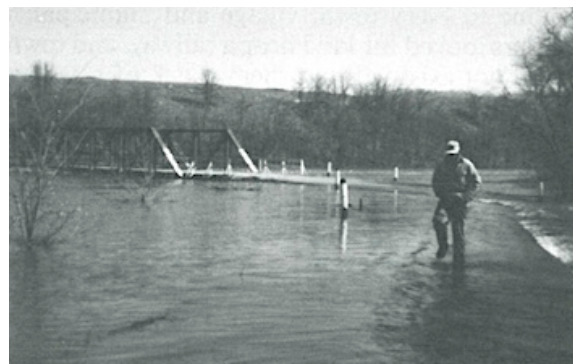
A new steel bridge was built in 1927. It seems likely the new approaches were built at that time.



Traces of the first approach from the north are quite visible on Google Earth.



The old road bed climbing out of the valley on the north side.



McKellar's is another example of a bridge that seems to have been built to last. Pictured here during the flood of 1976.

Souris River: Lang's Crossing

N49.459766 W99.844165 W



An equestrian group maintains trails in the large Wildlife Management Area that stretches along the west side of the river south of Wawanesa. It is also a popular spot for hikers and off-road enthusiasts.

In the past it was an important crossing point for settlers, especially before the railway arrived at Boissevain in 1885 and Deloraine in 1897.

Earlier than that the crossing was used by Red River Metis hunting parties in their semi-annual treks to the bison herds which by the 1850's had retreated southwards to Montana.

The Hind Expedition in 1858 made this observation:

"A continuation of the valley of the Souris- extends in a direction nearly south-east towards Pembina River, with which it is said by the half-breeds 'to interlock. Three lakes visible from our camp were said to be the sources of the Pembina River; "

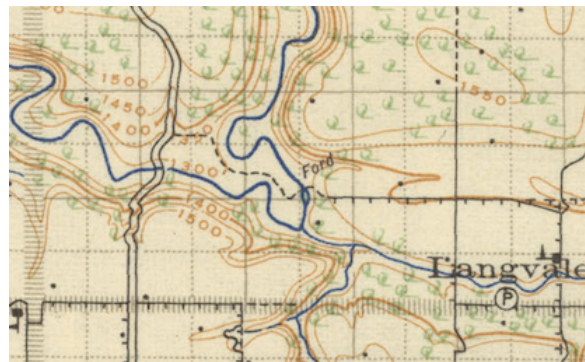
In the early settlement period, travellers going south or southeast from Brandon had to cross the Souris River. Just south of where Wawanesa is today, a small villages called Souris City offered a ferry, and for a time, a bridge. A bit south of that on property settled by George Lang there was a nice level point at the bottom of a nice set of rapids that offered fairly easy crossing except in very high water.

People heading east towards Ninette or Belmont would likely choose Souris City, while those going towards Holmfield or Killarney would be better served at Lang's.

The combination of better rail service and better roads soon made the crossing less popular, and building a bridge here was never considered.



Another view of the crossing in the spring - there can be quite a difference in water levels. Our prairie rivers can be challenging in the spring.



The trail and ford are well marked on this map from 1922.



The view from above

The path down the steep incline on the west (top) side of the crossing is etched deeply into the valley wall.

Souris River: **Souris City**

N49.57723, W99.73178

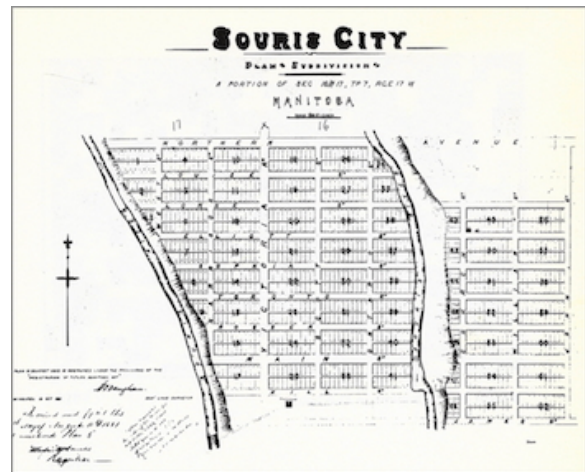


Souris City was located near the bottom left of this shot. The site is about two km southwest of Wawanesa. The Highway #2 Bridge is visible on the top left.

At its birth, Souris City was one of many speculative “cities” that came with the Manitoba Land Boom in 1880-82. The survey plan, which was ambitious even for these times of wild speculation, included parts of two sections of land and planned lots on both sides of the river, but the actual settlement was in the southwest corner of that deep loop in the river, and at its best was a somewhat scattered village with its buildings strung out along the river bank.

Before the railway, the old trails were used for trips to market grain in Brandon, for mail delivery and stagecoach service. Souris City’s position on a main trail depended upon having a river crossing. A bridge was a top priority. The first hastily constructed one was washed out in 1884. It had been built in 1882 by the Souris City Co. the owners/managers of the town site. This was before Oakland Municipality was established. By 1884 the municipality was beginning to take responsibility for such things. Although a communication in the South Cypress News mentions contacting the said company regarding a Cable Ferry. Local legend has it that the bridge was swept away by ice laden waters the evening before a government official was supposed to have presided over the Grand Opening. In any case it didn’t last long and a ferry service was quickly reestablished. It operated daily from six am until 8 pm, and the rate was 25 cents per team and 10 cents a pedestrian. (Return free of charge on same day, 6 am - 8 pm.) In 1884 the Oakland Council decided that they would “allow” the “Toronto Company” to put the bridge back subject to council supervision.¹⁴ A notice in the Sun from March of 1885 reads; “In the matter of the Souris City bridge its control has been taken

over by the Municipality of Oakland, pending a settlement of the cost of such care and maintenance between all the municipalities interested.



Souris City Plan from “The Prairie W.A.S.P.” by J.A.D. Stuart

A new bridge with a removable span was built at some point. The centre span could be removed during spring breakup to avoid destruction. It was, however, costly to maintain, and as far as we know the settlers to the south didn’t pay any of the costs. Oakland ratepayers paid an annual bridge bill until 1889.



Souris City was near the centre of this photo.

By that time the writing was on the wall for the future of Souris City as a budding metropolis. All the hopes of the town site had rested on the possibility of a rail crossing. The problems were twofold. First; the CPR had a deal with the Canadian Government that no competing line would be allowed south of its main line for 25 years after the construction of that line. This meant that they were in no hurry to satisfy the

needs of smaller markets in newly settled areas. Second; even if lines were constructed to the south there was no guarantee that the Souris City site would be chosen. By 1886 only three or four businesses remained.

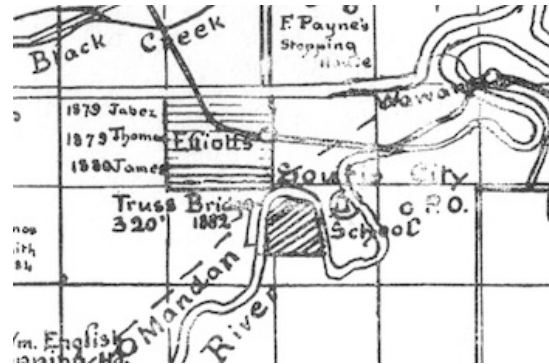


As of 2000, there was still evidence of a bridge.

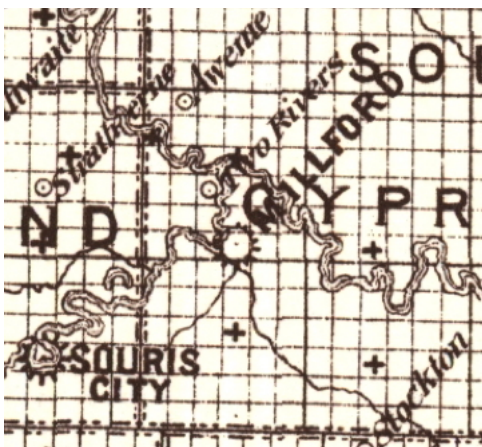
Unlike several other towns that have slowly disappeared over decades, the demise of Souris City was swift and certain. The municipality had already decided to cut some of the losses by dismantling the expensive bridge and using the parts in culvert construction programs at various points in the municipality. Community focal points shifted to both the newly formed village of Wawanessa, and to the nearby local school / church district of Cheslea.



On this map from 1892, Souris City has disappeared.



Another look at the region.



Note the place names in this map from 1886. Souris City and Millford were the only villages in the region - the other names denote Post Offices.

Souris River: **Wawanesa**

South "Black Bridge" N49.59353, W100.68875

Rail Bridge: N49.59381, W 99.69042

North "Red" Bridge: N49.59720, W99.67840



Wawanesa is located in a sharp loop of the Souris River.

1. Abandoned rail line entering from the southwest
2. Rail line exiting southwards before turning west
3. North access road and site of the "Red Bridge"
4. North access road and "Black Bridge", now closed
5. Railway Bridge site

In 1888 the Northern Pacific Railway made the decision to build a line from Morris to Brandon. It was obvious that the line would cross the Souris River at some point near the settlement of Souris City. Selecting the exact location for a bridge was important, and it must have been a challenge as the river valley was deep and steep in the region. Often railway engineers would go quite a bit out of their way to find an "easy" crossing. Anyone who has driven into Wawanesa from the Highway #2 entrance and enjoyed the view from the cliffs on the aptly named "Cliff Street", might wonder if they couldn't have found a more gentle approach. Just a few kilometres downstream, towards Treesbank for instance?

But build here they did, and they had to do a bit of twisting and turning to create a grade acceptable to a locomotive.

They created the Village of Wawanesa. The railway is long gone, but the village still thrives.



A bridge was finished in 1889 and in 1903 it was modified with a span below for horse and carriage traffic. Ward Fawcett, born in 1891, remembers the crossing vividly. "Many teams," he said, "balked at the approach and went off down the embankment, rather than cross. It was the scene of a number of spills." The horse and carriage part of the bridge was replaced in 1908 with the construction of the "Black Bridge" nearby.



The sign on the supports reads, "Do not go faster than a walk"



In 1924 the greatest disaster on the line occurred. As the train was crossing the bridge, the structure collapsed, plunging a number of cars to the river below, and killing one man. The

engine managed the crossing only through the quick action of the engineer, who realizing the danger uncoupled the rear cars.

Of course any mishap on a rail crossing had serious consequences for rail service down the line. There are no easy detours, the line needed to be fixed, and fast. The CN opted to rebuild without the traffic bridge component. That bridge served until the rail line was abandoned in 1984



The new bridge was less impressive to look at but much stronger. It lasted until the rail line closed.



Part of the structure remains

A steel bridge (the Red Bridge), was constructed in 1891-92, to enable farmers from the north to get to town. Previously they had used the ford just below the present dam.



The Red (North) Bridge

1908 a 150-foot long steel through truss bridge was built. Locals called it the "Black Bridge," The floods of 2012 & 2013 rendered it unsafe and it was closed to vehicle traffic. As there are two other access points to the village it has not been replaced or repaired. It is open to pedestrians and cyclists



The Black Bridge



The bridge today.

Souris River: **Treesbank Bridge**

N49.62798, W99.59883



This concrete bowstring bridge over the Souris River south of Treesbank was constructed in 1921. It was known locally as the Vane Bridge after the Vane farm adjacent to the river on the southwest side.



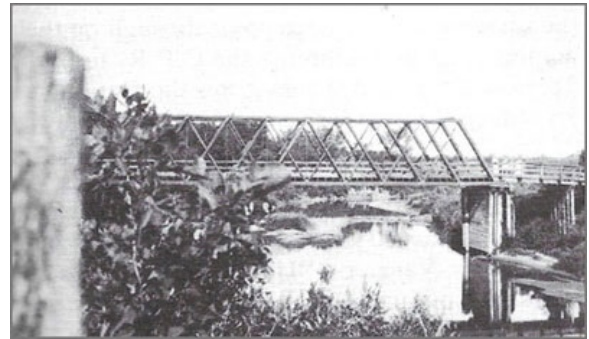
The flood of 1976 damaged one of the three arches and a new section was put in place.



The flood of 1976 damaged several Souris River bridges



The bridge collapsed completely during the flood of 2011 and has not been replaced. Photo by Travis Eversard



The first Treesbank Bridge

Souris River: Millford Village

N49.621565, S99.537819

The former village of Millford, near present day Treesbank, is not far from Brandon, but it is quite a drive since the Treesbank Bridge over the Souris River was washed away in 2011.

The decision not to rebuild the bridge is part of an ongoing trend. Rural depopulation and better roads means that there just isn't the demand that there once was for convenient crossings. But the site is worth the extra miles.



The village of Millford was located near the centre of this photo.

Why Local History Matters - a Brief Editorial

As a teacher and a student of history, I knew a bit about Nellie McClung and her role in the battle for Women's' suffrage. I had read a few of her works of fiction, at least one of which is set in what I assumed was a fictional town named Millford. I counted myself well informed in general. But what I didn't know, what my high school and university history courses had neglected to tell me, was that she grew up just a short distance from my home town. I had no idea that in the numerous times that I had driven down Highway #2 in the Wawanesa area I had passed within sight of the school yard where she got her early education, within a few kilometres of the homestead where she grew up. In fact I knew distant relatives of hers, (there still are quite a few in the area) before I knew anything about her early life. I had no idea that Millford was a real place and that it was her home.

I repeat. I didn't learn about Millford from any of the many textbooks I had read or courses I had

taken

I learned about the local connection to the Nellie McClung story while researching, of all things, canoe routes. In trying to learn more about the country I was passing through I started examining the dozens of Local History volumes, the sort produced in virtually every community by local committees of volunteers. I discovered that there were many forgotten town sites along the rivers and that their names were unfamiliar to me. Millford was one of them. Local histories of the Glenboro and Wawanesa area led me to her memoir "Clearing in the West", the best introduction anyone could have to this unique place.

The Millford Story

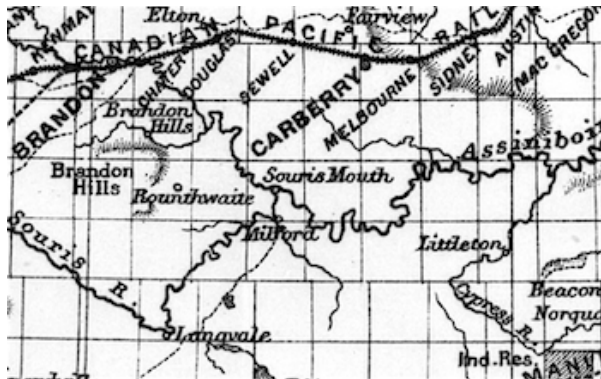
The town was the brainchild of a Major R.Z. Rogers from Grafton, Ontario. He happened to have a brother-in-law, Mr. E.C. Caddy who was to lead a team of Dominion Surveyors to Southwest Manitoba in 1879. He asked him to keep an eye out for a site for a sawmill and gristmill. His dream was to start a new community and to profit from the next wave of expansion to the west.

The plan worked for a while...

It was the first real village south of the Assiniboine in Southwest Manitoba and a very important place until the CPR Branch line stopped after reaching Glenboro and that site became the commercial centre. For a short time however it thrived and was an important stop for settlers on their way south and west.

Major Rogers was a determined entrepreneur and the townspeople in general were not easily discouraged by temporary setbacks. Like settlers in other riverside communities, they were not prepared for the unpredictability of the rivers. The heavy spring runoffs caused great difficulties. Being new to the west they probably weren't ready for the variation in water levels that occur in the dry prairie climate where most of our rivers are that in name only except for the heavy spring run-off. They also had no way of knowing that they had arrived in this new land just in time for two of the wettest years it has ever experienced. A bridge over the Souris River was built in 1882 giving farmers south of the river easier access to Brandon but only one

team went over the bridge before a spring flood washed it away.



From the "Map of South-West Portion of the Province of Manitoba" - 1885

Of all of the names on this map, Millford was the only settlement that was actually a town. The other sites were post office locations established in farm houses.

Imagine their surprise when what appeared to be a tiny stream (Oak Creek) in the summer of 1881, became a destructive torrent in the spring of 1882 and swallowed the newly built bridge. It was soon rebuilt.

Virtually every local history book published in Southwest Manitoba contains several accounts by pioneers mentioning Millford. Many settlers passed through on their journey to their homesteads. Many came by steamboat from Winnipeg or from the railways station in Brandon. They stopped at the nearby Land Titles Office to register for their homesteads. They stopped at Millford to get supplies, or to rest for the night.

The village of Millford was where Oak Creek enters the Souris, a site that would depend upon viable crossing points.

An Unhappy Ending?

The truth was that a town needed a railway to survive. The irony is that in 1891 a CPR Branch was extended from Glenboro through to Souris and it passed right by the townsite. By that time it was too late to save Millford.

As early as 1886 when the line reached Glenboro and appeared stalled there,

townspeople felt they could wait no longer. The gristmill had closed in 1885. The centre with the rail line would be the advantageous place to do business. People simply packed up and moved, often taking the buildings with them. The village of Glenboro was virtually started with buildings moved from Millford.



The neighbourhood....

1. The Souris River enters the Assiniboine from the south.
2. The Treesbank Ferry
3. The Souris River was forded at two locations north of Millford (1880- 1900)
4. Village of Millford (1880-1890)
5. Former Treesbank Bridge



The fact that several photos exist of Millford in the early 1880's confirms it's status as one of the more important early settlements. (Photo - Archives of Manitoba)

Souris River: Millford Rail Bridge

N49.62789, W99.57183



The Millford Rail Bridge in the 1890's (Photo - Archives of Manitoba)

Two approaches to crossing a deep valley.

The Souris River in the Millford area meanders through a wide valley. In crossing such a valley the main consideration is that you have to avoid a steep grade. You can do this by angling down the side of the valley, crossing the stream and then angling up the other side.



That's what the CNR did in 1901 when they built the Lenore Branch. To get from Pendennis to Wheatland they had to cross the steep valley of the Little Saskatchewan.

That often involves several extra kilometres.
(See Cossar Crossing in Part 4)

The alternative is to span the valley directly with a long trestle bridge. If you look at the map again you see that the Grand Trunk Pacific crossed the same valley near Rivers in a very direct manner.



In the Millford area, the CPR railway crossed the Souris with a long trestle bridge just a bit to the northeast of Millford and the new village of Treesbank (top right), was established.

To increase the stability of trestle bridge railway builders often fill the part of the span that isn't over the actual river. The centre portions of many of the first generation of trestle bridges were replaced by concrete and steel structures, beginning in the 1920's.



Filling the trestle in the 1890's



In Millford, what had been a very lengthy trestle was now a long embankment reaching right up to the edge of the channel, with a steel centre span on concrete pillars.



The bridge after damage caused by the flood of 1976.

The line was closed in 1983 and the rails were removed, but the structure remains.

Yet another editorial...

We've abandoned many rail lines in rural Manitoba. Some of that was inevitable as trips to the elevator became much easier when you traded your horse drawn wagon for a truck. We built a lot of lines based upon one mode of travel - where a trip to town of ten miles was an all day journey. No one foresaw just how quickly automobile age would change everything.

We also may have built a few too many lines to start with in the name of competition and boundless optimism.

Abandoning some lines made sense - up to a point. But the railway companies needed the farmer's business so they were in some ways willing to accommodate. The fact that there was still a bit of competition helped.

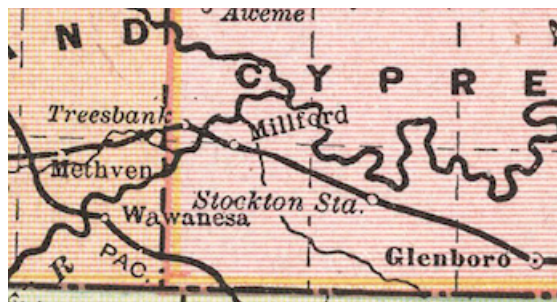
That seemed to change. In the next round of rail line closures beginning in the late 50's it seems that the railways had the upper hand and farmers had no choice but to drive the extra distance when their local elevator closed.

Like it or not we have 100's of kilometres of idle rail beds. Some have been saved as hiking trails and many more could be. The line from Neepawa to the Saskatchewan border near Russell is a great example. The abandoned bridge at Clearwater is another. The bridge at Millford pictured here would be an ideal part of such a trail.



This site is less than a kilometre from a great access point near Trreesebank

The lines that once connected communities by one mode, offer a great way to see the country by another.



This section of the abandoned rail line would take one through some beautiful country with plenty of opportunities to side trips into the Assiniboine Valley.

Many of these abandoned railway and road crossings, and the approaches to them would make components of great hiking trails. Isn't it sad that we've torn so many of them down and/or removed access to them. Check out what the community of Clearwater did with their rail bridge in Chapter 5.

A recent article in the Canadian Geographic Magazine (Nov.Dec.2025) highlights some examples of such initiatives across Canada.

The Little Saskatchewan River

The Little Saskatchewan River flows from Lake Audy in Riding Mountain National Park, south into the Assiniboine west of Brandon. For much of that distance its course winds within a deep and very scenic valley. It is a small river, excellent for paddlers, not readily navigable by larger craft. It passes through Elphinstone, the original site of Strathclair, Minnedosa, the former site of Riverdale, Rapid City, and Rivers. Its waters have been harnessed for industrial and recreational purposes through the creation of several dams.



The Remains of the Ten Mile Dam.

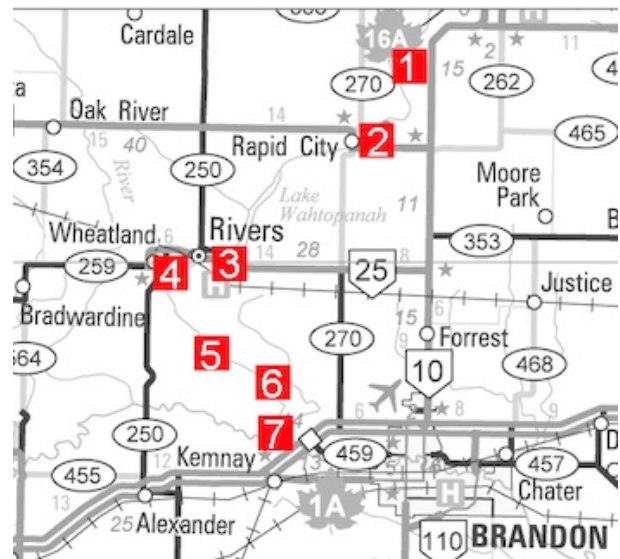
The first hydro electric plant in Manitoba was built just upstream from its confluence with the Assiniboine. They called it the Ten Mile Dam. That was in 1901.

The hydro generated there served Brandon until the 1920's. The lake that was created was a popular recreation spot for some time after that.

A dam at Minnedosa was also first erected as a power plant. An extreme flood washed it away in 1948. The resulting torrent flooded the town and washed away the Ten Mile Dam over 50 km downstream. The Minnedosa Dam was re-built for primarily recreational purposes and serves as a popular beach and campground today.



Just downstream from the dam you can see the clear outline of the Glenorky Ski Hill



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1. Abandoned Riverdale Bridge, 50.191475N 99.975044W
2. Rapid City- Abandoned Railway Bridges N50.13518, W100.01547
3. The "Rumble Bridge" near Rivers: N50.13518, W100.01547
4. Cossar Crossing - Former Railway Bridge Site N50.019533, W100.242249
5. Pendennis Bridge: Former Bridge Site: N49.93365, W100.18773
6. Kirkham's Bridge: N49.91448, W100.14510
7. Daly Bridge. N49.88076, W100.11332

The Little Saskatchewan River: **Riverdale Bridge**

N50.19148, W99.97504



In 2001 while in a small plane following the path of the Little Saskatchewan River I noticed this bridge to nowhere while passing over the site of Riverdale, a former railway stop between Minnedosa and Rapid City. I knew there must be a story there about how transportation routes change.

Much later with the help of Google Earth and a visit to the site, I was able to take another look...

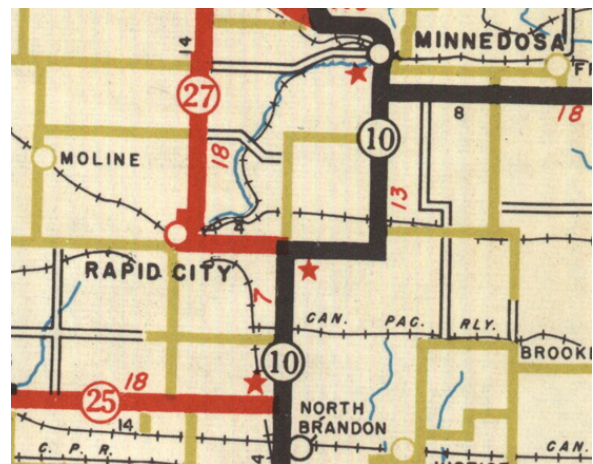


The station and elevator were to the left of the shot. You can see the faint trace of the former road coming in from the top, then turning towards the village. Today a newer bridge off to the top right allows road access.

The Rapid City History reports that a bridge was contracted in 1903. However the Manitoba North Western RR established the station in 1886 and there would likely have been some access from the west side. Every effort was made to give farmers easy access to the elevator.



This four-span concrete beam bridge over the Little Saskatchewan River was built in 1918.

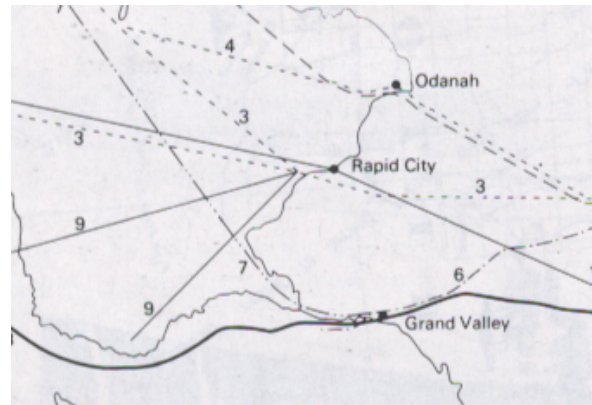
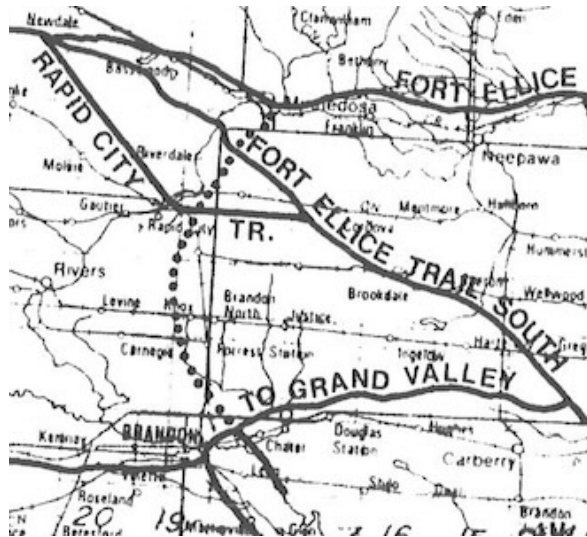


At the time of its construction, the bridge was on a road connecting Highways 27 and 10. By the time this Highway map was printed in 1950 the village didn't make the cut.

The Little Saskatchewan River: Rapid City

N50.13518, W100.01547

In the early 1800's a natural crossing of the Little Saskatchewan River near present day Rapid City was used by the Hudson Bay Company on the southern branch of the Carleton Trail. That trail ran all the way to Fort Edmonton. It was the main highway west and was well used.



*A map showing proposed railway routes.
(Section, Township & Range, Tynman)*

The Railway

Rapid City didn't get railway service until 1886, and never did approach the aspiration to be a "City".

The first line to reach Rapid City was the Manitoba and Northwestern from Minnedosa in 1886. They offered a return trip to Minnedosa for 65¢,

The Great West Railway, which ran from Chater to Hamiota, was built in 1890 but bypassed the town, offering only a siding called Gautier.

In the late 1870's surveys were started for the proposed transcontinental railway and the first divisional point west of Winnipeg was planned to be at the crossing of the rapids at that spot. The trail by then had become the route for settlers to the area. M. Turriff, an early arrival in 1878, operated a ferry there.

One traveler in 1879 described the crossing ...

"There was no bridge over the Little Saskatchewan but the river was not very big and a man pushing a small ferry with a long pole was charging 15¢ a trip to take people and goods across."

As of 1880 Rapid City was poised to be an important stop of the new transcontinental railway. The Grand Valley route was chosen at the last minute and Rapid City had to wait.

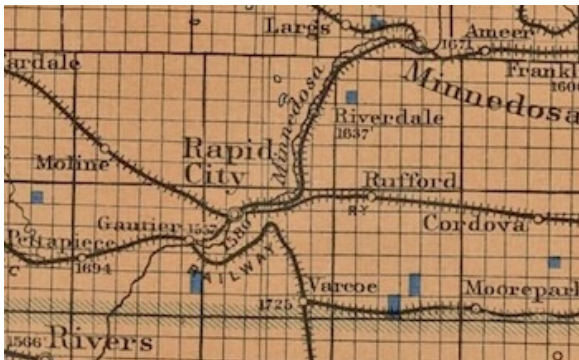
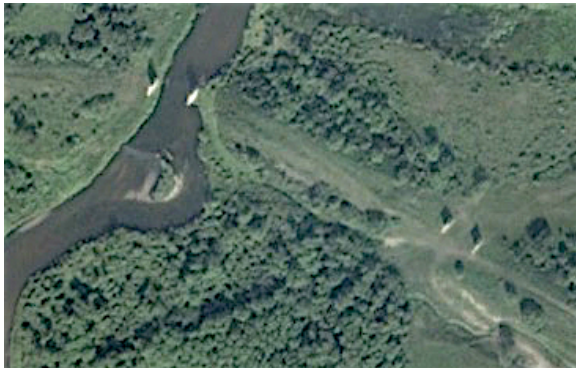


In 1907 the Canadian Northern Railway surveyed the land to build a railway branch line from Halboro to Beulah through Rapid City and Moline. This later became the Canadian National Branch Line. To reach Rapid City it had to cross the existing line from Minnedosa and go over the

Little Saskatchewan River. The result was an interesting pair of bridges.

The abandoned double rail crossing however is still a site worth seeing. Easily accessed by a road eastward from Highway 24, north of the village.

From above it looks like this...



Looking at the rail lines operating in 1908. Rapid City almost resembles the hub of transportation that it once hoped to become.

The Brandon GTO Spur

Speaking of abandoned rail bridges. some decades ago I was paddling down the Assiniboine just east of Brandon, and saw this giant concrete pillar in the middle of the river. I knew what it must be, but at that time I knew little about Brandon's history. The story turned out to be stranger than I expected.

This bridge was abandoned before it was even completed.

The remains are a visual (concrete?) reminder of one the more interesting examples of the rush to expand rail service and capture that trade.



It was much promised, almost completed, and never used.

In 1910 The Grand Trunk Pacific had just completed its own transcontinental line, following a route edging northwards from Portage to a divisional point at Rivers and from there northwest, paralleling what is today the Yellowhead Highway, through Edmonton and on the coast.



Brandon was promised that a spur would be started within six months of completion of the main line. And it was...started. Work began in 1911. A rail bed was graded from the main line at Harte for nearly 40 km, as far as the Assiniboine River, where a bridge was constructed.

But by the time it was finished, it was apparent that railway companies had overbuilt. The resulting financial woes intervened. The project was terminated in 1913 leaving only an unfinished rail bed that had never seen rails, let alone trains, and a bridge that was never crossed and had to be demolished in 1924, leaving only the massive supports.

The Little Saskatchewan River: The Rumble Bridge, Rivers N50.13518, W100.01547

In 1911, just three years after the Town of Rivers was created as a divisional point on the new Grand Trunk Pacific trans-continental railway, a bridge was built over the nearby Little Saskatchewan River on what would have been the main road south to Brandon.



The remains of the Rumble Bridge from the north.



The bridge (near centre) was upgraded in 1944 and taken down some years ago

Longtime resident Don McFadden explains the origin of the name.

"The concrete footings about 200 yards west of the present bridge on Highway 25 are the footings of the former bridge. That road was the main route to Brandon and all points to the south and east so everyone in the community crossed it often. And to get to Rivers --- and to get to school for me --- we had to cross it every day. (Except in the winter when, with a horse drawn cutter, van or sleigh we crossed on the river ice straight south of Rivers.) The deck on the bridge

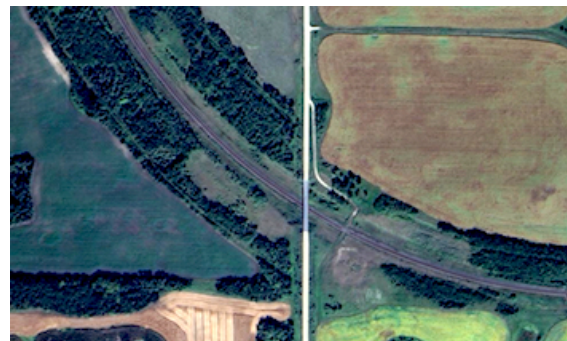
was made of heavy wooden planks sitting crossways in a steel frame. But they weren't fastened in any way --- they just sat loose in the frame. So, when a vehicle crossed the bridge the planks "rumbled" quite loudly so the bridge became known as the 'Rumble Bridge' or the 'Thunder Bridge'."

Grant's Cut & The Bell Crossing

Back in the day when the Rumble Bridge was on your route to Brandon, you also had to cross a busy railway line. The Grand Trunk Pacific took a sharp curve before heading down the valley into nearby Rivers.

Railway choices can impact other transportation. When a car approached the crossing, and oncoming eastbound train couldn't be seen.

To solve that problem, there was a post on the east side of the crossing about twelve feet high. Near the top there were cross arms similar to the cross arms seen at rail crossings today. But above the arms there was a large steel bell. This very loud bell was activated by oncoming trains just as signal lights are activated today.



The "Bell Crossing" was to the right (east) of the overpass. The old road is still there on the north side of the line.

The Little Saskatchewan River: Cossar Crossing

N50.01953, W100.24225



This photo, by prolific Brandon photographer (and railway worker) Lawrence Stuckey captures, a train crossing the Cossar or Wheatland Bridge over the Little Saskatchewan River south of Rivers.

When the Lenore Branch of the CPR connecting Brandon with Lenore was built in 1901, Rivers did not exist. The Grand Trunk Pacific, a transcontinental line, arrived in 1908, and the new town of Rivers became the commercial centre of the district.



The route taken illustrates just how important it was to a railway surveyor to find the best (cheapest) site for a crossing. The high wide spans required to cross deep, wide valley are very expensive to build. It was less expensive to angle gently down a deep valley and make a lower crossing, even if it added distance to the route.



The Grand Trunk Pacific transcontinental line nearby required a much more elaborate bridge.



Cossar Crossing from the west - a level crossing on the wide valley floor. The approach to the river required only a modest embankment.

The Lenore Branch was abandoned in 1980. I found no record of the bridge being torn down.

A Last Minute Find

The photo of the site is from a visit in 2018. When I visited recently I noticed this nearby...



Sure enough the map opposite shows an old trail just to the north of the rail crossing. I found no mention of this bridge in the Local History. It would have been unnecessary when new pattern of grids roads was established.

The Little Saskatchewan River Pendennis Bridge, N49.93365, W100.18773

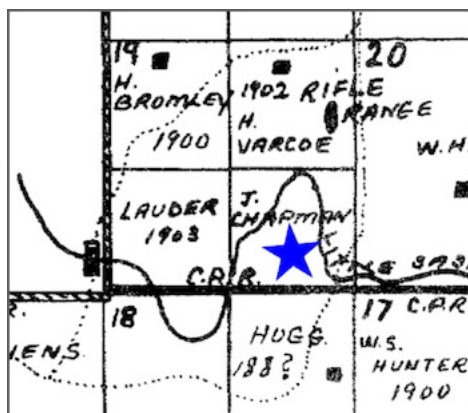
Hunter's Bridge, N49.93552, W 100.19849

I found this little story in the Kirkham's Bridge history...

"In 1928 Mr. H.J. Chapman bought this farm (NE 19-11-20). At the same time he bought the quarter to the south, which was owned by the CPR, and which had a plentiful supply of wood on it. In the days before Hydro this was quite an asset because a big pile of firewood was a "must" in every farmyard. The fact that the CPR was an "absentee landlord" and that a good road which ran down to the Pendennis Bridge, made that wood easily accessible from either side of the river, was a temptation hard to resist. Consequently, some farmers when questioned about where they got their wood, replied quite casually, "Oh-uh-on Section 37."

Now let me explain. If you grew up on a farm, as I did, and if you have reached a certain age, as I have, you know that farmland was surveyed on a system we borrowed from the Americans. A block of land six miles square was called a township. That means each township had 36 square miles. Each square mile was called a section.

Quiz: How many Sections in a Township?
 Answer: Not quite 37.



The dotted lines represent trails used in the days before cars and graded grid roads.

Of course Google Earth gives us a complete

picture. I have walked that trail many times over the years. It offers great views of the river valley and up-close access to a bit of history.



The trail from the north is a road allowance today. The one from the south seems to branch into two routes. In the early days trails ignored road allowances, and the map to the left shows the old trail angling westwards. The trail to the right, heading straight south would likely have joined the road allowance used later on.



The site in 2021. The pilings are visible in low water.



The trail up the south bank is overgrown but recognizable. A "No Trespassing" Sign warns visitors that it is private property



A view from the trail.

In the local history I also came across this memory from John Nicholas (p64) who farmed on 22-11-20 (near Harrow School of the map.)

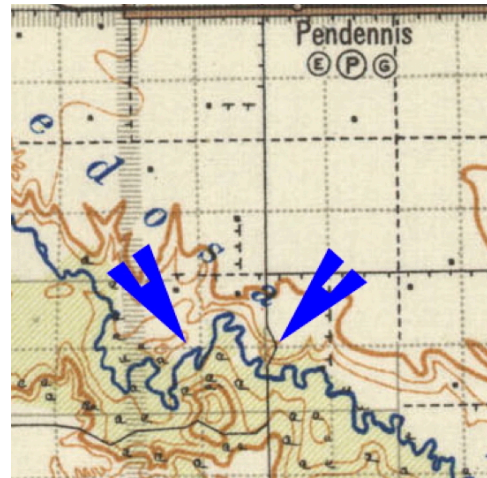
"Henry Quayle" (that's an apt name for a chicken-hunter) "and I drove out to shoot chickens, crossed river at Kirkham's Bridge, went west about five miles, crossed river at Hunter's Bridge, and came home from there.

Was that another name for the Pendennis Bridge? That happens.

Or...was there another bridge? Where?

Aside from Local History volumes and Google Earth, there is one more invaluable type of resource - friends who know more than me. In this case it was Gord Allen who set me on the right track. Gord and his wife Lois (Nee Chapman) operated the Chapman Museum, established by Lois's father, Ab Chapman, decades ago. They have done a superb job of

keeping the history of their region alive. Gord knew exactly where the bridges were.

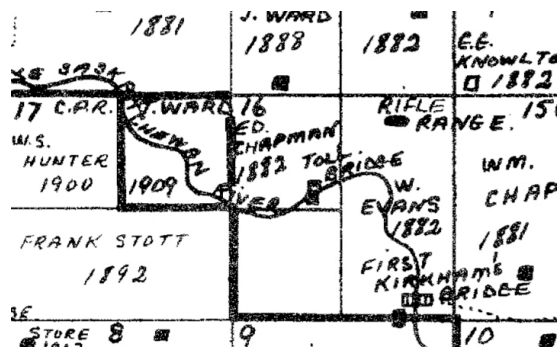


There was indeed a Hunter's Bridge. It was about a kilometre upstream from the Pendennis Bridge.

It is not so readily accessible, so I will rely on this map to show the location. The Pendennis Bridge and the road are shown on this map from 1922. To the left is the approximate site of the Hunter Bridge.



The Google Earth evidence shows a trail crossing near the middle of this image at 49.94150, W100.21346. That's my guess for the location.



Notice that W.S. Hunter owned land nearby.

As I noted in the chapter on the Souris River, there are some districts that ended up with a lot of bridges. The Kirkham's Bridge area was one of them. There could be a few reasons for that, but one reason is that if the river is narrow and has an easy approach, bridges could be home-made and relatively cheap. Logs for piles were found nearby. The loads were very much lighter than today.

Full Disclosure...

Long ago, while documenting heritage sites for the RM of Daly (Now Riverdale) I found this in the Kirkham Bridge history...

"Edward Chapman Sr. picked out a spot for a home on the river bank on the north-west quarter of 16-11-20. To reach this land the river had to be spanned, so he built a truss bridge costing \$200, but just wide enough for a team and wagon, and because it was a private bridge he collected a toll."

A helpful set of maps in the same volume also noted it - see above.

So when my wife Beverly and I were hiking a riverside trail and found the evidence of a bridge, I assumed that we had found the Toll Bridge.

It wasn't until I started working on this project and consulted Gord Allan, that I learned that I had been referring to Pendennis Bridge as the "Chapman Toll Bridge".

On Finding Things...

A friend once told me that there are two times to invest...now or five years ago. I think that applies to preserving both heritage sites and the natural world.

Change creeps up on us.

As I travel in search of old trails, old bridges and forgotten sites I am amazed at how quickly things disappear. How can the signs of a well-travelled road become so overgrown that they are hard to recognize? If parts of the trail to the Pendennis Bridge might pass unnoticed today, what will be left in a few more decades?

We can't preserve everything, but we can try to at least preserve the memories. Creating and encouraging an awareness and interest in abandoned sites is one way to generate support for conserving or at least documenting sites.

In that regard, nothing beats seeing things oneself.

To facilitate that we should, I believe give thought to access.

There are hundred of kilometres of abandoned road allowances throughout our land. They were wisely set aside in the surveys for good reason.

Access.

There were homes on every section and the old system of winding trails wasn't practical.

Now we don't need them all. But they were public land. Some have been preserved as "Conservation Corridors" or designated as "Machine Roads" while others seem to have been taken over by owners of adjacent land, either formally or informally. The public is losing access.

We have an opportunity to save as many of these pathways - and the time to do that is right now. Or else they will disappear.

The Little Saskatchewan River: **Kirkham's Bridge** N49.91448, W100.14510



Kirkham Bridge (1906 - 1981)

For the prairie farmer in pioneer times, the river was both a necessity and an obstacle. Many farmers had land on both sides, and while crossing in late summer was easy enough, what was sometimes a mere nuisance, could be deceptively dangerous in high water.

During the spring flood of 1897 while the bridge was washed out, Walter Chapman had some ploughshares that he wanted to take across the river to Joe Kirkham to be sharpened. He swam the swollen river empty-handed, no problem, then returned for the shares. He strapped them on his back and stepped back into the river, but this time the river proved to be too swift and the load too heavy, so a life was lost. In the early days, when the need of a convenient way to cross the river became apparent, surveyors were required to locate a suitable site for a bridge. In 1895 they arrived at the William Chapman home and after many measurements, they decided that the best location for the bridge was due west of his farm buildings. The bridge was named "Kirkham's Bridge" after the Kirkham family who had settled on the west bank of the river. All went well until the spring floods of 1897, when it washed out. Better footings had to be found. About 500 metres downstream suitable hardpan on which to support the piles was discovered, so the entire structure was floated down river and reconstructed on the site of present bridge. In 1906 a new steel bridge was erected.

Mr. William Baker, son of Mr. Jack Baker, was the first one to drive a truckload of grain across the new Kirkham's Bridge, just as his father had delivered the first load across the 1906 bridge.

During the 1930's the site became a favourite spot for school picnics, community ball games, and other forms of entertainment. Hundreds of people gathered here on Sunday afternoons to bathe in the cool water of the river and to enjoy a few hours of relaxation while visiting with friends and neighbours.

The proximity to Brandon has always meant that Brandonites used the site for recreation as well. I attended a Brandon University Frat Party there in 1966. I have embarked upon many a short paddling expedition from that site.

Locals regret however, that when the new Kirkham's Bridge was constructed in 1979-81 the beach, along the sandy river bottom, was ruined. Progress?



In 1981 the new bridge was installed next to the site of the previous one.



Today, the former picnic spot is a great departure point for a river trip.

The Little Saskatchewan River: **Daly Bridge**

N49.88076, W100.11332



The Little Saskatchewan ends its relatively short journey west of Brandon. The last crossing is the Daly Bridge, named after Thomas Mayne Daly, Brandon's first Mayor. It was built in 1982-83

The earlier bridge - built prior to 1912 was called the McMillan Bridge, after a local landowner.



This sign would seem to indicate that there was a bridge here as early as 1883. The Daly Bridge provides us with a look at the damage unpredictable streams can cause.

Evidence of the former bridge, which was located just a few metres upstream from the current one, was readily visible in 2010. This view hadn't changed much since I started paddling this river in the 1990's.



Several years of spring flooding, especially in 2021, changed the riverbed drastically.



Each spring more of the old bridge was exposed.



By 2022 the view from Daly Bridge was much altered and the remains of the earlier bridge were now in the centre of a much wider channel.

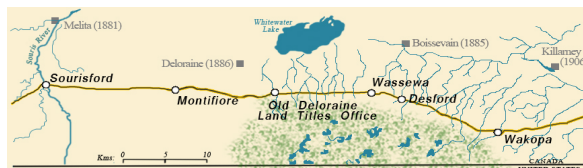
The Boundary Commission Trail

The Oldest Highway in the West

The Boundary Commission trail was the route taken by the Boundary Commission in 1873 & 74 as they surveyed the Canada – US Border. They bridged creeks, established crossings, and cleared bush as necessary; but the general route they followed spans centuries, crosses cultural lines, and involves a multitude of goals and purposes.

Although one short period of its life at the dawn of European settlement gave the trail its name, it was well travelled long before that time.

Parts of it began as a First Nations travel and trading route, which the fur traders of the 18th Century naturally used when they began penetrating the interior of Rupert's Land as the region was then called. Not too long afterwards, the Red River carts of the Métis wore grooves into the prairie sod of the trail in their pursuit of the bison as the large animals retreated ever westward.



*The Boundary Commission Trail in western Manitoba.
(Vantage Points Collection – TMSPHA)*

Many of the pioneers of European origin who came to take up homesteads in the southwestern corner of Manitoba in the 1880's came from Ontario. One popular route was via boat to Duluth on Lake Superior, then by rail to a point on the Red River directly south of Winnipeg, where they might have a choice between a riverboat or a train to Emerson on the Manitoba - Dakota Territory border. Before the CPR began regular service west from Winnipeg in late 1881, most made their way westward along the Boundary Commission Trail, often in wagons drawn by oxen or horses, with whatever belongings and supplies they owned. It was a long, slow, journey, but the trail first blazed by the Boundary Commission in 1873 was well travelled, and several "Stopping Houses", pioneer versions of the roadside motel, had been

established in farm houses along the trail. If the weather cooperated, and the wagon didn't lose a wheel or break an axle, it might well have been almost an enjoyable trip.

River crossing could be tricky, depending on the time of year and the water levels. Fortunately, the Boundary Commission, following the lead of Aboriginal hunters and Metis traders, selected advantageous locations for crossing streams.

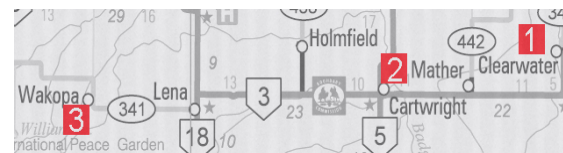
As technology marched on, new routes were drawn, first for trains, then for cars, and while the Boundary Trail was still useful for local travel for a time, the increased use of cars meant that even local and regional transportation shifted onto to those conveniently provided road allowances that bordered each section of land. Evidence of the old trail faded except in a few places where the ruts were deeply etched into a hillside or valley wall.

A Memory...

We set out across the frozen prairie on the Boundary Commission Trail to walk 125 miles west into the wilderness to find a homestead. Mother carried the baby in her arms. Uncle George managed to walk. I carried a big old gun which had been used in the Civil War. Father carried a big stick and pushed hard on the wagon box, saying "You'd been a good many miles behind if I hadn't kept shoving on the tailboard". Robert Blackwell

Contents

1. Clearwater - Former Bridge Site. N49.13306, W99.03069



2. Badger Creek. - Bridge Site and former ford: N49.10368 W99.32316

3. Wakopa: Former ford and bridge sites. 49.06359. W 99.86393

The Boundary Commission Trail: Clearwater

N49.13306, W99.03069

The first settlers in the region along the southern, border of Manitoba quite logically chose to create communities close to the trail. Clearwater, Cartwright, Wakopa, Deloraine, Sourisford and Butterfield are examples. With the arrival of the railway, Cartwright, Deloraine and Wakopa retained their name but moved to the new line. Sourisford was eclipsed by Melita and Butterfield by Pierson.

The settlement of Clearwater however, stayed right where it was. Both the Manitoba and Southwestern Railway and the Boundary Commission chose the same spot to cross Crystal Creek. So Clearwater has a special connection with the story of the Boundary Commission Trail.



The story is prominently displayed on a public building in the Village.



Today a modern highway crosses Cypress Creek near the village.



The Creek was once crossed by an attractive concrete bowstring arch bridge, constructed between 1919 and 1920. The bridge was closed to vehicular traffic in 2016 and demolished in the spring of 2018.



Another bridge was built to the north. (49.14055, W99.03664)



With the help of public donations, The abandoned railway bridge is now a scenic walkway.

In 1884, farmers' teams drew material from Manitou to build a railroad bridge. Mules were used to draw scrapers to build the grade. In 1885, the CPR line was completed through Clearwater.

The Boundary Commission Trail: **Beach's Bridge**, Badger Creek
N49.10368 W99.32316

Badger Creek Park is located about 3/4 mile north of Cartwright.



A monument marks the point where at the Boundary Commission crossed Badger Creek in 1873, near present-day Cartwright. The spot was also the site of Cartwright from 1881 to 1885, before it was moved a bit to the south when the railway arrived.

From a NWMP diary....

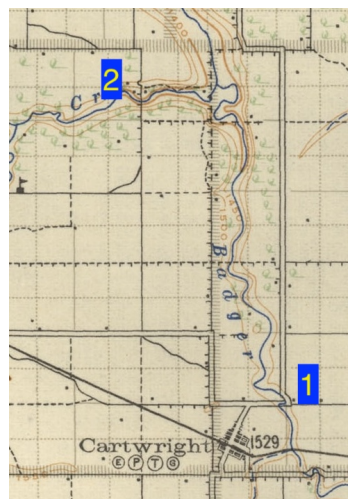
July 15, 1874, started at 6 a.m.; stopped at noon in a lovely valley by a spring-fed creek where the horses were watered and the men bathed. Proceeding, crossed Badger Creek and camped some miles beyond White Mud Creek (locally known as Long River). A few antelope were seen...

In the winter of 1882-83, Jack McKibbin and James Stirton built a bridge across Badger Creek. The lumber was hauled from Vaughn's mill near Rock Lake. It replaced the ferry that they had previously built. It was near the Beach farm and would always be called Beach's Bridge.



The previous photo would be the re-built or second bridge. The first bridge would more likely

have looked something like this one that used to cross Whitemud Creek, north west of Cartwright.



#1: The bridge over Whitemud Creek
#2: Beach's Bridge near the "Old" Cartwright site.

Pioneer's remember...

The flood waters in the flat on this side of Beach's bridge were very high and the horses were swept off their feet, upsetting the wagon and throwing the occupants into the raging stream. The Gemmills had great difficulty in saving themselves, but by clinging to tree branches they steadily worked their way out. The horses were drowned and the contents of the wagon lost. (Memories Along the Badger p144)

I was always apprehensive crossing the bridge over the Badger River, because there was a gap at each end of the bridge between the railings and the river bank.) J.W. Pickersgill, Memories Along the Badger)

The Boundary Commission Trail: Wakopa - Long River

N49.06359. W 99.86393

The Wakopa Crossing over the Long River was used by fur traders and Aboriginal hunters long before the Boundary Commission came along in 1873.



This photo from the Archives of Manitoba shows the Boundary Commission leaving the Long River Depot.

As you can see from the Google Earth image, evidence of the crossing is hard to spot. All evidence of the trail is gone. Local resident Charlie Baldock, another one of those very helpful people who know more than me, was able to take me to the spot.

1. Site of the crossing of Long River at Wakopa by the Boundary Commission
2. Site of bridge located just north of the ford.

The bridge was used until the 1950's.
49.06633 99.86305

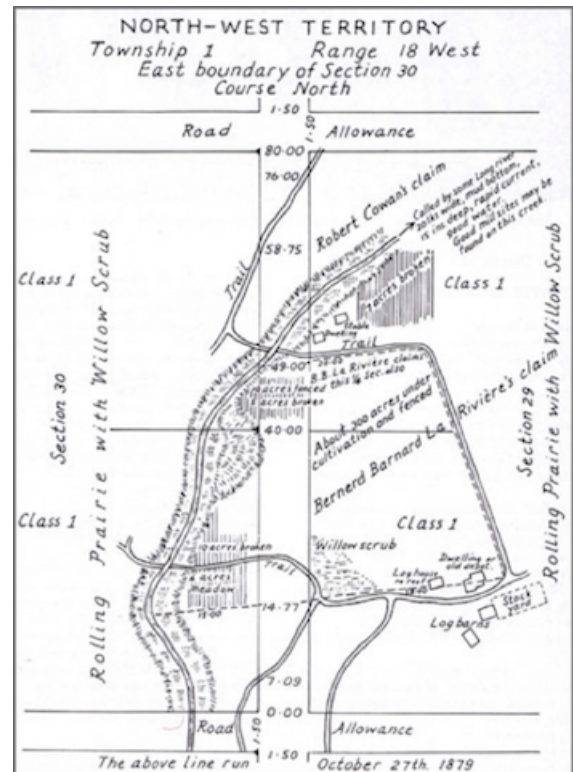


At different times there were three bridges crossed Long River. The remains of the "Middle Bridge" are shown here in 2025.



It's hard to image it but this was a well-travelled road, on a school bus route. Nature tends to reclaim habitat over time. Cultivation obliterates both roads and rail lines.

There is no record of a ferry at the crossing. Except in the early spring, crossing was relatively easy.



The survey map from 1879 shows the property of Bernard LaRivière, which became the village of Wakopa.

The site was a crossroads in one age and a different sort of crossroads in the next.



Fur trade era trails.

In pre-contact times, Nakota and Dakota people were in regular contact with other groups as far south as the Mandan Villages near where Bismarck is now. There were also trails for regular East-West travel. One set of trails crossed at the future Wakopa site.

In 1905 the original village of Wakopa was re-established a bit to the north on the CNR Branch Line. A station, store and elevator were the heart of the village and it was never destined to be a large commercial centre. By that time nearby Boissevain and Killarney were well established service centres. There was employment in railway work however and when the Brandon Saskatchewan and Hudson's Bay Railway crossed nearby that enhanced the importance of the village.



The region in 1920.

The BS&HB closed in 1936 and the CN served the village until 1961. The store closed a few years later and today Wakopa, though still on the map, has no residents. There is however public access to the site of the first real village in the Turtle Mountain Region.

An Interpretive Sign Display is located right where the store used to be.

****The full story of Wakopa is available as a book and online. A search for "Wakopa History" will lead you there.**

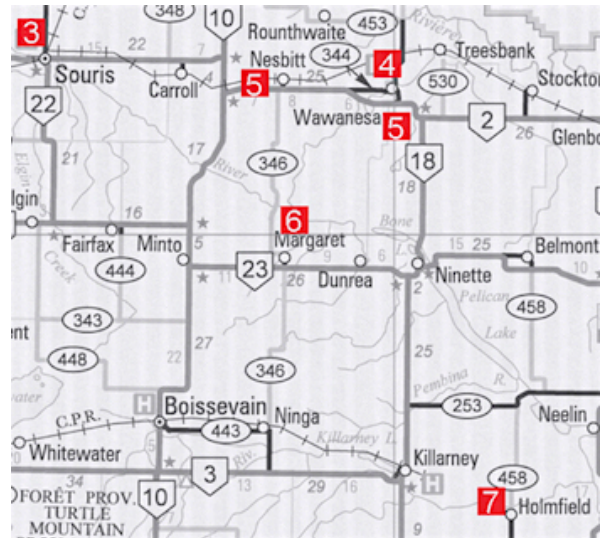
Here and There: An Overview

We present here just a small representative sample of the hundreds of bridges built over creeks and ravines in the Southwest Corner.



Part 1: North

1. Abandoned Bridge over the Oak River - Bradwardine Area. N49.98041, W100.46175
2. Abandoned Bridge over the Oak River - Sioux Valley First Nation. N49.86012, W100.47871



Part 2: South

3. Abandoned Bridge over Plum Creek N49.62135, W100.29937
4. Abandoned Bridge over Black Creek. N49.61945, W99.67744
5. Two small bridges in the RM of Oakland. N49.62135, W100.29937 and N49.57217, W99.68875
6. Abandoned Bridge over McKinnon's Ravine north of Margaret N49.41345, W99.85637
7. Abandoned Traffic and Railway Bridges in Holmfield N49.13806, W99.48190

Here and There: Oak River - Bradwardine Area

N49.98041, W100.46175

This concrete beam bridge over the Oak River, on Highway 564 south of Bradwardine, was built in 1916.



The more modern bridge nearby was built in
1961



Often the first bridges took the slight detour to find the best crossing site. Here the original crossing site was on the road allowance and the new bridge bypassed it.

Any chance they did that to leave attractive old structure standing?



The old bridge was left in place while the road was re-routed just a bit.

The Oak River is one busy river. As it winds it's way from north of Shoal Lake to meet the Assiniboine in the Sioux Valley First Nation it flows under many bridges. Most of these are on grid roads, and in most cases the stream is narrow. Not far from the one south of Bradwardine, which has been replaced, is another that is still in service at [N49.98887, W100.41642](#). It is near Ancrum, the site of a community (School, Church and Cemetery) established before the arrival of a rail line created the village of Bradwardine



It is of a similar design (George Penner - Historic Sites of Manitoba)

Here and There: Oak River: Sioux Valley First Nation

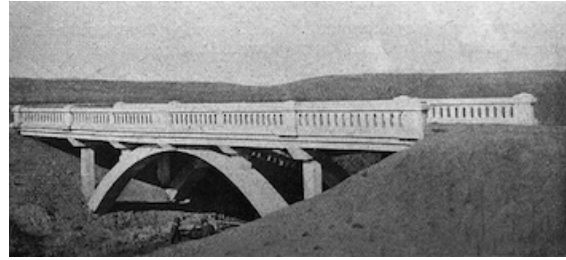
N49.86012, W100.47871

Just a bit off of Highway 21 as it passes through the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, the remains of a picturesque concrete arch bridge spans Oak River.

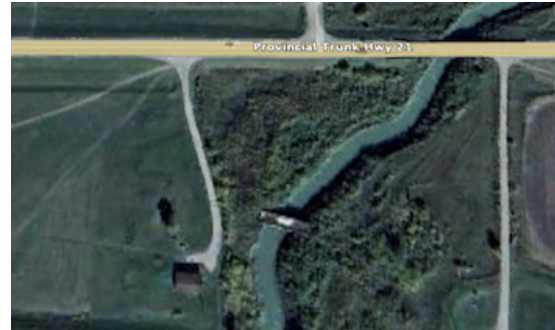


It was built in 1917.

The period from 1915 - 1930 was a time of extensive road construction and bridge building in Southwest Manitoba. During the first wave of settlement the necessary bridges were of wood construction, suitable for light loads. The explosion in the use of automobiles also prompted the need for not only better bridges, but many more of them. So we saw an extended period of sturdier bridges built of concrete.



Photos courtesy Historic Sites of Manitoba



As elsewhere, the new routes tended to be more direct. The old bridge may have been structurally sound when it was abandoned, but Highway #21 took a direct route and bypassed it.

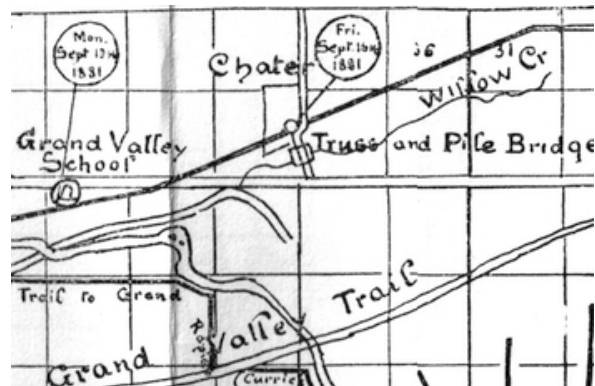
Here and There: Willow Creek

N49.75378, W99.75740

This concrete bridge on Valley Road [Provincial Road 457] is typical of the style used in the 1920's. The local history notes that in 1911, "Contractor Koester notified the Municipal Council that the bridges across Willow Creek and Little Souris River were now completed."



Many bridges of this type were replaced with the sort of structure we see in the new version. Less elaborate in style, but more functional and sturdy



This map by Kavanaugh depicting historic locations shows that the first bridge crossing Willow Creek was closer to Chater.

Here and There: **Glen Souris**

N49.75378, W99.75740

Glen Souris was a community based around a Church, Cemetery & School near where the Little Souris River runs into the Assiniboine River SE of Brandon.



The bridge built in 1919 has always been known as the Glen Souris Bridge, and mentioned often in the Cornwallis local history.



It was one of several bridges from that era that became part of the identity of the community it served. It is mentioned often as a reference point in the local history - a sort of local landmark that all could relate to.

The concrete for the bridge was hauled from Brandon to the site. While it is crumbling in places the bridge is still in use for local traffic.



The concrete may be crumbling in places but the structure seems sound. It sees local use.

Here and There: Plum Creek - Near Souris

N49.62135, W100.29937

Driving west out of Souris on Highway 21 you cross Plum Creek as it enters the town and winds its way to where it falls into the Souris River at Victoria Park. A minute or so later, if you happen to look north at just the right time, as I did one day, you will see another bridge where the highway used to cross the creek. The site can be accessed from the next grid road.



This concrete arch bridge over the Plum Creek was built in 1921.

The highway has since been relocated to the south. As roads and bridges were re-built more advantageous crossing points were often selected. As the original, or first, bridges really couldn't be brought up to standard by repairs, re-building was essential, so as you are starting from scratch you might as well re-consider location issues.



In this case the earlier site was used. Underneath you find what looks like the remains. Those first bridges were much simpler - usually based upon piles.



Gordon Goldsborough's photo from Historic Sites offers a great view. Plum Creek appears to be quite a river in this shot. For much of its journey from Oak Lake it is a modest stream through flat prairie. At nearby Souris it takes a sharp descent into the deep Souris Valley. A wander through Victoria Park in Souris is a great way to see it,

Here and There: **Black Creek**

N49.61945, W99.67744

Prior to 1966 if you wanted to go from Wawanessa, north to Shilo, there wasn't a very direct route. The road passed through Treesbank and then north to the Treesbank Ferry over the Assiniboine.

It was, however, a scenic route, that passed through or by some noteworthy locations. In just a few kilometres you would reach the bridge over Black Creek. Fans of Nellie McClung might be familiar with that name, as it was mentioned more than once in her writings.



1. Old Black Creek Bridge
2. Souris Mouth WMA
3. Brandon House #1
4. The Criddle Homestead

From Treesbank, after crossing at the ferry, you pass within two kilometres of the mouth of the Souris, the site of Brandon House, and the home of Percy Criddle.

From a pioneer account...

"Spring came in that year with a rush, and Black Creek overnight became a small sized torrent. The men decided they would have to devise some sort of ferry boat on which to transport the settlers across the Creek, bridges in those days being unknown luxuries. They set to work and the result of their labours was a deep flat bottomed wooden boat, somewhat like a wagon box, to be manipulated with a paddle. Johnnie was given the responsibility of transporting the new settlers and their effects across the Creek. Aside from the almost constant danger of upsetting his craft, there was interest and excitement alone in the varied nature of each cargo."



The old bridge appears to be sturdy and access is not blocked off, but there is no road access from the south and only a rough trail from the north. It does however make a part of a pleasant walk along the nearby grid road to the north with its pleasing views of Black Creek,



A view from the south.

Here and There: Pembina River, Ninga Area

N49.19732, W99.87847



This concrete beam bridge over the Pembina River on Highway 346 south of Ninga was built in 1927. (George Penner - Historic Sites of Manitoba)

Through much of the first leg of its long winding trek across southern Manitoba the Pembina River is a modest little stream. Originating south of Ninga, ultimately fed off of the south shoulder of Turtle Mountain, it changes its demeanor once it tumbles down a steep incline off of the Souris Plains into a much more prominent valley at the south end of Pelican Lake. From there it finds its way through a wide scenic valley. Rock Lake and Swan Lake are part of its course. It passes through LaRiviere, angles southeast toward Pembina Crossing. It is showcased, in all its scenic splendor, at Pembina Hills Provincial Park before dipping into North Dakota and entering the Red River near Pembina.

Which brings me to the next personal aside....

About 25 years ago while hiking along an old trail at the south end of Pelican Lake we came upon what looked like the remains of a bridge on the Pembina River.

You can see where the approach (from the south) starts to wind its way up out of the valley. I filed the photo away and forgot about it until I was digging through old files for this project. I had no idea exactly where I took the shot. So I checked my trusty Dominion Survey maps and found this...



Not only was there a bridge there, but it was an interesting one.



The symbol to the left of the bridge indicates a school. Glendenning School District would normally be centred on an area of about 16 sections. That meant several of the students would be from the south side of the stream. Aside from that, schools often doubled as community centres, and even Churches. They were the heart of the community.

The bridge was likely well used up until the school closed in 1966.

Here and There: Oakland RM. Nesbitt Area

N49.621349, W100.299373

Two bridges over small ravines in the Wawanesa area offer examples of the simple designs used to cross small streams.



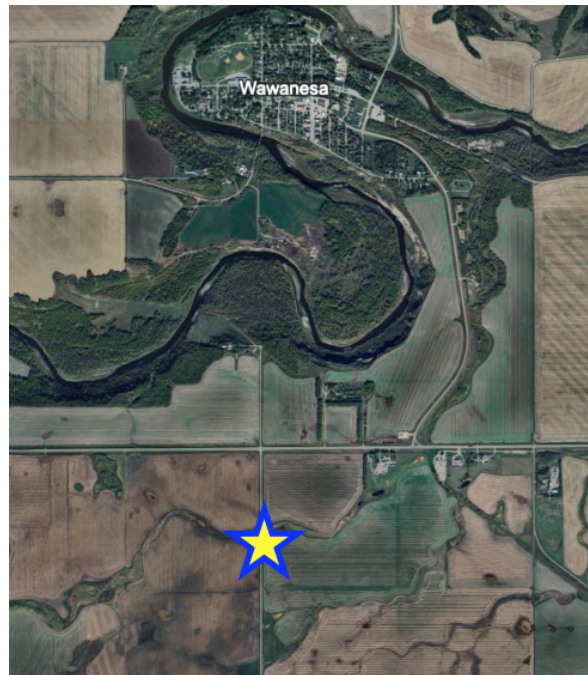
This concrete culvert bridge, built in the late 1910s or 1920s near Nesbitt is an example of Plan No. 460. It really is just like two culverts encased in concrete. Simple to build and all that was required for a seasonal stream.



Here and There: Oakland RM. Wawanesa Area N49.57217, W99.68875



This version of the concrete culvert design just south of Wawanesa was built in 1921. It is a more substantial structure than the previous design, likely built to replace a culvert that wasn't doing the job during spring run-off.



Here and There: Margaret

N49.41345, W99.85637



This concrete arch bridge was built over McKinnon's Ravine in 1916 just north of Margaret. It replaced a concrete culvert bridge destroyed by flooding in of 1916. Note that here, as elsewhere, when bridges were replaced, lessons had been learned from periodic flooding. The platform is raised high above the ravine.



The original concrete culvert bridge, visible in each photo, was left in place as engineers believed there was no benefit to remove it.

The bridge was later bypassed by a steel culvert and embankment to the west and the two old bridges are now abandoned. Whereas most "replacement bridges" were built higher - to sort of make sure they could withstand anything nature could throw at them, the strategy here was to revert to the use of the culvert, although in durable steel, and to rely on the earth filled embankment to hold back anything the culvert couldn't handle.



As you can see the road used to proceed straight north past the Cemetery. That road takes you to Lang's Valley and onward. Its a very scenic drive though the Souris Hills ending at Wawanesa



Another view,

Here and There: Long River - Holmfield

N49.13806, W99.48190



Photo by Gordon Goldsborough

This concrete beam bridge over the Long River north of Holmfield was constructed in 1925. It was removed in November 2022 but a portion was moved to the Bank of Toronto vault in Holmfield. Whereas the concrete arch bridges we've seen certainly showcase form as well as function, this concrete beam structure is notable for its touch of adornment.

At the Crossroads



Holmfield was served by both CP and CN Railways, both long gone. You can see traces of the CN Wakopa Line entering from top right. It was abandoned in 1961. The CP Branch from Cartwright and points east enters bottom right and exits top left on its way to Killarney and west. The tracks are gone but the structure of the bridge remains.



Another view.

Local History Volumes

To keep things simple, I've generally just used abbreviated citations in the text. Eg: "Hartney History"

Assiniboine River

Glenboro and Area Historical Society.
Beneath the Long Grass: Glenboro, Manitoba. Glenboro: The Society, 1979.
Grand Valley: Reminiscences of Early Brandon, Mrs. Dougald McVicar
Municipal Memories: 1884 - 1984, RM of Cornwallis. Leech Printing
The Brandon Hills Story (1979)
Brandon: A City - G.F. Barker, 1977
Griswold: "Bridging the Years 1867-1967 - Griswold Centennial Booklet"
Whitehead RM: Whitehead Wanderings
Oak Lake: "Ox Trails to Blacktop" Oak Lake History Committee, Friesen, 1982

Souris River

Sourisford and Area from 1879, The Sourisford History Committee
Melita: Our First Century (Town of Melita and Municipality of Arthur), Melita - Arthur History Committee

Lauder: The Rise and Fall of a Prairie Town, G.G. Phillips, 1973
A Century of Living - Hartney & District 1882 - 1982, Hartney and District Historical Committee
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Oakland Echoes, JB & J. Rome 1970. Leech Printing
Riverside (R.M.) Riverside Heritage, 1896 - 1996, Riverside Centennial Committee, Friesens, Altona, MB 1996
The People of Souris and Glenwood: From the earliest beginnings to the present", Souris and District Heritage Club, 2006.
Souris: A Pictorial History - Then and Now, 1989
Wawanesa: Sipiweske - 100 Years of

Wawanesa and District. Wawanesa and District History Book Committee, 1988

The Little Saskatchewan River

Kirkham's Bridge: From generation to generation
Rapid City and District; Our Past for the Future. Rapid City Historical Book Society. (ISBN: 0-919213-38-3) . [1978],

The Boundary Trail

Clearwater, 1876-1885: being some record of the life and times of Clearwater, Manitoba
Author: Clearwater Women's Institute:
Publisher: Pilot Mound: Pilot Mound Sentinel Print, 1927
Memories Along the Badger. A Story of the Village of Cartwright, Manitoba, seventy-five years of our history, 1885-1960. ? (Also Memories... Revisited)
Memories Along the Badger, Revisited. Cartwright & District 1885-1985. ?
Clearwater, 1876-1885 : being some record of the life and times of Clearwater, Manitoba
Author: Clearwater Women's Institute:
Publisher: Pilot Mound: Pilot Mound Sentinel Print, 1927

Here and There

Trails and Crossroads to Killarney, Garland, Aileen, the Killarney and District Historical Committee , Friesens Alton 1967
Bridging Brenda (Vol 1&2), Brenda History Committee, 1990
Holmfield: "By the Old Mill Stream." A History of the Village of Holmfield & District, 1982. ?
Kavanaugh, Martin, The Assiniboine Basin, The Gresham Press, Old Woking, Surrey, England

Goldsborough, Gordon. On the Road to Abandoned Manitoba, Great Plains Press, 2023- Specifically - P11 and p 251 For an overview on roads and highways

Crossings
Fords, Ferries & Bridges in Southwest Manitoba

By Ken Storie

Presented by the Grassland Municipality

2026

Suggestions, Acknowledgments & Thanks

For anyone wanting to dig more deeply into this topic or related topics I recommend the wide variety of resources available on the Manitoba Historical Society website. I turned often to Historic Sites of Manitoba and the MHS Facebook page.

In putting this document together I benefitted from a re-read of all three of Gordon Goldsborough's Abandoned Manitoba series. It provided more than facts, it provided inspiration.

A complete listing of relevant Local History Books is provided. The volunteers who created those books have done an important job. Without them much would have been lost.

In my resource collection at: **www.virtualmanitoba.com** you will find, among other things, a section devoted to "Crossings" where I will add updates, more photos and extensions on the topic.