

Tisdale & District

Adapted from, "Tisdale", by Byron Mason

The writer arrived at Emerson about the 25th of March 1881 after a somewhat slow and tedious journey from Halifax via Intercolonial Railway to Montreal, then via Toronto, Chicago, St. Paul and Milwaukee, Pembina and Emerson.

After staying a day or two in West Lynne to secure an outfit consisting of a yoke of oxen, sleigh and numerous other articles, we started west with two set of sleighs (my brother meeting us here).. The objective being Pelican Lake, about 130 miles. Our party consisting of my two brothers, Harry and Jack, the latter having travelled from the Old Country with me, and Mr. and Mrs. J. Stephens their son, Will and the writer.

Passing through the Mennonite villages and coming by way of Calf Mountain, Nelsonville, Dead Horse Creek (at which place was a store kept by one Asher by name) through Crystal City and Pilot Mound (the old sites), crossed the Valley at Wilson's, through the Marringhurst district, and so on to Pelican Lake to the house of Mr. H. Knight, on the west side of the lake. This house had been built during the summer of 1880, Mr. Knight bringing up his family that fall, consisting of Mrs. Knight and family of three, two sons and one daughter, who had been living recently in the Morden district,



The south end of Pelican Lake – settlers hoped a railway would cross here and create towns at Tisdale and Rowland.

This was the only house west of the lake, hence a stepping place for all travellers, and I think he was the first homesteader west of the lake for a good many miles.

All mail had to come through the Post Office at Marringhurst, 25 miles east and there being no regular courier it was carried by any one who might be passing east or west. F. Armstrong and Boucher settled in Glendenning valley and built a house and store, and a sawmill close to the west bank. This mill was run at intervals for a few months, or until the supply of logs gave out.

The CPR had surveyed their line through this district, and every one expected to have a townsite of their own, little else was talked about. But it was the Cameron Bros; who did more than talk, they, with the help of T. P. Murray, real estate man of Winnipeg, surveyed the town site of Tisdale on the West half of section 2-4-16, this having settled the question of where the town would be, activities commenced on all sides, a large house of logs being built, the bringing of a portable saw mill, overland from Brandon, one Thomas, of Millford (on the Souris) opening up a large general store.

T. J. Lawlor also built a frame two-storey building, in which one could buy almost anything from a "needle to an anchor." Also, one Rogers (of Crystal City) built a store, but which was later burnt down. E. Machon built a house and shop in which he carried on a blacksmith's business for some time. The proprietors of this site had not overlooked the comfort and necessity of the present and future generations seven acres being surveyed and laid out for a public park and recreation ground.

I think I will mention a rather amusing incident in connection with a service held at Tisdale. A young bachelor of the district decided to go to church that morning, remembering that his syrup can was empty, took it along to have it filled, and presented it at one of the stores, remarking that he would like to have it ready to take back after the service. The weather being cold and the storekeeper having a few minutes to spare, placed the can under a 56 gallon hogshead and turned on the tap, intending to turn it off before leaving for the service. Being one of the main singers and a leader of the choir he made haste to be at the service in time for the opening hymn, service being held in the boarding house, he forgot all about the tap. All went well until the last hymn, when half way through the first verse, he remembered the syrup. Having no music at that time, he held the key to the situation; and each verse was faster and faster, and the congregation wondered why the haste. Needless to say, he did not stay for the Benediction, but left quietly by a back door making the quickest time he had ever done, for the store; However, they found things not too bad, the bachelor got full measure, and the floor got some, but I do not think the loss was very serious, but it was a good ' joke around town and country for some time.



The church services mentioned above would have been in homes, as the Tisdale Anglican Church was built in 1903. The “village” was long gone but the community remained.

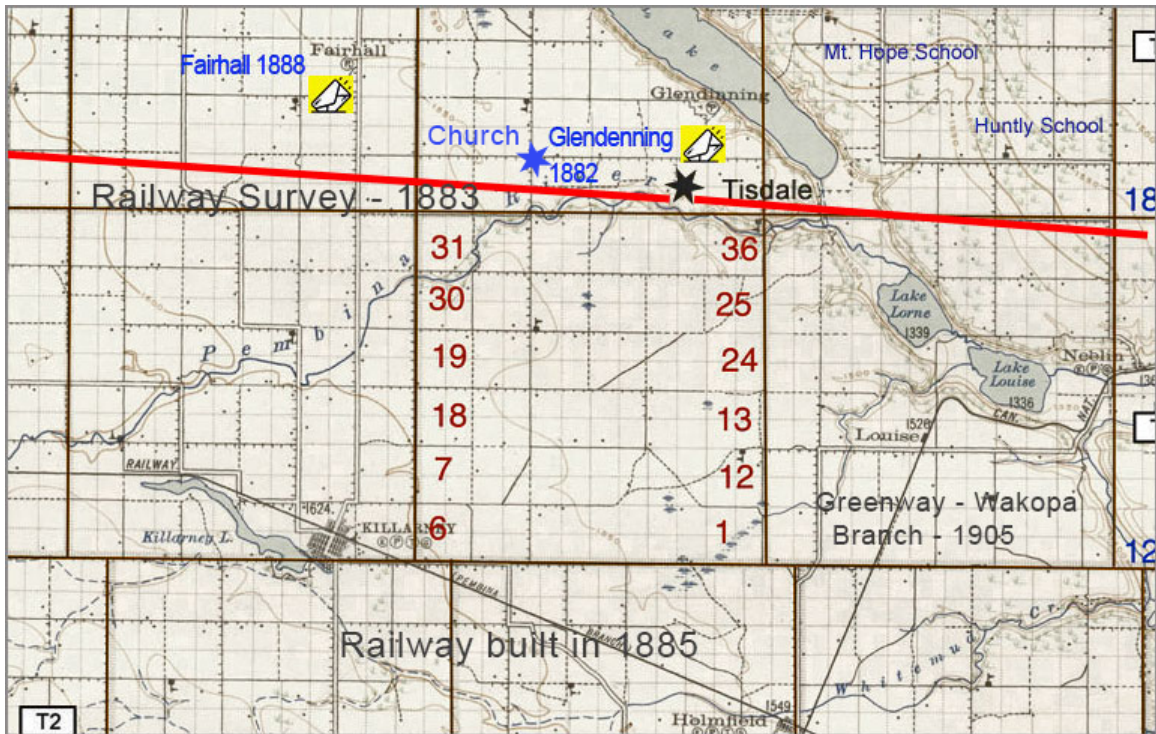


A cairn, situated on the intersection of Road 19N 92 W, a few kilometres west of the former village, reads.

*“In memory of the pioneers of Tisdale.
St. John’s Anglican Church
1903 - 1964*

During the winter of 1883 rumors began to circulate that the CPR had changed their plans, and would take a more southerly route. All rumor were set at rest as they began to grade the present line from Manitou, which had been the end of the track since 1882, the steel being laid through Killarney the fall of 1885 and Deloraine the next fall. From this time the town of Tisdale began to fade and the boom was over. T. J. Lawlor dismantling his building and moving it to Killarney.

Now that the railway and townsite had been definitely settled, people turned their attention to improving their lands, by breaking more land and drawing out wood and logs for building purposes from across the lake, and each spring saw the erection of many new buildings. As they were always built by having raising “bees”, it was the place where one would hear the latest gossip, good-natured chaff and jokes, some having a special gift that way, while the supply seemed to be limitless.



Railways – Surveys and Built – 1883 – 1905. It was not uncommon for railway companies to change their minds.

Recreation we had in various forms, picnics in summer and dances at any time. The writer remembers a lot of July at the house and grove of Mr. Knight, all kinds of games, races, etc., being on the programme, a race for oxen making the fastest time, ridden by the owner, also one for the slowest ox under the same conditions, and all kinds of foot races for old and young, jumping of all kinds, throwing the hammer, tossing the saber, etc. Dancing was indulged in by both young and old, as there were no school houses or community halls they took place in private houses, people coming from far and near.

MANITOBA SOUTHWESTERN.

The Route which the Line
will Take Defined.

MOBERLY AND CARMAN GET THE GO-BY.

The last of the surveying parties sent out last fall, to survey and locate the line of the Manitoba Southwestern Railway from its present terminus to the western boundary of the province, returned to the city yesterday.

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The road continues in a southwesterly direction, passing north of Swan Lake and crossing the Pembina Valley a, the west end of Rock Laket in the centre of township three, range 14. Passing south of White Water Lake, it continues west to the boundary of the province. The line is almost an air one, only diverging to avoid hills or rocks. Commencing from the terminus and going west the first 70 miles runs through a country covered with poplar and scrub. The balance, 105 miles, is through open, rolling prairie. The length of the line from Winnipeg is 230 miles. Of this amount 45 miles are already constructed.

The line passes five miles south of the town-site of Tisdale, and 1,000 feet south of the edge of the section on which the famous town site of Moberly was located.

The engineers and surveyors are preparing the plans and reports, which will be shortly sent to the manager and directors in Montreal for inspection and approval.

Of all the ghost towns in rural Manitoba, the life span of Tisdale is likely the shortest. This above story from the Winnipeg Daily Sun, Jan. 10, 1884 is the only mention one can find of it in the press. The "famous town site of Moberly" doesn't count because, unlike Tisdale, it never existed except on paper.

Bear Stories

We all know about the virtual extinction of the buffalo. To the first settlers in the Killarney area, that was recent news. It was dramatic and the reasons for their disappearance had little to do with the settlement process.

There have been, however several other less dramatic changes involving the wildlife of our region. Some species just don't mix well with humans and don't cope well with the changes brought by farming. Others were hunted until they retreated westward. Grizzly bears were common in the early days of the fur trade era. Pronghorns were quite comfortable here until farms fences and hunting arrived. They like a wide-open range.

It is interesting to see how some species seem to be returning to the southwest corner – perhaps now that farm houses are few and far between they feel more secure roaming our neighbourhood. I see many more coyotes now than I ever did as a kid on the farm. Moose and elk are much more common. Eagles were unknown around my childhood home, and I now see them quite regularly

Black bears seem to be more common these days than at any time in the past 100 years. But the first settlers often encountered them, sometime with comic results.

The Freeman family offers this report...

In the early days bears were quite plentiful, so there have been quite a lot of bear stories among the old-timers. One was told about Jim Freeman. There was a big black bear coming east down by his place. When it got quite close Jim took down his rifle, took aim and shot. The bear dropped, as he thought, right in its tracks. So when the smoke cleared away, Jim thought he would go and look at his prey. He gave the bear a kick with his foot. The bear jumped up. Jim turned and made for the shanty, with the bear close behind, both doing their best. Luckily there was a horse rake between the shanty and where the bear was, so Jim made a dodge around the rake, and when he looked back the bear was lying dead on the other side of the rake.

The Wilson family often enjoyed telling the story of "Polly and Jack" – two bear cubs:

One time when Jim Wilson was still batching, he and some others went across to the other side of the lake, and while there they shot a bear. They found three wee cubs had been left. Jim took them home to his shack. One cub was given to a neighbour lady, Mrs. Joe Johnson, but the other two remained as playful pets in the Wilson cabin.

In those days, milk was out in pans to set until the cream gathered. One particular day when no one was at home, the milk, as usual, was some pans upstairs (where also a wash tub of feathers were stored) the bears Polly and Jack crawled up the outside wall to an open upstairs window, went inside and enjoyed the cream. In the meantime they got into the feathers etc. and when discovered feathers and cream were everywhere. Sensing they were in disgrace, the two little bears cubs were found crouched together under the bed.

Later on, Mr. Wilson took the bears to Brandon and sold them for twenty-five dollars. He told how the bears followed him on the streets in Brandon and sometime afterwards when he was in the city again, he went out to see them... On calling Polly's name, she seemed to know him and came to him to be petted.

About this time a post office, Glendenning, was established, at the house of J. Moir, Mr. Fraser of Pilot Mound acting as courier. This office remained in the valley for a year or so, or until Mr. Moir moved to Virden, when it was transferred to the house of Mr. Knight, later the mail was brought in via Killarney, J. S. O'Brien having the contract. In those days people thought nothing of walking, some of the women going almost every week for the mail, both to the valley and later to Mr. Knights, sometimes carrying a plow share as far as the blacksmith's. I have known my old neighbor, Mrs. Stephens to do so. There were several ways of travelling, one had the choice of either a wagon, red river cart, stone boat or a hay rack, all of which the writer has seen used, and with oxen as the motive power, which though slow, one might generally depend on getting to their destination, unless the mosquitos were bad, which was often the case. The writer has seen oxen so covered with them it was hard to tell what color they were, and if space would permit, I could tell of many exciting times I have experienced. At the same time I still have quite a lot of respect for the oxen of the early days, for as a rule they were hard working, patient beasts, easily kept, and did a lot of hard work in opening up this settlement and others. The first harvesting that was done was cut with a cradle, then followed the reaper, and later the self binder.

The first threshing was done by hand power (flail). Robinson Bros. of Cartwright operated the first horse power machine, which had no straw carriers and when threshing near a building would take about six men and a boy to keep the straw away. McCool and Richards operated one later of a more modern type, although both threshed into bushels, the bushel man keeping tally by pulling a string through a hole in a board, a knot on each end for every bushel he emptied. This method often caused rows and arguments. J. Stephens operated the first steam outfit.

Of all the houses that the writer assisted in the raising of, only two are occupied at the present time, the Butcher Bros. are still living in the house built in 1881, and Guy Compton is living in one that T. Hamilton built on his homestead in 1883, both are built of oak logs. Of all who came to this district in those early days, none are on their former homesteads now, except the writer, Mr. P. Finnen having moved to Killamey last year, the rest having passing on to that place from which no one returns, Of the events that took place during the first ten years of this district, which is as far as this history deals with, I might mention: R. Freehorn's death, who was instantly killed from the kick of a horse near Mr. Knights, as he was going to the bush on the 23rd of January 1889. The death of Mrs. T. Hamilton in January 1889. The death of E. Douglas, during the winter of 1886. The death of Mr. Johnston; father of Joseph Johnston, in June 1885, The death of F. Corley, who was killed at the Tisdale sawmill 1883. All of these with the exception of F. Corley (who I think was taken east) were buried on a point of land on section 12 overlooking the lake, three of them have been re-interred.

Of the public buildings since that time are: Tisdale school house in April 1895, and the Anglican church in 1903, the Rev. W. R. Johnson, who had been holding services in this district for several years, being in charge.

