# The Rowland District

Adapted from, "Pioneer Days in the Rowland District " by J. E. Haight

George and Nancy Haight – Rowland pioneers.

The nearest post office was at Langvale, about 13 miles away and some of the young husky fellows thought it nothing to walk over in an afternoon for the mail for themselves and their neighbors, especially when they were expecting a letter from the "girl I left behind me."
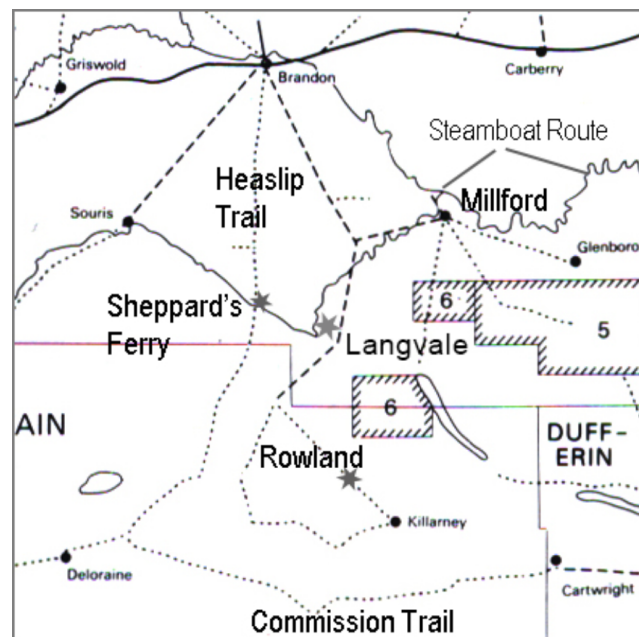
Trails in the Pre-Railway days

When the post office was established at Rowland in 1883, with Geo. Haight as post master, the late Mr. Chas. Bate was appointed in Her Majesty's Service to carry the mail from Killarney to Langvale and Rowland. Later Mr. James Russell, with his faithful old grey horse, "Dan" and backboard took over the service.

In 1882, it was fully expected that the Manitoba Southwestern Railway would pass from Glendenning through the southern part of Township 4 westward, so with high hopes what was expected to become a thriving town was located on Section 10-4-18. A stopping place, store, blacksmith shop, with Neil Johnson as first smith, a large feed and sales stable; consisting of poplar poles and prairie brick, and a commodious tent were erected. This location was in a direct line from Brandon to the historic village of Wakopa and the international boundary.

Rowland.

Settlers who have been absent during the winter, earning a little ready money, are now returning to their homesteads.

Fishing in Pelican Lake has at last been abandoned, as there have been no fish caught for a month past.

The new mail service from Langvale southwards commences this week. Killarney will be supplied by this route, receiving its mail one or two day latter each week than formerly by Clearwater. We doubt the Killarney district will not be satisfied by the present arrangement. Rowland is ye without an office. We can't understand why. An office has been promised us really a year ago. We are on the mail route, but no office here. The post office inspector is blamed.

There has been no seeding here yet. The snow-storm of the 6th inst. will delay farmers a week or more.

Some difficulty is experienced in crossing the Souris at Heaslip's Ferry, the water being two or three feet above the ice.

Seed wheat sells here at from 80 cents to $1 ; oats, 20 to 25 cents ; potatoes, 40 to 50 cents.

Brandon Sun, May 16, 1884.

But alas, the long cherished hopes of the pioneers were not to be realized, for in 1885, the railway came, leaving Rowland, the nucleus of a busy, prosperous, commercial center four miles north of its iron way. Thus the verification of the thought as expressed by the poet, "Hopes are allusions and not what they seem." Today there is nothing left to mark the spot.

Rowland United Church - 2012

Some notable persons were entertained in the humble farm homes in those days. Among them were Lord John Pollock, of London, Eng, Professor Tanner, of Edinborough, Scotland. These two were accompanied by Mr. J. W. Dafoe, later editor of the Winnipeg Free Press. He was on duty as reporter. It was Mrs."Geo. Haight, who did the entertaining on this occasion.

When Professor Tanner returned to his home in Scotland, he wrote a poem about the great west country, part of which I here quote: "There a man is a man, if he is willing to toil. And the humblest may gather the fruits of the soil. There children are plenty and he who hath most hath help for his fortunes and riches to boast. There the young may exult and the aged may rest, away far away in the land of the West."

Those were the good old days, there, was friendliness and companionableness, for every man was as good as his neighbor, they had hearts that could feel for his neighbor's woe and share in his joy with a friendly glow, with sympathies. large enough to enfold all men as brothers. They were bound together by one common tie in the days of the early eighties. If one was unfortunate and behind with his work, the word was, "come on boys, we'll help him out," With no thought of how much are we going to get for it.

Drinking Problem?

The family of Robert Crummer, who homesteaded in the Rowland area remember their father telling them that… "There was a hotel and blacksmith shop on the 1/4 of 4- 4-18 where George Crummer lived. The hotel had a whiskey they called "Oh Be Joyful". People walked for miles to bring their plow shares to be sharpened at the blacksmith shop."

The location mentioned is adjacent to the proposed townsite of Rowland. We know that there was a "stopping house" operated by Rowland pioneers, the Haights's, and that locals sometimes referred to these as hotels. Although one could get a meal at stopping houses, they certainly aren't generally remembered as places to get alcohol. Nowhere in other writings by Rowland pioneers do I find mention of the beverage in question.

It makes one wonder a bit about all the reminiscence that we use as the basis for local history. Were the accounts perhaps sanitized a bit? Did they leave out some of the good bits?

The Rowland district had its early beginning in the year 1881 and 1882 situated on S.W. corner of S.W. quarter 10-4-18, and across the road on N.W. Quarter 3-4-18. The townsite was located here owing to a survey for a proposed railway to Brandon, and was named Rowland by George Haight on account of the rolling contour of the surrounding countryside.

At that time it consisted of a Post Office, a store managed by Hugh McKellar, a blacksmith shop, with Neil Johnson as village smithy, who used to walk seven miles to and from his homestead, and the Haights, stopping house where everyone was assured of real hospitality.

Hospitality, yes…but…booze?

And what about that fanciful nickname, "Oh Be Joyful"?

Well, Google informs me that "Oh Be Joyful" was one of the nicknames Civil War soldiers used for hooch, along with other names like Forty-rod and Blue Ruin.

We know that many of the pioneers enjoyed a drink or two - sometimes more than two. Nellie McClung describes a Dominion Day picnic in Millford marred by public drunkenness. Years later she spearheaded efforts at prohibition.

Yet it is rare to find mention of alcohol, or problems with alcohol in pioneer writing. I suspect that a lot of this writing was put down on paper at a time when it just wasn't polite to mention it.

One amusing sight the writer saw was a horse and an ox hitched to a top buggy conveying a man and his wife to church service, on Sunday. The preacher was no less a person than the late Dr. Stewart who later became professor in Wesley College. Winnipeg. The meeting was held in what was then called a "house", dimensions, 10 x 12. Divine services were held in stopping places and in private homes until Rowland School was built in 1886 and Bethel School in 1887.

RIVERSIDE FARMERS' UNION.

A general meeting was held in the Langvale Schoolhouse, on Monday, Jan. 28.

A Constitution and by-laws were adopted, and the series of resolutions which the Executive committee submitted were carried unanimously.

As these resolutions were printed in a former issue, we need not reproduce them.

The various points gained, and likely soon to be carried, were discussed and all felt cheered to go on and work still more devotedly. Some who had failed to find any grievances were now seen working hand in hand with the others.

Altogether we are anything but discouraged by the success of the agitation already. The resolutions are to be put in the form of a memorial, and after getting the signatures including sec., tp., and range, of the rate-payers of the municipality, it is to be forwarded to the Dominion Government.

The next meeting of the Union is to be held at Rowland, 10, 4, 18, w, on the last Wednesday in February.

Brandon Sun, Feb. 16, 1884

The first political meeting ever held in the district was in the stopping place under the auspices of the "Farmers Union," Mr. James Lang of Langvale was the speaker. The Municipality of Riverside in which lies the Rowland district never had a place where liquor could legally be sold. It came under Local Option in the early days as the result of a petition circulated by Rev. Mr. Kinley and Mr. A. Mitchell, such solid men as Mr.Thos. Morrow, late of Killarney, the McMillans, Mitchells, Loves, Chesters, Bills, Hopwoods and many others, upheld the temperance cause, when an effort was made to repeal in 1908 and it failed.

Game was plentiful in the pioneer days; geese, ducks, sandhill cranes, and chicken. Fur-bearing animals were also numerous, red fox, of which the writer dressed 32 in one winter and the pelts were sold at from $1.50 to $2.00 each. Mink, badger and there was also in evidence that very much despised little

animal which when danger approached had the faculty of effusing an extremely obnoxious effluvia which plainly said, please let me alone and all will be well.

Sometimes the graceful jumping deer might be seen leisurely strolling over the prairie and in the timber areas, moose and elk were to be found.

In concluding these memories of the pioneer days, I have, to say that most of the brave men and women who turned the virgin soil of the wide open prairie into fields of productiveness, who endured the hardships and privations of pioneering, built homes, churches and schools and made it a goodly land in which to live, these have left their mark and passed on, showing that this is a world of change. In thinking of this, it seems to me that I might fittingly quote these words. "Like as a plank of driftwood, cast on an angry main, another plank encounters, meets, touches, parts again. So it is with life forever o'er life's dark troubled sea, we, meet, we greet, we sever, drifting eternally."

The Squires of Fairhall

Our home seemed to be a meeting place for the district, where the neighbours gathered to play baseball. The Orangemen also built a small lodge on the corner Dad's property, where we danced and held concerts.


Fun and Games

The chief school games were association football and baseball, prisoner's base, pon-pom-pull-away, and steal the wedge, and evening games in the downtown lots and byways amongst the boys were "smuggle the gag" and "hoist the sail". Skating and ice boating on the lake and Bay and tobogganing on both sides of the "Mountain" south of the lake were great winter sports engaged in by many. In the good old summertime many a happy moment was spent in swimming and fishing, in canoeing and sailing, and midnight cruising and dancing on the lake. Canoe fights and moonlight canoe parties were enjoyed by the participants in the water and the on-lookers sitting on the north bank of the lake in front of the John Williams' cottages.

A memory by J. C. Treleaven

Railway Roulette

Check out the Killarney area on a recent Manitoba Travel map and compare it with this map from the 1887. A rail line had just been completed through Cartwright, Killarney, and as far as Boissevain. Those names remain on today's maps, while the names Glendenning, Alcester, and Rowland, which were all much more well-known prior to 1884, have disappeared.
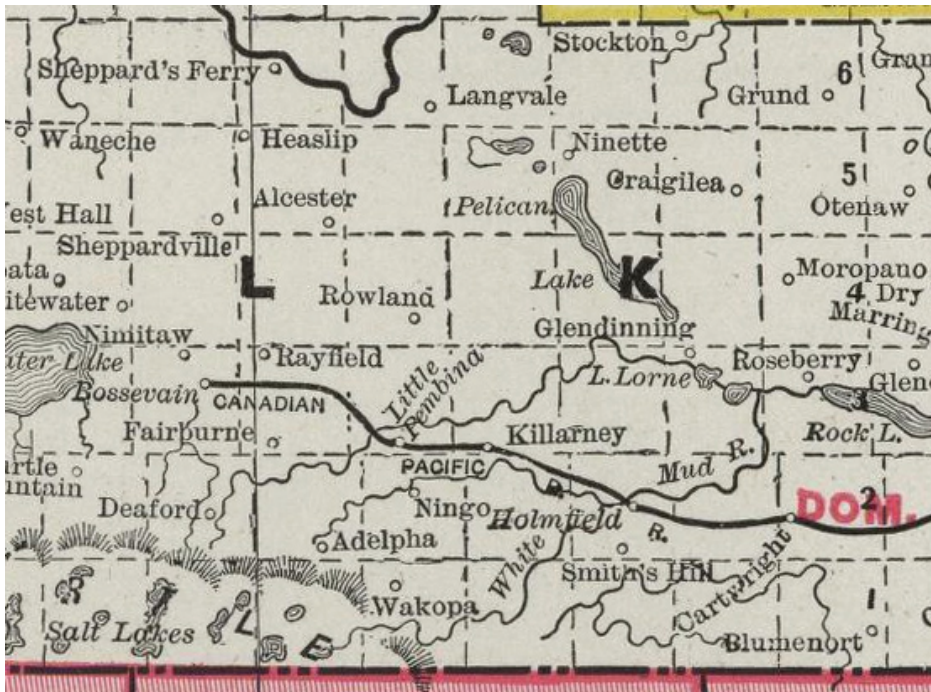
That's because the location of some of those first settlements was based on an expectation that a railway would pass their way. The railway seldom came where it was expected. That was partly by design, partly based on simple geography and landforms.

In 1884 settlers in the Turtle Mountain region expected that the much-anticipated railway link connecting them to Winnipeg, and the great wide world, would pass north of Rock Lake, through valley south of Pelican Lake and serve the new communities of Tisdale and Rowland. In 1885 the resident of those communities were surprised to find that plans had changed. The new route would proceed from Manitou, south of the Rock Lake. New towns would be located at Badger Creek (Cartwright), Killarney and Boissevain.

Tisdale was the community that came closest to actually becoming a town.

Mr. Lawlor the storekeeper wasted no time. Tisdale would soon be a ghost town, so he dismantled his thriving store and re-established his business in Killarney, arriving with merchandise and building materials on January 2, 1886. His was the

first "real" building erected in the newly-surveyed townsite, on the corner of South Railway Street and Broadway. While waiting for that he did business on the sidewalk.

Reminiscence by some of the settlers reveals that they were quite aware of the process.

"What decided these newcomers to settle in this area just west of the Pembina Valley was the fact that a railway company had made a survey that came up between the river and the lake, continuing on west. However, after a store, blacksmith shop, sawmill, and a couple of homes were built, a rumour began that the railway people had changed their plans. This proved to be true, and the railway finally was built much farther south by way of Oak Lake, as the present Killarney was then known. What was to have been the townsite called Tisdale (after the surveyor), with its few buildings, then faded away,,,"

The railway stated that it was too expensive to build a line up by the Glendenning Valley. That might have been so but some settlers suspected that time, it might be the means of cutting off competing lines from the south.

What Rowland Might Have Been

If the railway had followed through with their original plans, settlers taking the train from Winnipeg would have passed through the new town of Manitou (formerly Manitoba City but relocated a short distance and re-named, in 1882 when the railway arrived). Then the route would have taken them along the north side of Rock Lake through, or near, Glenora a community established in 1879, through the valley at the south end of Pelican Lake and into the booming town of Tisdale, where a well-stocked store and a boarding house was ready to accommodate the traveller.

Moving westward, the next settlement would be Rowland. Also ready and waiting for the traveller.

The last stop before leaving the Killarney district might have been Alcester, home of Reverend W.R. Johnson who homesteaded there in 1882 before deciding to pursue a career in the Church.

In this alternate outcome of the railway plans, the settlement along the little lake to the south called Oak Lake might today be in the history books as a memory, an old name on an older map. Or perhaps a small village on a branch line.