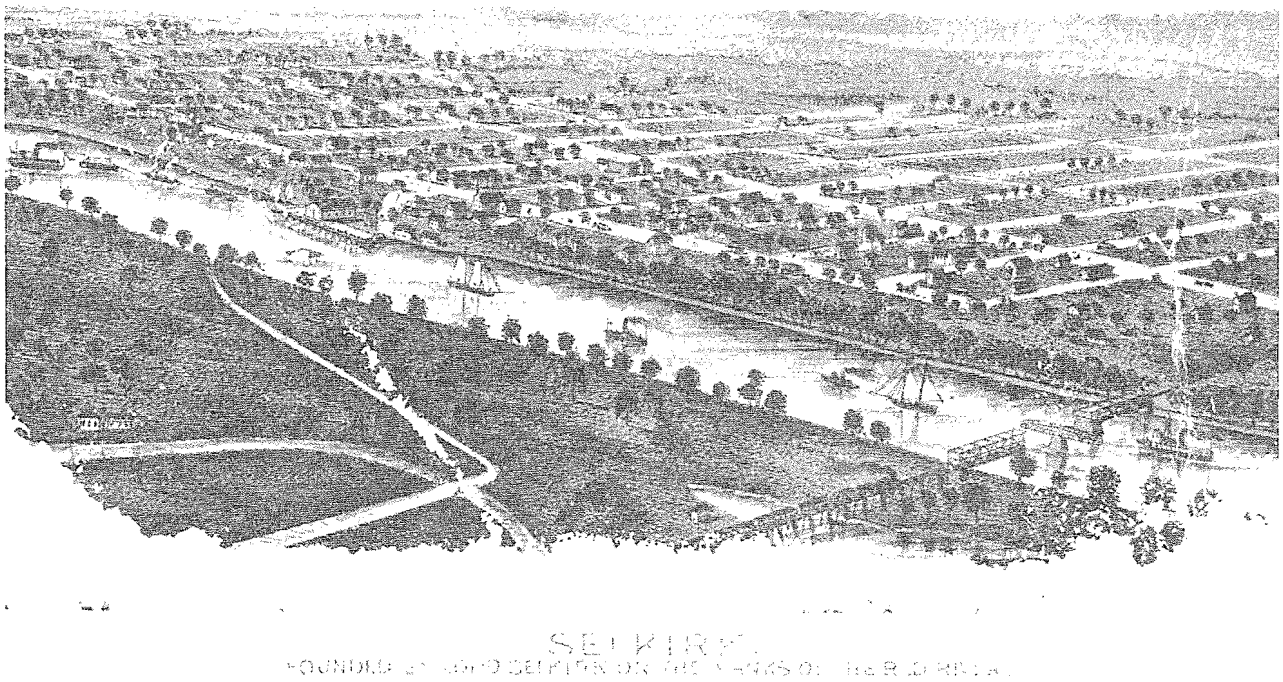
CHAPTER THREE

The Passing of Frontier Selkirk, 1883-1910

BORN OF THE RAILWAY and nurtured by the sea, Selkirk was destined for success. Perhaps the branch line was not the economic blessing that the mainline would have been, but it did tie the town and its merchants and manufacturers to the greatest railway centre in the west, splicing their fortunes inseparably for all time. The townspeople might still detest Winnipeg and its leaders for past guile and gall, but they could not deny the value of nearness to the city's unrivalled wholesaling houses, its immense market and its metropolitan amenities. They might not realize that while hundreds of tiny settlements across the prairies were locked in struggle for a station on the transcontinental line, their struggle was over and their stability as a community was assured. If, in 1883, they did not appreciate their singular good fortune, it was because they had yet to develop the potential of their town. Selkirk was, in that year and for many more to come, a raw frontier community.

The river and the railway, which shaped the lives of the townspeople, shaped the town as well. In the middle 1880s, when there were not more than 30 commercial buildings and about 130 houses in town,[1] they perched along the river bank on Eveline Street and had just began to turn the corners that led to the Main Highway. Some houses were scattered almost indifferently on isolated lots, but all were within the sweeping arc of the C.P.R. tracks that ran nearly parallel to Main until they reached Mercy Street and then curved past the Bradbury Station into town and down to the wharves and fish-packing plants and lumber piling grounds on the flats. Only the white brick insane asylum stood outside these community enclosures. The river, which had imparted order to the old river lot community, now became the starting point for the town's administrative divisions. Selkirk was sliced into three wards, each beginning at the river bank and running narrowly westward.

The middle ward, Ward II, was the preferable part of town in which to live. It took in the business district at Eveline and Manitoba, and several blocks on either side of this junction. This made it convenient for businessmen who had shops and warehouses there, and for the customers who patronized them. More importantly, perhaps, it was the most urbane part of town. Here the houses were larger and neater, the lots more spacious, and the cattle barns and piggeries less numerous. By contrast, the other two wards were almost rural in nature. Most residents kept several milk cows and a few pigs, and several had



Birdseye view of Selkirk, c.1880 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

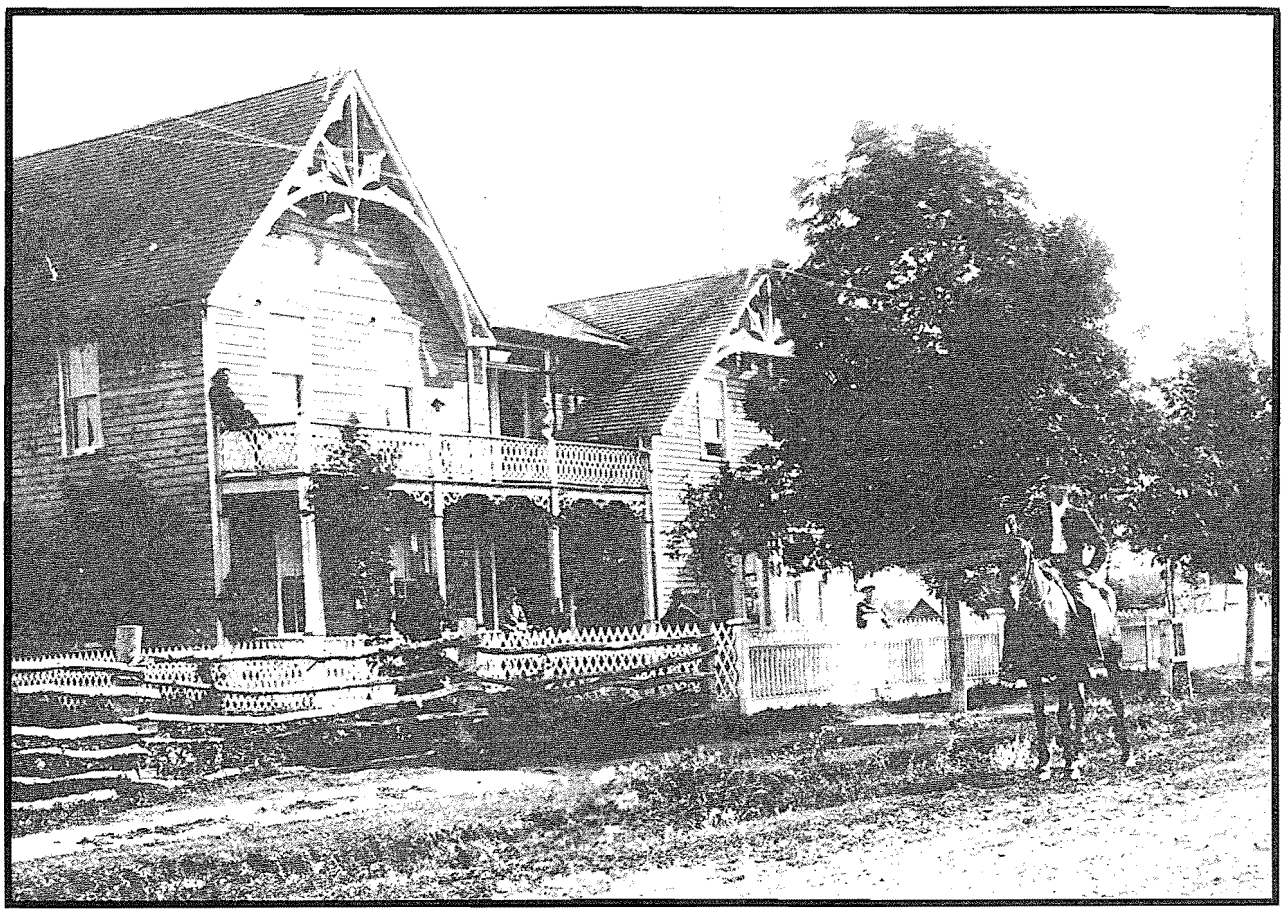
small flocks of sheep that chewed their yards down to a cropped mat of brown grass. The incessant mooing and bleating emanating from these parts of town were a constant source of annoyance to the well-to-do on Eveline Street. So, too, was the lack of care given the appearance of houses and yards in the outer wards. Haystacks abounded, outbuildings and some homes were ramshackle affairs, and the cosmetic value of paint seemed unknown to many residents. The businessmen of Selkirk were appalled by such indifference, mainly because they believed it detracted seriously from the attractiveness of their community as a place to live and work. If these conditions could not be changed, there would be few new families moving into town. As early as 1884, the town editor indignantly observed that "there are more unpainted houses in Selkirk than in any other town of its size in the Dominion."[2] Exaggeration aside, this comment reflected a genuine concern of the civic leaders in the 1880s. Signs of neglect were even worse when they were evident in the vicinity of Eveline Street. This was the case with the yard of the Dominion Fish Hatchery. The *Record* called attention to Selkirk's latest government institution, the "Dominion Experimental Weed Farm".

> Every possible weed is now to be seen, and should be a delight to the botanist, whatever the gardeners may think of it. The French weed, shepherd's purse, thistles, lamb's quarters, mustard, wild oats, artichokes, quack grass, wild rye and many other garden and field weeds are in all stages running from flower to full seed...Selkirk should be proud of the loving care the good Grit government gives the piece of ground presented to them by the town.[3]

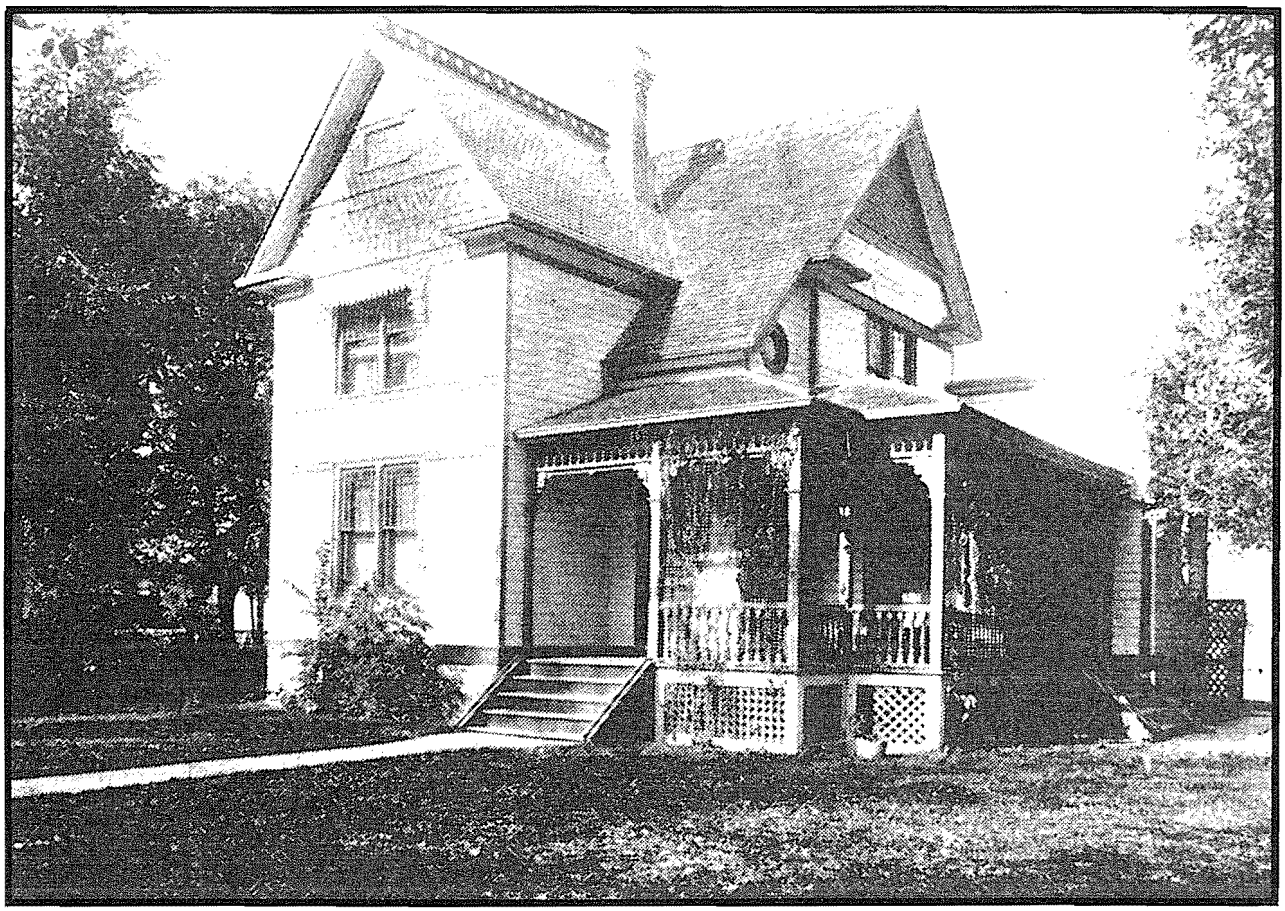
Yet even this neglect was insignificant in relation to conditions among the shanties on the flats. The flats were home to the poor. There a few families of Italians and Icelanders lived a beggarly existence among the half-breeds who still made up about one-third of the entire population.[4] It was a separate community, with its own crude eating-houses, tar-paper shacks, less than reputable boarding-houses, and 'blind-pigs' where liquor was cheap and always plentiful.

There were certain features of the town that even the rich had to endure for years. Selkirk had grown quickly after the arrival of the railway, and the streets were still little better than wagon trails. The town businessmen had made an early effort to grade them and provide elementary ditching, yet every spring they were awash with the run-off from melting snow. Some were impassable. All were badly rutted. Residents were quick to blame the town council for these conditions. R.W. Stewart, editor of the *Record*, noted that "strangers who visit the town occasionally are not disposed to view the disgraceful state of our principal streets with that calm indifference which is so characteristic of our town councillors."[5] Worse still, the main thoroughfares were wide enough for six or eight wagons to pass at once without scraping hubs; wide enough, as Stewart observed, for a city of several millions. This virtually ensured that the streets would not be properly maintained, because the town was too deeply in debt to the C.P.R. to handle this extra financial burden. To their credit, the councillors had provided wooden sidewalks along the main streets in 1884, but within five years these were badly in need of repairs that were almost grudgingly undertaken.[6]

Then there was the smell of the town. Winnipeg residents and businesses dumped their sewage and all manner of noxious material directly into the river as a matter of course. The Selkirk council protested, but to no avail. By the time the raw refuse and slaughter-house offal had floated down to Sugar Point, it was in a uniquely ripe state of decay. Fortunately, east winds were rare. There was, however, no escape from the malodourous fumes that wafted up from the asylum sewage and water drain running under the



Residence of James Colcleugh, c.1888 MANITOBA ARCHIVES



Residence of Robert Bullock, 1913 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

centre of Dufferin Avenue. The heavy concrete and metal manhole covers could not contain the stench at times, and the prevailing north-westerlies carried it across town. Each year the increasingly desperate newpaper editor would earnestly beseech the council to flush the drain to eliminate the odours and the possible spread of disease, suggesting that most councillors possessed a rather undeveloped sense of smell. The location of an abattoir in the centre of town gave variety to the character of the atmosphere and contributed the bawling of animals awaiting slaughter. No sooner had the council arranged to have the slaughter-house removed to the outer limits of town than complaints poured in about "several piggeries in town, which are becoming a nuisance."[7] The newspaper advised that "parties who are sufferers should give notice to the health officer."[8]

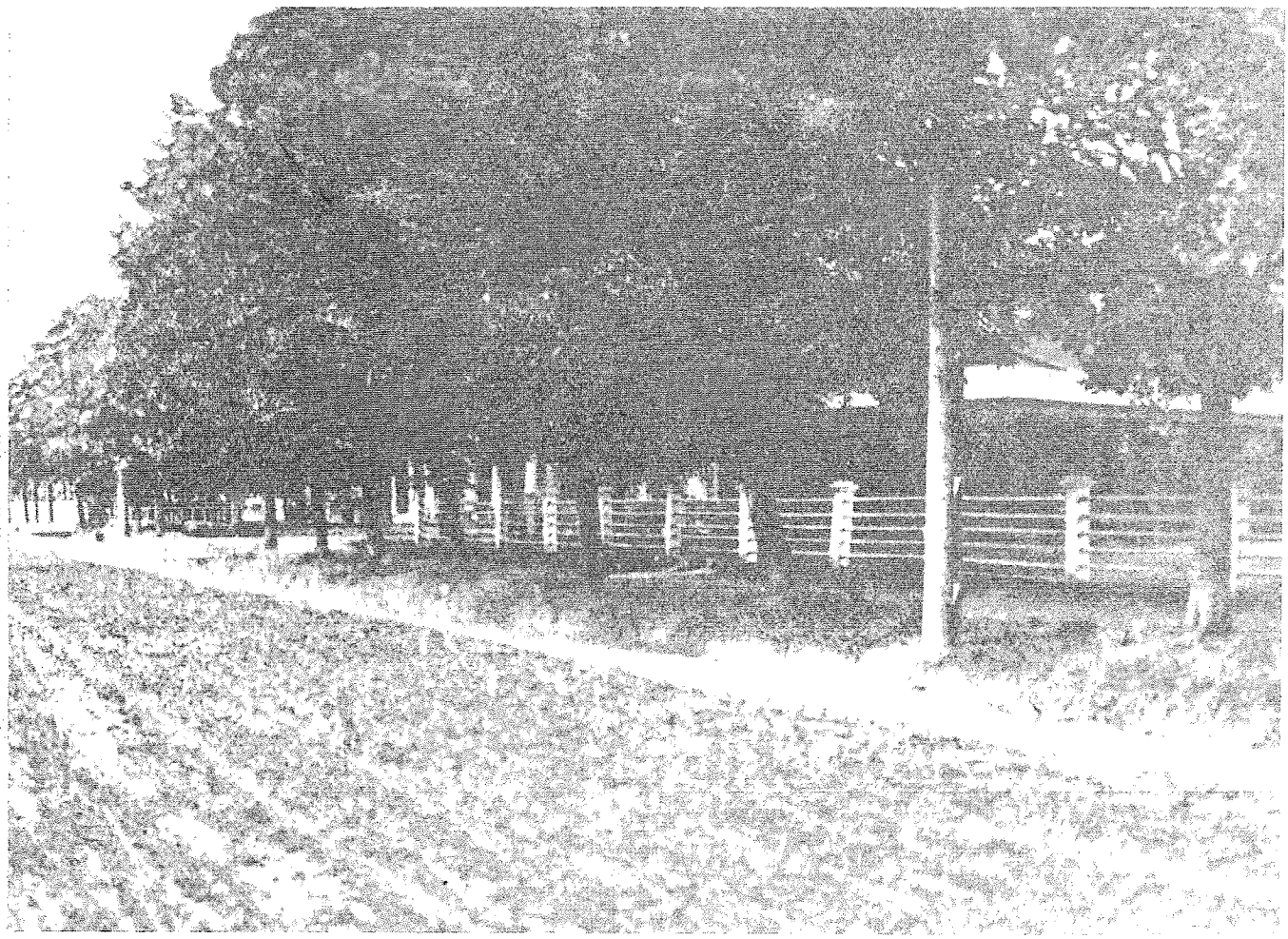
Wandering cattle were another of Stewart's obsessions. Every few months he would pen another editorial about the "herds" that roamed about town, grazing indiscriminantly on grass, weeds and vegetable gardens. In 1891 the town clerk, Thomas Partington, complained that cattle had invaded his garden, eating 30 bushels of potatoes, 75 heads of cabbage, and a large quantity of turnips, corn and other vegetables.[9] Partington, who would serve as town clerk for 25 years, seldom concealed his fondness for figures. When migratory cows ate the leaves of saplings that the council had planted along Eveline to beautify Selkirk, he was there to record the damage and call for immediate retribution. The councillors reacted by establishing a cattle pound to contain all livestock running at large, and imposed a stiff 25¢ fine for their release to the rightful owner. At first the pound-keeper enforced the new bylaw with enthusiasm, but it was not long before conditions had deteriorated to their former state. The cows continued to graze contentedly on the ornamental trees, rubbing the bark off them, and befouling the town pump as they paused to drink at the pool of water around it. Time and again the campaign against them was revived, only to fail once more. It would be decades before Selkirk lost its reputation as a community pasture.

The owner of the *Record*, Robert W. Stewart, usually won the editorial battles he waged against the town councillors and apathetic citizens, if only in the long run. Often it took years of cajoling and gallons of printer's ink to bring about the desired change. Yet Stewart never seemed discouraged, and during his 47 year career as editor and publisher of the town's chief newspaper, he remained a stal-

Eveline Street in 1905 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

wart booster, his enthusiasm for Selkirk and its material advancement never flagging. He was the eternal optimist in a community of sceptics, yet his background was not unlike that of most of his neighbours. Perhaps that is why he was able to deal so successfully with their complacent natures.

Like most of them, he was born a Scot and a Presbyterian in the North West, at Fort Garry in 1857, to be exact.[10] His father, James Stewart, was an Orcadian who came to the North West in 1851 to work for the Hudson's Bay Company and later settled at Fort Garry where he reportedly established the first drugstore. His mother, Robina McKay, was born at Kildonan, her maiden name suggesting half-breed origins. If anything set young Robert apart from his fellow townsmen in an obvious manner, it was his four-year stint at college in Toronto. When he graduated, he returned to the North West and rapidly gained experience in the newspaper business with the *Manitoban*, the *Free Press*, the Edmonton *Bulletin*, the Regina *Leader* and the Neepawa *Canadian*. Thus he came to Selkirk in 1885 well versed in the ways of both the small town and the city, and in the means of transforming one into the other. At 28, he was younger than most of the men in town, and he was still a bachelor, as most of them had been at his age.[11] This was not entirely his fault, for men still outnumbered women two to one in



Selkirk. But soon he was courting Isabella Hume and he married her before he turned 30. Like most couples in town, they had five children and lived rather modestly in a two-story frame house not far from his office on Manitoba Avenue. Throughout his long life, Stewart remained a faithful church-goer and a staunch Conservative. In all these ways, he represented the attitudes and lifestyle of Selkirk's leading citizens. He would never be a rich man—newspapermen seldom were—but the loudness of his weekly editorial voice compensated amply for his lack of financial clout.

Among the first generation of Selkirk residents, only a handful took a leading part in civic affairs. These men were usually merchants or manufacturers or professionals, men whose stake in the community was greater than that of most. Their homes were bigger and their buggies fancier than those of most people, but during the 1880s and 1890s these differences was still quite subtle. It was the turn of the century before they had amassed enough wealth to erect homes of brick or stone along Eveline and more substantial business blocks on Manitoba. In the early years it was their degree of involvement in local affairs, rather than their conspicuous wealth, that set them apart from most people.

There were the Colcleugh cousins, James and Frederick, who had started out together in the drugstore and telegraph businesses, but later became bitter enemies when James was chosen mayor and F.W., as Frederick was known, won only a councillor's seat. F.W. refused to sit on the same council with James because of this electoral slight, and later took an active part in evicting his cousin from the bursar's chair at the insane asylum.[12] Understandably, the families were never close.[13] Nonetheless, each man contributed in his own ways to the advancement of the town. James served as mayor for several terms, became a successful local merchant and investor, and started Selkirk's first telephone exchange. F.W. did become mayor in his turn, and was later elected to represent the town in the provincial legislature on two occasions. In 1898 he became the provincial fisheries inspector. He also ran a general store and invested heavily in lumbering and fishing operations.

William Gibbs, always referred to as a pioneer merchant of Selkirk, arrived in 1875 and immediately opened the town's first bakery.[14] He was from a family of bakers from Bridgewater, Somerset, England, and had established a small store in New York before moving to Winnipeg in 1874, and on to Selkirk in the next year. At first, he produced 20 loaves a day, which he sold from a dogsled at the Lower Fort and to settlers along the river. By 1895 he owned a large store and warehouse, turned out more than 100 loaves daily, and employed others to distribute the bread throughout town from a "neat delivery wagon." Admired for his "sterling integrity," he was elected first to the local school board and then to the town council. Later he became a director of the St. Andrew's Agricultural Society, which had organized the famous fair and exhibition at Selkirk since 1878, and an executive member of the Manitoba Liberal party. In 1890, with fellow Liberals Frank W. Hooker, W.H. Eaton, F.W. Colcleugh, James F. Reid and William Overton, he organized the Selkirk Electric Company to bring that modern convenience to the townspeople.

F.W. Hooker, "who had been identified with every feature of the town and community life since 1882,"[15] pursued similarly diverse interests. He was born at Welland, Canada West, in 1860, and studied pharmacy at Toronto and Orangeville before coming west in 1882 to join his brother Edward in the lumber and building business. While Ed Hooker manufactured bricks at St. Boniface, Frank moved to Selkirk in 1883 and established the first planing mill in town. They soon had mills at Grand Marais, Grindstone Point and Deer Island, and owned an immense lumber yard in the heart of Selkirk. In 1915 F.W. Hooker began a long association with local politics,

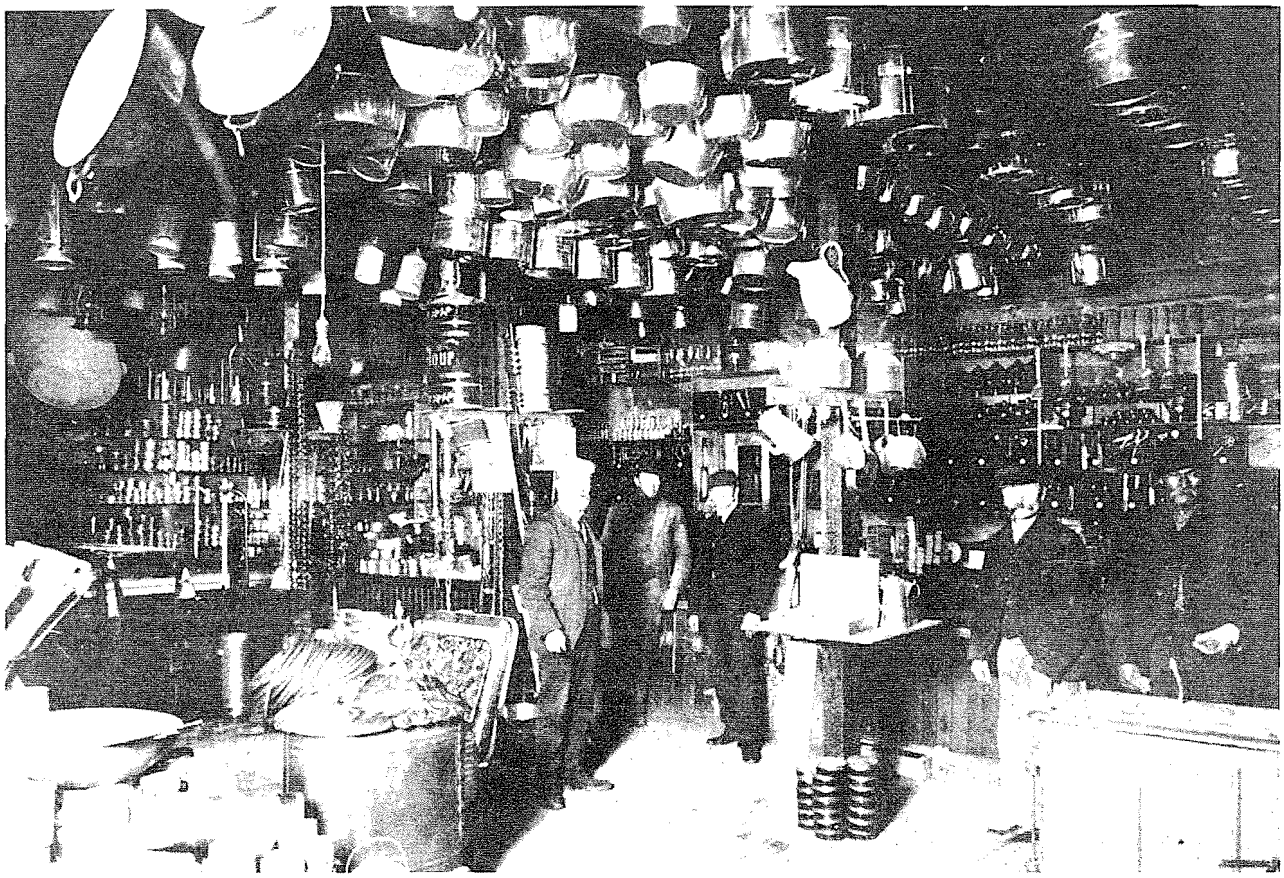
serving first on the council for four terms and then as mayor in 1920 and 1921. He participated in hospital affairs and was president of the St. Andrew's Rural Credits Association. His connection with the Liberal party was lifelong, his influence on the Selkirk Liberal Committee nothing short of legendary.

The Combers, Edwin and Reuben, were both steady town boosters for a half century. In 1870 Edwin left Somersetshire, England, aboard the old windjammer *St. Leonards*, and arrived in Quebec 47 days later.[16] From there he travelled to Hamilton, where he was offered a position in Robert Tait's grist mill at Silver Heights, just west of Fort Garry. He remained little more than a year, and then opened his own mill at Middlechurch. In 1883 he came to Selkirk and began a career of civic involvement that included 20 years on the town council, 14 years as warden of Christ Church and 15 years on the local school board. He was also a dedicated Odd Fellow, and served as librarian in the Carnegie Library in his later years. Reuben arrived in Canada four years later, having spent time in the navy as assistant butcher on the *Arethusa*, and opened a butcher shop in Selkirk in 1876.[17] The shop quickly gained a solid reputation, and Comber became procurer to many of the steamboats and lumber camps up the lake. For six terms he sat on the town council, and was instrumental in establishing the Selkirk Hunt Club, which provided the town with a patina of English gentility. Without exaggeration, the *Record* remarked that "every enterprise for the advancement of the best interests of the town meets [with] this public-spirited gentleman's hearty concurrence and support."[18]

There were many other businessmen who participated in local affairs with equal vigour and steadfastness. W.H. Eaton, owner of a large general store on Eveline and a relative of the famous Timothy Eaton, sat repeatedly on the town council and took part in local business ventures and clubs.[19] F.A. Gemmel, who served on council, as mayor, as secretary of the Board of Trade, as president of the hospital board, and in various capacities with fraternal organizations and volunteer agencies, was an esteemed real estate and insurance agent.[20] R.H. Gilhuly, proprietor of the best-known drugstore in Selkirk, arrived in 1880 to work with James Colcleugh in a combined general store and drugstore operation before purchasing the business in 1885. He, too, served on the town council and as postmaster starting in 1888.[21] The Vaughans, A.H. (Amos) and L.S., who surveyed most of the town in the 1870s and later became the offical town surveyors and engineers, virtually alternated as town councillors for more than two decades.[22] R.C. Moody, a pioneer hardware merchant and undertaker, was universally recognized as a "public spirited man, always supporting community enterprises,"[23] served on the council and in various organizations and business ventures for decades. General merchant and fishing fleet owner J.K. McKenzie, Dr. Orton Grain, blacksmith and machinist Fred Pook, store keeper Robert Bullock, lawyer Fred Heap, real estate and insurance agent James Dagg—all these men worked tirelessly to advance the fortunes of the town and their own fortunes as well.

They had much in common besides their political and financial concerns. In the 1880s most were still relatively young men, in their late twenties or early thirties. Unlike the bulk of the townspeople, who were originally from Manitoba, these boosters usually claimed British or Ontarian roots. They had come to Selkirk to realize their own potential in community affairs and commerce, rather than to find steady work on the boats or in the lumber camps. This reflected both their education and their political ties, characteristics that mattered enormously in their era. By virtue of their background and the influence of their business mentors, they possessed a deep appreciation of the need for boosterism in a small town like Selkirk. They were, in a word, visionaries.

Interior view of Gilhuly's drugstore on Eveline Street, c.1905 GEORGE GILHULY



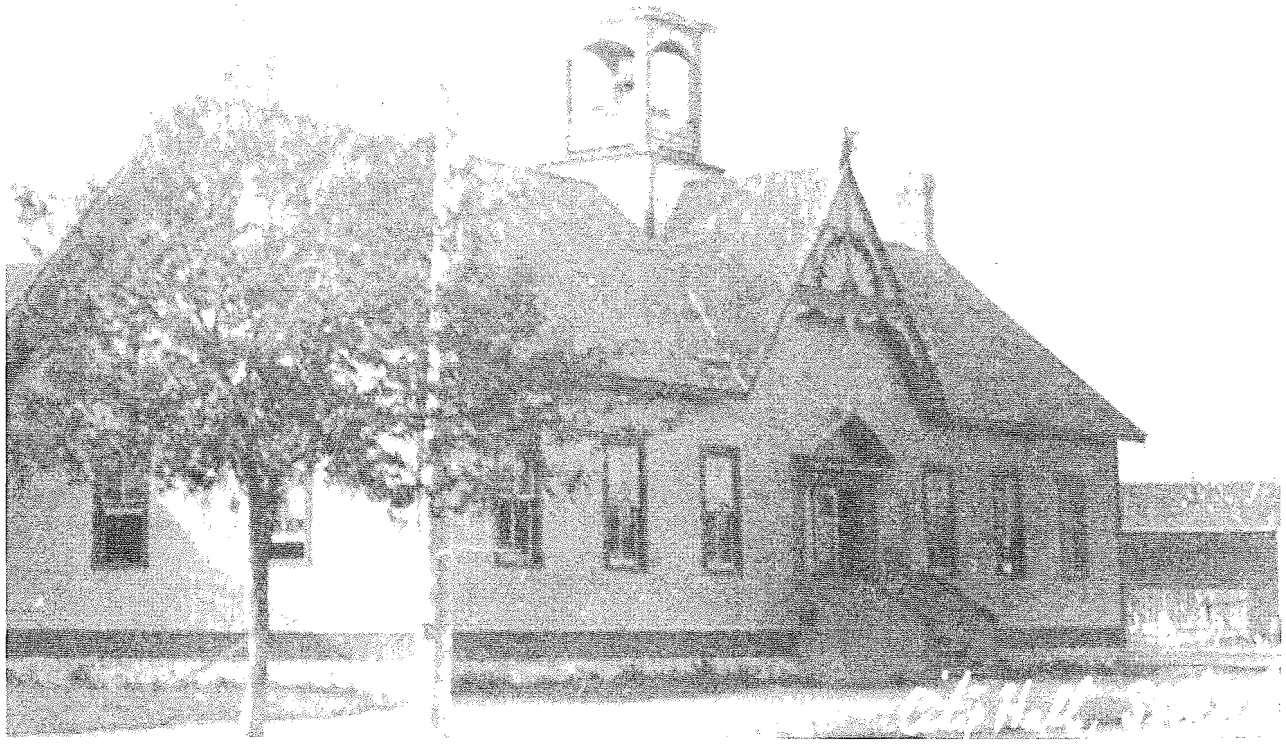
Moody Hardware store interior, Selkirk, 1903 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

As men of vision and sophistication, they placed their mark on Selkirk, giving the town its unique social texture. They tried to recreate the institutions and the lifestyle of the communities they had left behind to settle in Selkirk. Some, like Reuben Comber and W.H. Eaton, established the traditional fox-hunt on the prairies just west of town. Others, like James Colcleugh and F.A. Gemmel, started a Masonic Lodge as early as 1878.[24] Those of strong religious conviction worked assiduously to find the funds to erect churches, and by 1883 the congregations of the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist and Roman Catholic churches each had its own building in Selkirk.[25] The inevitable missionary societies and women's auxiliaries started at the same time. A Selkirk Literary and Debating Society began in 1882, and its members gathered weekly to listen to poetical readings, to debate controversial topics like "early marriages are desirable" (the negative side won narrowly), or to hear visiting lecturers speak on "The Search for Franklin" or "Modern Science and Free Thought, Evolution, Mind and Matter." Soon the ladies of the town formed the Young Ladies' Mutual Self-Improvement, Semi-Literary, Sewing and Benevolent Association. Festive occasions such as Robbie Burns Day, Victoria Day, and the Glorious Twelfth saw parades down the main streets and picnics by the river. The list was endless, and each newly-formed society or annual holiday procession spoke volumes about the roots of the people who settled Selkirk, oversaw its conversion from a mere place of residence into a vibrant community, and gave it character.

The character of the community, that invisible and yet tangible quality that made each town and village unique, derived mainly from the lifestyle and attitudes of the leading families in the settlement. It mattered little that they were the numerical minority in town. By virtue of their wealth and their positions of power, they created the image of the community that outsiders were most likely to remember. It was their voice that was heard in the Legislature and in Parliament, their weddings and funerals that made front-page news in the papers, their fashions and vacations and indiscretions that were the subjects of gossip and scrutiny. The actions of the great majority of townspeople may have been more typical, but they were also far less interesting and far more easily forgotten.

A deep sense of Anglo-Canadian patriotism comprised part of Selkirk's character. Usually this pride of nationality, this awareness of belonging to the greatest Empire the world had ever known, found expression in subtle and rather commonplace occurrences. When the mate on the steamer at the docks raised the Union Jack each morning, he raised a symbol of loyalty to the Crown and to Queen Victoria in particular, just as much as he raised a maritime convention. When thick, black borders framed the obituary of Sir John A. Macdonald in the Selkirk *Record* in 1891, they marked the end of a very special tie between Canada and Great Britain. When a patriotic concert was held in Pearson's Hall in February of 1900 to raise funds for the widows and children of Canadian volunteers who had lost their lives fighting for Britain in the Boer War, and Dr. Grain gave a "gifted address on patriotism," which was followed by the singing of patriotic songs, the townspeople once again reaffirmed their unflinching belief in the Empire and all that it represented.

At times this patriotism inspired remarkable public display. This was the case when it was learned, on July 13th, 1885, that the troops who had just quelled the North West Rebellion of Louis Riel and his Metis followers in Saskatchewan would be passing through Selkirk on their return to the east. The rebellion was seen as a revolt against the freedom and good government that the British tradition inspired in Canada, and "it was determined that the returning soldiers should be



Selkirk's First Town Hall, c.1890 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

greeted in a manner expressive of the high appreciation of their deeds of valor entertained by our citizens."[26] It was Monday, and as the troops were expected by steamer on Wednesday, a general committee was quickly formed to superintend the arrangements. Sub-committees developed to handle specific events for "our townspeople were determined to prove themselves equal to the occasion, and all joined heartily in the good cause." The carpenters in town were recruited to construct 3000 feet of table-space and the ladies started to prepare the feast that would be set out in the parade grounds. Volunteers stepped forward eagerly to carry out any and all duties associated with the celebration. On Tuesday evening a final meeting was held to iron out unexpected wrinkles in the organization for the next day.

"Wednesday morning dawned brightly, and people were early astir, members of the committee and the Mayor being especially busy in seeing after the arrangements." They thought the *Princess* would dock in the early afternoon, but at nine o'clock they heard great shouting and much whistle blowing a short distance down the river. The brass band readied its instruments, and as the steamer rounded the bend, the musicians "struck up the strains of an inspiring tune, while cheer after cheer arose from the crowds on the banks and were answered back as lustily by those on the boats." The *Princess* docked, then the *Colville*. The troops disembarked, shook hands all round, and started the luncheon. When this was over, Mayor Colcleugh rose to address the veterans of the war on the banks of the Saskatchewan:

> You deserve well of your country. You nobly supported the liberty and constitutional government by your valorous achievements in quelling the turbulence of discontented and traitorous subjects and have added a glorious page to Our Country's story. You have shown the world what the children of young Canada, while yet in her teens, can dare and do in defence of law and order, and have given increased assurance of the stability of our institutions.

General Middleton, the commander, replied briefly and the troops dispersed for a stroll around town or a nap under the trees. The townspeople flocked onto the *Princess* to visit the sick and the wounded. Then, in mid-afternoon, the soldiers climbed aboard a special troop train waiting at Bradbury Station and were off on the next leg of their long journey home. By Stewart's reckoning, "the day had been a great one for Selkirk and long to be remembered." Undoubtedly the townspeople agreed.

Politics generated the same intense loyalty and enthusiasm among Selkirkers. The townspeople were fiercely partisan. Most expressed their political preferences by swarming to the polls on election day. It was a rare election that did not bring out at least 75 per cent of those eligible to cast a ballot in Selkirk.[27] Invariably, a small but acutely active and vocal minority campaigned openly for their candidates, enlivening the town streets and meeting halls with their bombast and their bottles for the duration of the contest. And of course R.W. Stewart, who was so profoundly conservative that he found sailing on Sundays deeply offensive, contributed all the editorial vitriol he could muster to the defeat of the Liberal hopeful. Seldom was the seriousness that characterized local politics more evident than in the provincial fight of 1886.

Prior to this election, Manitoba was essentially a one-party province. The Conservatives, led by a politically nimble, 300-pound Metis named John Norquay, were the dominant force. Opposition came from many sides, each with its own particular grievance, but this factionalism prevented serious resistance to the all-powerful Tories. By 1886, however, these factions had coalesced under the leadership of Thomas Greenway and his chief lieutenant, Joseph Martin, and a united Liberal party was born. For this reason, the election of 1886 has

been described as the first truly partisan contest in the province, fought on the basis of two very distinct views of Manitoba's future. But in the riding of St. Andrew's, it was nothing of the sort. It was, in fact, little more than a mudslinging match based on personalities and personal abuse.

Although the election did not occur until December, R.W. Stewart started his editorial campaign to re-elect Tory chieftain John Norquay in January. And for six months he was able to voice his support for the type of government the province had been enjoying under Conservative leadership without having to contend with any Liberal opposition. In late July, however, the newly-formed Selkirk Liberal Association nominated Mayor F.W. Colcleugh to carry its banner, and underwrote publication of a second Selkirk newspaper, the *News*, to champion its cause. Stewart launched his attack without delay, castigating the Liberals for the unmanly way in which their nomination meeting was arranged, claiming that its secrecy was "characteristic of the present opposition to Mr. Norquay. They are ready at all times to sneak around in a clandestine manner and vilify those better than themselves, but they have not the manliness to come out boldly and in a dignified way declare their objections

F. W. Colcleugh, 1888 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

and have them discussed openly."[28] This description of party organizers as unmanly, sneaky vilifiers would soon pale in comparison to Stewart's vicious characterization of F.W. Colcleugh.

Colcleugh was a perfect political target, tailor-made for lampooning. His hot temper was infamous, chiefly as a result of his indignant response to his cousin James's triumph in the civic election of 1882. F.W.'s subsequent refusal to sit in the same council with his cousin as mayor earned him no end of ridicule. His part in the recent royal commission inquiry into charges of corruption on the part of Norquay, S.L. Bedson, his cousin James and others in locating the provincial asylum on their own property west of town did nothing to better his image. F.W., who had been a Norquay supporter, turned against the Tory leader and his cronies because, it was said, he wished revenge on James who became bursar of that institution. Then there was F.W.'s record as mayor of Selkirk, a position he attained in 1885 and then again in 1886. As Stewart wrote,

> he might tell us what his claims are to entitle him to be our representative. He, for instance, ought to show us what good he has already done in his position as Mayor of Selkirk. As a public officer he ought to show something he has done for the benefit of our town; such as enhancing the value of real estate, for example, or whether he did anything towards getting a Town Hall, or assisted those who wished to build one, or he might tell us what became of the resolution that was put in his hands anent the navigation of the Red River. He might tell us of various other things that he has done to entitle him to the confidence of the people....We certainly think that a man who seems so anxious to get into power as to make assertions where there is no chance of confuting them, is working for his own benefit and not that of the public.[29]

As the campaign wore on, Stewart compounded his caustic caricature of Colcleugh by adding charges of wholesale corruption. He quoted approvingly from other Tory newspapers that reported Colcleugh as saying "that he could beat Norquay if the whiskey held out."[30] He published letters that urged people not to "prostitute the word 'Reform' by attaching it to such men. You know the word 'Grit' can be attached to almost anything. A Grit whiskey slinger, for instance. You know that grit belongs to that part of the sand that is generally thrown into mud holes, as being unfit for anything else, as (politically speaking) Mr. F.W. Colcleugh certainly will be after the present contest is over."[31] Eventually, though it seemed to tax his creative powers, Stewart managed to sum up his view of Colcleugh in a little poem:

> How doth our busy candidate
> Improve each shining hour.
> He neatly baits his fishing-hook
> With whiskey pork and flour.
>
> He makes himself with voters' wives
> As solid as a rock.
> He taketh up and kisseth all
> The babies in our block.
>
> And if a voter takes a nip
> Our candidate with guile,
> Will whisper to that voter man
> "Good neighbor let us smile.
>
> But if that voter is a man
> Who on the Sabbath day,
> Do go to church, our candidate
> Will whisper, "let us pray."
>
> Lots of gush and taffy
> And barrels full of prate.
> Make up the little outfit of
> Our busy candidate.[32]

Little is known about the Liberals' response to the attacks of Stewart and other Tory stalwarts, mainly because no copies of the Selkirk *News* have survived. It is certain, however, that their behavior was not exemplary either. They maligned local Tory supporters and Norquay in particular, both in their newspaper and during their stumps throughout the riding. They challenged innumerable voters in the Court of Revision, continually raised the issue

of Tory corruption in the asylum scandal, and catered to every grievance they were able to elicit from unhappy Conservative supporters. They even brought in other Tory turncoats in an effort to show Norquay's loss of support within his own party. The issues of the day stood no chance of exposure in this barrage of partisan invective.

The results of the election demonstrate, as nothing else can, the intensity of the passion that marked the long, bitter campaign. Norquay managed to retain St. Andrew's, but only by 69 votes, or about 11 per cent of the ballots cast.

Poll	*Norquay*	*Colcleugh*
South St. Andrew's	81	32
North St. Andrew's	57	29
St. Peter's	17	20
Clandeboye	39	42
Mapleton	19	24
Selkirk	129	126
TOTALS	342	273

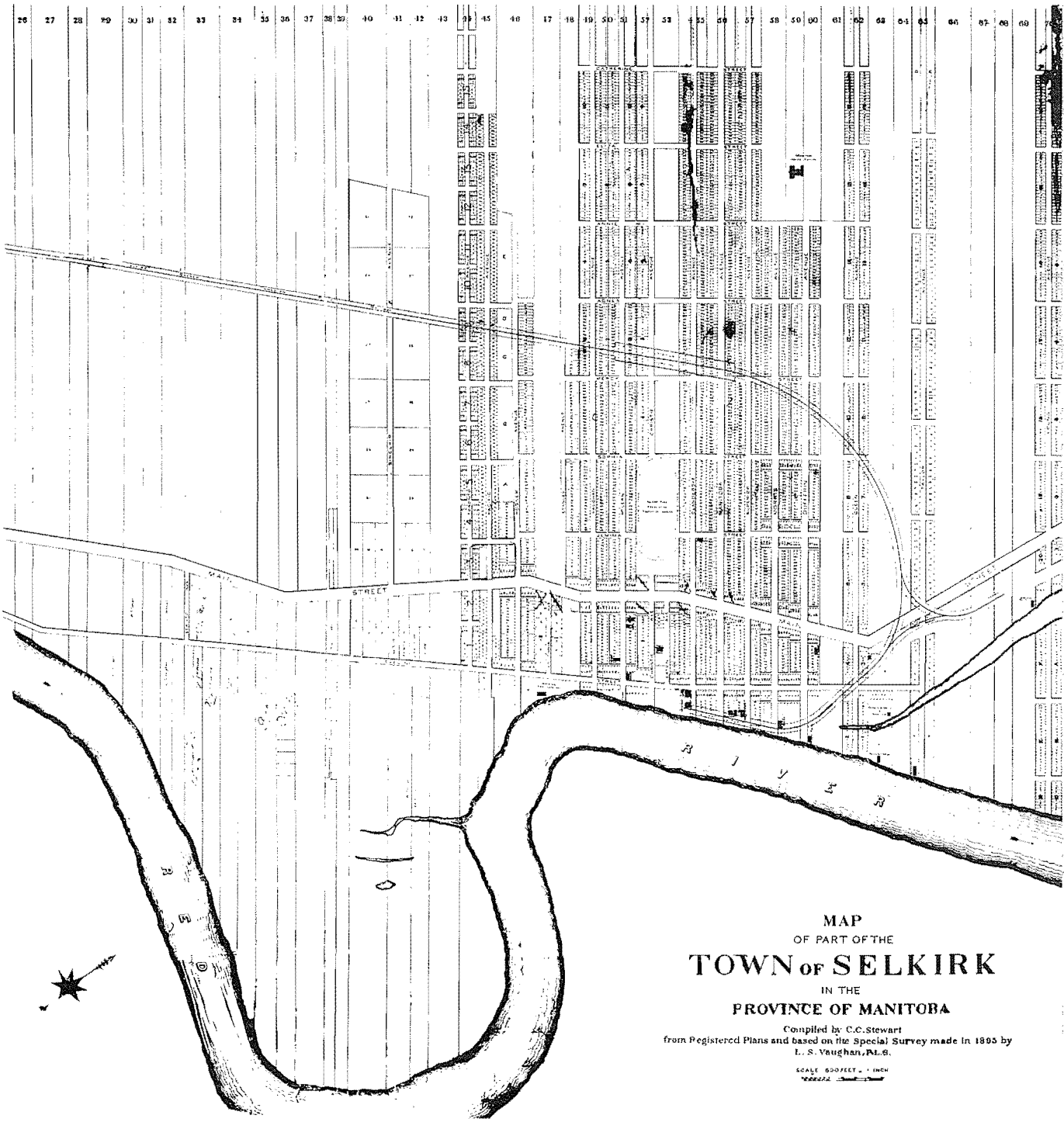
Source: Selkirk *Record*, 8 December 1886

When the final tally was announced, Stewart smugly observed that there was no need to gloat over the result, for the actions of the people had said all that needed to be said about the righteousness of the Tory cause. He may well have regretted this generosity two years later, when F.W. Colcleugh won the seat by acclamation.

It would be too simple to claim that all of Selkirk's character as a community derived from the behavior of leading citizens. In the main this was the case, for those very people spearheaded local political organizations, directed the annual fair and the holiday parades, formed the fraternal clubs, and of course financed the fishing fleets which provided the town with its special maritime flavour. But at times small groups of people on the very edge of polite society, or indeed beyond it altogether, could do just as much to provide the town with a singular reputation. This was certainly true in the 1880s and 1890s when vice of different sorts and particularly juvenile delinquency became an unenviable and undesirable thread in Selkirk's social fabric.

Vice had many guises. In 1881 a small band of temperance advocates appealed to the young men of Selkirk to throw away their bottles and save themselves from eternal damnation. These teatotalling zealots were repulsed by the behavior of storekeepers like Robert Bullock, who always stocked ample quantities of liquor in the back of their establishments for treating their friends and for outright sale to anyone with the required cash. Persuasion did not work too well among those who were accustomed to a wee dram on a daily basis, but the temperance workers did possess a stronger weapon. This was the Scott Act, a piece of federal legislation passed in 1878 that permitted any county to hold a vote on enforcement of total prohibition if one-quarter of the eligible voters petitioned for it. The prohibitionists managed to garner the required support and an election was set for early April. Meeting after meeting was held throughout Lisgar County to convert the undecided, and often these degenerated into loud and abusive shouting matches with the Methodists taking a strong stand for complete abstinence and almost everyone else arguing against it. Feelings ran high and the debate grew especially bitter in Selkirk where F.W. Colcleugh allied himself with the prohibitionists solely to put Bullock out of business.[33] When the vote was counted, it was found that although a majority in Selkirk had voted against prohibition, most of the county favoured enforcement of the Scott Act. James Colcleugh believed the unusual vote in town was largely a reaction against his cousin's self-proclaimed vendetta against Bullock, which caused many prohibitionists to shun association with such a man and others to vote not at all. Nonetheless, all of Lisgar County was now legally dry.

As it turned out, this was a blessing in disguise for the liquor dealers. Certainly it



MAP

OF PART OF THE

TOWN OF SELKIRK

IN THE

PROVINCE OF MANITOBA

Compiled by C.C.Stewart
from Registered Plans and based on the Special Survey made in 1895 by
L. S. Vaughan, M.L.S.

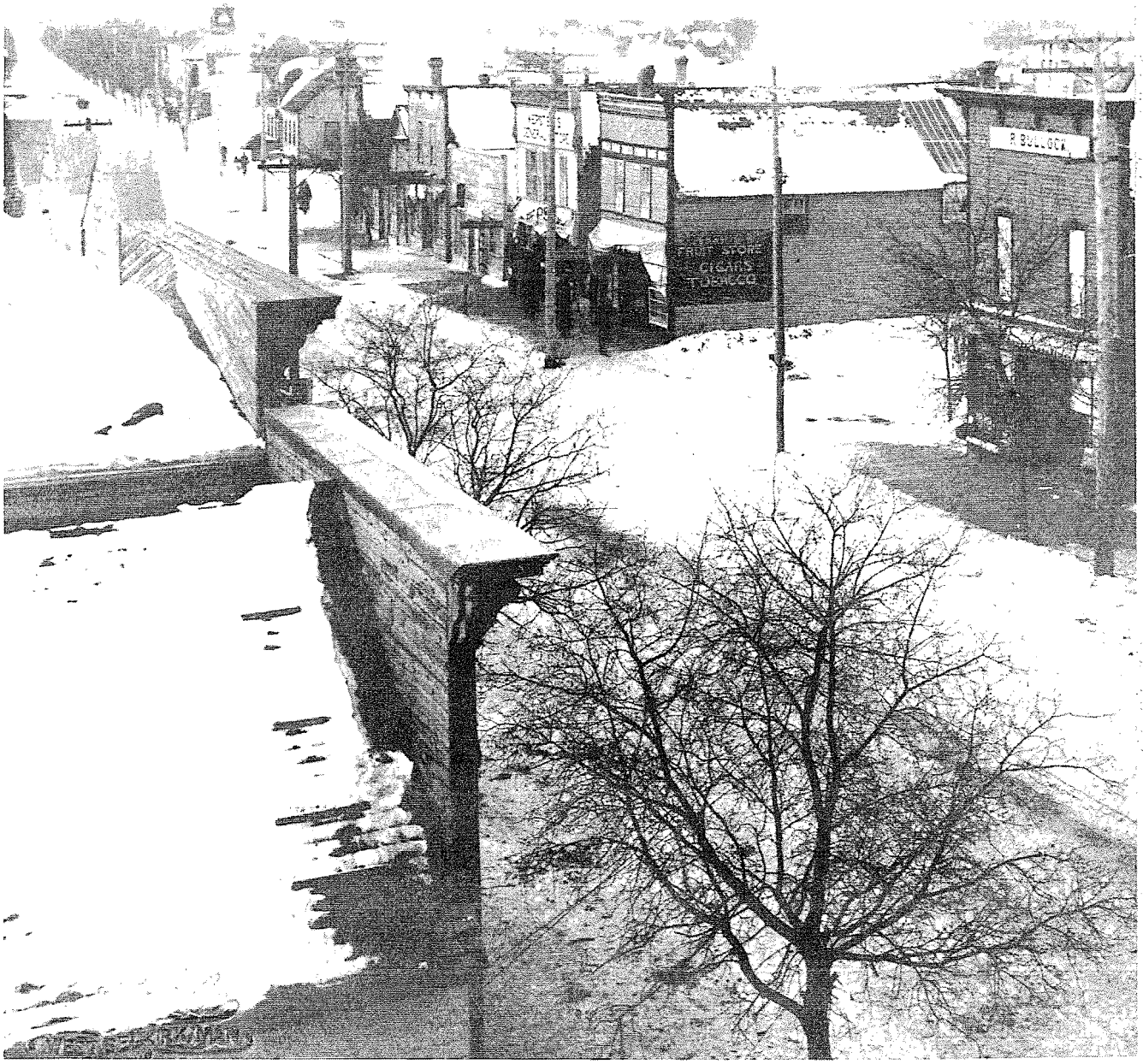
SCALE 600 FEET = 1 INCH

hurt the business of local hotelkeepers who had to close down their bars, but the traffic in booze continued at an even faster pace behind locked doors. With no liquor licences to pay, profits were greater than ever. One simply had to be careful not to get caught, for a stiff fine and ultimately imprisonment awaited the reckless transgressor. The prohibitionists must have been dismayed to find that drunkenness was actually on the upswing since the Act came into force.[34] Worse still, they were now attacked because enforcement of this law deprived the town of much-needed revenues from the sale of liquor licences. And most assuredly the tipplers cursed them as never before, for it was soon nearly impossible to obtain anything other than rot-gut whiskey. It is little wonder the townspeople returned to the licence system after only a few years of drought.

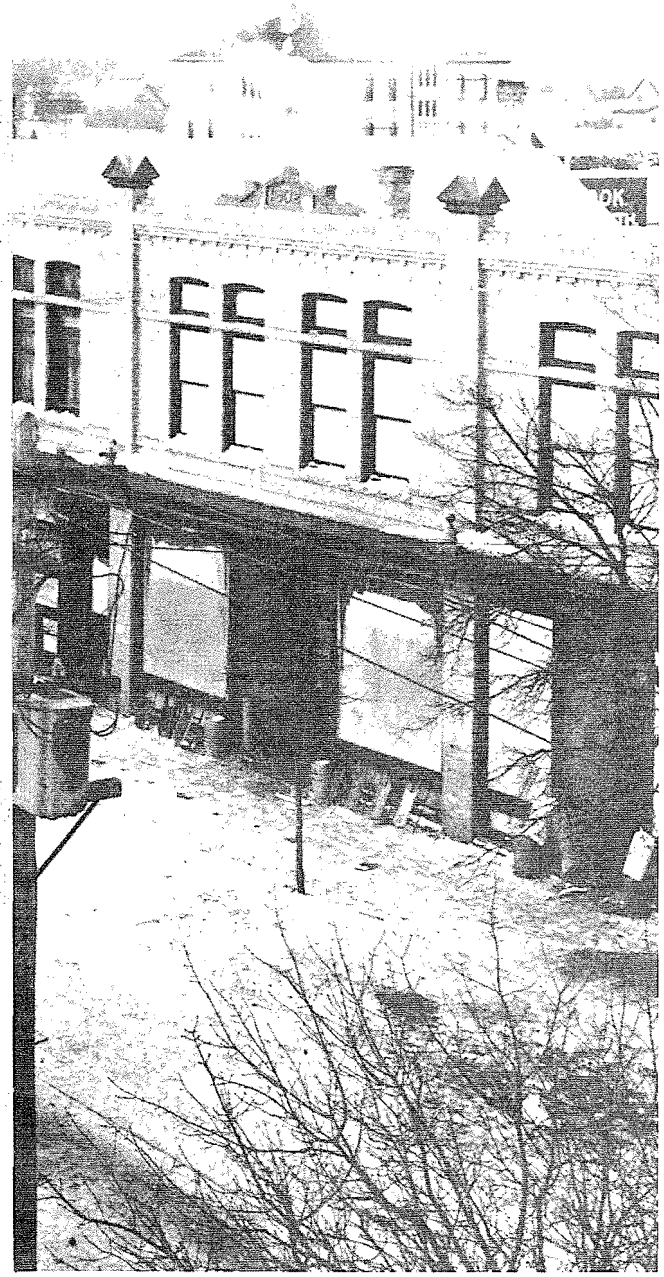
When Selkirk was but five years old, the residents started to feel the need for a permanent form of police protection. Petty crime, especially break, enter and theft, had gotten completely out of hand by 1886.[35] In the next year R.W. Stewart felt obliged to report that "frequent complaints have come to our ears with regard to immoral dens in this town, and we have been urged upon to advocate the expulsion of this social evil from our midst."[36] Prostitutes were one thing, but the pedlars who visited town every spring and took away money without actually contributing anything to the services offered in Selkirk were quite another. The townspeople demanded protection of their merchants who paid business taxes annually and thereby contributed to the building up of the town and its amenities. When a lone vigilante took matters into his own hands in the summer of 1888, and began locking up people without authority, the town councillors finally decided to take remedial action. In August, Harry Hodgins became town constable.

Hodgins seemed to come upon the scene at precisely the wrong time. If anything, matters only got worse after his appointment. The first generation of Selkirk boys were his nemesis. Every week, without fail, Stewart recorded more misdeeds on the part of these youngsters. In the daytime, they were wont to fire their rifles on the streets and to throw dirt in the faces of innocent passers-by. At night, when they were commonly out to two or three o'clock, they delighted in stoning windows and pulling down fences. As time went on, they added the detonation of firecrackers at the front door to their repertoire. By 1892 Stewart was advocating the creation of "some kind of society for the improvement of the morals of the young boys of Selkirk."[37] He noted that it was becoming all too common to see lads of eight to fourteen years walking the streets with pipes or cigars balanced on their lips, or with great wads of chewing tobacco bulging in their cheeks. Time and time again, he called for a curfew bell to keep these menaces off the streets at night. By the turn of the century Stewart's interest in pipes, cigars and chewing tobacco had waned and he turned his attention to cigarette smoking. If not chastised for this vile habit, he warned, the children of Selkirk would surely become "cigarette fiends."[38] Harry Hodgins seems to have had little moral effect on the boys, and it finally fell to certain responsible citizens to institute religious exercises at school in an effort to curb their 'depravity'.

The constable's other problem was controlling the drunks who prowled the streets at night, molesting women and causing them endless embarrassment with disgusting outbursts of profanity. Often this cursing lasted through the night and could still be heard by early risers in the morning.[39] On one occasion, Hodgins attempted to arrest an obstreperous drunk, only to be attacked by several others who found his actions offensive. A lively scuffle ensued, but for once Harry got his man. No doubt his task was much lightened when, in 1908, the town councillors bought him a new patrol wagon for hauling drunks off to



West Selkirk, Manitoba, c.1903



PUBLIC ARCHIVES CANADA

jail. It was a fine vehicle, consisting of one wheel in front and two handles at the rear.[40]

Though rich in industry and culture, Selkirk was a pauper when it came to adequate civic amenities. Fifteen years after the town was founded, it still had no town hall. The streets remained a disgrace, the sidewalks in a perpetual state of disrepair. There was no fire department, not even a volunteer bucket brigade, to guard the largely frame community. Empty lots and the river itself remained the local nuisance ground. Although the population was nearly 1000, only one school had been provided for the young. There was not even a town cemetery, and burials continued to take place at Mapleton.

Stewart was quick to blame the town council for these deficiencies. In 1892 he remarked that "the town is at present at a standstill and is not making any progress whatever that is noticeable. The only cause to which this state of affairs may be attributed is to [sic] the want of energy and resolution on the part of our citizens; and more especially those at the head of affairs."[41] To some extent, he was correct in this assessment of the situation. Certain inadequacies were clearly the result of local apathy. But to a greater degree, the lack of progress in Selkirk was the result of the community's crushing burden of debt.

By 1894 Selkirk owed $110,000 to various creditors who had purchased the railway bonus bonds and civic improvement debentures in 1882. The country as a whole had entered a period of depression and it was impossible for the community to meet even the interest payments. Whenever the council needed a loan of $500 to make improvements to the schoolhouse, for example, the secretary-treasurer first had to obtain personal guarantees of repayment from the councillors before the bank would extend credit. Soon Selkirk was known as the "town that did not pay its debts," and was unable to borrow a dollar from any source.[42] Acting mayor Edwin Comber was authorized to start negotiations with the

town's creditors, particularly the C.P.R. and the Canada Permanent Mortgage Company, which held most of the outstanding debentures, to see if he could arrange better terms. Comber, in turn, appealed to Captain William Robinson to use his influence, which was said to be considerable. Robinson took the outlandish step of offering the C.P.R. $10,000 for its accumulated $70,000. The railway balked at this, but did eventually accept $15,000. The captain then approached Canada Permanent and succeeded in having them accept payment of the amount of principal due, with interest, to the date of settlement. Through his generous exertions, the town saved $60,000. In 1898 Mayor James Dagg forged an agreement with the provincial government to guarantee the interest on the remaining $50,000, borrowed at four per cent with a low scale of repayment. This consolidation was, as Stewart noted, "appreciated by the citizens, as it brings the town out of a muddle which has always been a detriment to its progress."[43]

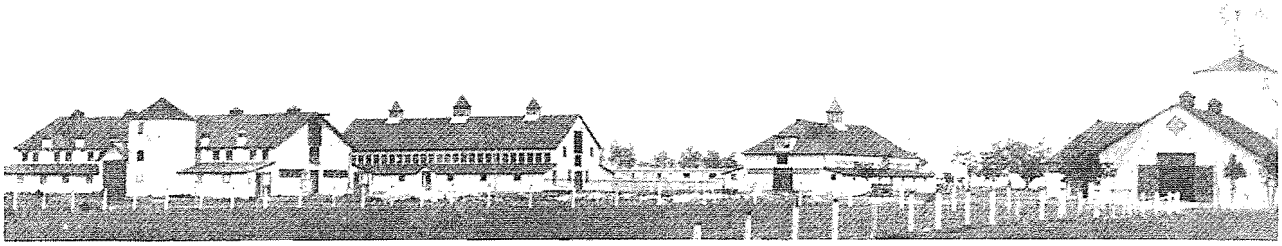
Settlement of the debt problem coincided with recovery of the national economy and Selkirk entered its first true boom period. By 1898 the population had doubled to 1,836.[44] The property assessment for taxation purposes rose from about $267,000 in 1888 to $436,337 by 1896, and then nearly doubled to $841,428 in 1901.[45] Farm settlers poured into the countryside, especially near Gimli, and the province started to drain the Big Bog to provide even more arable land. The old roundhouse at East Selkirk became an immigration hall in 1899.[46] Much of this new enthusiasm about farming around Selkirk was attributed to Sir William Van Horne's purchase of some 5,000 acres at East Selkirk around the turn of the century.[47] The newly-formed Board of Trade, led by Captain Robinson, cashed in on this economic development by persuading the Winnipeg Elevator Company to construct a 30,000 bushel grain elevator at Selkirk in 1902.[48] Two years later, the town council set aside an empty lot at the corner of Main and Clandeboye for a farmers' market square. Stewart expressed the feelings of all Selkirkers when he wrote that "we are evidently having our innings at last."[49]

Prosperity gave the town a facelift. In 1898 a building boom commenced, as the I.O.G.T. put up a large hall on Main Street; Oliver and Byron, the flour and feed merchants, built a new store at Main and Manitoba; butcher G.H. Fox erected a substantial building on Manitoba and one of his competitors, L. Mills, constructed a fine two-storey building complete with a large stable and ice-house on Eveline. In 1902 Captain Robinson razed the buildings on the north side of his general store on Eveline and replaced them with a 56 by 100 foot, three-storey edifice that became Selkirk's first department store. Moody and Sutherland followed suit with a new brick store next to Bullock's on Eveline. The old Merchant's Hotel, built by Schultz in 1877, was moved to make room for C. Sheldon's "splendidly decorated" replacement.[50] Fred Pook renovated his blacksmith shop and started an agricultural implement dealership. The boom continued into 1903, with Dr. Ross, Fred Heap, photographer J.H. Clarke and J.W. Simpson erecting new houses, F. Partridge and J.S. Chambers adding stone foundations to their homes, three-hotel keepers making extensive renovations, and the Presbyterian congregation putting up a new brick church.[51]

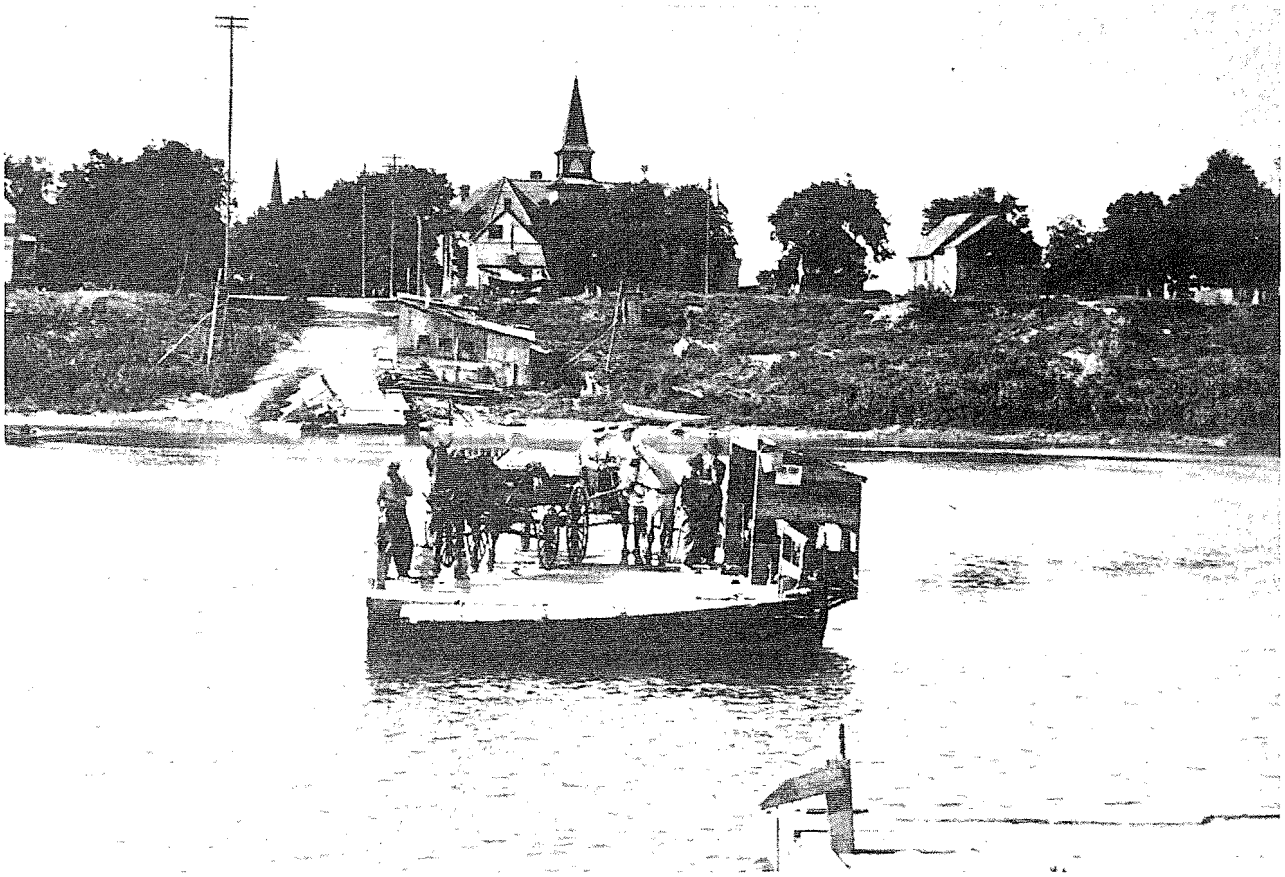
New public buildings soon followed. In 1905 a protracted debate began about the site of the proposed post office building. The town merchants, most of who had establishments on Eveline near Manitoba Avenue, wanted the post office built there. Several lots were still available, and Mayor McKenzie indicated he would be willing to sell one of his at a reasonable price. The Board of Trade, composed largely of businessmen with interests along Eveline, naturally endorsed this plan. But other store-keepers whose places of business were farther west on Manitoba argued just as strenuously in favour of a site near

Main and Manitoba. For reasons unknown, the Dominion government sided with these merchants and the new post office building began to take shape on the south-east corner of Main and Manitoba in the fall of 1905. When completed, the spacious brick structure housed not only the post office, but the customs house, the fishery office and Indian agency as well.[52]

The post office was still under construction when the townspeople decided they needed a cottage hospital. They formed a committee, incorporated the Selkirk General Hospital, and began to solicit contributions for its construction. Captain Robinson became the first president of the hospital board and, with the generosity for which he was universally known, gave the town 25 feet of his property from Eveline to the river for a new street past the hospital site, to be called "Idell."[53] Equally generous contributions of money from many of the residents enabled the committee to call for tenders in April, 1907. They were especially pleased with the site that had been obtained; it was far enough from town to assure the patients of quiet surroundings and a beautiful view of the river, yet within easy walking distance from residential areas. Henry Bird of Selkirk became the general contractor, and by January, 1908, the neat, three-storey structure, built of white pressed brick resting on an East Selkirk limestone foundation, was ready to admit patients.[54]

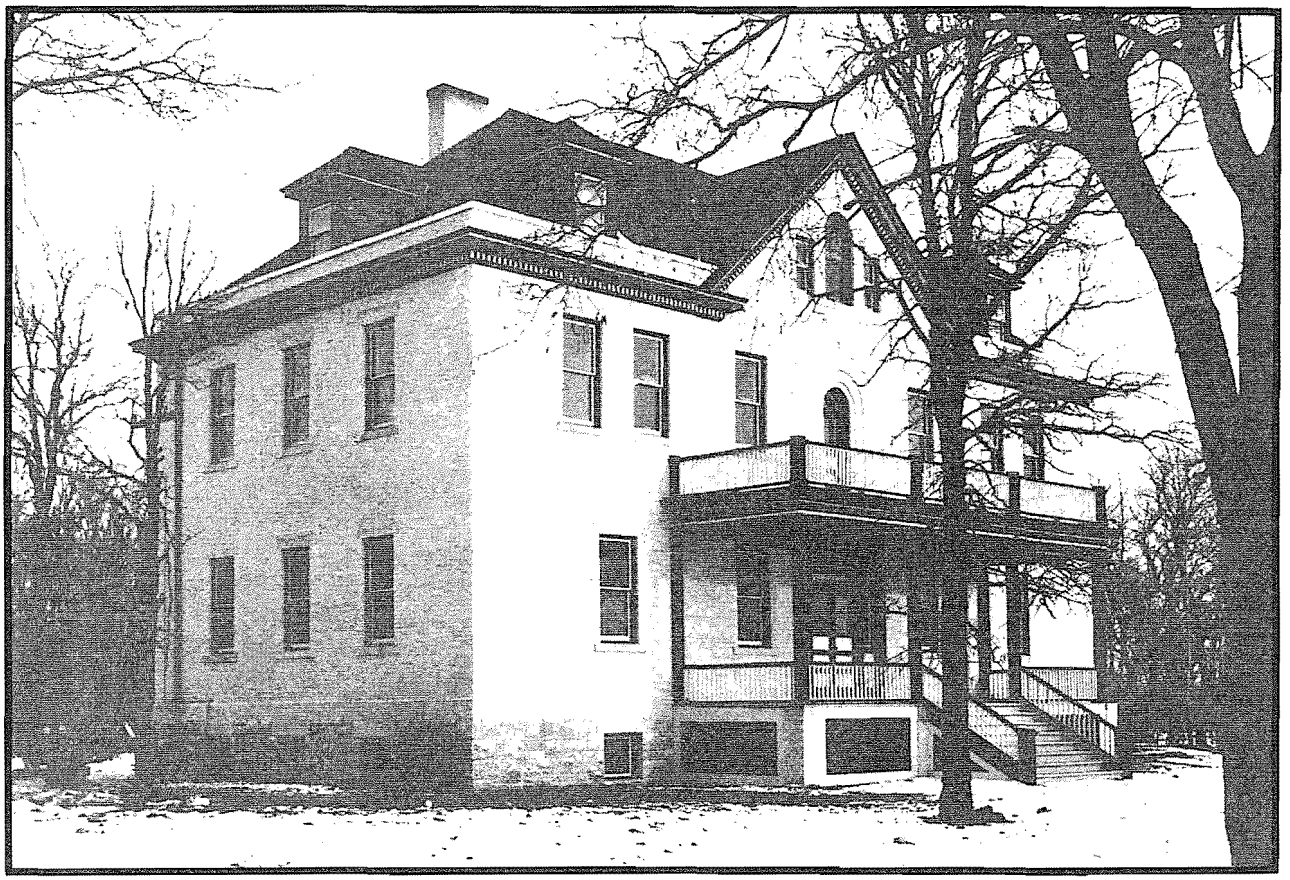


Farm of Sir William Van Horne, East Selkirk, 1913 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

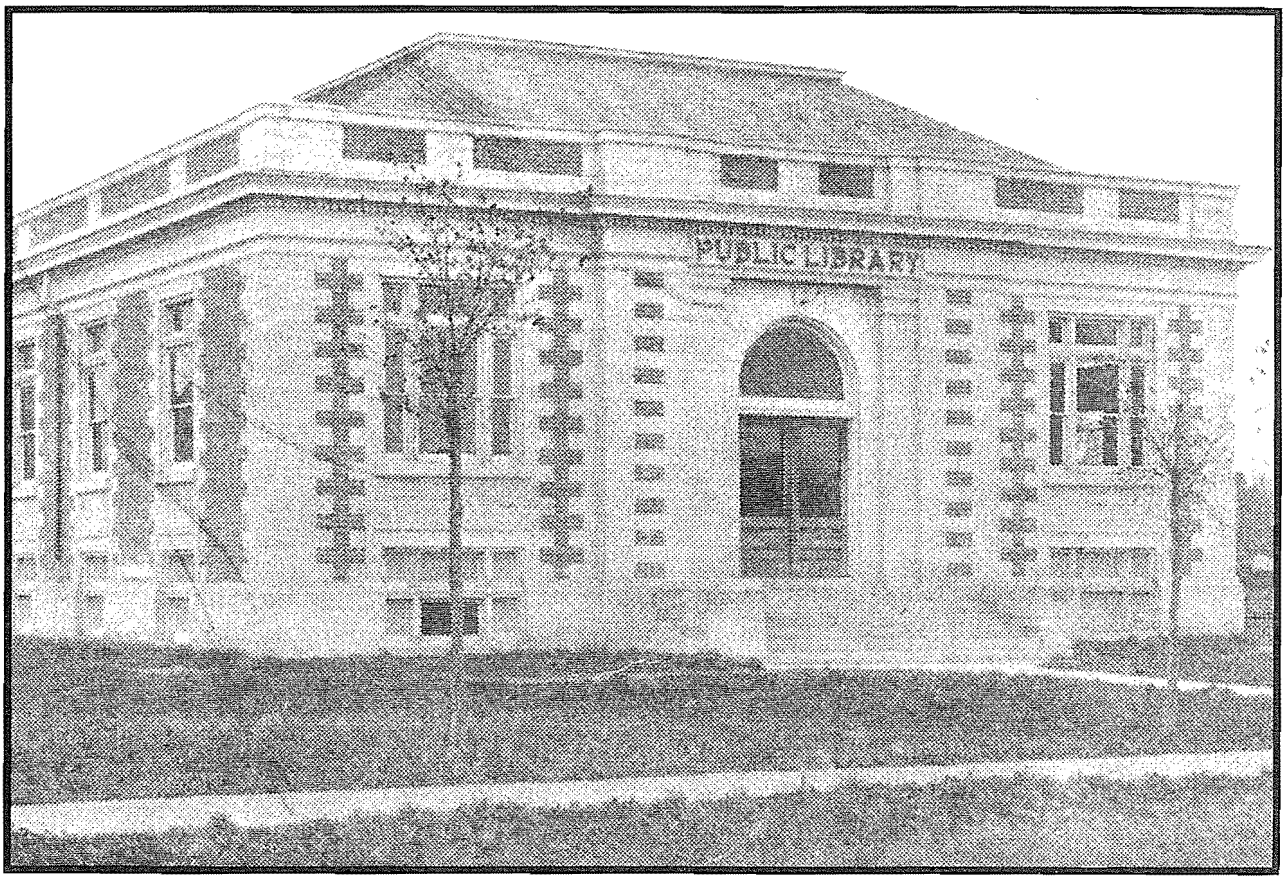


Selkirk Ferry (Holgate's), c.1905 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

Public Building [Post Office] in Selkirk, Manitoba, 1909 PUBLIC ARCHIVES CANADA



Selkirk Hospital, c.1908 MANITOBA ARCHIVES



The Carnegie Library on Eaton Avenue, 1913 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

The town council had meanwhile been negotiating with the famous Carnegie Foundation in the United States for funds with which to erect a public library. Just a week after the hospital opened, the Foundation notified the council that it would be willing to donate $10,000 towards a library building if the town would provide a suitable location and an annual grant of $1,000.[55] It was a marvellous offer, and the town quickly accepted the Foundation's terms. The councillors obtained a lot on Eaton Avenue, just off Eveline, and within a year and a half Selkirk could boast another magnificent brick building. Inside, there were two large reading rooms on the main floor (one for men and one for women), a board room and a library room filled with almost empty shelving. As his good deed for 1909, William Robinson completely furnished the library with modern fixtures. In the basement, provision was made for a bath-house and a gymnasium. Patrons were permitted, upon payment of five cents for a library card, to borrow one precious volume for a two-week period. In the coming years, Captain Robinson did much to stock the empty cabinets and bare shelves.

The Carnegie Library was the latest in a long line of public entertainments enjoyed by the people of Selkirk, and its boardroom provided much-needed meeting space. In the early years, club meetings were usually held in private homes, which worked satisfactorily as long as membership was small. As the town grew, and clubs proliferated, the schoolhouse was used as a meeting-place. Being unused by the teachers and pupils at night, it seemed ideal for larger gatherings. But in 1888 the town council, hard pressed to meet the expenses of its school board because of the debt, raised rental fees to an exorbitant level. James O'Donohue, owner of the Lisgar House, responded by opening a public hall above his carriage house.[55] By 1900 meeting-rooms were readily available above many of the new business blocks, in the town hall, in the old school, and of course in Pearson's Hall.

Being close to Winnipeg, Selkirk was often able to enjoy the finest travelling shows of the day. Pauline Johnson, the famous Indian poet and story-teller, appeared in town quite often, delighting the townspeople with readings from her own works of Indian romance, legend and adventure. There was J.W. Bengough, the most famous of the nineteenth century cartoonists, who would arrive at Pearson's Hall well in advance of his speech hour to chat with his sponsors and enjoy a glass of port. Then, during his speech, which was always profusely illustrated by his deft hand, he would create caricatures of some of the sponsors and work them into the presentation. "As a general rule," he observed, "the 'victims' enjoy the fun as well as their neighbours."[56] By 1897 Selkirkers had already seen the famous Cosgrove Merrymakers three times, and the crowd was larger every time. The entertainment varied each year.

> The attracting feature of the [1897] season will be Edison's Projecting Kinetoscope, which produces life as we see it every day among our neighbors, every action being reproduced. The Jubilee Procession, with Queen Victoria and other members of the Royal Family passing in full view, a Spanish bull fight with 10,000 people in the background, and a large number of Manitoba views will be among the pictures exhibited. Mr. Harry W. Fay, the great English comic singer, and Miss Ada Cosgrove will also contribute to the programme, while Miss Alice Galbraith, champion highland dancer, will attract all good and loyal Scotchmen.[57]

Not until 1908, when one corner of Pearson's Hall was fitted up by the Newman Electrical Comedy Company to show moving pictures, where these live shows surpassed.

As Selkirk began to lose its raw character, both physical and cultural, the townspeople demanded civic amenities of the sort they learned about in Winnipeg. With the population rising steadily and new buildings going up each year, protection from the scourge of

fire loomed as an important concern among residents. They were only too familiar with its destructive power. One Sunday evening in 1894, when most people were still talking about a small fire that had broken out downtown earlier that week, the bell at Christ Church sounded the dreaded alarm once again.[58] Smoke could be seen pouring out of one corner of Robinson's fish freezer at the bottom of Clandeboye Avenue, and by the time more volunteers arrived the flames were darting into the night sky. There was a strong south-east wind blowing, and it seemed certain the freezer was doomed, but the men worked feverishly to kept the fire from spreading. The telegraph operator sent word to Winnipeg for a fire engine to be sent by special train, and teams were despatched to the station to await its arrival. They waited and waited, only to receive word that the city could not spare its sole working engine. Meanwhile the flames had spread to Pearson's stables and Stovel's boot and shoe store, Gilhuly's new drugstore next to Stovel's was scorching, and sparks were showering down on the Dagg Block and Robinson's department store across the street. Embers were landing as far away as three-quarters of a mile from Pearson's and igniting small blazes. As the fire spread, so did the fear, and soon everyone believed the entire town would be lost. The fire-fighters covered as many buildings as possible with blankets and then soaked them with water that other volunteers were hauling from the river in buckets. Hours later, their work finally paid off as the fire died down and before the night was over only wisps of smoke and smouldering lumber was in evidence. But much had been lost. Robinson was hit worst with the loss of about $50,000 worth of warehousing, ice, fish and tools, on which he had only $35,000 insurance. Pearson's loss was $4,000, Stovel's about $600, and Gilhuly lost much of his stationery and stock of drugs. Aside from the actions of a few despicable persons who had busied themselves looting stores under the guise of protecting property, it had been a grand display of community solidarity in the face of disaster.

Just one week before the calamity, Stewart had renewed his editorial campaign against the town council for its neglect of fire protection, and now he severely chastised the members for their inexcusable behavior. Disgust dripped from his pen during the next few weeks, and finally it was announced the town would purchase a fire engine and form a hook and ladder company for future security. As time passed, and rebuilding commenced, the sense of urgency faded until at last no one spoke of creating a volunteer force. No doubt the councillors' preoccupation with the debt question helped to blur their vision.

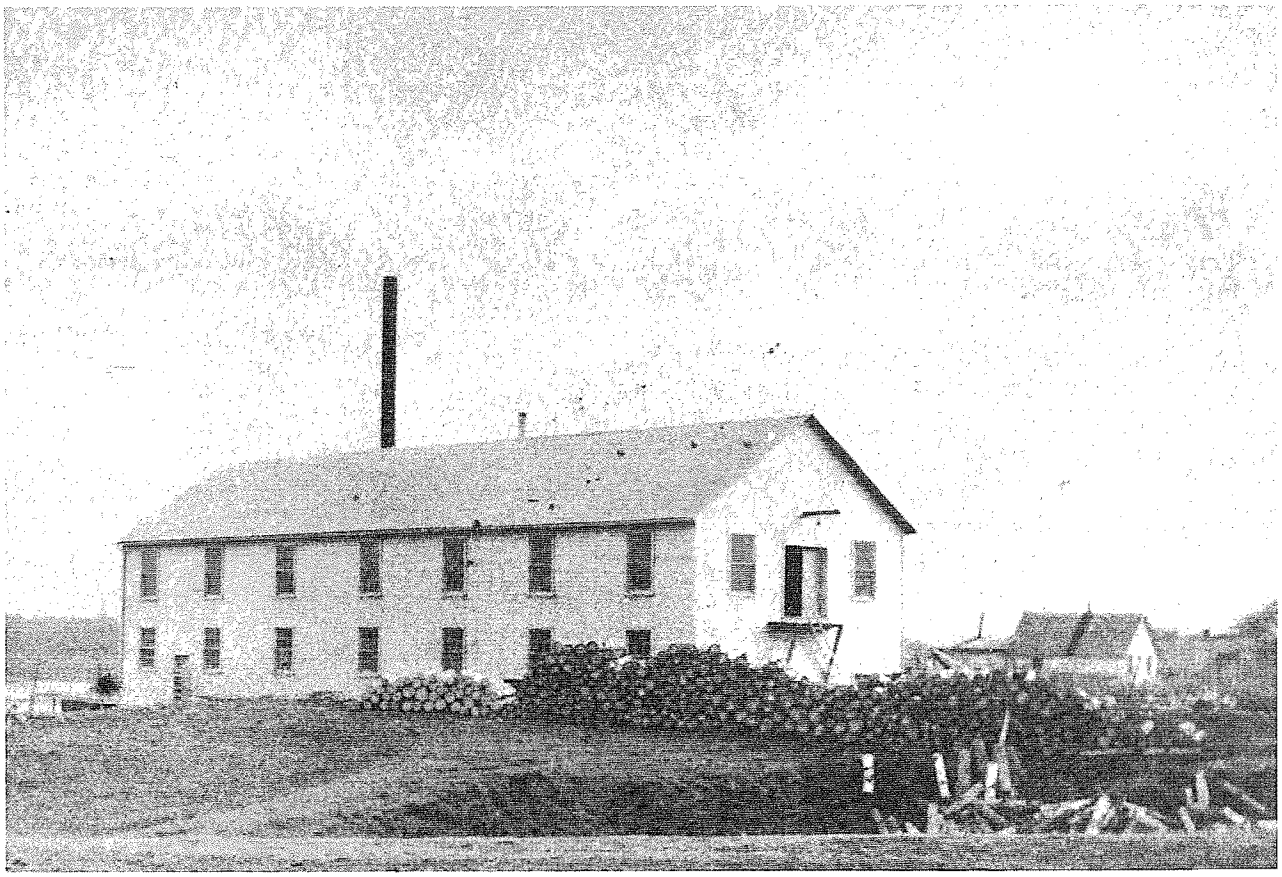
Then, in the winter of 1896, disaster struck again. A drayman named J. Wilson had arrived from Winnipeg in the early morning, lighted a lantern and put his horse into the small stable he rented behind the Lisgar House. He left the lantern burning while he went to get something to eat, and when he returned the stable was ablaze. Again a strong south-easter was blowing and it quickly carried the fire westward between Manitoba and Clandeboye. Almost everyone was in bed, and many learned of the blaze barely in time to escape their homes. The efforts of volunteers proved of little use, and 20 buildings burned to the ground, including the Lisgar stables, Beal's carriage shop and stable, O'Grady's butcher shop, Reuben Comber's stable and meat locker, the offices of the Selkirk *Record*, F.W. Hooker's house, and McDonald's blacksmith shop. The total loss was about $30,000 while the insurance amounted to only $2,000. Still more tragic, R. Beal died later of the burns he received.

Unbelievably, nothing was done about procuring fire fighting apparatus and organizing a volunteer brigade until 1904, when F.W. Colcleugh became chief of a small force. The town purchased a little chemical engine, which was replaced three years later by a No. 6

Watrous engine and 1500 feet of hose in two reels.[59] Even this modern equipment was not always adequate. In 1905 the local grist mill, Selkirk Rolling Mills, burned to the ground. Two years later the Selkirk High School was consumed. One week after that blaze, the town's only grain elevator burned along with 6,000 bushels of wheat. The Selkirk Bottling Plant was lost in 1908, and in 1910 the Selkirk Match Company's factory outside of town was reduced to ashes. Of course Stewart demanded better protection, but there were limits to what a small town could afford.

It was 1909 before water did not have to obtained from the river. Three years earlier, when the population of Selkirk was about 2,700, Captain Robinson formed a citizens' committee to consider the provision of modern water and sewage service. He was a man to whom people paid attention, and when he said that the town had reached the point "when it was no longer possible to avoid entering upon such a scheme without great detriment to the future welfare of the town,"[60] the townspeople voted overwhelmingly in favour of his plan. Three years later the work was completed. Selkirk drew water from a 225-foot artesian well, pumped it into a 130-foot tower with a capacity of 62,000 gallons, and then distributed it to the residents through nine miles of water mains. The system was equipped with 50 hydrants, concentrated in the downtown area, and had a 25-horsepower gasoline engine to provide additional pressure for fire-fighting.[61] The cost to each household, including interest charges on the debentures, was about 24¢ a month.

The Selkirk Volunteer Fire Brigade, c.1905
MANITOBA ARCHIVES



Selkirk Match Factory, c.1905 MANITOBA ARCHIVES

Telephone service came to Selkirk by a different route. In the spring of 1885 Mayor James Colcleugh established a small exchange in the post office, connecting the town with Winnipeg. Apparently this worked quite well, but when a group of Winnipeg businessmen approached the town council in 1893 and offered to install a modern exchange with many more subscribers, the townspeople jumped at the opportunity. By 1895 the system was complete, and the councillors passed a resolution thanking the Bell Telephone Company for an exchange that "is a credit to our town as well as to the company."[62] Long distance connections started in 1900, and Selkirk was in touch with far distant communities. Bell continued to provide service until the creation of Manitoba Government Telephones in 1908.

Selkirk's experience with electricity was not so fortunate. In 1890, W. H. Eaton, F. W. Hooker, William Gibbs, James F. Reid and William Overton incorporated The Selkirk Electric Company.[63] Within a year they had installed all the necessary poles, wires and lamps, and had located their dynamo in Hooker's planing mill on Manitoba Avenue. At first the company supplied only street lighting, with six clusters of four lights each at Main and Manitoba, Manitoba and Eveline, Eveline and McLean, Eveline and Rosser, Clandeboye and Eveline, and Queen and Main.[64] As might be expected, this arrangement blanketed most of the town with light, with particular attention being given to the business district. The lighting plant even became a source of evening entertainment to the townspeople, as many would trudge down to Hooker's through the snow every night just to watch the dynamo operate. They soon came to depend on the lights and were appalled when the system broke down for a few days, which happened regularly. As the newspaper pointed out in 1898, "our citizens are growing tired of the miserable service given in the electric light system of the town. The light itself was not so bad while it is burning, but the trouble has been that no dependence can be placed upon it, and generally when needed most something goes wrong and the lights go out."[65]

In 1906 this bad service got worse. W.H. Eaton and his cohorts sold the business to Joseph and John Flavelle of Lindsay, Ontario, for $40,000,[66] and much of the concern about local needs evaporated. According to Stewart,

> There is now an even more miserable service and people are asked to pay the same old price every month. It is time there was a change for the better and the public given a square deal. Note—Just as we were putting this item in type the lights went out for a few minutes, and we cussed during the interval.[67]

For the next two years the townspeople endured this erratic service, until the town council arrived at a better solution. There was now an electric railway line between Selkirk and Winnipeg, and the owners offered to supply the town with electricity at half the current price, or about ten cents per thousand kilowatt-hours. They would sell industrial power at a cost of one cent per horsepower, too. Eager to do business with men who had more of a stake in the town, the councillors sought a way out of their arrangement with the Flavelles.

It did not take long to find one. As they examined the arrangement the town had signed with Selkirk Electric in 1891, the councillors found that the franchise was only for a ten-year period, and that the Flavelles had been supplying service without an exclusive right to do so. The town council immediately went to court to establish its right to set up a competing electrical system. In December of 1910 the court found in favour of Selkirk, and the Flavelles, realizing their business would soon be ruined, shut down their plant.[68] For the next nine months, while the town installed a new and completely modern distribution system, those residents who had been enjoying electrical service rediscovered the burden of cleaning sooty lamp

chimneys and the ever-present smell of coal-oil. But their patience was well rewarded, for the municipally-owned system greatly exceeded the old in cheapness and reliability.

The Winnipeg, Selkirk and Lake Winnipeg Railway Company, which supplied Selkirk with electricity, exerted a profound influence on the town after the turn of the century and for decades to follow. The origins of the company are still somewhat obscure. As early as 1892 a group of Selkirk businessmen formed the Selkirk Electric Railway Company to build a line between the town and Winnipeg, but it was not until May of 1900 that it received its articles of incorporation.[69] During the same spring session of the legislature, five men from Winnipeg and district chartered the Winnipeg, Selkirk and Lake Winnipeg railway. Whether or not these two firms joined forces is not known, but the W. S & L.W. name was given to the line. In 1903 the Selkirk town council awarded the W. S & L.W. an exclusive 85-year franchise and a 20-year exemption from taxation in return for daily service between the town and Winnipeg. Construction took place over the next year, and in August of 1904 the first passenger train ran along the tracks. A small steam locomotive, affectionately called "Dinky", pulled the freight and passenger cars during the first year, but in 1905 a larger engine was obtained. Because no turning facilities had been built at Selkirk, the big locomotive had to run backwards into the city.[70]

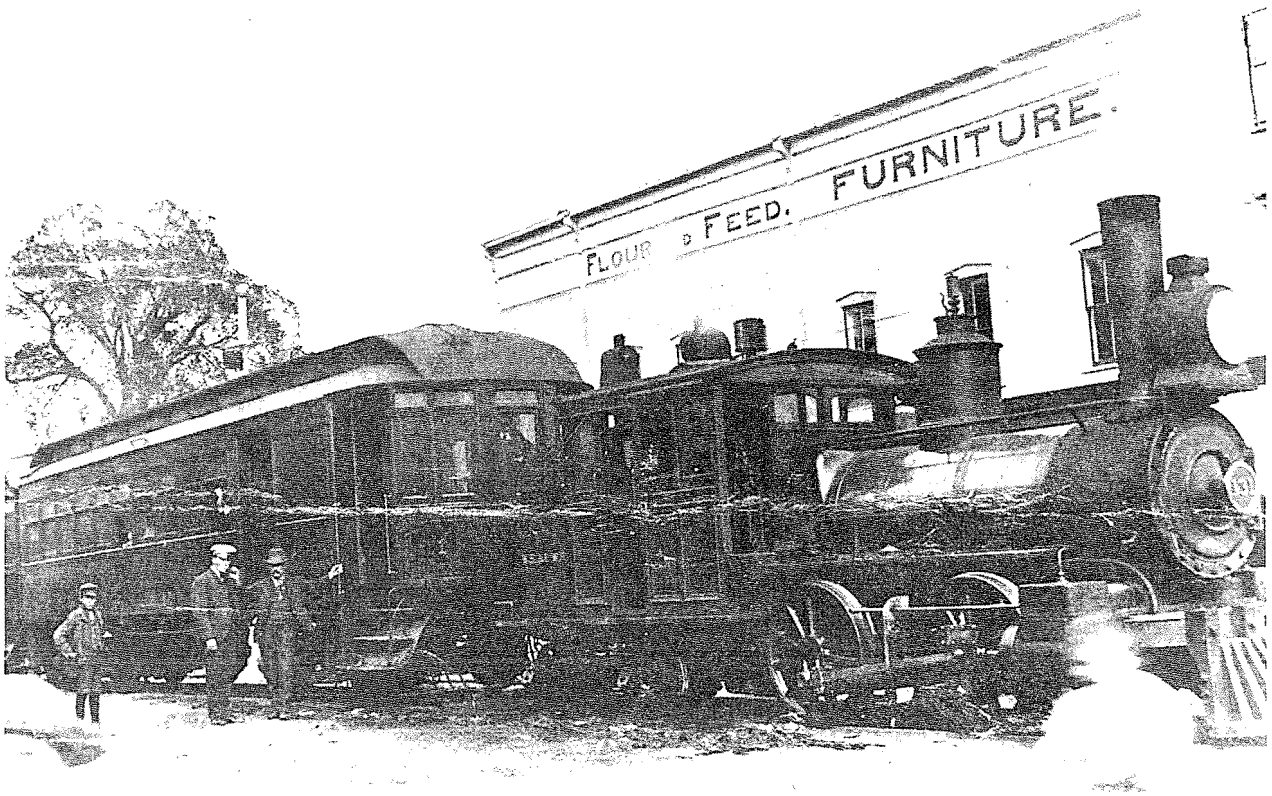
In 1906 the W. S & L.W. became affiliated with the Winnipeg Electric Street Railway, and electrification of the 22-mile line began. The tracks were upgraded, a car barn and station was built at Selkirk, and a "wye" was installed for turning the cars at Taylor and Eveline. A spur was constructed into Selkirk Park and a passenger and freight station took shape on the north-east corner of Eveline and Eaton. By May of 1908 the electric railway was ready to roll, and Selkirk became the proud possessor of the only substantial radial inter-urban on the prairies.

It took a mere 50 minutes to make the run between Selkirk and the city, and five round trips were made daily, starting at 7 a.m. The elegant brown and cream cars, with their stained-glass windows, mahogany panelling and plush red seats, were quite an improvement over the dingy C.P.R. accommodations. Each was lighted electrically and had adequate heating and cooling systems for the different seasons. The W. S & L.W. even supplied separate smoker sections to save women and children from the annoyance of dense cigar smoke and foul language. Yet it seems that too much was spent on luxurious cars and not enough on the roadbed over which they travelled. This was a light-rail system, laid on a minimal roadbed with little ballast, and the cars rocked violently as they sped down the tracks at 30 miles an hour. Even today, there are many people who recall the sensation of 'seasickness' that accompanied each and every trip along the rickety line.

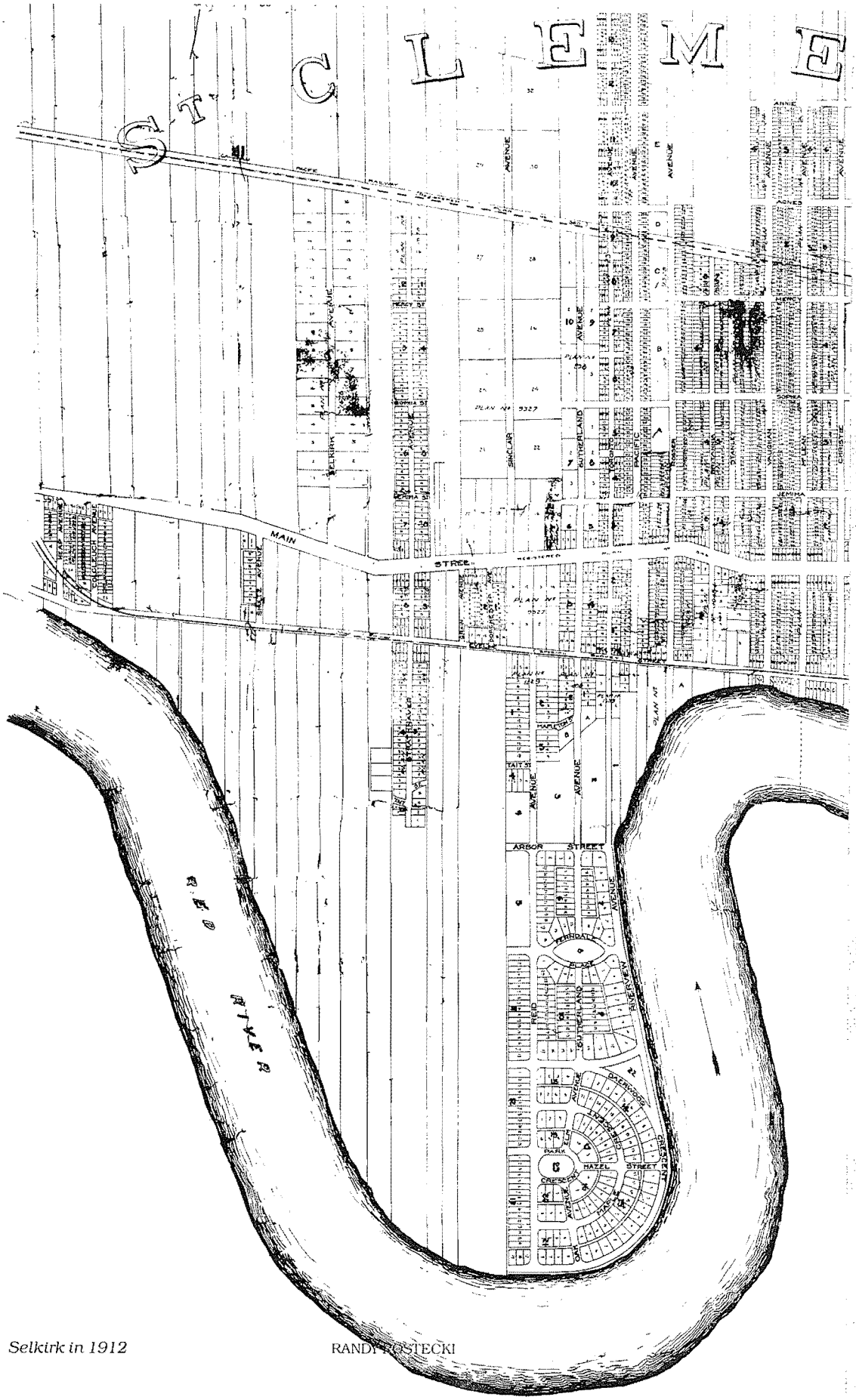
"This is an age of progress," the *Record* announced in 1911, "and Selkirk should not lag behind in the race."[71] The W. S & L.W. symbolized that progress as nothing else could. With its speed and its luxury, the line greatly enhanced the attractiveness of Selkirk as a resort town for wealthy Winnipeggers. Hundreds converged on the town every weekend to enjoy the scenic beauty of Selkirk Park, with its unrivalled boating and picnicking facilities and spacious dance pavilion. The age-old dream of turning Selkirk into a popular summer resort was at last becoming a reality. The excellent electrical service provided by the railway illuminated not only Selkirk's streets and homes, but brightened its industrial prospects as well, for inexpensive power was now available to even the largest manufacturing concern that cared to locate there. Coupled with offers of free industrial sites and generous tax exemptions, electrical power made Selkirk a manufacturer's mecca. And of course the railway changed the

townspeople's image of themselves and the good life. For just 80¢, a Selkirk shopper could travel to Winnipeg, with its smart shops, glorious variety and other attractions, browse and buy all day long, and still be back home by suppertime. The temptation to do just that became even greater as some of the larger Winnipeg department stores, such as Eaton's, started to advertise regularly in the Selkirk newspaper. The sophistication of big-city life was only 50 minutes away.

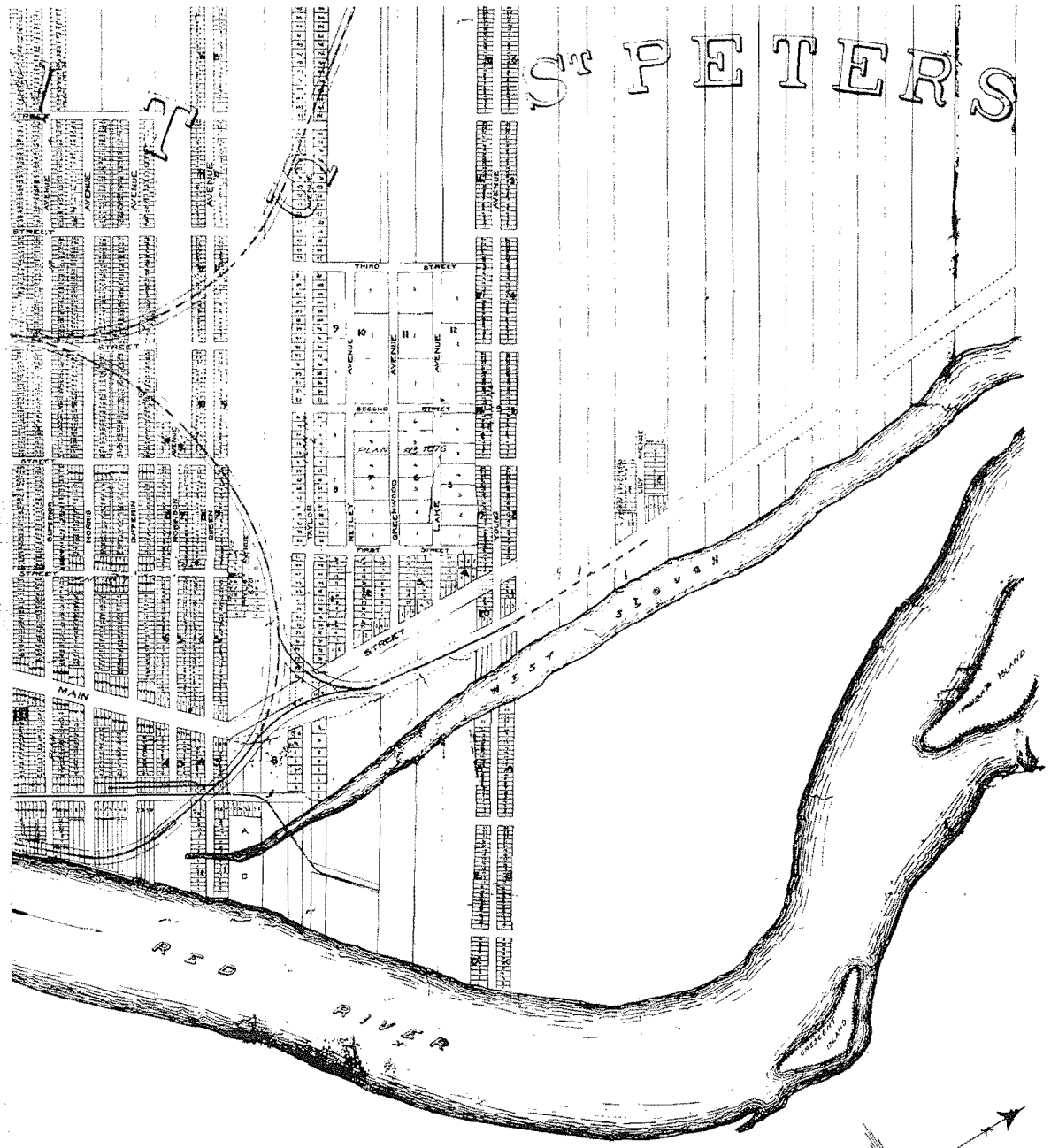
The W. S & L.W. brought a new spirit of confidence and optimism to Selkirk, just as the C.P.R. line had done decades before. It ended the isolation of the town, and took it out of the shadow of its frontier past. It broadened the townspeople's view of themselves and their community, allowing those with vision to plan a future of prosperity and stability. By 1910 Selkirk was poised on the brink of striking change, and local leaders rose to meet the challenge.



A steam locomotive used on the Winnipeg, Selkirk and Lake Winnipeg Electric Railway prior to electrification in 1907-8.
WESTERN CANADA PICTORIAL INDEX



Selkirk in 1912 RANDY POSTECKI



MAP

OF PART OF THE

OWN OF SELKIRK

IN THE

ROVINCE OF MANITOBA

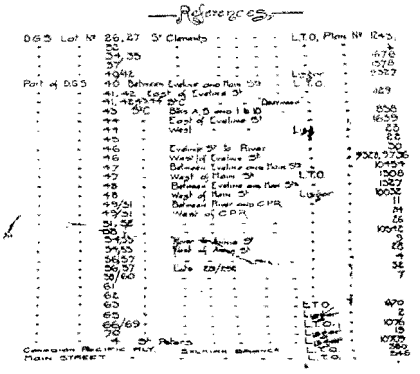
1912

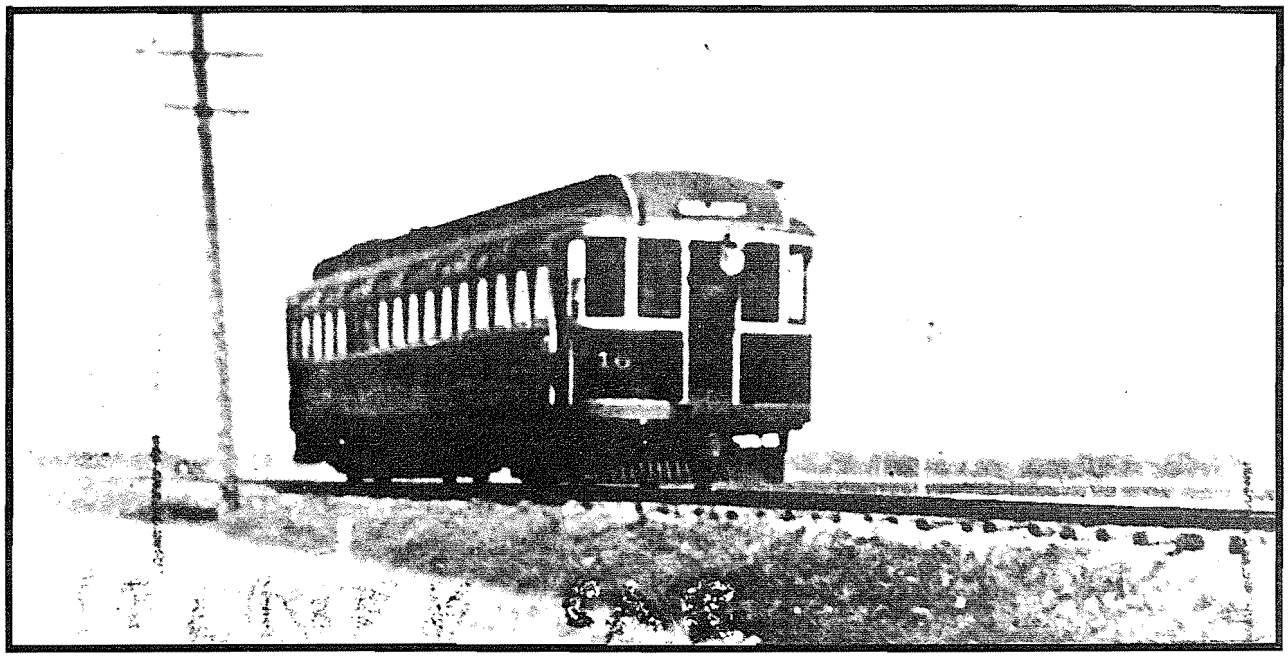
COMPILED BY A.S.PARTINGTON

STERED PLANS AND BASED ON THE SPECIAL SURVEY MADE IN 1895 BY

L.S.VAUCHAN, M.L.S.

SCALE 300 FEET = 1 INCH.





Passenger car of the Winnipeg, Selkirk and Lake Winnipeg Railway, 1918 MANITOBA ARCHIVES