CHAPTER FIVE

Bitter Lessons, 1929-1946

THE STOCK MARKET CRASH of October 29, 1929, went unnoticed in Selkirk, as it did in countless other towns. It happened on a Tuesday, and a very ordinary Tuesday at that. The men spent the day working down at the boatyard, on the docks, or at the mill; the women tidied their homes, did some shopping, and an odd one cleaned the stove pipes in anticipation of the coming winter months; the children were either at school or playing hooky down by the slough. Storekeepers routinely swept their patch of sidewalk, hotelkeepers polished their glasses, the waterman made his rounds through the older parts of town. Even those who scanned the business page of a Winnipeg newspaper were little alarmed by the financial chaos that was rocking Wall Street that day. It all seemed so remote. Shrewder local investors may have grasped that hard times lay ahead, but even they expected nothing more serious than the shortlived depressions of 1907, 1913, or the recent post-war years. When the *Weekly Record* finally published a story about the crash, more than a week later, it was in the form of a brief article clipped from another paper that chastised the foolish speculators who had been buying stocks on margin. No one in town had any idea of the decade of depression that was before them, a decade of sorrow and want that would be relieved only by the outbreak of another world war.

There had been no sign that such catastrophe was near. In fact, Selkirk seemed to be riding a new wave of prosperity. The C.P.R. had just finished a new brick station at Bradbury Junction, the Merchant's Hotel, Gibbs's drugstore and other businesses underwent extensive renovations and remodelling, commercial lots on Main Street were selling for as much as $12,000, and a Safeway store was taking shape. George Simpson erected a sawmill on Eveline to facilitate the manufacture of his wooden fish boxes and, not far away, a New York firm had purchased land between Manitoba and Superior for the erection of another fish plant. Over at the mental hospital, a new building was under construction on the north side, close to the newly-completed nurses' residence. The Board of Trade had almost convinced the Mitchell Grain company to put up a new elevator by the tracks, and rumours were circulating that the Manitoba Pulp and Paper Company would soon begin work on a pulp mill near town. Money abounded, and it seemed that the industrial boom that had been started by the Rolling Mills was gaining momentum.

The Soldiers' Pavilion of the Selkirk Mental Hospital during construction in 1930 WESTERN CANADA PICTORIAL INDEX

It was mid-1930 before the gloom began to take hold. Faced with declining markets and lower prices, the Rolling Mills and the fishing companies started to lay off men. Together with the mental hospital, these industries were the largest employers in Selkirk and their inevitable cutbacks were felt throughout the local economy. With hundreds out of work, merchants soon grew accustomed to only a handful of patrons each day instead of dozens as before. Window shoppers seemed plentiful enough, but paying customers were scarce. The bakeries suffered as women spurned convenience for the economy of their own ovens. Garage owners found they had automobile inventories they could not sell. Travelling salesmen, hawking everything from brushes to life insurance, became more numerous than ever before. The tourist trade dwindled. Nearly everyone was rediscovering the virtue (which fast became a necessity) of thrift, of doing without, until better times returned.

But better times did not return. By October of 1930 the town was receiving relief money from the federal Department of Public Works under the Unemployment Relief Scheme.[1] The federal government was responsible for 40 per cent of the cost of the relief programme, the province matched that amount, and the town was expected to contribute the other 20 per cent. Soon much of the work being done around town was paid for out of this fund. The unemployed registered down at the municipal office, and then waited until the chairman of the Board of Works called them for a job like gravelling the main streets or repairing the sidewalks. Direct relief was handled by the Police Committee of the town council, which made many people feel like criminals as they sought assistance. At first the committee members tried to dole out necessities on the strength of their personal knowledge of a family's circumstances, but

by the spring of 1931 so many needed aid that they were obliged to make a personal appearance before the entire town council to ask for help. At the height of the crisis, nearly 170 families were on the relief rolls.[2] Pride kept many more from seeking assistance.

As the depression deepened, Selkirk's crime rate began to climb. These petty break, enter and thefts revealed the plight of people as nothing else could. The new Safeway store was one of the first businesses to be robbed. One September night in 1930, the constable saw three persons leaving the darkened building. He gave chase and while one escaped, he apprehended the other two on McLean Avenue. In their possession, Constable Campbell found some cigarettes, a package of chocolate, one loaf of bread and a couple of cans of sardines.[3] The *Record* constantly reported poultry snatchings and thefts from clotheslines. Robberies at clothing stores like William Epstein's became increasingly common. All were reflections of the growing desperation of many people.

Those who were in a position to help the needy did so quite willingly. "We have observed," the newspaper editor wrote, "a larger sympathy on the part of the average person for their less fortunate fellow-citizens than has been noticeable for a long time. Fewer people are inclined to turn a deaf ear to stories of distress or appeals for help."[4] This sympathy took many forms. When, for example, the town council was considering the purchase of a tractor for street grading, one citizen appeared at the meeting to argue that local teamsters needed the work. The owner of the Central Theatre, 'the talky temple,' provided a free movie showing for all 300 children of the unemployed. The Unemployed Association of Selkirk, formed in 1932 at the Alexandra rink, started a fund to provide medicines to those on relief, as this necessity was not handled by the town council. The Rolling Mills tried, whenever possible, to give Selkirk residents the first chance at a job. Church groups, such as the Social Service Committee of Christ Church, held teas, bake sales and other events to raise money for boxes of groceries, clothing and other necessities for the needy. Other citizens, possessing more querulous natures, wrote letter after letter to the editor calling upon the town council to make every possible reduction in staff and salaries. Eventually a Ratepayers' and Citizens' Association was formed to guide the council down the path of civic economy.

These critics were not entirely fair to their councillors, who faced the unenviable task of juggling steadily increasing relief costs with rapidly declining revenues, while simultaneously meeting the annual interest payments on the town debt. At times their performance seemed almost miraculous, such as in 1933 when they managed to reduce the tax rate from 41 to 38½ mills despite the fact that relief expenses were five times their 1931 level.[5] Criticism notwithstanding, the councillors did attempt to pare civic expenses when they could. In 1932 the Finance Committee recommended reductions in the salaries paid all civic employees. Those earning over $100 per month lost ten per cent of their income, those earning between $75 and $100 lost five per cent, and everyone working for an hourly wage found their incomes reduced by an average of five cents per hour.[6] Even so, such salaries compared very favourably to those received by men in the boatyards, for example, where four dollars a day was good money. Economy was the watchword in other matters as well. In 1935, when it was decided that something had to be done about the dust on Main Street, the councillors rejected the notion of purchasing a water sprinkler in favour of securing free, used crankcase oil from the local garages and bulk oil plants to pour on the street.[7] They also tried to ensure that local people were employed in local jobs whenever possible. They approached the steel plants about this concern, and discovered that only about one-

quarter of their workers lived outside Selkirk. Of these, most were residents of East Selkirk and the rest came from Old England and Lockport. Enquiries at the mental hospital revealed equally gratifying news. Fully 60 per cent of the men working at the institution, and over 48 per cent of the women, were from Selkirk. Local people were, in fact, highly represented on all but the nursing and clerical staffs, suggesting that not enough qualified personnel were available locally for these positions.[8]

Even those townspeople fortunate enough to have good jobs seldom earned more than they needed to get by in the depression, and as a result entertainment took on a decidedly home-made, thrifty cast. People tended to visit much more than they had before, and card parties, quilting bees and listening to the radio shows became favourite evening pastimes. Hockey and baseball did not cost much to play, and skating and tobogganing parties were easily arranged down by the river. Excellent bob sleigh slides could be found by Knox Church, and with a good push it was possible to glide clear across the river and two-thirds of the way back.[9] After the rink was renovated in the early 1930s, curling gained many new fans. Those with theatrical aspirations formed a Dramatic Club in 1932, and turned out shows of such quality that in the following year they won the coveted *Free Press* shield for their production of Harold Brighouse's *Lonesome-Like*, judged the best amateur show in the province.[10] The Choral Society continually attracted new voices, and soon the *Record* reported that the Selkirk Music Festival was one of the most popular community events of the year. The children in town seemed content with inexpensive amusements like sledding, skating, shooting at birds with their home-made sling-shots, and rolling hoops down the streets. But they, too, had their fads, such as the great yo-yo craze of 1931.[11]

Many forms of entertainment were still reasonable in price, such as the weekly Saturday dance at the pavilion in Selkirk Park. This event attracted throngs of young people until the blast from an exploding gasoline tank levelled both the pavilion and the refreshment booth in 1936. Movies were cheap, and the Central Theatre was often packed for showings of Spencer Tracy and Bette Davis in *20,000 Years in Sing Sing*, or Jackie Cooper in *Divorce in the Family*. Even such forgettable films as *They Just Had to Get Married*, starring Slim Summerville and Zazu Pitts, attracted a fair number. If someone had a car and everyone else pitched in for some gas, a group of friends might run down the bumpy road to Winnipeg Beach for a day of swimming and riding the roller coaster and then stay on for the evening dance at the dance hall. Evening trips on the Moonlight Special from Winnipeg were always crowded, too. Those who stayed at Selkirk could frequent one of the three miniature golf courses that were built in 1930. Of these, Harry Moody's Riverview Golfette on Eveline was the most popular, perhaps because it had a fine archery range as well.[12] In 1931 the more professional golfers made arrangements with the town council for lease of 50 acres in Daerwood Park for a new course and provided another reasonable amusement. Just south of Moody's 'club', the town built a first-class bathing beach complete with diving tower and change houses. Then there were special attractions, like the aerial display sponsored by the Selkirk Hockey Club in 1932. More than 500 people came out to Hagaard's field to watch the tactical formations, stunt flying and parachute jumping. The braver citizens even took advantage of the free flights over town. Needless to say, each of these amusements was a form of relief in its own way.

Throughout the lean years people needed distractions to make them forget their troubles for a while, and Selkirk residents were more fortunate than most in this regard. For six years they were able to watch as a

The famous roller coaster at Winnipeg Beach
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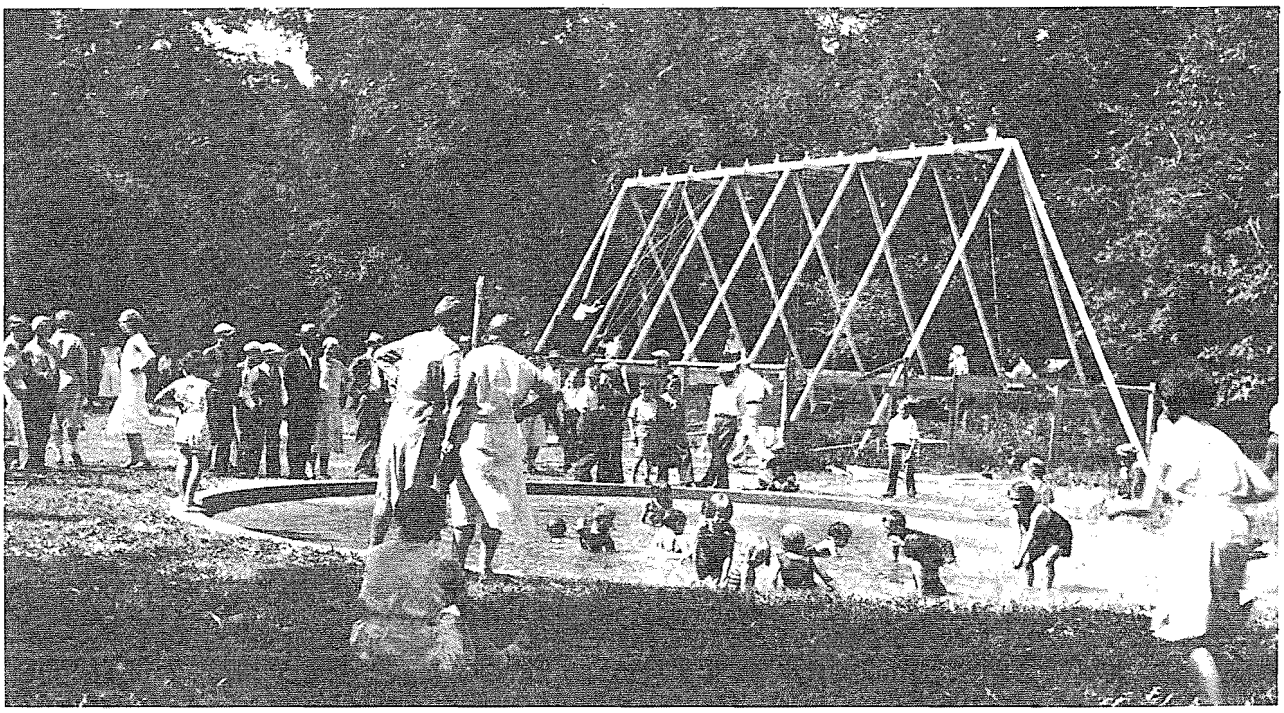
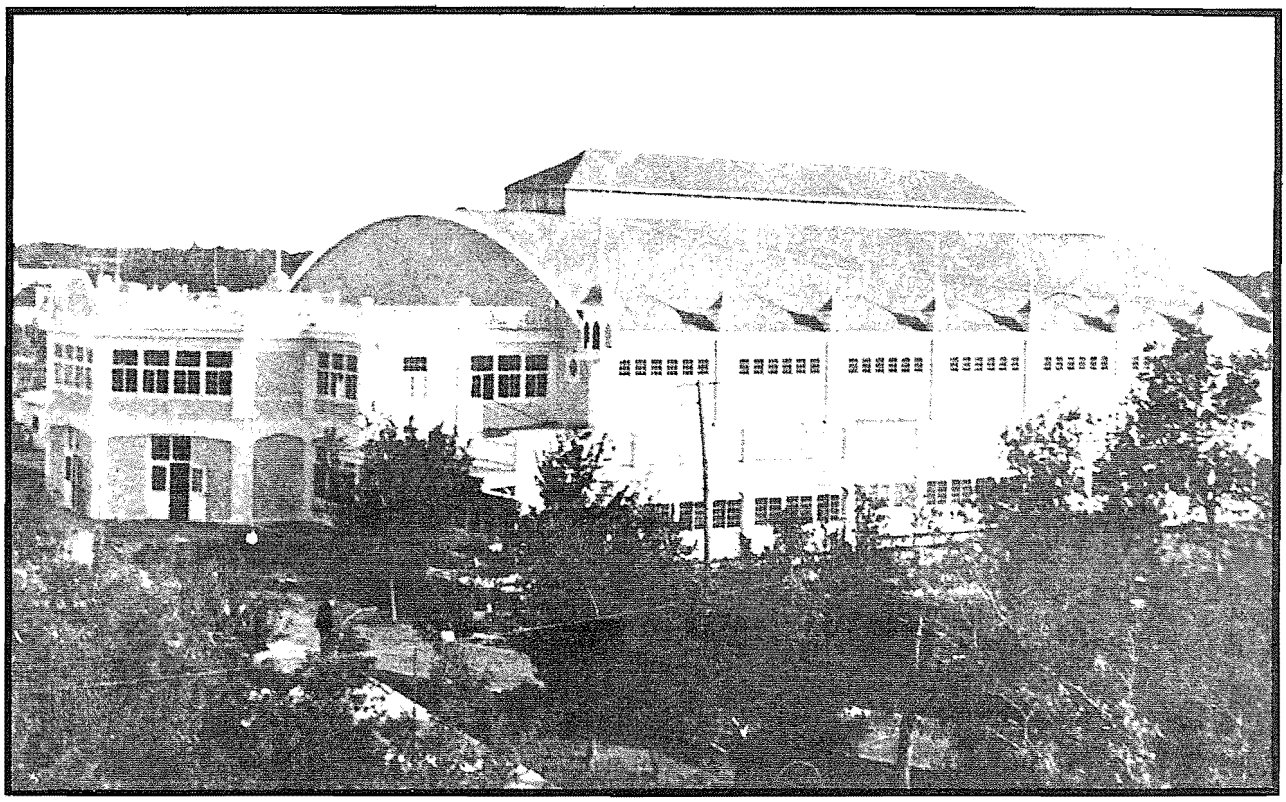


The children's playground in Selkirk Park, 1931
WESTERN CANADA PICTORIAL INDEX



The dance pavilion at Winnipeg Beach WESTERN CANADA PICTORIAL INDEX

bridge across the Red took shape amid endless political controversy and intrigue. The bridge held little significance to the youth of the town, who saw it as just another link in the modern road network that was developing around them daily. Many of their parents, able to recollect the promises of a bridge made during the 1911 federal election campaign, must have looked on with scepticism. But to the last pioneers of Selkirk, who had fought so hard for a railway bridge in 1879, seeing this new structure span the water was like a dream come true.

It was in 1931 that construction of the bridge first became a distinct possibility. There had been talk as early as 1927 about Canadian National Railways erecting a combined railway and automobile bridge at Selkirk as part of a new branch line, but the depression quashed these plans.[13] They were resurrected in a somewhat different form when, in 1930, a booster organization known as the Eastern Manitoba Development Bureau succeeded in having the Trans-Canada highway routed north of the Dawson Trail through Whitemouth and Beausejour. W. W. Childe, the Bureau's executive director, wasted little time contacting the Selkirk Board of Trade about the tourist trade potential of the highway. He pointed out that a connection between Ontario and Manitoba would soon be made, and that "if by that time there is not a good road connecting East Selkirk with the Trans-Canada Highway a little west of Garson, and a traffic bridge across the Red River into Selkirk, then Selkirk is going to lose out."[14] Selkirk businessmen had no difficulty grasping this impeccable logic and immediately vowed to participate in promotion of the scheme.

In August, Mayor J. J. Bell and M.L.A. James McLenaghen met with W. R. Clubb, the provincial Minister of Public Works, and asked for his co-operation in developing the bridge as a relief project. Clubb was enthusiastic, and preliminary plans were drawn up for construction of a traffic bridge at a cost of between $250,000 and $300,000.[15] It was anticipated that the federal government would contribute 50 per cent of the funding, the province would provide 30 per cent, and the town would give the remaining 20 per cent. As the municipalities of St. Andrews and St. Clements made it quite clear that they were not in a position to assist financially, Selkirk proposed to issue about $60,000 worth of debentures for a period of 20 years. During that time the bridge would collect tolls from everyone who used it, and those revenues would assist greatly in retiring the debt.

The project developed swiftly. The town officials called in engineers from the Dominion Bridge Company to provide advice on the best sort of structure and its cost. They recommended a bascule, or counterweighted liftspan, type of bridge and estimated its cost at $300,000.[16] A public meeting was called to discuss the bridge question, and "it was announced with some confidence that with an immediate start, the bridge could be completed in nine months."[17] The mayor repeated that this would be a toll bridge, and then added that the municipal council of St. Clements had, at a recent meeting, agreed to raise $10,000 for construction costs if Selkirk was able to raise its $60,000 share. This seemed likely, for the provincial government had already agreed to guarantee the town debentures. Events were moving at a frenzied pace because everyone realized that the success of the project depended on federal support, and no one knew how much longer the authorities in Ottawa would be interested in financing relief work such as this. No one could know, of course, that the depression had hardly begun. Nor could anyone have guessed that, just as the federal government approved the project, the Manitoba authorities would suddenly back out completely, claiming that there were insufficient relief funds with which to begin the bridge in

1931.[18] For the next three years, nothing more was heard about the Selkirk bridge.

As the troubled administration of Prime Minister R. B. Bennett approached the end of its term in office, the Selkirk bridge project was revived by an injection of relief funding into Manitoba in early 1934. "Quite a flutter of excitement was prevalent in Selkirk on Tuesday," the *Record* noted,

> when it was announced through the city papers that spring would see the start of several large undertakings in Manitoba by the Federal Government...the government intends to spend at least $4,600,000 in Manitoba and included in these projects was a bridge at Selkirk to cost approximately $250,000.[19]

In June, Bennett himself announced the government's intention to proceed with the bridge, and one month later Selkirk's Member of Parliament, Conservative J. H. Stitt, informed the town council that it had only to decide where to build the bridge and work would commence at once.

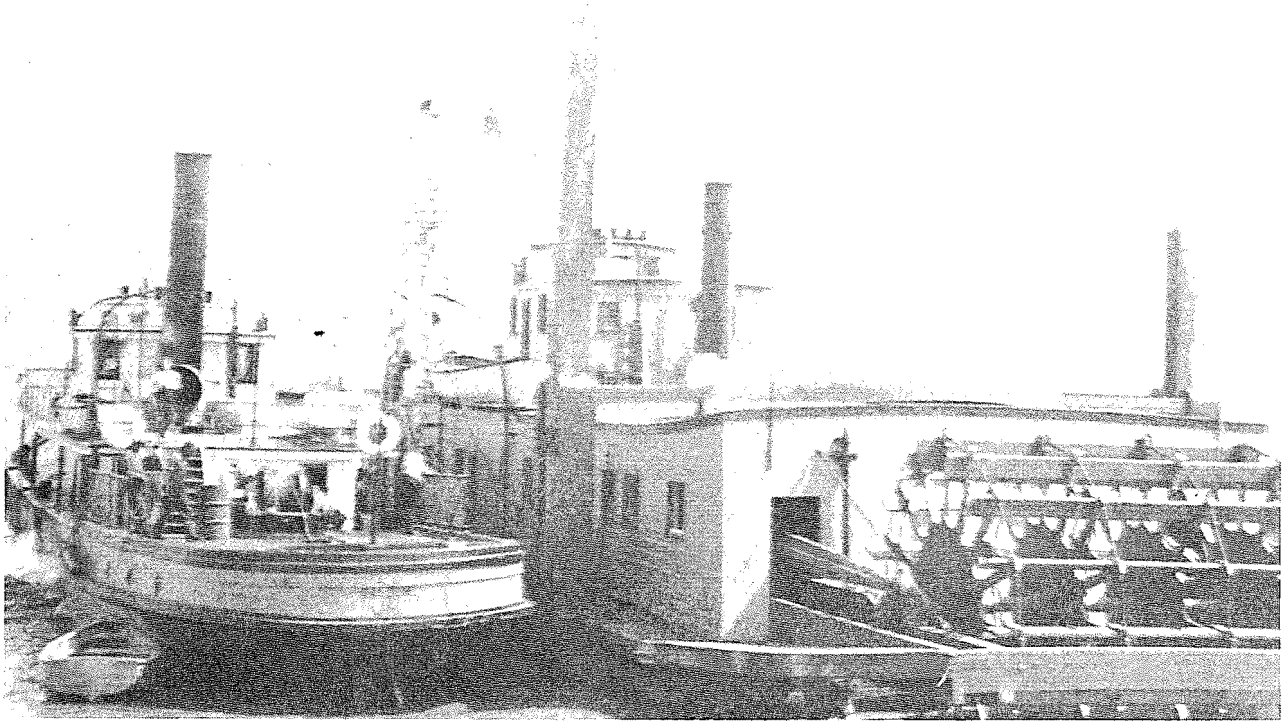
Three locations seemed feasible. The foot of Clandeboye Avenue, where James Colcleugh had landed over half a century before, was the choice of most Selkirk councillors, as a bridge at that point would direct all incoming traffic straight into the business district. The St. Clements council, which had to be consulted because of its financial commitment to the project, favoured a McLean Avenue approach. The federal engineers, however, were more favourably disposed toward the Eaton Avenue approach.[20] In their opinion, the Clandeboye site was too near the wharves on the waterfront, and the McLean Avenue approach was too close to the bend in the river, which might cause serious ice problems each spring, as well as being adjacent to power and telephone lines crossing the river. The Eaton Avenue location, on the other hand, was free of such problems. Test borings of the riverbed confirmed that the Eaton approach was practicable, the town donated land for such an approach, and a contract was let for construction of the bridge before the year was out.

From the beginning, it was understood the bridge was to be a relief project. In August of 1934 the federal authorities indicated that local tradesmen should be hired whenever possible, without regard to individual political affiliations. This action did much to diminish local concern about political patronage, a matter which was generating considerable controversy in the government boatyards,[21] and the local editor added that "if the majority of the labor is done by man power rather than using grading and other machinery, this would give employment to at least a large number of men who are now on the relief lists of the town."[22] But as early as November, 1934, complaints were pouring in about the hiring of a Winnipeg trucking firm to haul gravel from Birds Hill for construction of the bridge piers. In unison, the town council, the Board of Trade, the St. Clements council, the local Conservative Association, the Canadian Legion and concerned citizens telegrammed their disapproval to Ottawa. The work stopped almost immediately, and did not recommence until 50 local teams and 70 men could be found to do the job. This slowed construction somewhat, but at least the spirit of the agreement was honoured.

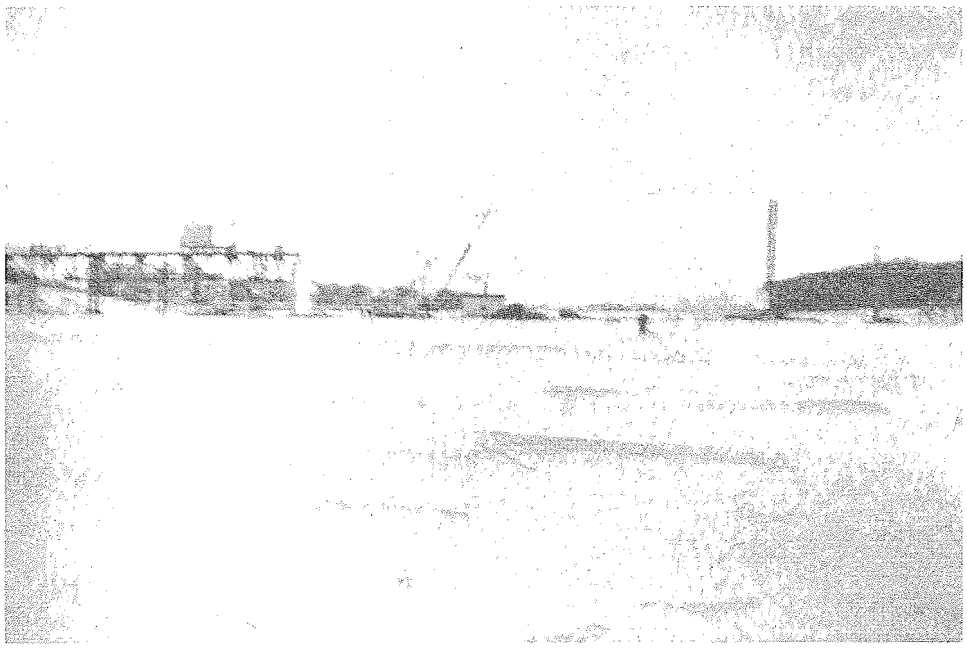
The work took most of the next two years. Because the contract was let late in 1934, little more than excavation work, pile driving and some pier construction was possible before the onset of winter.[23] During the following year the entire substructure was completed, and the townspeople enthusiastically compared the actual structure with a fine model that was on display at Gilhuly's drugstore on Eveline. In the autumn, the towers for the lift span were built. This was the central section of the bridge which could be electrically raised to a height of about 80 feet above summer water levels to allow large boats to pass underneath. By the spring of 1936 only one pier remained to be completed, and

steel could be laid to the middle of the river where final work was being done on the lift span itself. Painting, approach work and the completion of a four-foot sidewalk on the north side was finished in the summer.

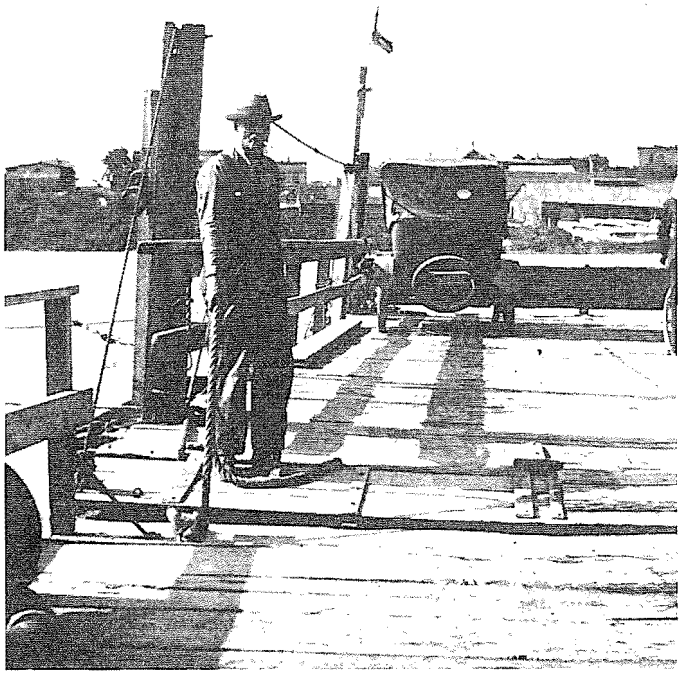
While this work approached completion, an acrimonious debate started among the three levels of government about responsibility for the cost of bridge maintenance. The federal government had, from the beginning, made it plain that it only paid for bridges of international or interprovincial stature.[24] Since



The tug Baldur, *built at the Selkirk boatyards in 1939, alongside an earlier paddlewheel dredge.*
WESTERN CANADA PICTORIAL INDEX



The Selkirk Bridge under construction in 1935 WILLIAM HALL



Otto Scramstad operating the Selkirk ferry in 1926
SCRAMSTAD COLLECTION

the Selkirk bridge had neither, it had to be built as a relief project in order to garner any federal funding. As late as the summer of 1935, Ottawa authorities informed W. R. Clubb that they assumed Manitoba would take over the bridge upon its completion. Clubb quickly replied that the province only paid the cost of upkeep on bridges joining provincial highways and that, as far as he was concerned, this was clearly an intermunicipal issue.[25] The town of Selkirk and the municipality of St. Clements were burdened with other relief expenses and could only plead poverty. As the bridge was nearing completion, it became imperative that something be done to resolve the impasse. In the spring of 1936 the federal government returned to the original bridge proposal and recommended that, in view of the positions of the three levels of government, a toll schedule be established to pay for part of the maintenance costs.[26] This recommendation, based on the town's own proposal of 1931, earned federal authorities the unremitting wrath of the townspeople.

Local reaction came swiftly. The town council declared the schedule prohibitive and said that if it were enforced, people would demand the return of the ferry.[27] The editor of the *Record* published the schedule and commented that "with a toll being collected at the bridge, Selkirk and district has gained nothing by having it built, but is practically in the same position, or worse, than before. Is it not time this town and district had a fair break?"[28] Another columnist said "it is hard to understand why they [federal authorities] are acting this way now that the bridge is nearing completion. Anyway, the time for bargaining was before the project was started ...it would appear that it might be well in order to transfer the bridge to Ottawa to repose with other costly relics. There is still a lot of service left in the ferry."[29] Other citizens affixed their signatures to petitions for a free bridge and fired these off to Ottawa as a demonstration of their unanimous indignation.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1936 the federal, provincial and local representatives met to resolve the impasse. By July it seemed that the parties had agreed to open the bridge toll-free as soon as all signed an

RECOMMENDED TOLL SCHEDULE, SELKIRK BRIDGE, 1936

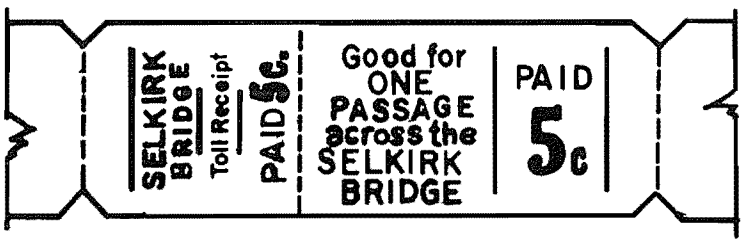
Foot passengers	— 5 cents
Passenger, auto & driver	— 25 cents
Passengers in vehicle	— 5 cents
Commercial Vehicles	
Up to 1 ton	— 25 cents
1-2 ton	— 35 cents
2-5 ton	— 45 cents
5 ton & over	— 55 cents
Motor buses & driver	— 50 cents
Motor bus passengers	— 5 cents
Motorcycle & driver	— 15 cents
One-horse vehicle	— 15 cents
Two-horse vehicle	— 35 cents
Livestock (per head)	— 10 cents

Source: PAC, RG 11, Volume 4396, File 1624-6-A.

agreement to split the cost of maintenance for an initial period of five years.[30] In the interim, the federal government suggested that the old ferry toll schedule be used to defray expenses, and it went so far as to pass an order-in-council to enforce these fares and printed toll tickets for the bridge. This was unacceptable to J. T. Thorson, the Member of Parliament who was acting on behalf of the municipalities. He stressed that "to impose tolls for the short period that would elapse pending the completion of an agreement would in my opinion be purely a source of irritation and resentment, and would serve no useful purpose whatever in view of the willingness of the Provincial Government and the Dominion Government to work out an agreement for contributions to the cost of operation and maintenance."[31] The townspeople agreed with Thorson. Any imposition of tolls would be self-defeating, especially in view of the fact that people could use the Lockport bridge toll-free.

Winter came and passed, and still no agreement was signed. The bridge was structurally completed, yet stood with the lift-span raised high in the air so that vehicular traffic was impossible. In December the *Record* reported that this albatross would soon be a boon to local sportsmen. "According to what is said, some man, of considerable means, had purchased our dear old white elephant...and proposes covering it and turning it into a bowling alley."[32] Another aggrieved citizen suggested planting shrubs and flowers for the creation of the town's own 'hanging gardens.' By spring breakup, when it was no longer possible to cross on the ice, mill workers from East Selkirk and other athletic 'passengers' could routinely be seen climbing over the span, bicycles clutched precariously in hand, to get to work. One determined farmer even managed to carry a calf across on his way to market. Viewing this situation with alarm, the Selkirk Board of Trade implored Ottawa to lower the lift-span to at least a safe level. The Minister of Public Works replied that while he sympathized, nothing could be done until a procrastinating W. R. Clubb felt ready to sign an agreement.

Finally, in late April, the federal government succeeded in having Clubb sign an agreement that turned all responsibility for the bridge over to the provincial authorities in exchange for a lump sum payment of $6000 from Ottawa.[34] But one thoroughly disgruntled citizen by the name of Ed Maloney, who knew nothing of these negotiations, took matters into his own hands and lowered the lift-span by means of the manual crank.



Blueprint of the toll tickets printed by the federal government in 1936 for use on the Selkirk Bridge. The tickets were never used. PUBLIC ARCHIVES CANADA

For one glorious afternoon traffic poured across the bridge. When officials of the Dominion Bridge Company learned of this, they arrived to return the lift-span to its former elevated position, only to find a group of townspeople blockading the bridgehead. Despite this protest, the lift-span was raised. Telegrams again flooded into Ottawa, and the company men were ordered to return the span to a safe level that still prevented auto crossings.

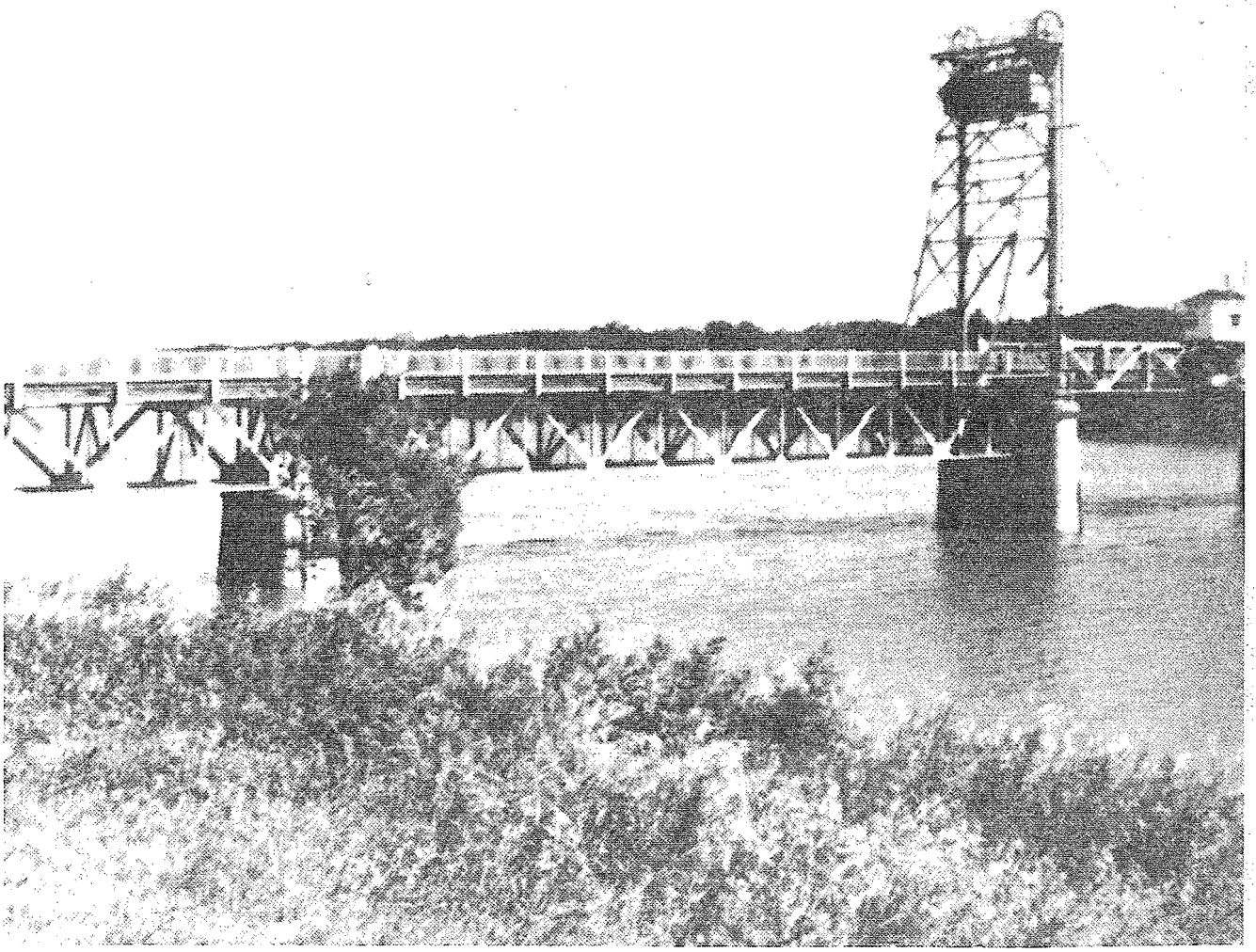
Two days later, the government officials came to open the bridge themselves. They arrived at mid-morning to no fanfare whatsoever, met with some town councillors and the town engineer, tested the span and finally opened the bridge to traffic. The engineer ran a town truck across for the sake of formality. Then the government officials unceremoniously handed the keys to the electrical switch-box to the town representatives and returned to the city. The whole affair took two hours, and was appreciated by no one. What little reverie there was centred around the true hero of Selkirk's battle of the bridge, Edward Maloney. As one local bard wrote, some twenty years later,

> With weeping and with laughter,
> Still will the tale be told
> How Ed Maloney lowered the bridge,
> In the brave days of old.[35]

The building of the bridge emphasized the importance that motorized transportation now had in the daily lives of the townspeople. Signs of this change were everywhere. Automobile garages and gas pumps had taken the place of the livery stables and hitching rails around town. The prosperous years of the 1920s had filled Selkirk with automobiles and by 1926 one out of every three farmers in the district owned a car.[36] Naturally, the town council became concerned with the quality of streets and incoming roads. Main Street, which was made a provincial highway in 1930, was hard-surfaced from the town's southern limit to the corner of Manitoba Avenue in 1936. A short time later, the merchants on Eveline and Manitoba petitioned the council to pave their streets to keep down the dust and to "provide an incentive for many to visit our business section and stop and shop."[37] In the spring of 1938 work began on the Selkirk Oil Refinery, just north of the C.P.R. spur line, and it was soon producing gasoline, diesel and furnace fuel and distillate. During the next year the council succeeded in having the beach highway re-routed down Manitoba Avenue west to the new highway linking Selkirk with Clandeboye. This encouraged travellers from Winnipeg to the beaches to pass directly through town, and boosted the fortunes of many businesses.

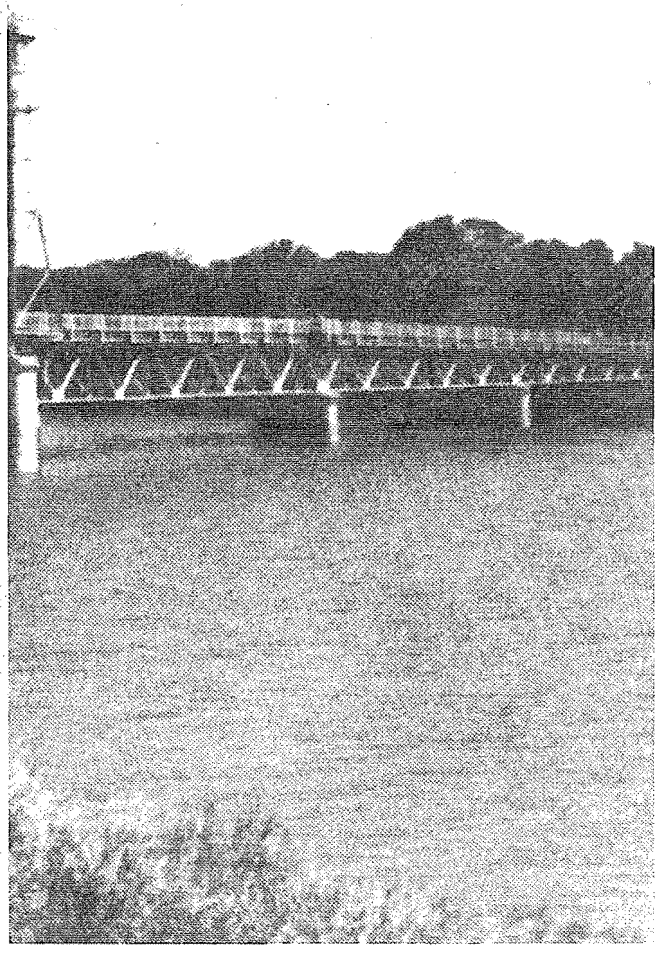
Perhaps the most telling sign of the automobile's new importance was the demise of the Winnipeg, Selkirk and Lake Winnipeg railway. The decline of passenger and freight traffic and the increasingly unmanageable burden of the depression forced the company directors to seek exemption from taxation in 1932. The town seemed divided on this issue. While the Board of Trade supported the company's plea for assistance, the more representative Ratepayers' and Citizens' Association was strongly against such a concession. When the Selkirk town council finally did act, in conjunction with the municipality of St. Andrews, it merely requested the provincial government to provide additional funding for maintenance of the highway between Selkirk and Winnipeg.[38] Over the next few years the quality of service and the condition of the railway slowly deteriorated. In 1937 the W. S & L.W. started daily bus service between the two centres,thereby confirming its own obsolescence. Not even the outbreak of war in 1939 could have rescued this outmoded transportation system.

To the townspeople, on the other hand, the start of the war signalled the gradual return of prosperity after the long drought of depression. Being an industrial town, Selkirk benefitted more than most prairie centres from



Selkirk Bridge, n.d.

the new demand for munitions and war materiel. The Canadian Industries Limited explosives factory (Brainerd Plant), which had been constructed at East Selkirk in 1934 to serve the mining districts of northern Manitoba and northwestern Ontario, found a new market for its deadly products. The Manitoba Rolling Mills increased production and began to manufacture shell casings.[39] The foundry diversified into casting Valentine tank tracks, gun mounts, asdic domes and other submarine detection components.[40] The demand for clothing enabled Fairfield's woolen mill to double its capacity with the addition of a new factory and equipment, and in 1944 a Winnipeg firm, Monarch Overall Company, opened a Selkirk plant in the former Odd Fellows Hall at Main and Manitoba. This growth did much to diminish the relief rolls.



MANITOBA ARCHIVES

This war did not strike with the awful suddenness of the Great War. In 1939 Canadian participation on the battle front was still two years away, yet the people of Selkirk responded to the struggle as though it were happening just outside their doors. The Selkirk local of the Army and Navy Veterans' Association immediately organized for active service. The local platoon of the 106th Infantry Reserve Company swelled to full strength by September of 1940.[41] Members of the Red River Rifle Association formed the Manitoba Volunteer Reserve to serve as special constables if required, and trained under the direction of veterans like Matt Bennett, who had seen action in the Boer War, the Natal Uprising of 1906, and the Great War.[42] Before long, Selkirk had a local war savings campaign organized, a salvage corps overseeing the collection and sale of scrap materials, and an entirely new spirit of thriftiness created by the universal distribution of coupons and ration cards. When the unexpected bombing of Pearl Harbor took place in late 1941, the townspeople organized for a morale-boosting trial blackout, complete with the sounds

of airplanes, bren gun carriers and exploding bombs.

Local concern about Japanese participation in the war took on new meaning in 1942, when the British Columbia Securities Commission was instructed to relocate about 23,000 Japanese nationals inland from the sensitive coastal region. In the spring some 1100 Japanese found themselves in Manitoba, where they were to work in the sugar beet fields of the south and in essential industries at and around Winnipeg. Of these, perhaps two or three per cent were situated at East Selkirk, Selkirk and in the Lockport and Little Britain areas.[44] Despite the small number of people involved, the Selkirk Board of Trade and the municipal councils of St. Andrews and St. Clements vehemently protested their placement. Representatives of the Fairfield Woolen Mills, the Manitoba Rolling Mills, Manitoba Steel Foundries and C.I.L. added their voices to these demands for removal of the Japanese.[45] The fear of sabotage reigned throughout the area.[46] The protesters did succeed in moving the Lockport Japanese, but in 1945 there were still 12 at East Selkirk and 19 in town.[47]

As in the Great War, enlistment of Selkirk men took place rapidly. For brief periods these recruits trained with their units in Canada, and then shipped out to distant parts of the globe. Some saw little action, like those with the Royal Rifles and the Winnipeg Grenadiers, who arrived in Hong Kong just a month before the island fell to the Japanese on Christmas Day, 1941. Many soldiers spent years in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, which did nothing to lessen the anti-Japanese sentiments around Selkirk. Other soldiers waited restlessly in Great Britain, eager to join the real action on the continent. Those serving with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders got their chance on August 19th, 1942, when they took part in the ill-fated commando assault on the town of Dieppe, which resulted in nearly 3,400 Canadian casualties. Although it was later said that the Cameron Highlanders had penetrated farther inland than any other battalion on that horrible day, this was little consolation to the families of the five Selkirk boys who did not return.[48] By the end of the war, 76 more local boys would be dead.[49]

As the conflict ceased, the townspeople braced for the post-war depression they felt certain would come. Memories of the financial collapse that followed the Great War were still fresh, and there were those who had blamed the Depression on the First World War. Yet the expected fiasco never arrived. Instead, the economy began a sharp upswing and the expectations of the townspeople soared. Unlike many prairie towns, Selkirk actually gained residents during the depression years, moving from 4,486 people in 1931 to 4,915 by 1941.[50] By the end of the war the population had topped 5,400. This growth occurred just as the town emerged from under the cloud of debt that had so long cast a shadow over its affairs. For the first time in decades there were sufficient funds to undertake needed civic improvements. At the same time housing starts leaped in number. Automobile garages boomed. Returning soldiers opened a variety of new stores. The mechanization of local farms spawned many new implement dealerships in town, and soon a 22,000 bushel grain elevator opened to service the farmers. The town even acquired a new newspaper as the *Record* and the *Journal* amalgamated in 1946 to form the Selkirk *Enterprise*. Its very name symbolized the type of change the townspeople were now looking forward to, and the new editor, G. C. Kroft, wasted little time in announcing that "today we realize that we are at the threshold of a new day in Selkirk. In the very near future, changes must occur which will make this town and district occupy a much different position in the province."[51]