

Saints and Sinners: the story of Selkirk's founding in two city blocks

A walk along Eaton and McLean Avenues will reveal much about the early years of Selkirk and the intrepid (and the not so intrepid) “fathers” of this community.

1. Selkirk’s Civic Offices

The Crest of Selkirk located in front of the Civic Offices reveals the date of Selkirk’s incorporation (1882) but not its founding (1875) nor the early struggles for its survival! Using a bit of “tongue in cheek” hyperbole we can classify the founders of our town based on their contribution to the preservation and maintenance of the town. We can say that some of our founders were “saints” and others by comparison were “Sinners”.

In an era of polarized politics, lies promoted as truths in order to sell soap or candidates for office a Saints and Sinners walk may just be the humorous antidote to cynicism about today’s society.

By crossing Eveline to Queen’s Park, one can view the Red River and this “Blue” bridge

2. The Selkirk Bridge - a bridge too late!

Many Selkirk residents know that a bridge played a part in the beginnings of this city, but few know the real background of the birth of this community and why the Red River crossing changed the history of this whole region.

Perhaps no feature of modern Selkirk so exemplifies the confusion of hopes and dreams of its people than the Blue Bridge! Even the core values of its Scottish founders and the habits that create economic success are demonstrated by this rust covered structure. This bridge was simply a bridge too late!



The Red River posed a unique barrier to westward expansion of the Railway system . This river running north and south not only stopped prairie fires and buffalo herds from passing east and west, it also halted railway engines!

A crossing of the Red River had to be made ...and to do that a bridge was required..

As early as 1872, the conglomerate had designated “Selkirk” as the “Crossing”. According to Chief Engineer, (Sir) Sanford Fleming, the location was ideal for a bridge (our first “Saint”) because he recognized the advantages that nature had bestowed on the site.

Unlike the swampy village of Winnipeg 25 miles south, this site was immune from severe flooding . It was also a few miles below the impassable St Andrews Rapids. It had a protected, deep, mile-long inlet that was perfect for a port that would be the key to Lake Winnipeg and Saskatchewan River navigation.

To a visionary like Sanford Fleming any spot that linked the potential of cheap water transportation to the new “high speed” railway system was going to be an important centre in the development of the North-West Territories.. Selkirk, on whichever side of the river it turned out to be, was going to be a transportation , economic and perhaps, even a political centre.

For the founders and investors in the new town of Selkirk (for which they registered a site plan), these advantages meant that the railway company would be building a bridge at the “Crossing” in very short order, (making them fabulously wealthy).

Some of the most prominent men in the new province (Bannatyne, Schultz, Bedson) bought up every available inch of land on the west side of the river from Lower Fort Garry to Netley Creek.

Smaller scale investors like Selkirk founders such as the Colcleughs, (James and Frederick William), John Sifton, W H Eaton, and the Gibbs family were “connected” to the Liberal government in Ottawa. Since they also had support from the most influential entrepreneurs in Manitoba believed their position as the “Crossing” was unassailable.

Their faith in their political and geographical advantages meant that they did not have to get into a bidding war with interlopers. Their innate thriftiness and honesty (ie Scots Presbyterian background) would not let them waste money on such crooked things as bribes or debt to build a bridge and then give it to the CPR. If the Liberals under Alexander Mackenzie had only won the federal election of 1878, then their dream of becoming the “gateway to the West” would likely have been achieved.

The planners of the railway were also mostly either Scottish (like John A Macdonald and Sandford Fleming) and nothing bothered them more than the cost of building bridges especially it was possible to get them for free!

If only God had been on Selkirk’s side! If only there had been more saints than sinners in this picture! If only on Sundays, the town fathers had prayed a bit more loudly, more sincerely and perhaps more often , then Selkirk would have become the centre of Manitoba and the whole North-West!

The narrow return of John A. Macdonald and his Tories to office changed everything in 1878! The “underhanded” and “under the table” donations (by the merchants of Winnipeg) of the Louise Bridge, of tax-free land in Point Douglas and a cash gift of \$200,000 caused the new railway to magically shift its course south to Winnipeg. This makes all the merchants of Winnipeg and by extension, all Winnipeggers “sinners” (using our stated criterion). Winnipeg capitalists had reached to the north and strangled its fledgling brother in its cradle and snatched away its birthright!

Selkirk’s bright prospects as the “new Chicago” were dashed! Land prices collapsed. Businesses closed as half of the 400 inhabitants left town almost overnight.

Selkirk could have become a ghost town (like many others on the frontier) had it not been for the determination of **James Colcleugh**. He had lost his shirt in the crash and instead of becoming a tycoon, he took on the job of captaining a tugboat to haul rafts of timber to the now “booming” Winnipeg. He repaid all of his debtors and came up with an idea!

James Colcleugh proposed to get a branch line even if he had to build it himself (which he almost did!). The town had to incorporate to issue bonds to pay the “bonus” demanded by the CPR. (The Scots of Selkirk had finally learned the lesson that John A had taught them, one needed to “ grease” the wheels of progress).

(**John A** and his cronies, including the Tory MP for Lisgar (that included Selkirk), **John Christian Schultz** were definitely “Sinners” because they almost killed the town before it could be born) .

The CPR “saint” who gave permission for the town to receive one of the rare branch lines was **Thomas Lafayette Rosser**. Just a few months later, Rosser was fired for taking bribes, however Selkirk town council named a street after him (just as the new town of Brandon did...and for the same reason!)

Unfortunately, the cautious Scottish descendants who made up the town council made sure that the debt incurred by that branch played a part in every public decision made about spending for the next thirty years and consequently important public works like a sewerage system, a safe water supply, a hospital, fire-fighting equipment and naturally - a bridge- were too expensive to contemplate.

Selkirk had no money left for the construction of a bridge across the river. A cable ferry carried wagons, passengers and livestock across the river. Let the users pay for the service because town had no money!

It took the collapse of the national economy 50 years later to even contemplate the building of a Selkirk bridge. During the Great Depression, the dream of a bridge was revived as people looked for work on infrastructure that would enhance motor tourism and economic growth.

3. The Eaton Building - 369 Eveline Street



Eaton Avenue was named for W.H. Eaton, a member of merchandising empire family. He was a stalwart booster of the town. Even when the land values crashed in 1879, he stayed and opened a substantial general store. Eaton was a town councillor for twenty years, a founder and sponsor of the second oldest agricultural fair in the province (1878) and a proponent of the electricity company and other local improvements.

W.H. Eaton's modest brick general store just north of the bridge at **369 Eveline** has withstood fire and flood to take on new identities as times changed.

4. The Old City Hall site at the corner of Eaton and Eveline

Selkirk's original town hall was constructed in the 1880's. It housed the council chambers, magistrate's court, a jail cell and offices of town officials.

The wooden structure resembling a schoolhouse was nominally the administrative centre of town. Council meetings were often raucous. Small wonder when one considers its beginnings:

In its first election for mayor, James Colcleugh he was opposed by his cousin and business partner F W Colcleugh! The issue was mainly ethics, as straight-laced FW took on his morally "flexible" and creative cousin, James. When James won, F W promised he would never again speak to or share the same room as his cousin. F W was a man of his word, so the administration of Selkirk was off to a roaring start!

Mayors came and went rather quickly in those days as a one year term seemed quite normal. Thomas Sinclair succeeded the feuding Colcleughs, but lasted only a year before he died - the council meetings must have worn him out!

Fortunately, there were capable managers assisting council during tough times. Thomas Partington was town clerk for 25 years. His minute recounting of daily

mischief and minor problems that reached council gives the researcher a clearer picture of life in a frontier community. Partington's tabulating of the numerous depredations of wandering cattle into gardens and their devouring of the newly planted shade trees along Eveline are a treat to read. The local newspaper editor opined that Selkirk was little more than a "community pasture" and an "experimental weedlot".

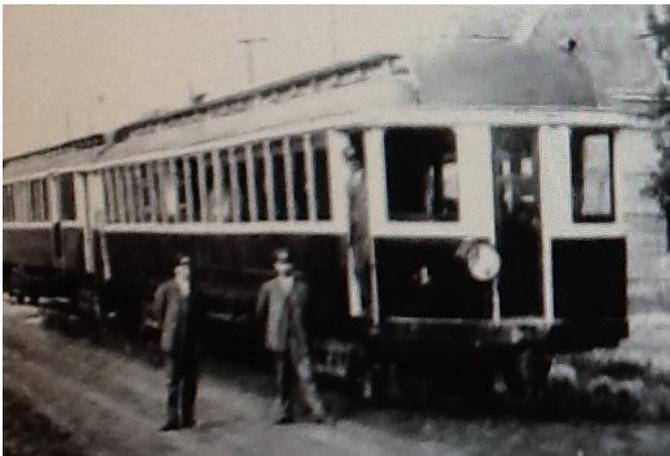
One very able manager for the town was Thomas Bunn, the son of the builder of the Bunn House in St Clements and author of the English version of Louis Riel's Bill of Rights.

Bunn suggested to provincial and federal politicians the Selkirk bridge project that would improve transportation between the east and west sides of the river and bring more people into the region. For once, the political and economic stars aligned in the sky and the project was begun in 1933. The accord broke down soon after amid accusations of favouring outsiders for jobs and contracts, cost overruns and delays.

Though the bridge was completed in 1936 the lift bridge sat for months with the centre span raised as governments debated who would pay for maintenance. Finally, as ice swept under the span in the spring flood of 1937, Ed Maloney, a frustrated citizen, climbed the girders and, by hand, lowered the lift into level position.

People and vehicles poured across. A few days later, an official opening was held, photos were taken and the bridge has been part of the fabric of East and West Selkirk ever since. Toll tickets that had been printed, were never used after the public rebelled in this act of civil disobedience!

4. The Electric Street Railway - Eveline Street



In the early 1900's, the Eaton store became the main ticket and freight office for the **Winnipeg, Selkirk and Lake Winnipeg Street Railway**. The company name indicates that from this line starting in Winnipeg, with a transfer at the Selkirk docks, one had all of Lake Winnipeg at one's disposal.

By 1910, Selkirk was becoming a significant regional centre with more than 2200 inhabitants. In that era of horse and buggies, many roadways were of limited use during wet or snowy conditions. Rail travel overcame many of these issues. With increased population and traffic along its busy streets, a streetcar system connected to Winnipeg made economic sense.

The streetcar left Selkirk and returned 7 times a day along a track that ran the length of Eveline and then shifted over (along Heap Avenue) to the King's Road (another old ox-cart trail) over a bumpy road bed all the way to Luxton Avenue in Winnipeg.

When the streetcar service was replaced by buses in 1937, the old Eaton building became the ticket office for the bus company. The Eaton building stands, much altered, already re-purposed to last another hundred years.

The street railway made Eveline not only a commercial street, but a desirable residential address. The town began to expand southward along this "rapid transit corridor" onto new streets to the west and south. Streets honoured mayors and significant citizens of the era (Eaton, Vaughan, Sinclair, McLean, Reid, Tait, Sutherland and Grain)

Tourism began to play a role in the local economy every summer, as hundreds of Winnipeggers took advantage of the rapid, cheap service. They jammed the streetcars to get to Selkirk Park for picnicking, sailing, rowing and sports.

5. Christie Avenue - a missing house on a sealed up street

Though this avenue has been reduced to being a parking lot between Eveline and Main it had a role in the founding of the town and 28 years later was the site of Selkirk's first fire hall.

- **The old Fire Hall site** - Eveline and Christie Avenue



Selkirk's first fire department (1904) had its station and stables on Christie behind the town hall.

The volunteer brigade was a response to the destruction that fire had caused the downtown of Selkirk in 1896, 98 and 1904. The first fire chief was FW Colcleugh, the MLA for Selkirk. FW was a real and very straight-laced "Saint"!

James Colcleugh, the man contracted to erect the telegraph line between Rat Portage (Kenora) to the Red River crossing. put the telegraph line across the Red in April, 1875 (near Sugar Point - today's Selkirk Golf Course), he looked for a site for a telegraph office. None of the series of tiny thatched cabins on the river trail were appropriate except for the abandoned stone house of HBC Chief Factor Alexander Christie.

Christie was the man who had overseen the building of both Upper and Lower Fort Garry. He had retired to Scotland where he had died in 1872 - so his house was empty. That property was here 140 years ago. It became the first telegraph office once the town was established.

What Colcleugh gained by walking the trails around the new telegraph site was the awareness that all of the lots nearby were occupied by scrip-holding “squatters” (Metis descendants of Hudson’s Bay Company employees).

Greed now changes our erstwhile “Founder of Selkirk” from “Saint” into a “Sinner”!

Colcleugh knew also that scrip was a cheap commodity and that the land at “the crossing” would be worth a goldmine when the railway came (it usually paralleled the telegraph line).

James Colcleugh bought as much cheap land as he could! He also moved here and became the “Father of Selkirk” (and by 1882, its first mayor!)

In 1877, he invited his cousin, Frederick William Colcleugh (F.W.), who had studied law in Ontario, to be his business partner in a general store in Selkirk.. F.W. became Selkirk’s second mayor and later its Member in the legislature.



James Colcleugh, (1880)
(1890)



F.W. Colcleugh

6. “Church Street”

The first block of **McLean Avenue** from Eveline to Main has long been referred to as “church” street. As well as Knox Presbyterian (1876), McLean Avenue boasts Selkirk’s oldest Anglican congregation (1887) at (the recently rebuilt) Christ Church Anglican, and its oldest Methodist assembly (1895) at (the newly renovated) Selkirk United Church.

Why so many churches? Perhaps there was just so much sinning going on in the rest of town, that churches were really necessary!

Archdeacon Crowley of St Peters , writing back to the Christian Missionary Society in 1877, expressed his fears about the people of Selkirk “ I hear lamentable accounts of the moral state of the people at Selkirk.”

Crowley was ringing alarms about the moral dangers of a frontier” boom” town where, wine, women and song were all on the menu at the temporary inns and hotels. At that time, men outnumbered women by a 4:1 ratio - a virtual devil’s playground!

To the north of McLean Avenue a few blocks was the Selkirk Waterfront. The focus of the town’s economic activity for a hundred years was the arrival and departure of goods,

people and resources on Selkirk's wharves aboard a vast array of steamboats, tugs, sail boats, York boats and canoes.

It was also a ramshackle collection of tents, sheds and warehouses.

Among them were "inns" and "booze pigs"; places where cheap whiskey and access to ladies of easy virtue were available to the lumbermen, railway workers and fishers. Selkirk's waterfront from the 1880's onward was a beehive of activity, much of which was quite "sinful"!

The permanent residents of the town built their community through their churches. At least for one day a week the churches ignored the fact that some of their leading citizens were heavily involved in making and selling illegal whiskey and in exploiting men's baser instincts in order to make fortunes. Eg the builder of the first Merchants Hotel in 1877 was none other than the MP John Christian Schultz. The prominent local merchant Robert Bullock sold booze to anyone with money and broke the law daily by selling to aboriginals especially on "treaty days".

The tolerance for illegal alcohol and "red light" activities was demonstrated firmly in 1908, when the town constable requested that council to provide him with a paddy wagon with which to haul drunken brawlers off to the town jail. The councilors (some of whom were providing the alcohol fuelling the brawls and mischief), balked at the price but awarded their embattled law enforcer with a smaller vehicle - a wheelbarrow!

Due to the influence of the church-goers on McLean, Selkirk became a "dry" town during the early years. Several town elections were fought on whether Selkirk should have emporiums of alcohol or not. Though hotels were prevented from selling liquor openly, bootleggers continued to do big business. There was a steady flow of alcohol across the river on the cable ferry!

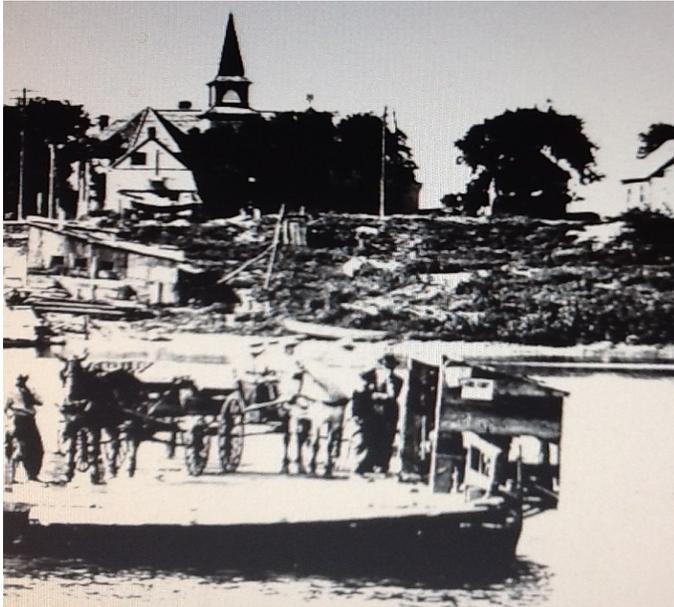
The incidence of drunkenness declined very little despite the earnest "morality campaigns" from the various pulpits. When World War 1 began, a bar was even set up in the lower level of the Carnegie Library as a booster of morale for the troops (who were being trained a mile south of town at Red Feather Farms). The bar was shut down after one young soldier actually froze to death in a snow bank trying to get back to camp after a sojourn at the library.

7. Knox Presbyterian Church

At McLean Avenue stands one of the architectural treasures of Selkirk, Knox Presbyterian Church which celebrated its 140th anniversary in 2016.

This fine neo-gothic church (1904) replaced a smaller wooden building dating from 1876. An addition from the 1920's and fine original stained glass windows (and two modern ones by Manitoba artist, Leo Mol) complete the church we see today.

This impressive brick structure speaks of the wealth and power of this congregation in the early days of Selkirk. The spire became a useful landmark in stormy weather for the ferrymen who landed their passengers at the landing on the bank opposite the church.



8. Selkirk Ferry Landing- across the street from Knox

The ramp opposite Knox Church leads down to the place where the old Selkirk Cable Ferry docked. The ferry was the only way to cross the Red River during the ice-free seasons from the 1880's to 1937. The ferry was a barge that accommodated passengers, livestock, wagons and autos.

The earliest cable ferry was powered by an ox on a winch, by river current and, according to some irate passengers, by the "captain's" non-stop swearing. So "blue" was the language, that church-goers on a Sunday had to cover their children's ears.

"Commodore" Holgate was probably not a "Saint" though he sacrificed much for the town, His son's name is one of those on Selkirk's war Memorial for WW1 fatalities.

The Ferryman could be hailed from the opposite shore by lantern or by shouting. Though passage cost just a few cents, the weather, the current, and the sharing of the barge with assorted vehicles and animals always made the 10 minute trip interesting (and a bit risky).

9. Selkirk United Church opposite Knox Church on McLean Avenue

The Wesleyan Methodists were late arrivals in Selkirk (1895) yet claimed many supporters in the town.

Part of the appeal of Methodism was its hands-on approach to society - whereas other Protestant sects put their emphasis on improving individual moral behavior, Methodists were street-based activists. They not only condemned drunkenness and prostitution, they conducted investigations into the causes and remedies for social ills such as poverty, family discord and violence.

Methodist preacher, J.S. Woodsworth conducted door to door surveys in the slums of Winnipeg and reported on the conditions he found there and then opened missions to help feed and counsel impoverished newcomers and exploited women.

In one rooming house, quite similar to those that at one time existed near Selkirk's docks, there were 25 people living in a space meant for 7. And "in one four-roomed house, a family kept 6 lodgers, and a flock of chickens in the kitchen"

As in Selkirk, outdoor privies were standard and residents were permitted to keep one cow per family. "When it rained the whole area became a sea of mud and manure"

For the Methodists, it was a pillar of their religion to change society for the better by taking on the institutions and attitudes that permitted moral decay. The appeal of this activism led to many conversions among the more established Protestant churches. It also led to Selkirk adopting Prohibition !

In 1926, the Methodist church merged with the Congregationalists and some of the Presbyterians to form the United Church of Canada. At that point, about half of Knox's members crossed the street to join the United Church.

One of the outstanding clerics to guide the Selkirk Methodists was Chancellor Teeter. He arrived in Selkirk in 1912 after spreading the gospel for 30 years across Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Until his death in 1942, both he and his family were pivotal influences in the thinking and mores of this community.

He was highly regarded across the province. For 18 years, he wrote a religious advice column in the Winnipeg Free Press. One of his daughters directed the Sunday school program for 40 years and led countless charity drives and good works in the community. Both would qualify as "Saints".

10. Christ Church Anglican

Christ Church and its steeple have been factors of Selkirk life since 1887. Many town councilors and mayors have been Anglicans.

Two of the most notable were the Comber brothers, Edwin and Reuben who came from England in the early 1880's Edwin was an engineer who had begun as a miller at John Tait's Grist Mill in Middlechurch. He moved to Selkirk in 1883 and immediately became involved in helping build the town. He was a town councilor for twenty years, on the

school board for 15 years and was a warden of Christ Church for 14 years. In the 1910 telephone directory, he was listed as a “ Banker” When he retired he volunteered as the librarian at the Carnegie Library.

Comber and Reverend Littler of Christ Church invented a device for removing smoke from stoves and went on to patent and market the invention in Europe. Comber stayed in Selkirk, while Littler left to start a new life in Europe.

Reuben had trained as a butcher in the British Navy and arrived in Selkirk in 1887 to open his own butcher shop. He gained a tremendous reputation for the quality of his products and provided meat for lumber and fishing camps along the Lake. He was the founder of the Selkirk Hunt Club (foxes) and focused his attention on bringing a bit of British gentility to Selkirk. He sat on town council for 6 terms.

The Church bell tower was the tallest in the region and the large Christ Church bell became the town's alarm for fires and disasters.

Complaints from members of other faiths and persuasions were heaped on the parishioners of Christ Church because the bell was too loud, rung too often and too early for those who desired to sleep longer on Sunday mornings.

The new church possesses sets of glorious modern stained glass based on the seasons of the religious calendar. These are the most beautiful feature in any of Selkirk’s Churches!

11. The Gibb House - 212 McLean

Once owned by the Gibb Family, it was they who started the first bakery in Selkirk in 1876. One son became a doctor and was a mayor of Selkirk during the 1920’s.

This pretty house was built by Roy Hooker, one of the carpenter sons of F. W. Hooker. Hooker was one of the town fathers who arrived in 1883 to open Selkirk’s first planning Mill. The Hooker and Gibb families each contributed to Selkirk’s growth and economic stability.

12. The Teeter House -218 McLean

This house was a manse designed for Reverend Chancellor Teeter of Selkirk Methodist by his nephew, well-known architect G.G. Teeter. The beautifully balanced “arts and craft” styled residence is stately and comfortable looking.

Its yard which once boasted gardens and lovely flowers has recently been replaced by two rather ugly in-fill houses. This recent occurrence highlights the need by the City of Selkirk to develop a policy to preserve heritage homes from the encroachments of developers.

Chancellor Teeter was very well known as a preacher throughout Saskatchewan and Manitoba before he arrived in Selkirk. He and his family were very influential in setting a moral; tone for this community and many others. He wrote a religious advice column for the Winnipeg Free Press for 18 years from his pulpit in Selkirk!

13.Selkirk Post Office - the corner of McLean and Main

Built in 1960, this standard brick postal station will likely become surplus in the next few years as Canada Post reduces its local operations. The fate of the building will be a challenge to the community. As an example of architecture of the fifties, it is not distinctive or rare. Will someone step forward to preserve it?

The preservation of our last post office has resulted in a tremendous advantage for local artists with the creation of our city's art gallery. Perhaps, the repurposing of this federal building will result a similar community asset.

14. The King's Road / Main Street

Main Street began as an extension of the King's road - alternate more direct route to Lower Fort Garry (and then on to Upper Fort Garry). The earliest "main" street of Selkirk was Eveline Street (a continuation of the River Road which followed the meandering Red and connected the small farms along the river bank).

Few houses or businesses located on the King's Road until after the Federal Post office was built at Main and Manitoba in 1909. Since then, traffic and businesses have gradually migrated to this road, though it was often a mud-filled bog.

The first uses of land along the road were public spaces such as the farmers' market that once occupied the lots opposite. In winter, cordwood sat on sleighs waiting as citizens bought from the Icelandic woodcutters who trekked to Selkirk to sell fuel for wood-burning stoves and furnaces.

The open fields were perfect as school yards when the first educational facilities were built in the town near the corner of Eaton Avenue. Eaton Avenue became the street for decisions big and small. It was the street where the young were prepared for life in this frontier town and for the world beyond. It was also a street where society levied judgments on their choices.

15. Devonshire School site Located at Main and Eaton



This school, built in 1920 at a cost of \$20,000, educated Selkirk's students for generations. It was the high school in Selkirk until 1947 when it became an elementary school.

In 1942 there were only 145 students still enrolled in grades 9 to 11. Many of the students had left to join the military. The yearbook that year recorded a list of 112 former students in various branches of the military with the motto "They fight for Freedom". A 4 classroom extension was added in 1954 to accommodate the increase in "baby boom" population. Most citizens who ran the town until quite recently had passed through the doors of this fine old two storey building.

This school was finally closed in 1971 and knocked down to make room for the Selkirk Mall in 1972.

16. Central School site located mid-block on Eaton



This was Selkirk's only large school in the early days of the town . It was located in the middle of the block and had about 8 classrooms on two levels. A two-storey Edwardian building, built of brick about 1897, it served all grades at various times.

Likely, it had replaced a wooden structure that had been built near this site about 1878, when the Selkirk School district was organized. Fire had claimed the Selkirk High School in 1907, so the Central School became the home for all grades until Devonshire was built.

In 1917, 11 of the alumni from this school were part of the victory at Vimy Ridge.

When Devonshire school was built in 1920, Central became strictly the high school until 1947.

17. The Carnegie Library site

Selkirk's first public lending library was built on this spot in 1909.

The town fathers argued and delayed over whether the town could afford the luxury of lending books to just anyone. The costs of such a facility had to be balanced against other public services newly instituted such as the Fire Department, the Pressurized water system and the repair of roads and wooden sidewalks. Most crushing of all was the fear of debt- the town had just emerged from under a huge cloud of near bankruptcy, and didn't want to be caught again in the deficit trap!

Finally, it was a group of citizens who wrote the Carnegie Foundation in New York to ask for a grant. Much to their delight (and amazement), the foundation agreed to give \$10,000 (as much as Winnipeg received for theirs) to construct a public library.

Many saw the library as the key to knowledge and education, others saw it as a costly waste. So when the library was built, there was no money set aside for furnishings or for new books. Here, the shipping magnate, Captain Robinson gave a lesson in generosity, he furnished the library himself. Like an earlier Jim and Betty Gaynor, a citizen had come forward to lead! The wealthy engineer and businessman, Edwin Comber retired from his enterprises and acted as Librarian.

18. The Masonic Hall - what secrets these walls could tell



Meetings of the Masonic Order were held in Selkirk from its inception. This “Lisgar” lodge is in fact the second oldest in Manitoba (only Winnipeg’s is older). Meetings were held at various hotels and places of business before this sturdy, unassuming, almost windowless structure was built in 1920.

A glance at its first membership roll reads like the list of investors and land speculators that founded the town in 1875. Bannatyne was the first Grand Master, Schultz, Bedson, Colcleugh, Eaton. Gibb, Gilhuly, Moody and Heap and most other councilors and mayors for a hundred years were masons. **Decisions of importance to the town’s future were discussed in this hall even before they reached the council chambers at the town hall.** Deals made here united Masonic brothers despite their outward politics, race or religion.

19. The Magistrate's House



The interesting “Queen Anne” styled house at **205 Eaton** was the popular Garden on Eaton Tea Room until 2012. It was built for the police magistrate, a Robert Scott.

Mr Scott had the advantage of a great location. He was just across the street from his place of work - the town courts at the town hall. Unfortunately, his residence was adjacent to the Masonic Lodge where drink was commonly part of all rituals and social occasions. And just down the back lane was Bullock’s Dry Goods Store where Proprietor Robert Bullock sold clothing and flour out the front door and illegal whiskey out the back door (- and made a fortune doing it). The Magistrate often must have found the temptations in a dry town a bit daunting!
Later, the house became the home of the Robertson family.

This family was the second for Mr. Robertson. He was a Scottish immigrant who had established himself as a butcher in Selkirk, providing meats not only for Selkirk residents but for the steamboats, and for whole communities all along Lake Winnipeg. He must have been very popular with his customers because of what happened to him during the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918-19.

Robertson, his wife and children were all stricken until only Robertson was left alive in the Selkirk hospital. The nurses were convinced they could do no more for him and they should clear him out to let someone else take his bed. One of Robertson’s customers took him into his home - at great risk to himself. The friend and his wife nursed Robertson back to health.
Several years later, Robertson remarried and started a new family. The children of that marriage went on to become a doctor (who has just passed away), a operator of a furniture store which carried the Robertson name until the 1990’s (now DuFresne’s) and other fine citizens. .

20.The Water Tower - Looking back towards Main St.

There is one last “Saint” to be mentioned on this tour and that water tower is a reminder of the entrepreneur and philanthropist, Captain William Robinson. Robinson made his fortune in Selkirk’s shipping, fishing and timber industries - employing through his various companies more than a thousand seasonal workers as fishers, lumbermen and sailors on his ships.

Robinson decided to use his wealth to help this struggling debt-ridden town. He approached Selkirk’s creditors when the town was near bankruptcy and bargained them down. He proposed and supported the beginning of Selkirk’s Fire Department. He helped create Selkirk’s first Hospital (the street leading to it was named Idell in honour of his daughter). He led the drive to dig a deep well to provide the community with a safe water supply with a water tower that would give every house indoor plumbing and freedom from the water-borne diseases that plagued Selkirk every year. He equipped the Carnegie

Library when the Town refused. It is no wonder that the town named a street in his honour!

So we end this tour of two blocks in Selkirk. Hopefully, it has given you some insight into the politics, the aspirations and the characters of the founders of this community and perhaps a better idea about what saints and sinners go into creating our City!