Athabasca Landing:

An Illustrated History

A seventy-fifth anniversary project
by the Athabasca Historical Society,
David Gregory and Athabasca University

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Historical Society

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Dedication

There could be no more fitting project for the Town of Athabasca's 75th Anniversary than publishing an illustrated history of the beginnings and subsequent growth of our town. Our heritage is of immeasureable importance, and this book is an excellent record for future generations.

Athabasca Landing: An Illustrated History is dedicated to the memory of a man whose family has played an important role in making Athabasca's history, and who himself has done much, working in the Athabasca Town Archives, to preserve a record of Athabasca's past: Frank Falconer, Jr.

It is my pleasure to have the opportunity also to dedicate this book to all those who have lived in Athabasca in previous years, to all who reside here now, and to those who will be its citizens in the future.

A.J.S. (Tony) Schinkinger, Mayor.

Frank Falconer Jr. 1915–1986

Acknowledgements

The text of this book has been written by David Gregory, with the assistance of Frank Falconer, Jr., Eileen Hendy, Vi Kowalchuk, Gilda Sanders, Robert Tannas, and other members of the Athabasca Historical Society. The research for the book was coordinated by Eileen Hendy, and carried out by her and by Dr. Josephine Brown, Alice Donahue, Louis Da Costa, Frank Falconer, Jr., David Gregory, Edith Jordan, Vi Kowalchuk, Morgan Newington, Annie Rypien, and Robert Tannas. Wendy de Candole, Jeannie Henry, and Rosaleen Gregory have read and commented upon drafts of some or all the chapters, but they are in no way responsible for any errors or omissions that remain. The photographs have been compiled and selected by David Gregory, Eileen Hendy, Edith Jordan and Robert Tannas, with help from Wendy de Candole, Bob Zebic, and other members of the Athabasca Historical Society. Glenda Waddle acted as secretary and Louis Da Costa as treasurer of the Athabasca Historical Society while the book was being researched and written.

We wish to thank Calvin Cornish, Vi Kowalchuk, and David Mcguire for generously allowing some of their pen and ink sketches to be reproduced in this book. We also wish to thank the many other people, too numerous to mention by name, who have helped with the project, either by providing information or by working in the Athabasca Archives. Much of the work of typing the first draft of the original manuscript was done by Carole Tannas, the Office Procedures 30 class (Semester I, 1985-86) taught by Darlene Day, the AVC Clerk-typist class (1985-86) taught by Deanna Rabin, and the Typing 20/30 class (1985-86) taught by Audrey Dupilka. Later drafts were typed by Eileen Hendy and David Gregory. Text entry has been done by Lloydene Eherer, Cathy Ross and Stella Spence; typesetting by Deb Buchanan-Peterson and Cheryl Mayes. Wayne Allison has acted as art director and production manager for the project. Vincent Foster has contributed to the photolithography work. Margaret Anderson and Alan Brownoff assisted with the maps and illustrations. Copy editing has been done by Gilda Sanders; indexing by Wendy de Candole , Gilda Sanders and Robert Tannas. The general editors for the entire project have been David Gregory and Eileen Hendy, with the assistance of Robert Tannas, President of the Athabasca Historical Society.

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Preface

The idea for this book was born on September 14th, 1982, at an organizational meeting of the Town of Athabasca's 75th Anniversary Celebration Committee. Mayor Tony Schinkinger suggested the resurrection of the then moribund Athabasca Historical Society, with the specific purpose of preparing a pictorial history of the town. About six months later, a new Historical Society was formed, and a group of about a dozen optimistic researchers began to read and organize source materials in the Athabasca Archives, pore over local newspapers, tape-record local "old-timers," make flying visits to the Provincial Archives in Edmonton, and send a two-woman delegation to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg.

By the summer of 1985 it had become evident that the huge task of researching and writing a comprehensive history of Athabasca in time for the 1986 celebrations was simply too much for the diminishing group of amateur historians with limited amounts of spare time available for the project. Some corners had to be cut, but the project was not abandoned, and the result of much blood, sweat and tears is *Athabasca Landing: An Illustrated History*.

Some readers may be disappointed that this volume carries the story of Athabasca in detail no further than 1921. There are several reasons why we chose this cut-off date. First and foremost, it became increasingly clear to us, as we researched the most important of the available sources, that there have been two Athabascas: Athabasca Landing and modern Athabasca. The history of Old Athabasca, Athabasca Landing, began in 1799 and ended in 1921, and it makes a good subject for a book. Moreover, we have assembled a fine collection of early photographs from the years before 1914, whereas pictures from the 1920s and 1930s are surprisingly scarce. The history of modern Athabasca began in the mid-1920s as the village very slowly began to grow again after the catastrophic slump the Landing had suffered during the period from 1915 to 1921. We hope, eventually, to write a second volume, tentatively titled *The Rise of Modern Athabasca* , to begin where this first volume leaves off, but there seemed little sense in tagging onto volume one chapters that really belong in a book on the second Athabasca.

A second reason for delaying our portrait of Athabasca in the 1920s and 1930s is that the sources that have so far been researched on this period are meagre. We await the publication of the Eight Horizons family history of the districts west of town, which will complement the valuable material compiled in *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, and we have heard promising rumours of plans for a family history of the district north of the Athabasca River. We hope to undertake an oral history project to capture on tape, before it is too late, some of the memories and vital information stored in the minds of our senior citizens who grew up during those decades, and we hope to make a much more thorough investigation of the rich hoard of archival material stored in the Provincial Archives of Alberta, the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, and elsewhere. Work has already begun on a comprehensive listing of archival sources on Athabasca history, and, once all of these have been located and explored, we expect to be able to do a much better job of writing the early history of modern Athabasca than we could at present.

A third reason for the decision to omit a detailed treatment of the '20s and '30s from this book was the untimely and much-regretted death of our archivist, teacher and friend, Frank Falconer. In our original plan, Frank was to write the chapters that would have covered the years 1914 to 1945. In the event, his illness and subsequent hospitalization greatly hampered his work on the book, and he was able to complete only a few pages before his death. Most of what he wrote you will find in chapters seven and nine, but this history of Old Athabasca is much the poorer because he was not granted the time to complete a project that was very dear to his heart. Rather than attempt

to cover inadequately the ground that Frank would have surveyed with his characteristic wit, passion and personal insight, we have decided to tell briefly and simply the short story of the Landing's decline and fall, a chapter, however gloomy, that could not be left out of any history of the first Athabasca. To this we have added a short postscript summarizing some of the more important events in the town's history between 1921 and the present. Of course, this is not intended as a proper history of modern Athabasca, but should be viewed more as a quick sketch of the decades that separate us from the exciting boom years when Athabasca first became a town, and also as an appetizer for volume two.

We have also taken the liberty of doing something against which Frank Falconer would have protested vigorously: dedicating this book, however imperfect, to his memory. He was a remarkable man: forthright, honest, immensely knowledgeable and with a mischievous twinkle in his eye that spoke volumes. His death was a tremendous blow to the Athabasca Historical Society, to the Board of Education, and to the citizens of Athabasca and district.

David Gregory
Eileen Hendy
Robert Tannas

75TH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE – 1986
Standing left to right, Glenda Waddle, Pat Bellamy, Tom Blatt, Tim Busch, Mike Murphy, Don Borowicz, Mary Olsen, Eileen Fulk, Jean Barry. Seated left to right, Dr. Josephine Brown, Jody Howells, Tony Schinkinger, Edith Jordan, Alice Donahue

ATHABASCA HISTORICAL SOCIETY – 1986
Standing left to right, Louis Da Costa, Eileen Hendy, Dr. David Gregory, Bob Zebic, Vi Kowalchuk, Tony Schinkinger, Robert Tannas
Seated left to right, Edith Jordan, Gilda Sanders, Glenda Waddle, Alice Donahue, Dr. Josephine Brown
Missing: Morgan Newington and Wayne Allison

ATHABASCA TOWN COUNCIL – 1986
Left to right, Lionel Cherniwchan, John Stychin, Dr. Josephine Brown, Mayor Tony Schinkinger, Town Manager Cliff Sawatsky, Peter Fedoretz, Ole Hermanson

Contents

Chapter 1

Indigenous Peoples and Explorers to 1867

Athabasca, in the mid-1980s, is a small administrative and market centre situated at the southernmost point of the deep southward swing made by the Athabasca River before it flows north-eastward to Fort McMurray and Lake Athabasca. Three features make it stand out from other small towns of the Prairie Provinces: its attractive natural setting, its university, and its history. The town now has a population of just under 2,000 and serves at least another 5,000 people living in the surrounding countryside. Back in 1913 Athabasca Landing was a town of similar size, with a population of 1,900 according to the most plausible estimate we possess. That figure declined drastically, to about 400, in the wake of World War I, and in 1941 the town's population was still only 578. The rise of modern Athabasca has therefore been a phenomenon of the last forty years. This book deals with the rise—and fall—of old Athabasca, the town of Athabasca Landing and the countryside immediately surrounding and dependent

Aerial view of Athabasca townsite, showing southward loop of the Athabasca River. Athabasca Archives, 01211.

upon it. Geography and economics were the two great forces that moulded the history of Athabasca Landing although, as is usually the case in human affairs, politics also played a role. Geography is the first we should consider.

Some twenty thousand years ago, at the height of the fourth (and so far the last) glacial stage of the Pleistocene Ice Age, vast fields of glaciers stretched over the land that was eventually to become Canada, and the site of the present town of Athabasca was buried under thousands of feet of ice. Around 16,000 BC, for reasons that geologists still do not fully understand, the great glaciers began to retreat, leaving a corridor of ice-free land along the Rockies. Gradually the corridor broadened, revealing the series of plains that slope down, in a north-easterly direction, from the western mountains to Hudson's Bay.[1]

Archaeological evidence, in the form of leaf-shaped stone arrow points and spear heads, suggests that by about 10,000 BC the ice-free corridor stretched from the Bering Strait to the centre of the North American continent, and was the path traversed by the first human beings to set foot in the region now called Alberta. They were hunters, the descendants of those who, several thousand years before, had pursued mammoth, bear, bison and moose across the narrow land bridge that then joined eastern Asia to what is now Alaska. We have no evidence that they passed through the future site of Athabasca, but they may have: the retreat of the glaciers established the present topography and drainage pattern, and the Mackenzie and Athabasca river valleys form a natural north-south route running parallel to the Rockies. This same natural waterway would bring explorers, traders and gold seekers of European extraction through Athabasca millennia later, but they would be travelling in the opposite direction.

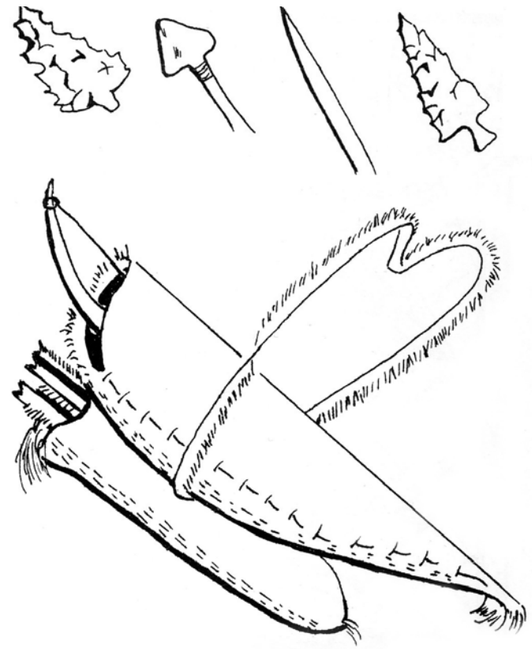
By 6,000 BC most of the North American continent was free of ice, and the northern prairies were inhabited by roaming bands of hunter-gatherers from whom the present indigenous peoples are descended.[2] One such group made the Calling Lake area, forty miles north of Athabasca, a more or less permanent base to which it would return after hunting and foraging expeditions. Archaeological digs at Calling Lake have revealed tools and weapons (darts and spear heads) similar to those found at sites in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and Alaska, as well as elsewhere in the Canadian Prairies.[3]

The Calling Lake region may have been occupied, albeit sporadically, for at least 5,000 years, so people have probably disembarked from boats and camped overnight at Athabasca landing for many thousands of years as well. But Athabasca probably was not the site of a permanent Indigenuos encampment. No

Calling Lake archaeological dig. Courtesy of Doris Sutton.

evidence of, such a camp has been found to date, nor, to judge from fur traders' reports in the nineteenth century, was the Athabasca River a particularly good source of fish or the local forests of fur-bearing animals that could be trapped for meat and clothing.

Relatively little is known about the history of the Indigenous peoples of the western plains and forests before the arrival of Europeans in the seventeenth century. We do know from archaeological evidence, however, that by the seventh century AD—the time when the Byzantine Empire finally lost control of the western Mediterranean, and the power of Islam overran Persia, Egypt and the Middle East—four fairly distinct cultural traditions had emerged in what is now Western Canada: Plains Village, Plains Woodland, Plains Hunter and Sub-Arctic. The Plains Village culture was, in European terms, the most advanced: it involved cultivation of corn, beans and squash, in addition to the buffalo hunting which was the mainstay of the Plains Hunter culture. The Sub-Arctic tradition relied on the caribou as its primary food source, while the Plains Woodland culture, the lifestyle probably practised by the Indigenous groups that frequented the Athabasca area, was the most varied. It was a highly nomadic form of existence, in which hunter-gatherers travelled far north into the boreal forest in pursuit of moose and beaver, far south and east into the grassland after buffalo, and into the parkland to fish, hunt, and collect plants, nuts and berries.[4]



Hunting weapons; arrowheads, arrowhead and shaft bowcase and quiver. Pen and ink impression by Vi Kowalchuk.

On May 2, 1670, King Charles II of England and Scotland granted a charter to The Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay, a group of nobles, gentry, merchants and bankers headed by the King's cousin, Prince Rupert. The charter conferred on the company (the name of which was subsequently abbreviated to "Hudson's Bay Company" or HBC) a monopoly of trade on the shores of the Bay and throughout the as yet uncharted drainage basin of the rivers flowing into the Bay. This area, which actually stretched as far west as Skeleton and Amisk Lakes (twenty-five miles east of present-day Athabasca), was to be named "Rupert's Land," and the Adventurers were designated the "true and absolute Lordes and Proprietors" of it. The Hudson's Bay Company, in short, was to provide government and law in Rupert's Land, and to own the land and exercise exclusive trading rights in the area.[5]

This declaration was made, of course, without consulting the inhabitants of the region, and in 1670 Britain had no military control over Rupert's Land, nor did British law in practice operate in the area. Yet, although it may have seemed a rather empty gesture when it was made, this grant to the Hudson's Bay Company was to prove crucial in the early history of the western interior.

One controversial question arises immediately: did Charles II actually have the authority, under British law, to grant property rights in the new colony to the Company, thereby (in theory at least) dispossessing the existing inhabitants? The answer seems to be a qualified yes, since an ethnocentric judgement by the British courts in 1608 (Calvin's Case) had declared that:

> if a Christian King should conquer a kingdom of an infidel, and bring them under his subjection, there ipso facto the laws of the infidels are abrogated, for that they be not only against Christianity, but against the law of God and of nature.[6]

In British law, then, the Indigenous peoples living east of the watershed between the Mackenzie valley basin and the Hudson's Bay basin had, at one stroke of the royal pen, lost their aboriginal land rights. As the HBC explorers and fur traders pushed westward, they had the legal right—in British eyes—to expropriate the Indigeous peoples' lands and to subject them to the authority of the Company.

The cultural groups living further to the west

Emanuel Bowen. "North America." 1743. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

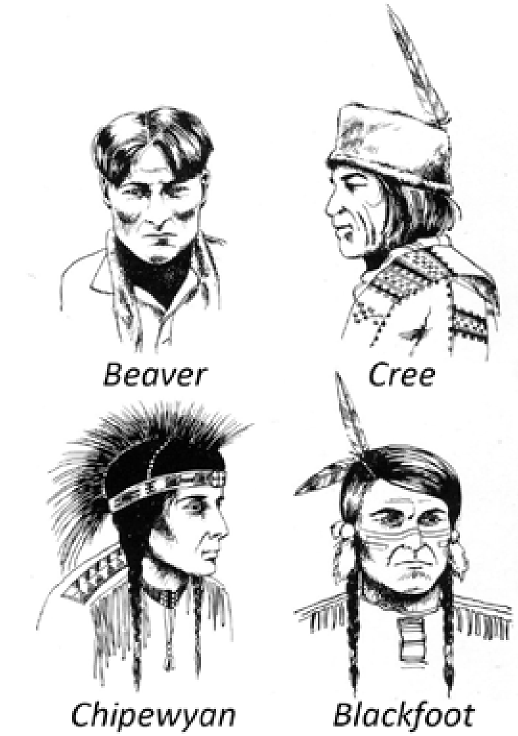
were luckier. They lived in what the British called vaguely "the North-West," and the Crown did not get around to announcing its attitude towards them until the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763. This Proclamation was actually motivated by the need to set Indigenous policy in the Frontier lands west of the Thirteen Colonies but, by extension, it applied to the country west of Rupert's Land too.

Quite different from the Charter of 1670 in its sense of responsibility toward the Indigenous peoples of North America, the Proclamation designated all British-colonized lands west of the Appalachians and south and west of Rupert's Land as "Indian Territory" reserved for the exclusive use of the cultural groups of those regions. Explaining the Royal government's policy earlier in the year of the Proclamation, Secretary of State Lord Egremont declared:

> … it may become necessary to erect some Forts in the Indian Country, with their Consent, yet His Majesty's Justice and Moderation inclines Him to adopt the more eligible Method of conciliating the Minds of the Indians by the Mildness of His Government, by protecting their Persons and Property and securing to them all the Possessions, Rights and Privileges they have hitherto enjoyed, and are entitled to, most cautiously guarding against any Invasion or Occupation of their Hunting Lands, the Possession of which is to be acquired by fair Purchase only[7].

But what of the beneficiaries of this well-intentioned paternalism, who included the people of the Calling Lake area, and more generally all those cultural groups who roamed the western prairies and the boreal forests and tundra of the North-West? They knew nothing of the Hudson's Bay Company's Charter or the Royal Proclamation, but a few of them had seen their first European by this time. The HBC had set up trading posts at the mouths of such rivers as the Nelson and the Churchill on the western shore of the Bay, and by the mid-eighteenth century was sending its employees inland along these rivers to contact cultural groups to persuade them to bring furs to the posts. One such employee, Henry Kelsey, may have reached what is now Alberta as early as 1688 or 1691.[8] It is certain that in 1754 Anthony Henday, another HBC explorer on a similar mission, travelled as far as the Rockies, but his route used the Saskatchewan and Battle River valleys, and so he passed at least 150 miles south of the southern loop of the Athabasca River.[9] These first contacts between Europeans and Indigenous peoples had little impact on the daily lives of the inhabitants of the Western Plains and the North-West.

The thousands of Indigenous peoples who hunted,



Beaver, Blackfoot, Chipewyan and Cree sketches by Margaret Anderson. Beaver and Cree based on photographs in *Red Hunters of the Snows* by Philip H. Godsell. Blackfoot based on drawing by Arthur Heming in *Across the Sub-Arctics of Canada* by J.W Tyrrell. Chipewyan based on painting by Paul Loze in *Indians of Canada* by Diamond Jenness.

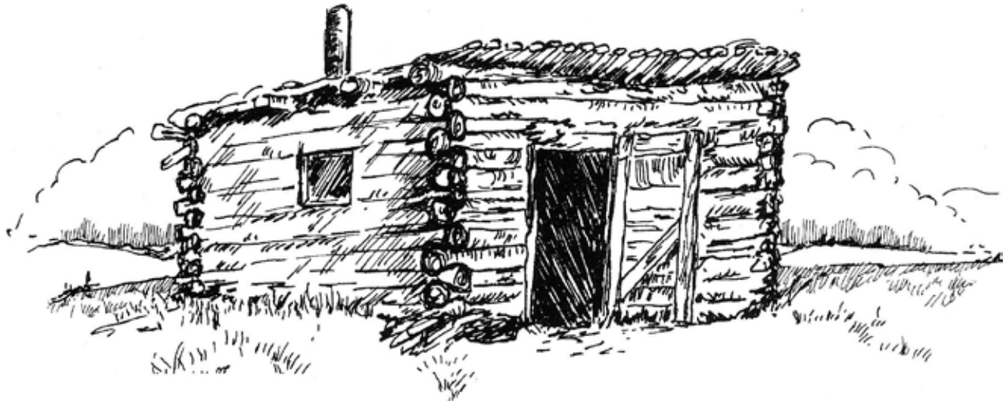
fished and trapped these vast regions were divided into three main cultural groups, each with its own language. The languages were Algonquian (variants of which were spoken by the Ojibwa, the Cree, and the Blackfoot), Siouan (spoken by the Assiniboine), and Athapaskan (spoken by the bands that together constitute the Dene nation—the Chipewyan, the Beaver, the Slave and others). The Ojibwas, Crees and Assiniboines, who in the seventeenth century roamed through the territory now called Northern Ontario and Manitoba, were the first to enter into regular trading relationships with the HBC. Not only did they trap the regions east of Lake Winnipeg and north of Lake Superior, they also soon came to act as middlemen between Europeans further west and north, especially the Blackfoot of the western plains and the Chipewyans and other Dene peoples of the North-West.[10]

It is difficult to say precisely which cultural groups inhabited the region we now know as central Alberta in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Not only is information about them scanty, but the people themselves were nomadic, travelling hundreds of miles each year and migrating from place to place with the seasons and according to the fortunes of the hunt. It seems likely that the

Inside a trading post. Hudson's Bay Company post at Lower Fort Garry, Winnipeg. Tannas Collection.

Athabasca region was used occasionally by the Blackfoot (whose home bases were the Saskatchewan River valleys), the Beaver (who occupied the Peace River country and the Cold Lake/Lac La Biche region) and the Chipewyan (who frequented the lands north and south of Lake Athabasca). The middle Athabasca River valley was thus a meeting ground for different peoples, a buffer zone between itinerant cultrual groups that often tolerated and traded with each other, but that occasionally fought for control over the countryside and its fauna.

By the early eighteenth century the Blackfoot, Beaver and Chipewyan were all trading skins and furs for European goods such as guns, powder and



A typical North West Company trading post. Pen and ink impression by Vi Kowalchuk.

shot, flints, knives, hatchets, chisels, needles, files, awls, kettles and blankets, but they were still doing so indirectly, through the Cree and Assiniboine middlemen who dominated the fur trade until the 1760s. During this period, at least, the fur trade seems to have been of benefit to the Indigenous peoples of the Western plains and the North-West. It left their nomadic life style and customs untouched, but improved their material standard of living by allowing them to acquire metal tools and more efficient hunting gear. Furthermore, since the Blackfoot and Dene were trading partners of the Cree and Assiniboine, peace was a necessity, and a vast alliance system linked groups from Hudson Bay to the Rockies, and protected the fur trade from hostile bands further south and west, such as the Sioux, the Snakes, the Gros Ventres, the Shoshones and the Kootenays.[11]

This century-long period of peaceful, indirect trade between the Indigenous peoples of what would later be Alberta and the Hudson's Bay Company came to an end in the 1770s and 1780s. In the 1740s, Pierre de la Verendrye and other fur traders from New France had penetrated west as far as the north end of Lake Winnipeg and the forks in the Saskatchewan River, and had set up a series of trading posts linking this new frontier to the Red River region, Lake Superior and ultimately Montreal. Faced with this competition, the Hudson's Bay Company looked further west, which was why Henday made his trip to the Rockies in 1754, and which was one of the reasons Samuel Hearne explored the "barren land" north-west of Churchill and discovered Great Slave Lake in 1772. The competition increased after the fall

Main routes used by explorers and fur traders in the 18th and early 19th centuries, showing how the middle Athabasca River valley was by passed by most traders and missionaries before 1857. Map by David Gregory and Alan Brownoff. Revised by Margaret Anderson.

What's In A Name? Speculating About "Athabasca"

No one knows for sure what "Athabasca" means. It is usually said to be a Cree word, although it is not to be found in that pioneering labour of love, Father Lacombe's *Dictionnaire de la langue des Cris* (1874), but there the agreement ends. The modern town of Athabasca derived its name from the older settlement of Athabasca Landing. Athabasca Landing was the name given by the Hudson's Bay Company to the location of its transshipment warehouse and trading post on the southern loop of the Athabasca River, so the town of Athabasca is obviously named after the river. The river, however, has not always been called the Athabasca. In the late eighteenth century, the Beaver who lived along its banks called it the Elk River, and it apperas to be Elk on Alexander Mackenzie's 1801 map of his "track" to the Beaufort Sea. In contrast, David Thompson and Peter Fidler, who explored the middle section of the river in 1799–1800, both referred to it in their journals as the Athabasca. Most likely Mackenzie was using a translation of the Athapaskan word for the river while Thompson and Fidler were using the Cree name.

Why did the Cree call the river the Athabasca? One possibility is that, since both the river and the large lake into which it drains were Beaver and Chipewyan territory in the late eighteenth century, the name derives from the name of these cultural group's common language, Athapaskan. If so, the Cree name would simply be an acknowledgement that when one journeyed north-westwards and reached either lake or river one would be in the land of the Athapaskan speakers.

An alternative explanation depends on defining a specific meaning for the Cree word "Athabasa." The most authoritative translation is that suggested by Eric and Patricia Holmgren in their book *Over 2000 Place Names in Alberta.* They argue that "Athabasca" means "where there are reeds" and initially described the river delta at the south-west corner of Lake Athabasca. As evidence for this theory, the Holmgrens cite Peter Pond's map of 1790 and Philip Turner's jpournal of 1791. According to this interpretation, then, the lake derived its name from its reedy delta, and the river was named after the lake into which it flowed.

This translation has been challenged. For example, Colonel Henry Inman, who journeyed down the Athabasca a year or two before the Klondike rush, claimed in *Buffalo Jones' Forty Years of Adventure* (1899) that the Indigenous word means "without a spirit" or, more freely translated, "God-forsaken." Other suggestions include "a chain of prairies like the meshes of a net" and "a low swampy piece of country with bare patches." Both of these opinions were advanced by writers of the *Norhtern News* in February and March of 1911. More recently, promotional literature published by the Town of Athabasca has used the phrase "land of the whispering hills" to describe the Athabasca area, but whether this is being advanced as a translation of the name is unclear. There seems to be no compelling evidence for accepting any of these alternatives to the Holmgren's interpretation. So we are left with a choice between "place where there are reeds" and "land of the Athapaskan-speakers." Neither is certain.

What is probable, however, is that the Town of Athabasca has derived its name, indirectly, from Lake Athabasca. Lake Athabasca is sometimes spelt with a "k," and this orthography has led to suggestions that the town's name should be Athabaska. In fact, however, the settlement has always been Athabasca: the HBC referred to its post as Athabasca Landing; an early geological survey map of the area made by Dr. R. Bell used the Athabasca spelling; and early sketch-maps and site-plans of the HBC reserve also use the "c" form. Athabaska Landing was not incorporated as a village in 1905, or as a town in 1911, but Athabasca Landing was. When the town's name was shortened in 1913, it remained Athabasca. So, as a matter of custom and usage, the most usual and "official" spelling has been with a "c."

Whether the HBC officals and the first villagers were correct in the choice of "Athabasca Landing" rather than "Athabaska Landing" is more debatable. Nowadays, both river and lake are spelt with a "c" in authoritative gazetteers and atlases, but in the early fur-trading days the term "Athabaska region" was often employed for the North-west, and in 1882 the Athabaska District was created by the Government of Canada as one of the North West Territories. Similarly, in 1905 the polictical map of the new province of Alberta included an Athabaska constituancy. Moreover, the French transliteration of the Cree word has apparently always been "Athabaskaw." Had a fur-trading post been established at the elbow of the Athabasca seventy-five years earlier, or had the Roman Catholic missionaries chosen Athabasca as a mission site in the days of Father Lacombe and Bishop Grouard, then most likely it would have been Athabaska Landing that became the "gateway to the north" and that first steamboat would have been named the S.S. *Athabaska*. But, as it turned out, such was not the case, and the HBC fur-traders, the Anglican missionaries, the Klondikers and the pioneer homesteaders always knew their settlement as Athabasca Landing.

of New France to the British in 1760, and especially after the Proclamation of 1763, which created the Province of Quebec but placed the hinterland of the French fur traders under the direct control of the British Crown.[12]

By the mid-1770s the Montreal fur trade had been taken over by several groups of merchants, mainly from Scotland and New England, and they were busy expanding the network of trading posts along Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan River. The HBC's response was to begin building its own inland forts, starting with Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan, but the Montrealers were more aggressive in pushing north west into the Churchill River/Reindeer Lake system, with Peter Pond reaching Lake Athabasca in 1778. Pond was probably the first European to trade directly with the Chipewyans, and he discovered that the furs of the Lake Athabasca region were both plentiful and of exceptionally high quality. Pond also learned the trick of living on pemmican, which meant that voyageurs could cut down drastically on the time they spent hunting and fishing, and so could bring furs from the North-West to market more speedily. [13]

Following in Pond's footsteps, the Montreal fur traders quickly established a regular trading route to the Lake Athabasca area, via the Methye Portage on the watershed between the Churchill and Athabasca river systems. This route, also called the La Loche route, was one of the main channels through which the fur trade passed for the next hundred years. In 1780 several small firms of Montreal merchants banded together to exploit this path, and the other main fur-trading route along the Saskatchewan River, more efficiently in the face of HBC expansion inland: their new partnership was called the North West Company, and it was soon engaged in a bitter trade war with its older rival.[14]

The heightened competition in the fur trade had two consequences for the middle Athabasca River valley. First, by depriving the Cree of their lucrative role as middlemen, it forced them to adopt another, more dependent role, as suppliers of pemmican to the traders and their canoe men. In the process, the Cree culture changed too: from being hunter-gatherers of the Plains/Woodland type, the Cree became Plains Hunters whose livelihood was dependent on the buffalo and who needed good supplies of the horses now being imported from the south by the Blackfoot, Gros Ventre and Mandan.

In their search for horses, buffalo and furs, the Cree pushed ever westward, increasingly coming into conflict with the Blackfoot and Dene. By 1800 or so they had forced the Blackfoot south west to the Bow River in what is now Southern Alberta, the Beaver west beyond Lac La Biche, and the Chipewyan north to the shores of Lake Athabasca.[15] The middle Athabasca River valley ceased to be a no-man's land between Blackfoot, Beaver and Chipewyan—it became, temporarily, the preserve of the Beaver. If there still was a semi-permanent Indigenous settlement at Calling Lake at the end of the 18th century, it was probably now a Beaver encampment, and those who paddled the Athabasca River drew their canoes to shore at the southern-most point of the great loop, and set off—on foot or on horseback—on the trails that linked that river, which they called the Elk River, to the Beaver River and to the North Saskatchewan, probably were Athapaskan speakers.

The trade war also brought Europeans to the Athabasca River. In 1795 both the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company established trading posts on the North Saskatchewan River near the site of the present-day city of Edmonton. In 1798-99 both groups built posts on Lac La Biche, which could be reached from the east via the Beaver River system. The North West Company was also established at Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca, further to the north.[16]

David Thompson. Pen and ink imprerssion by Calvin Cornish.

Each of these outlying trading posts had been reached by a different river route, and in the 1790s no white fur trader had a good grasp of the lie of the land between them. To gain this information, David Thompson, once a HBC employee but after 1797 a partner in the North West Company, set out to explore and survey what is now central Alberta.

David Thompson. "Map of the North-West Territory of the Province of Canada." Detail. 1814. Superimposed, David Thompson's journey of 1799. Archives of Ontario, I0012850. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

In March, 1799, he left his winter base at Lac La Biche and travelled overland to the North West Company post, Fort Augustus, situated at the site of the present Fort Saskatchewan, near Edmonton. From there he struck out north-westwards to the Pembina River, following it down to its confluence with the Athabasca River. Thompson then canoed north down the Athabasca to the mouth of the Lesser Slave River, which he surveyed to Lesser Slave Lake before returning to the Athabasca and continuing his journey downstream. In early May he passed through the "elbow" of the Athabasca River, where Athabasca town is now situated, and then continued northwards to the confluence with the Clearwater River, where Fort McMurray now stands.[17] He left the North-West by the Methye Portage/Churchill River route, but later that summer was back on the North Saskatchewan River at Fort George. When he continued on to Fort Augustus the next spring, he had completed a great circular journey, and had obtained much valuable information for the comprehensive map of the Prairies and North-West that he eventually completed in 1814.[18]

Meanwhile, Peter Fidler, the man who had replaced Thompson as the Hudson's Bay Company's surveyor in the area, had arrived at the HBC post at Red Deers Lake (Lac La Biche). Fidler kept a close watch on the activities of the Nor' Westers at their rival Lac La Biche post, and on October 6,1799, noted that "20 Canadians in 5 canoes embarked from this place to erect a settlement at the Slave Lake to the SW of the Peace River and very near it."[19] Lacking men and supplies, Fidler was unable to follow these Nor' Westers, as he would have liked, but he found out that they had travelled down the Lac La Biche River to the Athabasca, up the latter river to the present site of Athabasca town, and then on to Lesser Slave Lake via the Lesser Slave River.

In effect, a new route to the Peace country had been pioneered, and Fidler was anxious to try it himself. In December he travelled to the HBC post at Fort Edmonton for supplies and equipment, then returned to Lac La Biche. By January, 1800, he was ready to set off with two sleds and five dogs for Lesser Slave Lake. His pace was rapid over the frozen rivers, and on January 29th he noted in his diary that he was already at the "elbow" of the Athabasca River. By the end of the month Fidler was inspecting the new North West Company post on Lesser Slave Lake, and early in February he travelled back to Lac La Biche again along the Athabasca River.[20] The future site of Athabasca town was now known to both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company.

For the next twenty years the rivalry between the two businesses continued, with new posts opening side by side, new territories explored, and even a few skirmishes breaking out over trading locations. Somewhat surprisingly, however, neither side built a post at the elbow of the Athabasca, although this site was the crossroads of a north-south trail from Fort Edmonton to the Lake Athabasca region and the east-west route from Lac La Biche to Lesser Slave Lake. There seem to have been three main reasons why no post was established. First, the area was inferior in furs, at least when compared to the Lesser Slave Lake, Lac La Biche and Lake Athabasca regions. Then, both companies already had establishments on Red Deers Lake, and the journey north from Fort Edmonton via Lac La Biche, although less direct, was along a well-established, well-travelled route. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, in 1821 the two companies gave up the ruinous struggle and were merged, retaining the HBC name.[21] This amalgamation led to a reduction in the number of Europeans working in the fur trade, the closing of some posts, and a general stabilizing of the business (including a drastic reduction in the quantity of alcohol sold to the Indigenous peoples).

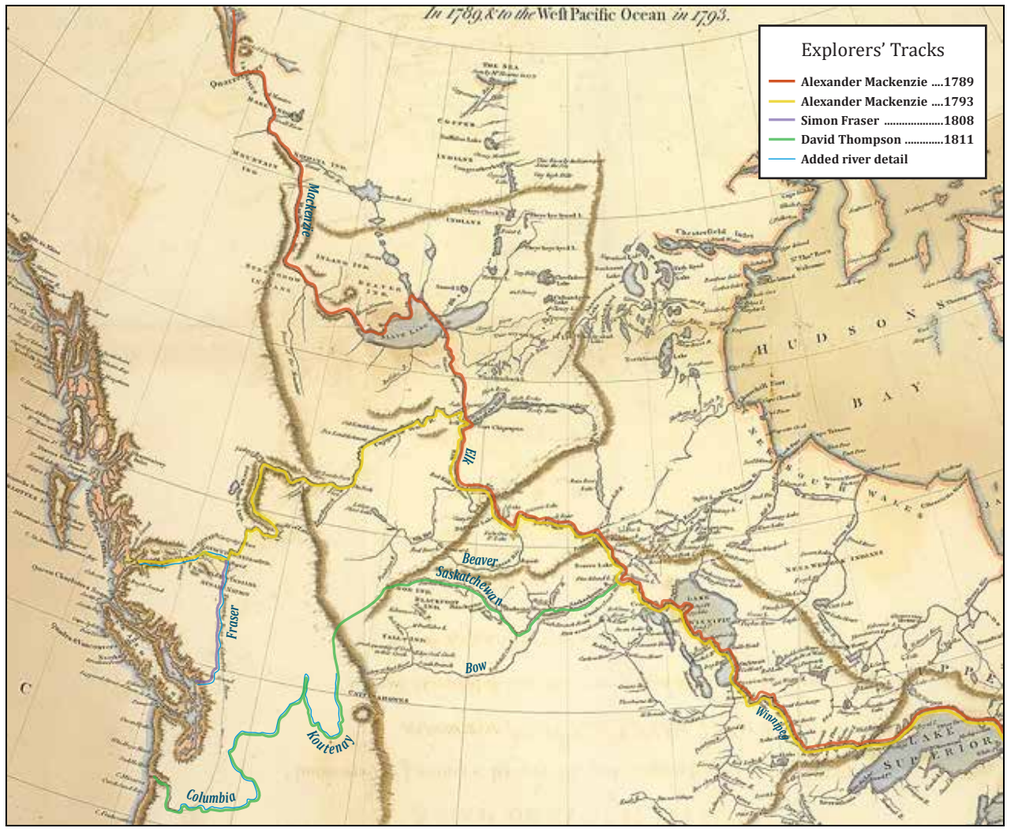
The merger also resulted in a reorganization of the trading districts and transportation routes. The explorations made by Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser and David Thompson across the Rockies to the Pacific Coast had opened up two new fur-trading regions, the Columbia and Caledonia districts. In 1825 HBC Governor Sir George Simpson decided that the Fort Edmonton/Lesser Slave Lake route was the best way to ship goods to these new districts.[22] But how should the furs and trade goods be transported from Fort Edmonton to the Lesser Slave River? One possibility was to blaze a pack-trail north to the elbow of the Athabasca River. A second option was to use David Thompson's route via the Pembina River. A third strategy, the one Simpson chose, was to develop a trail overland, in a north-westerly direction, to the point on the Athabasca River where Fort Assiniboine had been constructed the year before. This decision meant that the future site of Athabasca town had once again been by passed by the fur trade, and that the central stretch of the Athabasca River would be left to the Indigenous peoples for another half-century.

At least, that was true as far as the fur trade was concerned. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, Roman Catholic missionaries were active in the western prairies and the North-West, and had established missions at Lac La Biche and at Grouard on Lesser Slave Lake. Using the HBC to transport priests and supplies from one mission to the other would have meant going by the circuitous and costly Fort Edmonton/Fort Assiniboine route. In 1857 Bishop

Taché decided to establish an independent, and more direct, alternative.[23] His new supply route to Lesser Slave Lake followed the North Saskatchewan River to Fort Pitt (near the present Alberta/Saskatchewan border), and then went overland to the Beaver River, upstream on the Beaver as far as possible, overland to Lac La Biche. down the Lac La Biche River to the Athabasca River, and up it (via the "elbow") to the Lesser Slave River. Now there were three viable ways of getting to the North-West, and the future site of Athabasca town was a way station on one of them.

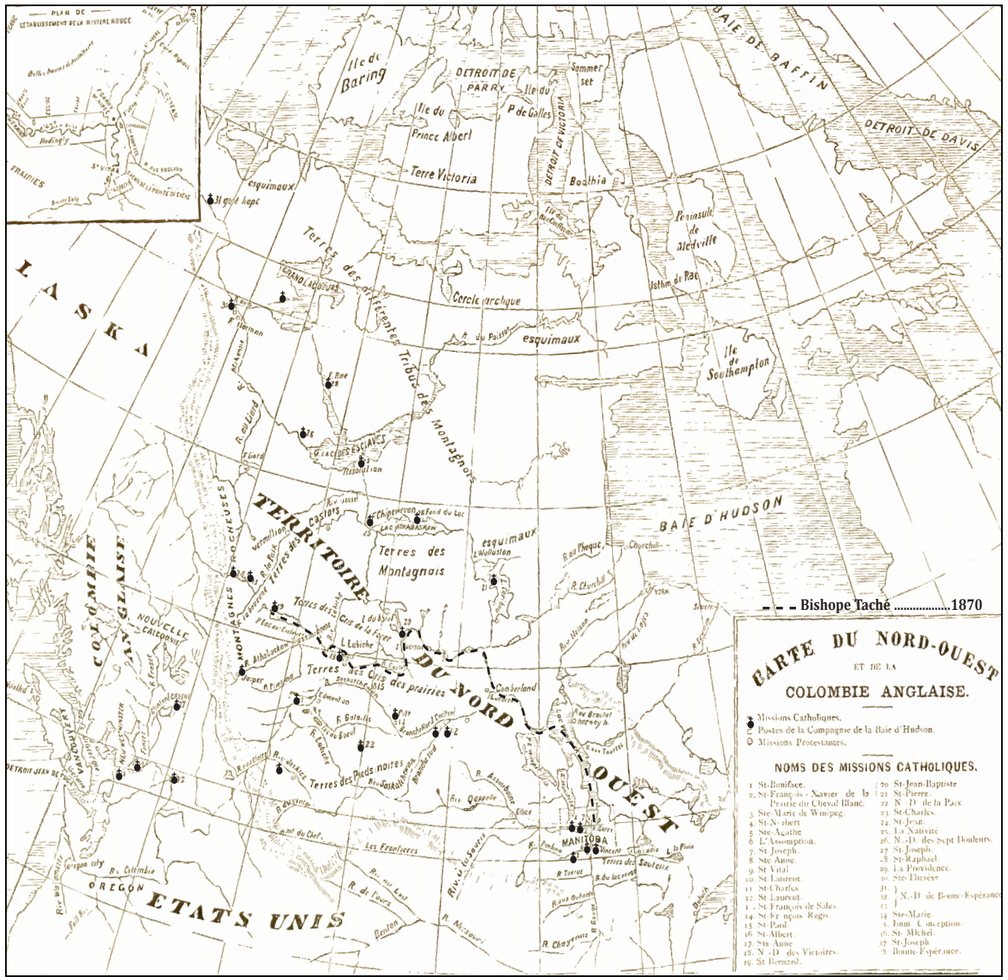
But if the Fort Assiniboine and La Loche routes both had their drawbacks (a long and sometime impassable pack trail, in the case of the former, and the back-breaking Methye Portage, in the case of the latter), so did Bishop Tache's route. It, too, involved long portages, the use of the shallow and treacherous Beaver River, and a long upstream slog on the Athabasca River. Nor could it be used easily for transportation north to the Lake Athabasca region because of the dangerous Grand Rapids on the Athabasca River between the confluence with the Lac La Biche River and the confluence with the Clearwater River. In consequence, it remained a minor route until it was superseded completely in the 1880s.

As the fur trade pushed ever westward during the first half of the nineteenth century, the relationship between the Canadian traders and the Indignous peoples of the Western plains underwent further change. The Indigenous peoples were also affected by the increasing number of Métis buffalo hunters



Alexander Mackenzie. "Map of America Exhibiting Mackenzie's Track" Detail. 1801. Superimposed, routes of Mackenzie, Fraser, and Thompson. This map shows why the middle Athabasca River valley continued to be a backwater of the fur trade even after the opening up of the Caledonia and Columbia districts. Library and Archives Canada National Map Collection, NMC108621. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

on the prairies, and by the growth of the Red River settlement. The Cree had already lost their role as middlemen, now they lost their substitute role as the primary suppliers of pemmican, in part because the Métis took over this function but also because the buffalo herds were beginning to dwindle.[24] The Cree bands retreated further west, but met determined resistance from the Chipewyans in the North-West and the Blackfoot in what is now southern Alberta. Following the wood bison west of Lac La Biche, they encountered the Beaver in the middle Athabasca River valley but drove them upstream to the area of Lesser Slave Lake. By the time Bishop Tache's route to Grouard Mission was in regular use, it probably passed through Cree territory, and the settlement at Calling Lake had changed from Athapaskan speaking to Algonquian speaking. It is difficult to be precise about the date at which the Cree gained firm control over the area that is now the County of Athabasca, because our sources of information are inadequate, and because there is some conflict between authorities. It would appear, however, that by 1820 the region had once again become a no-man's land, this time between Beaver and Cree, and that



Rev. Pére Albert Lacombe. "Carte du nord-ouest." c. 1870. *Dictionnaire de la langue des Cris*. Shows Roman Catholic mission stations in the West and North-West. Superimposed, Bishop Tache's route of 1857. Public domain via Internet Archive.

William Notman. *Monseigneur Taché, Bishop of Ste-Hyacinthe, Montreal, QC, 1866.* Creative Commons, © McCord Museum.

by mid-century the Cree—still nomadic hunter-gatherers in life style—were the undisputed lords of the area.[25]

As a result of the Proclamation of 1763 the Indigenous peoples still possessed their aboriginal rights in the North-West, and the British Crown was committed (at least in theory) to protecting their "Persons, Property, Possessions, Rights and Privileges" and to guarding their hunting land from "Invasion or Occupation." Since its merger with the North West Company in 1821, the Hudson's Bay Company had enjoyed, by licence from the Crown, exclusive trading rights in the North-West, and its Charter rights in Rupert's Land had been confirmed, but neither of these grants affected the Cree's aboriginal land rights west of the Mackenzie/Beaver watershed and north of the Athabasca/North Saskatchewan watershed.[26]

Neglected by the HBC during the forty-year period of George Simpson's administration, the central section of the Athabasca River valley remained in its natural state, uncultivated and unsettled except for the Indigenous encampment at Calling Lake, until the 1870s. Only 120 years ago it was still "Indian territory," governed in theory, but not in practice, by the British Crown.

CHAPTER 2

Growth of a Fur-trading Post, 1867–1888

The economic and political situation began to change in the mid-1860s. In 1863 the HBC was taken over by the International Financial Society. This consortium of bankers and businessmen from the City of London anticipated making large profits from the sale of land in the southern part of Rupert's Land as roads and railways opened the prairies to settlement. The Company began negotiations with the British Colonial Office shortly after the take over, and these negotiations became tripartite when the government of the Province of Canada—which had been given "responsible government" in 1848—objected to the deal worked out between these two parties on the grounds, first, that the HBC Charter was invalid (at least as the Company interpreted it), and second, that Canada, not the British Crown, should control the opening up and settlement of the prairies.[1] In legal terms, Canada's case was weak, but politically the Province had the upper hand since the Crown Colony of British Columbia had been created in 1858, and the British government had in mind the eventual unification of its remaining North

Hudson's Bay Company post, Pelican Portage, Alberta, August 1911. Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 3264.

American colonies into a single federation that could better withstand potential aggression or infiltration from the United States.

The first stage in the development of this continent-wide federation was achieved in 1867, with the creation of the Dominion of Canada, which initially included only Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The writing was now on the wall for the HBC, and in 1868 the British parliament spelled the matter out even more clearly by enacting the Rupert's Land Act, which authorized the British government to "accept a surrender upon terms" of the Company's lands, and to arrange for Rupert's Land and the North-West to be admitted into the new Dominion. This Act forced the HBC to deal directly with the Canadian government, and in March, 1869, a "deed of surrender" was signed, under which the Company received a cash settlement plus two land grants: 45,000 acres around its 120 trading posts, and one-twentieth (about seven million acres) of the farmland to be laid out for settlement in the "fertile belt" between the U.S. border and the North Saskatchewan River.[2]

Implementation of the agreement was delayed by the Red River uprising, led by Louis Riel, which resulted in the establishment of the Province of Manitoba, but on July 15, 1870, the North-West became part of the Dominion of Canada, and the government of Canada, then headed by Sir John A. Macdonald, took over the British Crown's responsibilities towards the Indigenous peoples of the Athabasca River valley. Bribed with the promise of a transcontinental railroad, British Columbia joined Confederation the next year, but the Macdonald government (which had only reluctantly conceded quasi independence to the Métis in Manitoba) was not prepared to grant provincial status to the western prairies or the North-West. Limited though its financial and military powers were, it was determined to control (and profit from) the opening up and settlement of the West.

The vast North-West Territories therefore came under direct government from Ottawa, an arrangement sanctioned by the British North America Act of 1871, which provided that the Parliament of Canada could legislate for any territory not included in a province. Ottawa moved quickly to assert its new powers: the 1872 Dominion Lands Act paved the way for settlement of the west by laying down the principle of free homesteading (with a three-year residency requirement) in the Territories; and the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) force was founded in 1873 to enforce law and order in the frontier lands.[3] Such policies, however, were potentially in conflict with the aboriginal land rights recognized (or granted) by the Proclamation of 1763, rights which the Dominion government had implicitly agreed to respect and protect when it took over control of the North-West from the British Crown.

All of these political and legal manoeuvres had little immediate effect on the inhabitants of what would eventually become Alberta. At this time there were probably still fewer than 8,000 of them: some 5,000–6,000 Indigenous peoples (mainly Blackfoot, Cree and Dene), less than 2,000 Métis, and a handful of Canadians, Americans and Europeans working at the ten fur-trading posts operated by the HBC and the nine religious mission stations.[4]

Both Indigenous peoples and fur traders had suffered hard times in the 1860s: the HBC employees in the field were apprehensive about the changes in management occurring in far-away London, while cultural groups were experiencing epidemics of European diseases, such as smallpox, to which they were highly susceptible, and a worrying scarcity of their principal resource, the buffalo. The Cree responded by trying to forbid the Métis from hunting on the prairies, and also by attempting to increase their westward pressure on other cultural groups, especially the Blackfoot to the south west. By 1869 full-scale warfare had broken out between Cree and Blackfoot, a conflict exacerbated by the activities of American whiskey traders in the Cypress Hills/Oldman River area. The war lasted only a couple of years and ended in a compromise, with both sides too weakened by the ravages of starvation, disease and alcohol to press home their military victories. This violence—and outrages, such as the Cypress Hills massacre, perpetrated against Indigenous peoples by American "traders" during these years—underlined two facts that were rapidly becoming apparent: neither the HBC, nor any government, British or Canadian, really had any *de facto* authority in the North-West Territories; and the Indigenous peoples who still did were facing a cultural and economic crisis of immense proportions.[5]

Thanks to the "deed of surrender" of March, 1869, however, these huge problems had ceased to be of direct concern to the harassed officials of the HBC in such fur-trading posts as Fort Edmonton and Fort Assiniboine. What most troubled them, in the early 1870s, was the fact that the pack road between the two posts—a key segment of the main trade route to Lesser Slave Lake, the Peace River district, and the interior of British Columbia—was almost impassable because of mud and swollen river crossings. For decades they had known of a possible alternative route, but had done nothing about it. Now, in the spring of 1874, they resolved to consider it seriously,

Hudson's Bay Company sketch map of the Red Deers Lake/Athabasca River area. Detail. 1876. The map shows the Methye portage between the Clearwater River and Lac La Loche as well as overland routes between Lac La Biche and Fort McMurray. The Athabasca Landing Trail (completed 1876) is not shown. Archives of Manitoba: Hudson's Bay Company Archives, G.1/246.

and sent a scout to survey the terrain from Fort Edmonton to the south loop of the Athabasca River. In a letter dated May 15, 1874, Chief Factor Richard Hardisty reported the results of this preliminary survey to his superior, Donald Smith, at Fort Garry, "Mr. Bunn has returned from … the Athabasca … and considers that the road can be practical and that 12 men in the course of a summer with a good superintendent could make a passable road.[6] The idea of the Athabasca Landing Trail had been born.

Hardisty's scheme initially fell on deaf ears in the HBC bureaucracy, and at first it seemed as though the idea of a cart trail to the "elbow" of the Athabasca was just one more notion whose time had not come. But events were on Hardisty's side. Civilization, in the form of the North West Mounted Police, reached Fort Edmonton in 1874, and plans were soon being made to improve communications with Manitoba and with Ottawa by constructing a telegraph line to this new outpost of law and order. In the event, the line took five years to complete, in part because of opposition from the Cree of the Western Plains who were determined to prevent further erosion of their land rights before the Canadian government decided it was ready to bargain with them. The Cree could do nothing about the white man's navigation of the Saskatchewan River system, however, and one year after the NWMP post was established, the first HBC steamboat, the *Northcote*, arrived at Fort Edmonton.[7]

Aboard was Robert Hamilton, the Company's

Inspecting Chief Factor, who had come to see for himself the problems of the Fort Assiniboine route to the North. Hardisty, meanwhile, had kept up his campaign for money and equipment to build a new road north, writing to Chief Commissioner James Grahame on June 8, 1875, that:

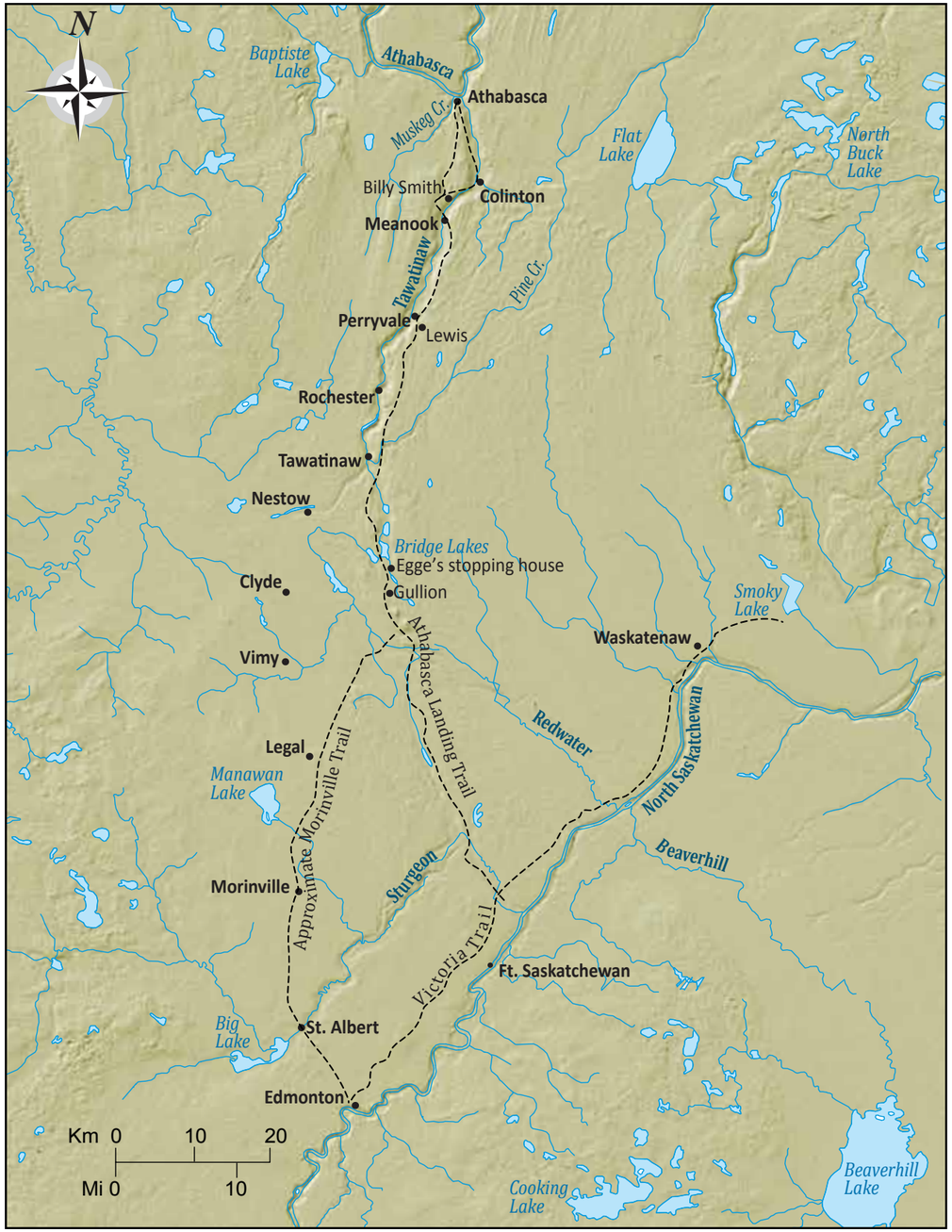
> The road to Fort Assiniboine is a very bad one, so bad that freighters won't attempt it; several animals have been entirely ruined in going through the road in summer time … From Indians acquainted with the country, I have been informed that a good road could be made with very little trouble to a point on the Athabasca, two days down from Fort Assiniboine, which would shorten the trip [to Lesser Slave Lake] by land as well as by water by two days.[8]

By September Hardisty had convinced Hamilton that the Athabasca River offered a viable way around the bottleneck of the Fort Assiniboine trail. Conscious that the new steamboat route on the North Saskatchewan River would quickly make Fort Edmonton the principal distribution centre for the entire North-West, Hamilton authorized an immediate start on construction and stayed to supervise the work. It proceeded slowly, as he reported to Commissioner Grahame on Christmas Eve:

> In my letter of 2nd September, I mentioned that a good line of country had been discovered through which to make a road to the Elbow on Athabasca River. I had hoped that this road would have been completed this Autumn but owing to the difficulty of procuring good labourers at that season it was only opened out about halfway. I am in hopes however that it will be completed in ample time next spring to enable the returns from Lesser Slave Lake to be brought out that route. It is computed that the new road will not be over seventy miles in length while the route by way of Ft. Assiniboine is fully ninety and as I said before through very bad country.[9]

Hamilton and Hardisty had thus underestimated the length of the Athabasca Trail which actually proved to be about 100 miles long. Nonetheless, it was completed the next summer at a cost of $4,059.00, and from 1877 onwards was the Company's main route to the Peace Country.[10] Since furs and trade goods sometimes had to be stored en route, the HBC found it convenient to build a small warehouse at the "Elbow," which, from this time on, was known as Athabasca Landing. Constructed in 1877, this log storage shed was twenty feet by thirty-six feet in area, and doubled as a temporary dwelling house equipped with a lean-to kitchen.[11] As yet, no one lived permanently at the Landing: the HBC "post" was merely a storage depot kept bolted and padlocked for most of the year, but opened up occasionally when carts lumbered over the Athabasca Trail during dry periods in the summer or when sleighs arrived with

The original "post": Hudson's Bay Company storage shed, Athabasca Landing, built 1877. Library and Archives Canada RCMP Archives, e999916217-u.



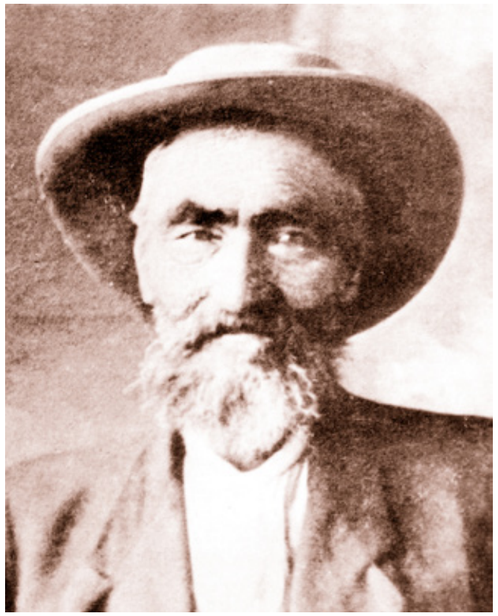
The Athabasca Landing Trail, 1876. Map based on information supplied by Trail North Association. Revised by Margaret Anderson. Map art © Government of Alberta. Topographic map © onlinetopomap.net.

Scows leaving Athabasca Landing. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2980.

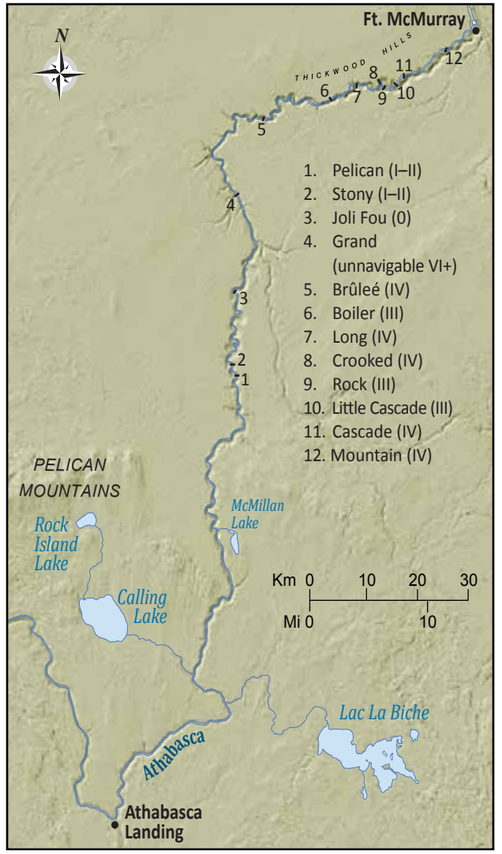
consignments of trade goods in the winter.

Spring was the time of greatest activity at Athabasca Landing during the late 1870s: one of the Fort Edmonton clerks, usually Leslie Wood, was dispatched to the Landing to gather together a group of Métis labourers and to supervise the construction of scows. These flatbottomed barges were made from local timber, and were used to transport furs and supplies to and from the much more important HBC post at the western end of Lesser Slave Lake, itself a way-station on the route to Fort Dunvegan on the Peace River.

As early as 1877 Hardisty and Wood had the idea of also sending scows down the Athabasca River to Fort McMurray and Fort Chipewyan. but they soon discovered to their dismay that, from Pelican Portage northwards, the river traversed a series of rapids: Pelican Rapids, Stony Rapids, Rapides du Joli Fou, Grand Rapids, Brule Rapids, Long Rapids, Crooked Rapids, Cascade Rapids, and the rest. Some of the Métis labourers, who came mainly from the Lesser Slave Lake and Lac La Biche areas, were from *voyageur* families and were not averse to risking their lives running this white water. One of them, Louis Fousseneuve, had, ten years before, successfully piloted a party of Roman Catholic nuns from Lac La Biche to Fort Chipewyan, and was confident that loaded scows could make the voyage



Captain Shot (Louis Fousseneuve). Courtesy of the Fort McMurray Historical Society Bob Duncan Collection, .



The Athabasca River between Athabasca Landing and Fort McMurray, showing the location of the main rapids. Map art © Government of Alberta. Revised by Margaret Anderson.

without mishap.[12]

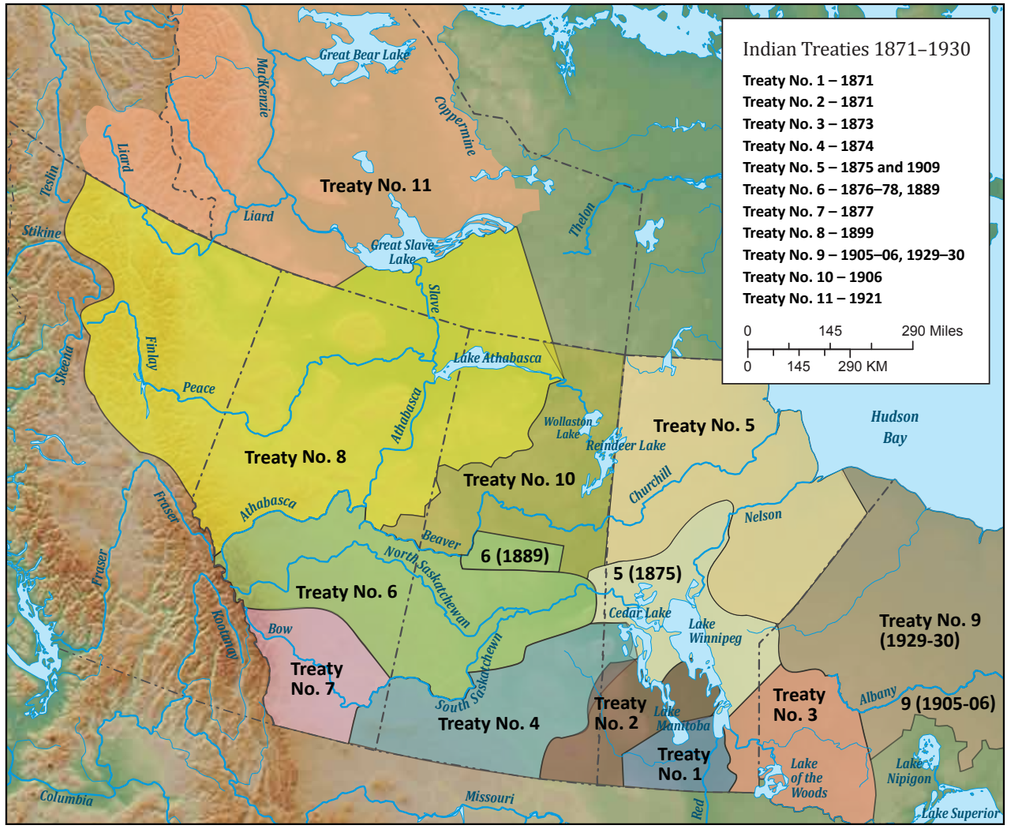
Hardisty, however, was not convinced: to him it was clear that the Grand Rapids was a major impediment to northward navigation of the Athabasca River. In 1877 he had optimistically worked out a freight rate of 3½ cents per pound from the Landing to Fort McMurray, but the rapids put an end to that idea, at least for a few years. Hence, Athabasca Landing was, initially, merely the site of an HBC warehouse near which feverish logging and boatbuilding occurred each April or May while the Athabasca River thawed. Its first inhabitants—Wood's Métis labourers and boatmen— stayed for only a few weeks, living in a work camp of tents or rough lean-tos made from logs, brush wood, and mud.[13]

What had happened to the previous occupants of the middle Athabasca River valley, the Cree? As far as we know they were still using the region sporadically for hunting and trapping, and still regarded the land as their own. But during the time that the HBC was opening the valley as a trading route and attracting Métis to work seasonally at the Landing, major changes were occurring in the economic and legal status of the Cree. In 1871 the Canadian government had begun the process of inducing the Plains cultural groups, by a mixture of negotiation and coercion, to sign treaties giving up their aboriginal land rights in exchange for reservations, medical supplies, pensions and food. Rendered destitute and desperate by the disappearance of the buffalo herds, most—not quite all—Plains cultural groups succumbed to the pressure.

Treaty #1, covering the Red River region, and Treaty #2, covering the rest of Southern Manitoba, were signed in 1871; in 1874 the Ojibwa and Cree inhabitants of southern Saskatchewan reluctantly accepted Treaty #4. After mopping up northern Manitoba in 1875 with Treaty #5, the federal government turned its attention further west, sending its chief negotiator, Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, to Fort Carlton (situated on the North Saskatchewan River in what is now central Saskatchewan) to deal with such Plains Cree chiefs as Star Blanket, Big Child, Poundmaker and Big Bear. He found them divided over the wisdom of "taking treaty." After lengthy debates, most of these chiefs eventually signed Treaty #6 in 1876, but some Saskatchewan Indigenous leaders, such as Big Bear, refused, holding out for a number of years in the face of starvation and harassment by the NWMP. Other groups simply did not turn up to negotiate.[14]

Gradually, over the next twenty years, the government extended the area covered by Treaty #6 westwards to the Rockies, persuading most of the smaller groups in what is now central Alberta to sign. In the interval, they concluded Treaty #7 with the Blackfoot of the south-western plains. During this period the Cree of the Lac La Biche area took treaty (under the provisions of Treaty #6), receiving the Beaver Lake reservation, while the Cree in the Fort Edmonton region obtained several reserves at Wabamun, Lac Ste. Anne and Stony Plain.

Significantly, however, no reservations were created along the Athabasca Trail or in the Athabasca River valley north east or north west of the Landing.[15] The Cree who hunted and trapped these regions were not Plains Cree facing starvation because of the demise of the buffalo, they were Woodland Cree who had no intention of abandoning their nomadic lifestyle to become tillers of the soil on small plots of arable land. If approached by white traders or police, they could easily move north or west, across the Athabasca River

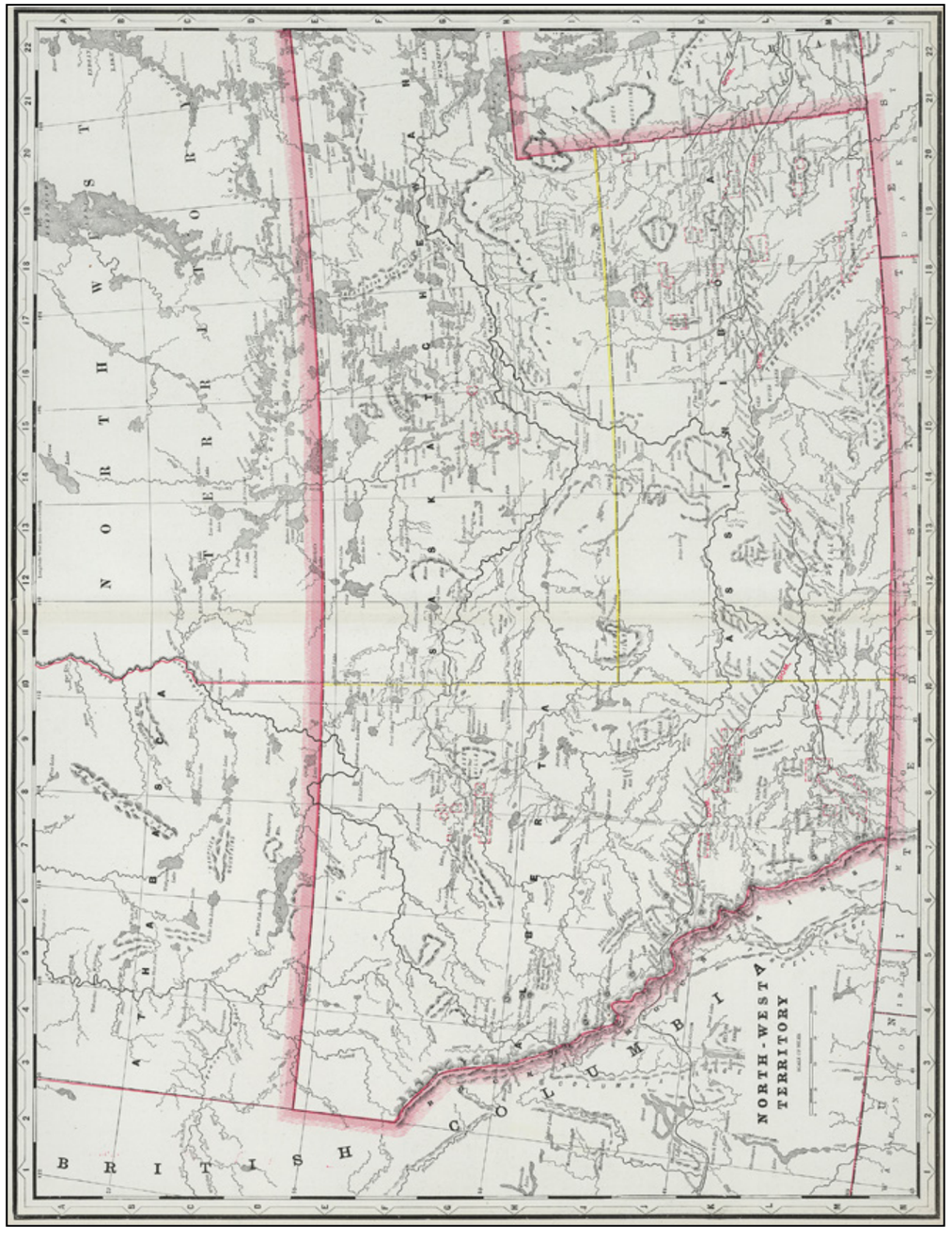


Indian Treaties and non-treaty areas c. 1880. Map based on *Archaeological Resource Management in a Lands Claim Context*, Parks Canada, 1997. Further learning resources can be found at the Office of the Treaty Commissioner.

and into the still vast region not yet covered, even nominally, by a treaty. Arguably, then, although the countryside for at least fifty miles west, south and east of Athabasca Landing, was, from the Canadian government's point of view, included in Treaty #6, it was never legally ceded by the Cree who possessed aboriginal land rights there. In practice, however, they vacated the area, although probably not until the 1880s when traffic along the trail increased in volume and forest fires devastated part of the woodlands south of the Landing. In contrast, the Calling Lake region, like that of Lesser Slave Lake to the west and Wabasca to the north, remained a semi-permanent Cree settlement. Those areas were north of the Athabasca River; hence, they were not covered by Treaty #6.

Nothing much changed at Athabasca Landing between 1877 and 1882. No HBC employee was stationed there for more than a few weeks, and the only significant event of which we have record was an Anglican Sunday service held there by a missionary, the Rev. A.C. Garrioch, who was passing through.[16] Elsewhere, however, events were occurring that would have a profound effect on the Landing, its temporary inhabitants, and the Cree in the vicinity.

One such event was the Macdonald government's consolidated Indian Act of 1880, an extraordinary piece of legislation that set out to protect and control Indigenous cultural groups, and ultimately to coerce them into adopting the life style, values and forms of organization prescribed to them by the federal government. Among other things, the Act defined who was Indigenous in the government's eyes, and who was not; it set up a "pass system" designed to keep Indigenous peoples as farm labourers on reserves; and it replaced traditional methods of Indigenous self-government with a system of chiefs and band councils



George Franklin Cram. "North-West Territory." 1889. *Cram's Standard American Atlas Of The World.* Creative Commons via David Rumsey. Copyright © 2018 Cartography Associates. All Rights Reserved.

Aerial view of the Grand Rapids. The freight was landed at the head of the island (left) and then transported to the foot of the island (right). The empty scows were piloted through the rock-strewn but calmer waters of the East (bottom) Channel. Athabasca Archives Tannas Collection, 00416.

supervised by white administrators.[17] The Cree north of the Athabasca River were, as yet, exempt from this totalitarian paternalism, but their cousins south of the Landing were deemed to have accepted it by taking treaty.

However, while the Indian Act would not directly affect the Cree of Calling Lake until the turn of the century, another piece of legislation, passed by the Macdonald government in 1881, would have an impact on the HBC and the Landing much sooner. This was the Act that sanctioned the contract Macdonald had made with a syndicate of financiers and businessmen whereby, in exchange for $25,000,000, a land grant of 25,000,000 acres, and a twenty-year monopoly, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company would build the first Canadian transcontinental railroad.[18] In fact, because the CPR, desperate to cut costs, altered the railway's route so that it passed through what is now Calgary instead of Edmonton, this new transportation link with the East did not have as immediate or as great an effect on the fur trade and on the Landing as it might have had. Nonetheless, the rails reached Calgary in 1883, and it was obvious that a spur would soon be built to Edmonton. In the meantime, a cart road linked the two frontier towns. The construction of the CPR thus reinforced Edmonton's role as the chief HBC distribution centre for the North and the North-West, and that fact meant that, sooner or later, Athabasca Landing would have a bigger role to play.

The immediate stimulus to improve the Athabasca Trail and to develop the Landing came not from the CPR, however, but from the *Northcote* and other steamboats now regularly plying the North Saskatchewan River. It was so much easier for the HBC to ship trade goods into, and furs out of, the West via steamboat that the Company made two key decisions: to build steamboats on the northern lakes and rivers, and to abandon the old La Loche/Methye Portage route to Lake Athabasca.[19] The latter decision meant that the Athabasca Landing Trail and the Athabasca River were henceforth to be not only the HBC's main route to Lesser Slave Lake and the Peace country but also to Lake Athabasca, Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie valley. Athabasca Landing would become a gateway to the North.

The news reached Chief Factor Hardisty at Edmonton House around Christmas 1881, and it disturbed him. He was ordered to build a flotilla of

The East Channel of the Grand Rapids Athabasca Archives Tannas Collection, 00414.

scows to ship, down the Athabasca to Fort McMurray, the trade goods that in the past would have gone via the Methye Portage. Moreover, he was to expect the delivery of a ship's boiler, destined for the steamboat *Grahame*, soon to be built at Fort McMurray. Better aware—and more fearful—of the hazard posed by the Grand Rapids, Hardisty wondered whether scows and boiler would ever reach their destination. Still, orders were orders, so he gave a local builder, John Walters of Edmonton, a contract to build approximately 100 scows at the Landing, and he set to work assembling a larger contingent of Indigenous peoples and Métis to man the boats. [20]

Each scow required a crew of five or six men, and held about eight tons of freight. Constructed of rough lumber, they resembled long, narrow rafts with wooden walls and flat bottoms; most were destined to be broken up and used as building timber when they reached their destination.

The several hundred boatmen who loaded and navigated these cumbersome craft came to be known as the "Athabasca Brigade."[21] Tough, independent and carefree, they would come after a few years to know the river intimately; however, in 1882 no one, not even Louis Fousseneuve, knew exactly which rapids were navigable with a loaded scow (given skill and some luck), and which, if any, were simply impassable. Hardisty again consulted a local river "guide" and then obtained a second opinion from the Roman Catholic missionaries at Lesser Slave Lake and Lac La Biche. They advised that square-ended, flatbottomed scows would likely be swamped at Grand Rapids, where the river drops thirty feet in half a mile, but that if this dangerous spot were portaged, experienced boatmen might, under normal water conditions, successfully run the lesser rapids to the north.[22] This assessment proved accurate, and in the early summer of 1882 a small flotilla of specially designed boats set off downstream from Athabasca Landing. The Métis boatmen portaged the cargoes around the Grand Rapids, eased the lightened vessels through the rocks and white water, and made it safely through to Fort McMurray.

Hardisty was relieved to learn that even the heavy iron machinery intended for the *Grahame* had reached its destination, and that the first steamboat on the Athabasca River would be plying between Fort McMurray and Lake Athabasca in 1883.[23] The HBC authorities in Winnipeg, convinced that the decision to try the Athabasca River route had been wise, continued to send most trade goods and furs through Edmonton and Athabasca Landing. In June, 1883,

Hardisty sent the following routine report to Chief Commissioner Grahame:

> The steamer reached here 20.5. with our outfit. The goods were immediately dispatched to their several destinations and a good quantity of spring hunt in furs has been collected at different points. Two boats have been dispatched to Slave Lake, leaving the Landing on the 30th. There will be 450 pieces at the Landing by the end of the month to go by way of Slave Lake for Peace River and Athabasca District. There are 305 pieces for Athabasca [District] at the Landing ready to go down by scow by the end of the month. Communication from Ft. Chief was too late to have the scows ready in May.[24]

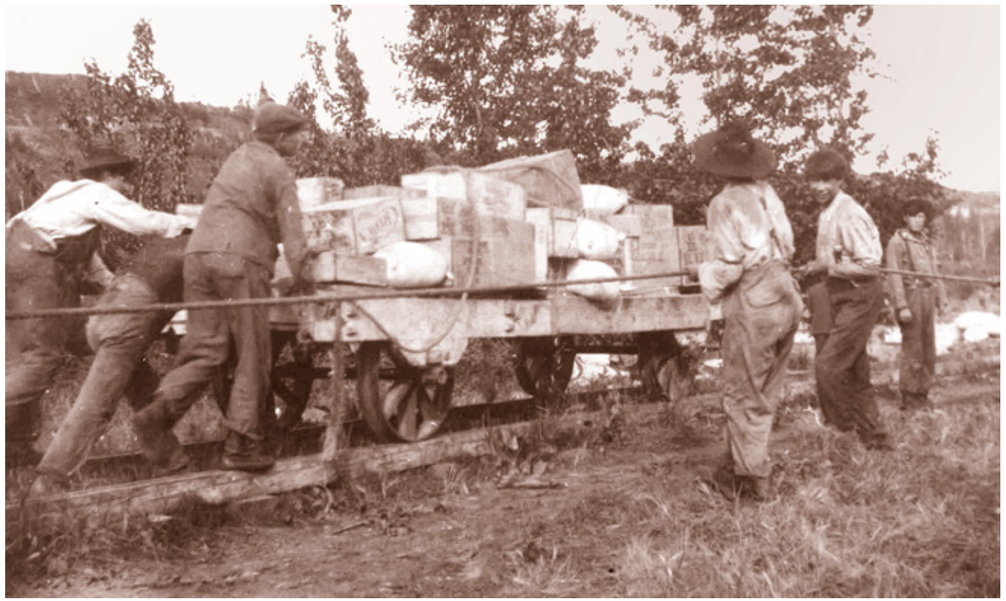
This report makes clear that Hardisty, a cautious man not yet fully certain about the Grand Rapids route, was hedging his bets, sending part of the consignment for Fort Chipewyan via the much longer, but safer, Lesser Slave Lake/Peace River route. For the boatmen this route entailed a weary haul upstream to Mirror Landing (near the present town of Smith), and then upstream again to Lesser Slave Lake. They—or at least the more adventurous spirits among them—preferred the excitement of the white water downstream to Fort McMurray, and Fousseneuve set out to prove that even laden, flatbottomed scows could run the Grand Rapids. He succeeded sometime between 1883 and 1885, winning the sobriquet "Captain Shot." Soon other "guides" from the Athabasca Brigade emulated him, but it was still chancy business: scows and their cargoes were lost occasionally, and almost invariably the precious goods were drenched with spray and had to be unpacked and dried out before the voyage could continue.

To this problem the HBC devised a solution. At the Grand Rapids the Athabasca River divides into two streams, with an island separating them. A narrow-gauge wooden railroad was constructed from the head of the island to the other end, below the worst rapids. Cargoes were unloaded at the head, taken down by flatcar, and then reloaded on the scows which, when light, could more easily negotiate the swirling east channel. It wasn't a perfect solution; lives and cargoes were still lost here occasionally, and in bad weather some of the other rapids further downstream also claimed their share of drowned men. But from the point of view of Hardisty and the HBC, it was good enough—after all, the boatmen made good money and enjoyed showing off their skills. From 1885 onwards the Athabasca Landing/Fort McMurray river route was the principal highway to the North.[25]

As a result of these developments, the HBC warehouse at Athabasca Landing was upgraded into a trading post. Since 1881 Leslie Wood had been spending several months a year at the Landing "dwelling house" (it was still a small log shack, mostly filled with furs

The island at Grand Rapids. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2899.

Narrow gauge railroad on Grand Rapids island. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2898.



Rivermen and flatcar using the Grand Rapids railroad, c. 1900. Athabasca Archives Wright Collection, 00437.

Scow going over Big Cascade on the Athabasca River. n.d. Library and Archives Canada Dept. of Interior, PA-046110.

or trade goods in transit), but now, in 1884, he took up permanent residence. Wood was Hardisty's choice for the job, and he explained his reasons in a confidential report penned that year:

> Wood—10 years in the service, found very interested in any work he has been put to. He has lately been most of the time in the office, and as he understands the Indian language is very useful when sent out to trade in Indian camp. He is a pushing, energetic man, runs freight dept. and takes charge of trading parties. Has been married 12 years. Good post manager.[26]

Leslie Wood (left) and two other HBC employees, Jock Irwin and Russell Bannerman, standing in front of the first Hudson's Bay Company retail store, Athabasca Landing, built 1886-87. Athabasca Archives, 00758.

Leslie Wood's first house, Athabasca Landing, built 1884. Athabasca Archives, 01265.

Freighter stuck on the Landing Trail. Provincial Archives of Alberta: Brown Collection, B 5682.

We do not know if Wood's wife accompanied him to Athabasca Landing, but we do know that he was soon joined there by a young man named Colin Johnston, whom Wood was to train to be the Post's itinerant trader with the Cree of Calling Lake and Wabasca.[27]

The next step was to improve the cart road to the

Hudson's Bay Company main warehouse, Athabasca Landing, built 1886-87. Athabasca Archives, 00697.

The S.S. *Athabasca* at Athabasca Landing. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2866.

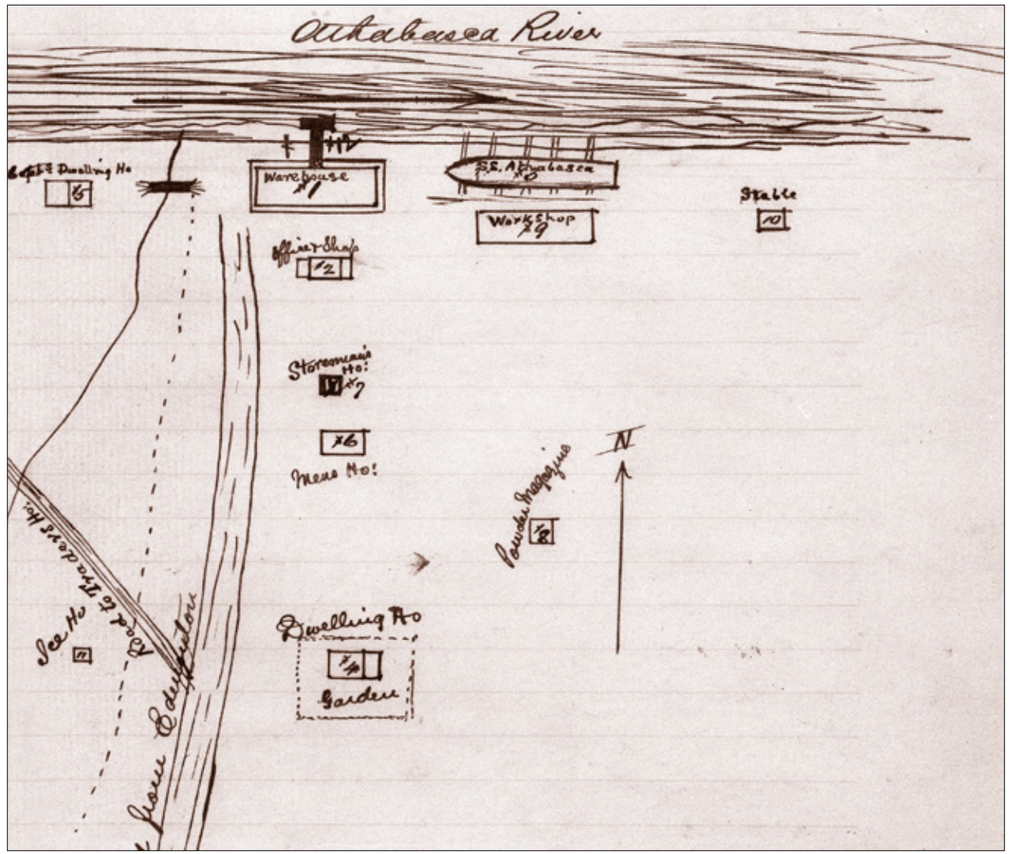
Four riverboat captains, including Captain John Segers (probably second from left), 1884. Canada. Library and Archives Canada Patent and Copyright Office, C-002876.

Landing: this was done, at HBC expense, in 1885 by a gang of labourers in the charge of W.R. Brereton. The main improvements were widening the trail, burning back the forest on either side to prevent it encroaching again, and building wooden bridges over streams and patches of bog.[28] The burns, which set off forest fires and devastated large areas of woodland, made settlement along the trail more feasible, and the process began in 1886, when John Gullion homesteaded land three miles south of Bridge Lakes.[29] The HBC also resumed building at the Landing: in 1886–87 workmen constructed a log dwelling house, 100 feet long and thirty feet wide, with kitchen, an ice house, a small retail store, a workshop, a blacksmith shop, a stable, and a large freight warehouse.[30] Nor was this all. A steamboat was planned for the central section of the Athabasca River between Mirror Landing and Pelican Portage, and it was to be constructed at the Landing. As the Edmonton Bulletin reported on September 24, 1887:

> The steamer to be built at the Athabasca Landing this winter by the HB Co. is to be 144 feet keel and 26 feet beam, a sternwheeler with engines having a 12 by 42 inch stroke. The machinery is to be furnished by the Iowa Iron Works, the same establishment which furnished that of the *Grahame*. The engines are of the same power as those of the *Grahame*. The hull of the new boat will be on much the same model as the *Grahame* but will be 14 ft longer with 2 ft greater breadth of beam. The machinery and supplies will be brought in the fall. The lumber will be sawn at the Landing. … About 10 men will be employed on her all winter. It is expected to have her completed next May. … The boat will be built on plans drawn by Capt. Smith who will superintend the work. This steamer will supply the missing link in the chain of steamboat communication reaching from Winnipeg to the Arctic Ocean, all owned and operated directly or indirectly by the HB Co. and will completely establish the northern trade by the Edmonton route.[31]

In the event, the Edmonton Bulletin article turned out to be slightly inaccurate. When completed the next summer, the S. S. *Athabasca* was 162 feet long and nearly twenty-eight feet wide, with a draft of four feet, and her Captain was John Segers. The most difficult task involved in building her was transporting her 6,200 lb boiler from Calgary over the muddy cart roads to Edmonton and then north to the Landing. Once the boiler was installed, however, the steamboat could be launched, and the launching duly took place in August, 1888. The *Athabasca* had cost $31,966.98.[32]

With all this capital investment by the HBC in Athabasca Landing, it is not surprising that the volume of trade passing through the post increased dramatically from 1888 onwards. The number of inhabitants at the Landing was increasing too. George Gullion moved there to take up work with the Company, bringing with him his wife and



Inspecting Chief Factor James McDougall. Hudson's Bay Company "Sketch Plan of Athabasca Landing." 1891. Archives of Manitoba Hudson's Bay Company Archives, D. 24/19 fo. 295.

Richard Secord. Edmonton Public Library.

his two-year-old son, Frank, and constructing a log cabin approximately on the site of the present Union Hotel.[33] In June, 1888, Richard Secord, former Edmonton schoolteacher and sometime employee of Edmonton fur trader J. A. McDougall, moved to the Landing to open a trading store, his first independent commercial venture. Secord purchased two lots from the HBC, land which the Company itself had purchased from the Canadian Government only a few months before.[34]

In fact, until 1888 the HBC did not own the land upon which its facilities had been built. On April 4th of the same year James W. Millians of the Department of the Interior, Dominion Lands Office, Survey Branch, authorized the sale of 640 acres to the Company. The HBC paid $2.00 per acre, plus $317.22 for the government survey: a total of $1,597.22.[35] Except perhaps in the eyes of the Cree, whose aboriginal land rights in the area had never been legally extinguished, Athabasca Landing was now a full-fledged HBC trading post and settlement.

CHAPTER 3

Hudson's Bay Company Settlement, 1889–1896

The launching of the S. S. *Athabasca* in 1888 and the completion of the Calgary–Strathcona railroad in 1891 consolidated Athabasca Landing's new role as a key link in the Hudson's Bay Company's transportation network in the North-West Territories. By 1889, then, the Landing was established as "the gateway to the North," and a small settlement was beginning to huddle around the HBC wharf and warehouse.

It is difficult to be sure of the hamlet's population in these years before the Klondike gold rush artificially (and temporarily) swelled the numbers of people at the "elbow of the Athabasca," but it seems to have fluctuated between as few as half a dozen and as many as 100. By 1896 there would be four groups of permanent residents—HBC employees, Anglican missionaries, policemen and independent traders—but as in 1889 neither the missionaries nor the police had yet arrived,

Scows and a steamboat at Athabasca Landing, 1903. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2863.

Scow arriving at Athabasca Landing. n.d. Glenbow Archives, NA-4002-10.

the Landing's population then consisted of the five or six people who ran the HBC post (Leslie Wood and possibly his wife, cook Lynn Short, and labourers Thomas Mearon, George Gullion and William Gullion), the eleven men who manned the steamboat (Captain John Segers, his captain's boy, the pilot, the engineer, the mate, who was also an apprentice engineer, two firemen and four deck-hands), and the independent store-keeper and fur-trader, Richard Secord.[1]

This nucleus was periodically augmented by Métis boatmen from the Athabasca brigade who were paid for their gruelling and dangerous work in goods from the Landing post's store. And during this period another transient group of Métis came, not from the Wabasca or Lac La Biche areas, but from central Saskatchewan, fleeing the wrath of the Canadian government after the Rebellion of 1885. After stopping temporarily at the Landing, these Métis moved a dozen miles further west, and in the late 1880s established the first permanent native settlement at what later came to be known as Baptiste Lake. They often returned to the Landing when seasonal work was available from the Company. The Landing's population was also at times augmented by an Indigenous encampment, but although reported by several travellers, this camp does not seem to have been permanent. Since the steamboat crewmen lived at the Landing only in the summer, and even then were often away on trips, life must have been rather lonely for Wood and Secord, and they no doubt welcomed the company provided by the occasional traveller making use of the HBC transportation service to the North.[2]

A few of these travellers have left us the earliest eye-witness accounts of the Athabasca Trail, the Landing, and the river route beyond. For example, Warburton Pike, who visited Athabasca in June, 1889, kept a diary that he later wrote up as *The Barren Ground at Northern Canada*. This book included the first published description of the Landing Trail and the Landing itself:

> A fair road some hundred miles in length has been made by the Hudson's Bay Company through a rolling sandy country, crossing several large streams and passing through a good deal of thick pine timber where some heavy chopping must have been necessary. The flies bothered us greatly; the large bulldogs, looking like a cross between a bee and a blue-bottle, drove the horses almost to madness, and after our midday halt it was no easy matter to put the harness on; fortunately we had netting, or the poor beasts would have fared much worse: as it was the blood was streaming from their flanks during the heat of the day. The mosquitoes appeared towards evening, but as the nights were usually chilly they annoyed us only for a few hours. There were no houses along the road, but plenty of firewood and feed for the horses; we had a good camp every night, sleeping in the open air, starting very early and resting long in the middle of the day. … [E]arly on the fourth day we carne in sight of Athabasca, running between high pine-clad banks. … This spot is known as the Athabasca landing, and consists of a large depot for goods, trading-store, and several workmen's houses, while the house of the officer in charge stands on the hillside a little way back from the river.[3]

Pike apparently travelled in dry weather, and, although plagued by insects, did not suffer the other bane of travellers on the Athabasca Trail—mud. Others were not so lucky. As one reads the succession of visitors' reports that appeared in print from 1894 onwards, one finds a near consensus on four things: the bugs were pesky; the trail was poorly maintained; the accommodations at the Landing were primitive and uncomfortable; but the Woods were hospitable and friendly, if rather taciturn.

Three parties of travellers who passed through in 1893 have left accounts of their visits. The first to arrive that year was Frank Russell, who subsequently published the following brief description in his book, *Exploration in the Far North*:

> Upon reaching the crest of the hill overlooking the picturesque valley of the Athabasca, at its northward bend, we were greatly disappointed to behold the river still locked in the ice of winter. We were compelled to wait four days before it opened. … A quarter of a mile up the river was the free traders' establishment, where a barge was being built to take down their summer outfit. Below the Company's wharf lay the "Athabasca", a stern wheel steamer, drawn out upon the bank for the winter. Beyond was a depot containing goods for the Roman Catholic missions of the North, and near by two young Scotchmen had pitched their tent to await the first trip of the steamer toward the Peace River valley where they expected to engage in farming.[4]

Apart from informing us that the Landing settlement consisted of "six log buildings, picturesquely set in the deep and beautiful valley of one of the greatest rivers of America," J. W. Tyrrell's record, in *Across the Sub-Arctics of Canada*, of his visit to Athabasca later that same month adds little to Russell's account.[5] However, A. Hungerford Pollen's introduction to the book, *The Land of the Muskeg*, by H. Somers Somerset, is more informative. Somerset and Pollen were making a hunting trip through the Peace River country, but they were interested in much more than the wild animals of the North-West. They observed the aboriginal inhabitants of the region keenly, and Pollen made some perceptive comments about the independence of action and freedom from government still enjoyed by fur traders, missionaries and native peoples north of the Athabasca River:

> The Athabaska Landing is the gate of the great North. It is from here that all the stores go out that supply the Hudson's Bay Company's forts from Hudson's Hope to the mouth of the Mackenzie. A steamer built on the spot plies up the river to the mouth of the Slave River, and down to where the rapids make the Athabaska no longer navigable, where the stores are transshipped to York boats. Beyond the warehouses, offices, and Mr. Wood's residence there are no buildings, although most of the year there is a large Indian encampment near by. It is, too, the last outpost of the Government, and a couple of the Canadian police were on duty to stop the importation of strong liquor. ... Over all the rest of … Canada the land has been taken and settled after treaty with the Indian

Loaded scow leaving foot of island, at Grand Rapids, Athabasca River. n.d. Library and Archives Canada Dept. of Interior, PA-046106.

tribes, the natives giving up their right to range freely, and getting reservations of territory and an annual supply of food in return. With the northern Indians no such treaties have been made, and I believe it is an open question whether they are at all under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Courts. . . . One thing, however, is certain, and it is that north of Athabaska there is no function of Government that is discharged either by the Dominion of Canada or the Imperial authority; nor has the original power of the Indian chiefs survived in its integrity, and over far the greater part of the North-West all the machinery of control they know is represented to the uncovenanted Indian by the Hudson's Bay Company and the missionaries of St. Mary Immaculate.[6]

As these accounts indicate, by 1893 the fur traders at Athabasca Landing had been joined by Indigenous, missionaries, policemen and whiskey runners. The first homesteaders headed for the Peace country were passing through, and another year or two would see the arrival of the first gold panners and oil drillers. Athabasca Landing, in short, was beginning to become a frontier community.

The new bustle of activity in and around the HBC's one square mile reserve was as yet limited in scope and magnitude, but we can detect four important developments during the eight years, 1889–1896: the further expansion and consolidation of the HBC operation at the Landing; the activities of various kinds of independent traders and prospectors; the impact of measures taken by the government of Canada; and a significant increase in the use made of the Landing by Christian missionaries.

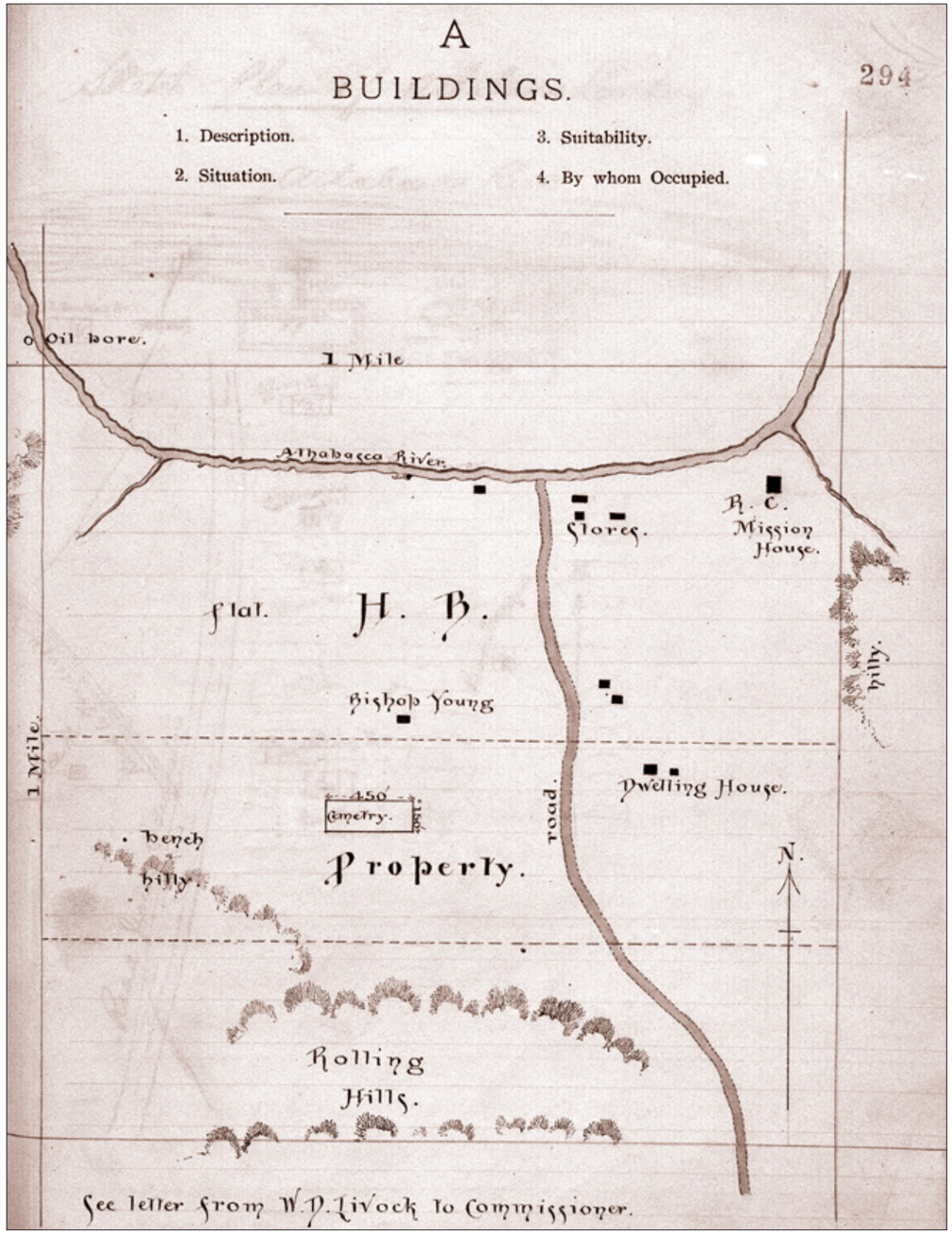
The increasing importance of Athabasca Landing to the HBC's trading network in the North-West was reflected in renewed building activity at the post in 1890–91. The new structures included a new wharf with a connecting jetty to the main warehouse, a powder magazine, and an additional one-and-a-half storey dwelling house, to which was attached an existing log cabin to serve as a kitchen.[7] Most of this work was done by the steamer crew, in between trips on the river, under the supervision of a new HBC clerk, George Kinnaird.

Kinnaird replaced Leslie Wood at the Landing for these two years, but Wood was back in 1892, perhaps because Kinnaird, whom the Fort Edmonton factor (now a man named Livock) characterized as "thoroughly reliable & trustworthy although rather slow," was not suited to the demanding combination of responsibility and solitude involved in running the Landing post.[8] Not that Wood found it easy; he apparently had recourse to the whiskey bottle rather frequently, and his drinking was mentioned with concern in several confidential HBC personnel reports

Leslie Wood (right) with postmaster James McKernan, main street Athabasca Landing, 1909. Library and Archives Canada RCMP Archives, e999916225-u.

during the mid-1890s.[9] By 1896, however, he had turned over a new leaf, and was once again being judged by his superiors as hard working and capable, if a little difficult to get along with. Wood, incidentally, was not the only inhabitant of the Landing who found the long winter evenings intolerable without chemical solace—Richard Secord's ledger books for his Athabasca store reveal that he both sold and used considerable quantities of painkiller.[10]

Relations between Wood and Secord seem to have been less than cordial. They were both hard-headed businessmen, but Secord had the edge: he brought into his store a wider selection of merchandise than the HBC made available to Wood; he had established good trading connections with trappers and independent fur buyers in the far North; and he paid higher prices (and gave credit more readily) to local Indigenous and Métis trappers. By the spring of 1890, this irksome competition was strong enough to require action by the Company. In line with the HBC's general policy of attempting to undercut or buy out all competitors in the fur trade, Secord was offered a fairly generous deal, and given an ultimatum, by Harrison Young of the Fort Edmonton post. As Young explained in a letter to HBC Commissioner Joseph Wrigley, Secord "did not care to sell, but I assured him I was prepared to drop a couple of thousand in forcing him away."[11] This threat, plus the carrot of $3,500 for buildings, stock and "book debts" really worth considerably less, achieved the desired result—in May the HBC regained its monopoly of trade at the Landing. Although Richard Secord left the Landing, he remained in the fur trade, setting up



"HBC Buildings at Athabasca Landing." 1894. Hudson's Bay Company sketch-map. Archives of Manitoba Hudson's Bay Company Archives, D. 25i19 fa. 294.

Leslie Wood's house, originally built in 1884 but probably rebuilt in the early to mid 1890s. Library and Archives Canada RCMP Archives, e999916219-u.

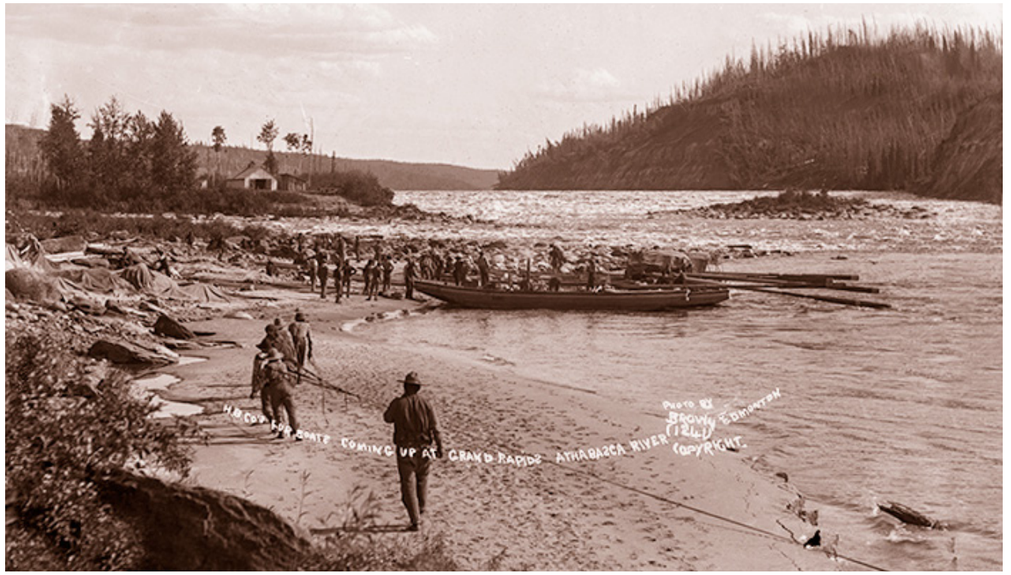
in Edmonton the next year, in partnership with his old employer, John A. McDougall.[12]

The costly defeat of Secord left the HBC free to retain its old trading methods at the Landing. The basic principle underlying this technique was an avoidance of cash transactions. While the Landing post was usually kept well stocked with supplies that could be purchased by casual visitors on their way north or south, the primary purpose of this merchandise was to provide payment in kind to boatmen, labourers, freighters and trappers. The "no cash" approach prevented the Company's clients from spending their earnings elsewhere than at the HBC store, and hence made constant shipments of coin and banknotes to the Landing unnecessary. But it could not disguise the fact that the Landing post regularly lost money. Despite the moderate success of the subsidiary post at Wabasca, which did bring in some furs and hence some profits, the running expenses of the Company's river transportation system far outweighed the income generated by local fur trading and by the increasing volume of passenger traffic on the steamboat. This was not surprising, and was hardly Wood's fault, but the fact remained that the Landing post was perpetually "in the red," and from 1892 onwards Wood, whom his superiors regarded as somewhat bullheaded and inclined to ram things through no matter what the price, was under constant pressure to minimize costs. [13]

So, while the HBC post at Athabasca Landing expanded during the 1890s, it did so in a relatively cautious, even parsimonious, manner. The Landing remained primarily a transportation centre rather than a trading outlet, and supervising the transfer of trade goods from cart to warehouse to steamboat (and vice-versa for the rather less bulky and heavy furs on their way to Montreal and London) was still Leslie Wood's main task in the 1890s. The S. S. *Athabasca* continued to be at the heart of this transportation network, at least during the summer months while the Athabasca River was navigable.

The *Athabasca* was not a fast boat—the round trip from the Landing to Grand Rapids and back sometimes took about a week—but she was capable of carrying more cargo and of making more trips than the HBC actually required to supply its northern posts. Only in the early summer did the steamboat operate at maximum capacity, as the following extracts from the *Athabasca's* log indicate:

May 18—launched from the ways where she was wintered.
June 2—first trip-left for the Grand Rapids with 127½ tons of freight and four passengers.
June 9—returned to the Landing.
June 12—second trip-left for Lesser Slave Lake.
June 14—reached the mouth of Lesser Slave Lake.
July 13—third trip-left for Grand Rapids with 60⅕ tons of freight.
July 14—arrived at Grand Rapids.
July 22—left Grand Rapids (delayed because of sickness among the boatmen who did not arrive until the 19th).
July 25—reached the Landing.
August 15—fourth trip-left for Grand Rapids with 3⅒ tons of freight.
August 16—arrived at Grand Rapids.
August 19—1eft Grand Rapids with 14 tons of freight
August 22—reached the Landing.[14]



HBC scows at Grand Rapids. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2890.

However, if the S. S. *Athabasca*, like her sister ship the S. S. *Grahame* further north, was one of the stronger links in the HBC transportation system, two weak links remained. One was the series of rapids from Grand Rapids north, which the Athabasca brigade, notwithstanding the heroic deeds of Captain Shot, never completely tamed. The rapids posed three problems. The first was the inconvenience, expense and loss of time involved in transferring cargoes from steamer to York boat or scow and back again. The second was the danger—every once in a while more cargo or lives would be lost to the white water, the most notorious instance being when a steamship boiler plunged to the bottom of the river thirty miles south

Tracking scows on the Athabasca River. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Acc. #70-297/74c.

of Fort McMurray, at the place thereafter known as Boiler Rapids. The third was the fact that pulling boats upstream through the rapids was an exceptionally onerous task: called "tracking," the procedure required a crew of at least eight to ten men per scow, walking along the slippery banks of the river with long ropes attached to the clumsy craft, and it was a tedious, dangerous and backbreaking job that normally took two or three weeks per trip.[15] Yet there seemed to be no way around these difficulties if the HBC were to go on using the Athabasca River route, so the Company and its employees simply learned to put up with them. The weak link in the chain remained weak, however, and that meant that the HBC and its rivals, the independent traders, kept on the look-out for an alternative route. In the short term there was no alternative, but the enduring problem of the rapids suggested—to anyone who thought carefully about the matter—that the long-term future of the Landing was not bright.

The other weak link in the HBC's chain of communications was the Landing Trail. The Company had invested a considerable amount of capital in the road, first by blazing it and later by improving it, but it was still not very satisfactory. With heavy use it tended to deteriorate, and it was nearly impassable in rainy weather, when the low-lying sections turned into treacherous mud bogs. Furthermore, there were several tricky fords to be negotiated on the southern sections of the route. Naturally, the Company wanted the road to be further improved; however, in 1888 the federal government had passed an act to provide for an elected Assembly and a limited degree of self-government for the North-West Territories, and the Territorial government had made it clear that it would have no truck with the HBC claim that the Trail was a private right-of-way. Having proclaimed public ownership of the road, the government became responsible for maintaining and improving it. Although the Territorial Council needed a couple of years to obtain the funding, in 1890 it did commission bridges over the Sturgeon and Vermilion rivers, an important first step in reconstructing the trail.[16] These improvements certainly helped, yet—as numerous travellers' reports testify—the Athabasca Trail remained inadequate even by contemporary standards. Understandably, Leslie Wood and other HBC officials dreamed of an extension of the Calgary–Edmonton railroad to the Landing. But, like the idea of somehow by passing the Athabasca River rapids, that vision of the future was to remain a dream for quite a few years.

The Athabasca Landing Trail on the outskirts of Athabasca Landing. Glenbow Archives, NA-4035-106.

While the Company's "headquarters of northern transportation" (the phrase used to describe the Landing post in internal documents) still dominated commercial activity at Athabasca Landing in the 1890s, other business enterprises were now also in evidence. Although Richard Secord had relocated his main office to Edmonton in 1890, he continued in the fur business, setting up a series of posts between Athabasca and Great Slave Lake, and regularly travelling to the Landing to receive shipments of furs brought up-river from these posts. For transportation he used, not the S. S. *Athabasca* (his relations with the Company were icy), but independent Métis boatmen. If he needed short-term storage space at the Landing, he rented it from Colin Johnston who in 1891 became an independent trader and built himself a cabin/warehouse on the edge of the HBC reserve, just west of Muskeg Creek.

This new competition irritated the HBC inspector, J. McDougall, who had a keen sense of the Company's capital investment in the Landing and its legal rights as owner of the square mile on which the little frontier community was growing up. Indignantly he reported to his superiors this new free trader's incursions into what he regarded as the HBC's preserve:

> A trader squatted on the Company's western boundary has opened a road across the Co.'s property between his house & the Edmonton Road. The road is used by freighters going to Lesser Slave Lake, & if not closed might be claimed as a public road. It is suggested a fence be built. The road from Edmonton was opened by the Company in 1876 at a cost of $4,059.00 and since then repairs and maintenance were made at different times amounting to $7,792.00, making a total of $11,851.00.[17]

As far as we know, McDougall's fence was never built. It was unnecessary in any case: the Company's ownership of the Landing reserve was not in doubt, and its futile attempt to claim ownership of the Trail south of the reserve was already a lost cause. Nor was there any realistic possibility that the HBC could seriously hamper the free-traders' activities.

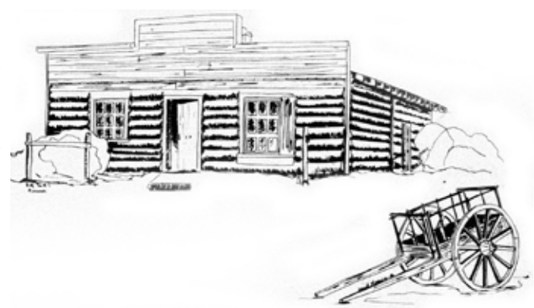
Moreover, more people unconnected with the HBC were coming to live and work at the Landing. Isaie Gagnon, for example, saw in the increasing passenger traffic through the Landing a good opportunity for a hotel proprietor. Lacking capital, he started small: his first boarding house had only two beds and one table.

But as the years went by, business gradually improved so that he eventually became the owner of the village's first hotel. Meanwhile, he supplemented his income by dealing in livestock, operating a small sawmill, and doing any odd jobs that were available.[15] In 1894 Gagnon and Johnston were joined by W. F. "Billy" Smith who initially worked as a labourer with a drilling

Isaie Gagnon. Athabasca Archives, 16840.

company, then as a freighter, next as a proprietor of a "stopping house" serving other freighters, and finally (from April 1901) as a homesteader, squatting on land ten miles south of the HBC reserve.[19] These newcomers, like the Wood, grew grain and vegetables to help support themselves; thus, by the mid-1890s several acres were under cultivation in the vicinity of the Landing.

The drilling for oil with which Billy Smith assisted was conducted in 1894-95 by a small firm, owned and operated by A. W. Fraser, under contract from the Geological Survey of Canada, a branch of the federal government.[20] Ottawa had become interested in searching for oil in the middle Athabasca River valley



Billy Smith's stopping house. Pen and ink imprerssion by David McGuire.

Oil drilling rig at Athabasca Landing. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2583.

as the result of two developments: the opening of the Calgary–Edmonton railroad, which had made the region more accessible; and an 1890 report by geologist R. G. McConnell, who had surveyed both Athabasca and Peace River valleys for the Department of the Interior. McConnell considered that there was a good chance that the tar sands evident near the surface at Boiler Rapids might be found at a greater, but still mineable depth near Athabasca Landing.[21] The only way to test McConnell's theory was to drill, so the operation got underway in August, 1894, on the river bank just west of the HBC reserve. By freeze up a test bore of 1,011 feet had been made, and considerable reserves of natural gas had been discovered, but no oil. This was disappointing, but Fraser was still optimistic and appended the following remarks to the technical report he submitted to the Geological Survey:

> Owing to the greater thickness of the La Biche shales, the oil sands will probably not be met with at a less depth than 1,500 feet. … With a view to the economic value of the discovery of petroleum in the far North-West, the present site must be regarded as a wise selection. Had the test been made lower down the river, and nearer to the outcrop of the "tar sands", the finding of petroleum might have been more certain, but if found, nothing could be done about it until tests were made at the Landing or elsewhere to discover whether it was not to be had nearer to the railway. Much interest has been taken in the development of this oil field by the residents of Edmonton and the surrounding country. … Already a few have profited by the money spent in prospecting and have earned small sums of money which have materially helped them in paying for lands. … The Hudson's Bay Company has evinced great interest and its agents at Edmonton and Athabasca Landing, Mr. Livock and Mr. Wood, have used every endeavour to help on the work, I am greatly indebted to them for their ever willing help.[22]

The Geological Survey's own estimate was that the strata containing the tar sands would be found at a depth of between 1,200 and 1,500 feet, so Fraser was authorized to resume drilling next spring. He did so, but the results were no more encouraging. Breakdowns of the drilling equipment slowed the work, but by October, 1895, the bore hole had reached 1,731 feet with no sign of oil or tar sands. This depth was near the technical limit of the time, so Fraser recommended that the entire operation be switched the next spring to the confluence of the Pelican River and the Athabasca, about half way to Fort McMurray, where he estimated the tar sands might be found at a depth of 700 feet. Thus ended the first attempt to find oil near Athabasca Landing. The exploratory drill had achieved one thing: it had demonstrated that natural gas was available to provide a future energy source in the region.[23]

Fraser and Smith were not the only miners to visit Athabasca Landing in the mid-1890s. Gold seekers were already panning along the North Saskatchewan River, and in 1895 several groups of them decided to move further north to try the Athabasca and its tributaries.

Beginning with the Pembina River, they followed the route David Thompson had once taken when he became the first white man to ever set eyes on the "elbow of the Athabasca." By the time they had floated on primitive log rafts downstream to the Landing, most of them had concluded that gold was not to be found in paying quantities, and they returned, dejected, along the Athabasca Trail to Edmonton.[24] Some would be back, a few years later, with their hopes pinned on using the river to reach the Yukon. Others concluded that freighting on the Trail was a surer, if slower, way of making money.

Since both the HBC and the independent traders would be dependent on horse-drawn cartage from Edmonton to the Landing until the hoped for railroad reached the river, freighting provided a solid and reasonably secure livelihood in the 1890s and 1900s to anyone with both sufficient capital to purchase a cart, sleigh and horses, and sufficient determination to endure the hardships of the freighter's life. It was an all-season, all-weather activity, as one freighter, Laurence Rye, who began travelling on the Athabasca Trail in 1892, recalled more than seventy years later:

> Freighting was a big business. A good two-horse team could haul two tons twenty-two miles a day. A yoke of oxen would haul about one-third more but would take two or three hours longer to travel the same distance. The roads and trails during the busy seasons would be occupied by scores of teams going and coming. … The freighter usually carried feed grain for his teams and would pay for the overnight stabling where hay was usually supplied. Many of the stopping places consisted of a fair size shack equipped with a stove, which provided welcome warmth during the winter. After stabling our horses we would go into this shack and cook our own meal, then roll our blankets on the floor and go to sleep. We were on the road before daybreak. At noon we usually stopped at any convenient place along the way, gave our horses a feed of grain, possibly a little hay, and ate our lunch which not infrequently was frozen. Each freighter usually operated two two-

Freighter with six-horse team transporting a boiler on the Athabasca Trail. NAPOTA, EA-10-1206.

Freighter with two two-horse teams on the Athabasca Trail. NAPOTA, EA-10-1214.

horse teams and two sleighs. It was considered a much better practice to distribute the loads over two sleighs hauled by a team each than to overload one sleigh hauled by four horses. By the former method the roads were protected and maintained in better condition throughout the winter. Heavy freighting was usually done during the winter when the ground was frozen and the ice on the rivers and lakes could be utilized.[25]

Still a youth not yet in his teens when he first saw Athabasca Landing in the company of freighter Hayward Roswell, Laurence Rye and his father worked regularly on the Trail throughout the 1890s, carrying "all kinds of freight and heavy equipment, the latter consisting of machines, engines and boilers … for shipment up the river for northern destinations.[26] With such cargo the hundred miles between Edmonton and Athabasca took five days in good weather, although the trip could be made in three days if the carts or sleighs were returning empty. Apparently the freighting charge for most merchandise was fairly standard-$I5.00 per ton or 75 cents per hundredweight for the Edmonton–Athabasca haul.[27]

One kind of merchandise carried by some traders and travellers was illegal anywhere north of Athabasca Landing—liquor. But since there was a good market for whiskey and brandy among trappers, boatmen and other residents of the North, whether Indigenous, white or Métis, the North-West Territorial Government's decree prohibiting liquor sales was frequently broken. The liquor traffic became more difficult after 1892. In that year, for the first time, a detachment of North West Mounted Police was stationed at the Landing for the duration of the freighting season, and the free traders in alcohol had to resort to smuggling.[28] Soon "whiskey trails" led off to right and left as the Trail approached

Egge's stopping house, halfway between Edmonton and Athabasca Landing (built 1896). Athabasca Archives, 00690.

the Landing, disguised paths that circumvented the police checkpoint and reached the river bank at points where boats might pick up the contraband goods. Since the NWMP routinely searched the banks downstream for such stashes, some enterprising smugglers took their booze a few miles upstream instead, and then floated it past the Landing by night. Traveller Frank Russell recalled one such incident in his *Explorations in the Far North*:

> A small squad of mounted police was stationed at the landing to prevent liquor from being carried into the North. On the night of May 2nd we were awakened by the uproar occasioned by a passing skiff, containing a large quantity of whiskey, which, owing to the darkness and the dangerous condition of the river, succeeded in escaping.[29]

That was not the only liquor that escaped the watchful eyes of Sgt. S. Heatherington and his nine-man force. Many stories have entered local folklore about the bootleggers' methods of tricking the police constables. Some smugglers, for example, would tie their illicit cargo to drifting logs. Others would boldly submit their merchandise to inspection, trusting that the NWMP would not look too carefully at their cans of peaches and bottles of horse liniment. One flamboyant character loaded his brew in an empty coffin and offered a free ride in his wagon to a group of nuns travelling north. How much liquor got through—or bypassed—the police checkpoint we do not know, but, according to NWMP records, some 130 gallons of wine and spirits were confiscated in 1893, while in 1894 the total catch rose to 465 gallons.[30] Since the amount of freight examined was much the same each year (between 500 and 600 tons), the police operation obviously became more efficient as the constables cottoned on to the smugglers' wiles. One of the NWMP's more effective moves was to station officers at the mouth of the Lesser Slave River and at the Grand Rapids, thereby netting much of the contraband that escaped detection at the Landing. For the three years 1893–1895, bootlegging became a more risky and less profitable business, but, just when they seemed to have the situation under control, the NWMP gave up. In 1896 a severe manpower shortage at the Fort Saskatchewan headquarters (or was it, perhaps, political pressure?) resulted in the withdrawal from the Landing of all but two policemen, and the closing down of the Lesser Slave River and Grand Rapids posts.[31]

The NWMP at Athabasca Landing encountered other problems as well. To help them deal with the local Indigenous population they employed Métis interpreters, such as James Gullion, but being able to communicate with the people was one thing; making

Mounties looking for illicit liquor. Athabasca Archives Thorne Collection, 00033.

A NWMP patrol in winter. Athabasca Archives Thorne Collection, 00104.

them understand and respect Canadian law was quite another. Essentially the attitude of the Calling Lake, Lesser Slave Lake, Wabasca and other cultural groups was that they owned and controlled their hunting grounds, and they made and abided by their own laws. They were not hostile to the NWMP, provided the detachment minded its own business—policing Europeans—but any attempt to enforce Canadian law among cultural groups was protested vigorously. An incident reported by Somerset and Pollen in *The Land of the Muskeg* illustrates the difficulty in which the police found themselves: even the courts of the North-West Territories were reluctant to impose their jurisdiction north of the Athabasca River.

> … the day after our arrival [at Athabasca] a weatherbeaten old savage landed in a beautifully made birch-bark canoe while we were loitering at the landing-place … His story was curious … there was a domestic quarrel, it seems, one day in his lodge, and his son offering some serious incivility to his mother, he gave him a lesson in good-breeding by chopping off his head with an axe. For this he was taken out to Winnipeg, I think, and tried for murder, found guilty and sentenced, his counsel all the while protesting. The sentence was changed to imprisonment, and finally after a few weeks' detention, he was released and restored to his country—whether on the score of health or want of jurisdiction in the Court I am unable to say, but I was told that the first was made an excuse for not deciding the latter question.[32]

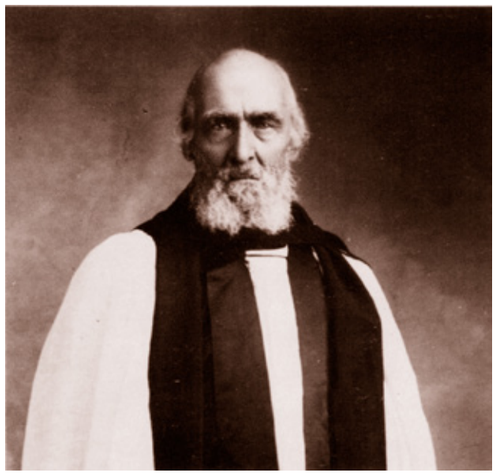
Faced with this apparent ambiguity in the legal status of the local Indigenous population, the NWMP for the time being beat a retreat from its premature attempt to bring the Queen's justice to the non-treaty areas of the North-West. Its manpower was, in any case, obviously insufficient to mount more than the occasional roving patrol across the river.

But if the mounted police left the Indigenous peoples alone, and after 1895 ignored most of the whiskey smugglers as well, what did the remaining policemen at the Landing do? The Territorial government, apparently, was becoming concerned about its wholesale ignorance of what was really happening in the Far North, and was perturbed about rumors of widespread forest fires, traffic in liquor to Indigenous bands, and the large scale laying of poison by white trappers. Like the NWMP detachment sent to Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake in January, 1897, the small force remaining at Athabasca Landing had the job of investigating these rumors and reporting its findings back to the commanding officer, Superintendent A. H. Griesbach, at Fort Saskatchewan.

Sergeant Heatherington and guide/interpreter James Gullion accompanied Inspector A. M. Jarvis on the expedition to Fort Resolution, helping him to distribute, to all Indigenouo peoples and trappers they met, handbills stating the laws concerning game, liquor, forest fires and the protection from hunting of the almost extinct wood buffalo. According to the patrol's own report of the trip, "a number of arrests were made and convictions generally followed, but except in glaring cases when the parties were well aware of the law, Insp. Jarvis merely cautioned the delinquents."[33] Reading between the lines, one may be permitted to doubt whether the NWMP were any more effective at policing the game laws than they were at stopping whiskey trading or preventing destructive forest fires caused by careless travellers.

If the attempt to bring the rule of law to Athabasca Landing and the North-West was rather half hearted in the 1890s, efforts to bring Christianity to the people were more persistent, and, albeit on a small scale, rather more successful. The Diocese of Athabasca had been created by the Canadian wing of the Anglican Church in 1873 as an administrative framework within which to begin missionary activities among the Indigenous populations of the North-West, and William C. Bompas had been consecrated the first Bishop of Athabasca in the next year.[34] During the ten years that Bompas administered this vast but sparsely populated diocese, a handful of mission stations were established at such points as Fort Vermilion, Fort Simpson, Fort Chipewyan and Dunvegan; and one school for Indigenous children, the Irene Training School at Fort Vermilion, was opened. In 1884 the Diocese of Athabasca was split in two, with Bishop Bompas retaining the northern half, now named the Diocese of Mackenzie River, and the Reverend Richard Young taking over the smaller (but still huge) Diocese of Athabasca, which now extended from fifteen miles south of Athabasca Landing to Lake Athabasca and the northern Peace River valley.[35]

Bishop Young embarked on a fund-raising trip to England after his consecration, and did not set foot in his diocese until 1886, at which time the See of Athabasca administered just three mission posts and the Indigenous school at Fort Vermilion. Young's first priorities as bishop were to establish a few more missions, and to try to do something for the material, as well as the spiritual well being, of the Indigenous groups he encountered while making his first tour of the diocese. He made Fort Vermilion his headquarters, and the records of the diocese's first synod, convoked there in 1888, reveal that the missionaries from Fort Chipewyan and Dunvegan were horrified at the disease and starvation endemic among the Cree, Beaver and Chipewyan living near their isolated mission houses. Reverend Alfred Garrioch at Dunvegan had even started a soup kitchen for the itinerant Beaver who visited his station, but the limited funds available to Bishop Young and his assistants meant that little more could be done in this line. The synod sent a long letter to the Minister responsible for the Department of the Interior, detailing the local peoples' plight, a humanitarian gesture that fell on deaf ears; it also decided that more effort should be put into bringing Christianity to the Indigenous peoples in the southern part of the diocese, with the



Bishop William Bompas. Photograph courtesy of All Saints Anglican Church, Athabasca.

Bishop Richard Young. Photograph courtesy of All Saints Anglican Church, Athabasca.

result that the Reverend George Holmes opened a new mission on Lesser Slave Lake.[36]

Given the very limited financial resources and manpower available, Young opted not to establish a mission at Athabasca Landing at this time: its population was small and mainly transient, and there were few Indigenous attached to the HBC post. He kept it in mind, as a possible future mission site, however, and after another fund-raising trip to England in 1890 wrote to the HBC clerk at the Landing, George Kinnaird, seeking help from the company in establishing a mission there. The HBC was unwilling to donate any land to the Church but did agree to lease a couple of lots at a fairly nominal rent.[37] Two more years passed before Young was ready to act, but in the fall of 1893, he hired a Scotsman named Magnus Brown to begin building a church and a residence at the Landing.[38]

Young's plan was to make Athabasca Landing the new seat of his See because the settlement was rapidly becoming the communications hub for the entire North-West: from Athabasca he would be able to travel more easily both to his far-flung mission stations and to the East for important meetings and fund-raising lecture tours. He expected, too, that the Landing would soon acquire a post office, a telegraph office, and perhaps even a railway station; facilities that would make communication with Winnipeg, Toronto and London much easier. Young was perhaps also motivated by rivalry with the Roman Catholic missionaries who were, by and large, better established as a Christianizing force among the Indigenous peoples of the North-West, and who, in 1891, built a dwelling house/storage shed at the Landing to serve their missions at Grouard and elsewhere.[39]

Construction of the first Anglican church and mission house at Athabasca Landing proceeded slowly because the builder, Magnus Brown, was also working for the HBC. But by 1894 the house was sufficiently finished for Young to persuade his young photographer friend, F.H. Killick, who was touring the North-West photographing missions and churches for an Anglican brochure on missionary

St. Matthew's Anglican Church, Athabasca Landing (built 1895-96). Athabasca Archives, 00214.

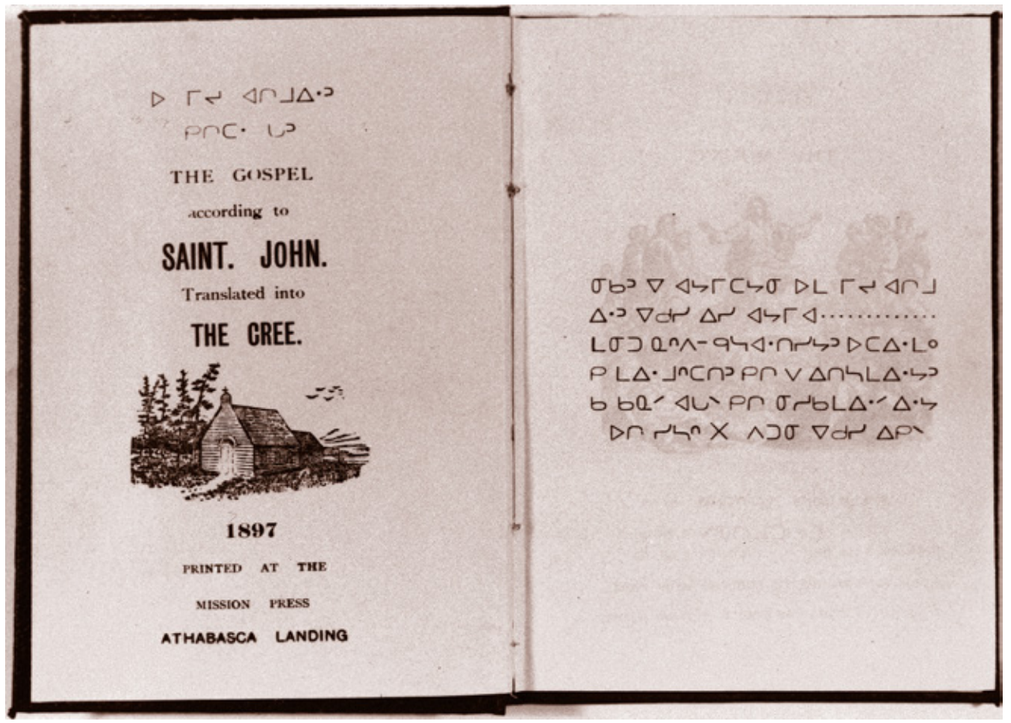
activity among the Indigenous peoples, to take up residence there, teach school to the local children, and supervise construction of the church.

Killick did start a school, initially holding it in a tent at the nearby Indigenous camp, then moving the classes into the still incomplete house for the winter. He found teaching the children a rather frustrating experience because his pupils' attendance was irregular and they knew no English, but he soldiered on, concentrating on teaching English rather than Christianity and offering a night class for adults who wanted to learn English.[40]

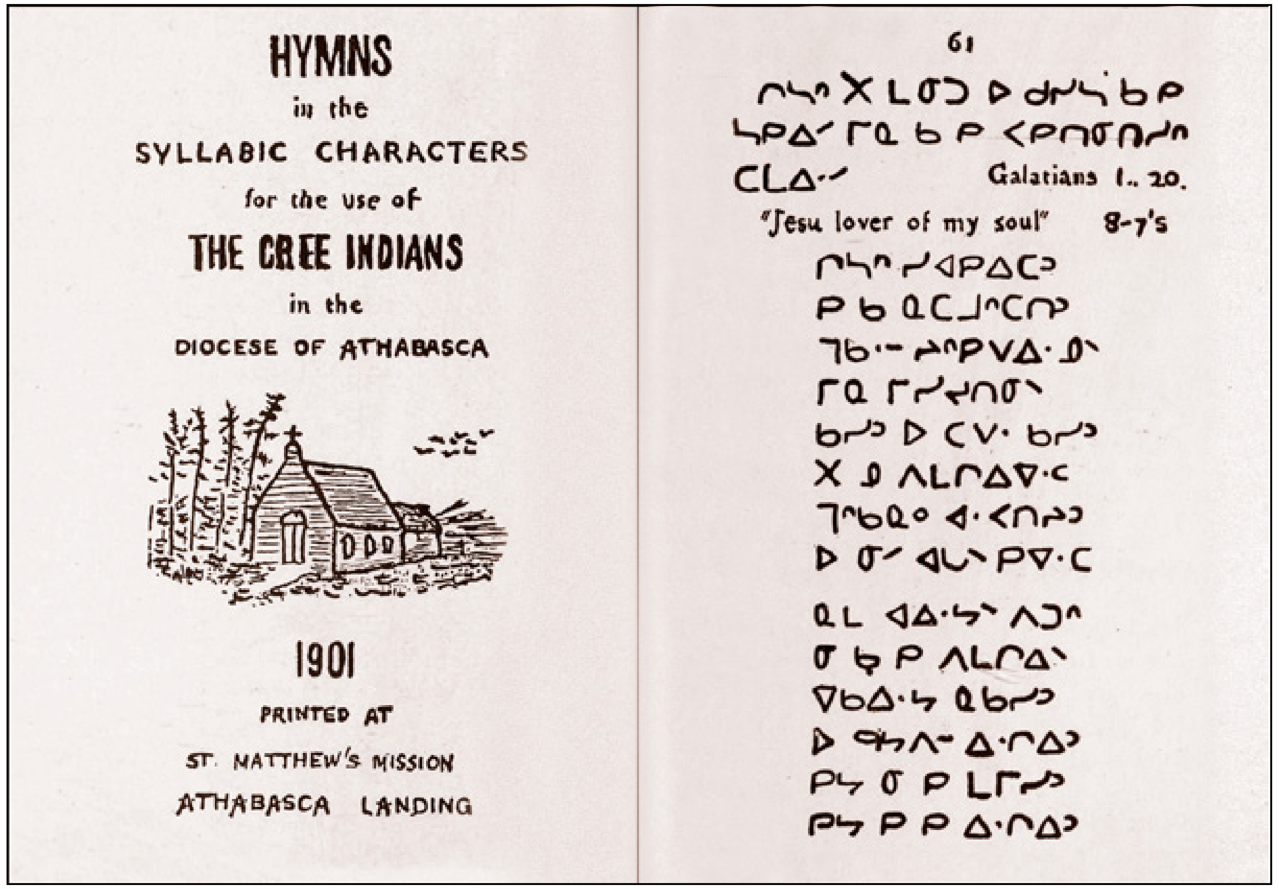
When Bishop Young and his family arrived the next summer to take over the project, they found the house almost finished but the church not yet begun. Brown did start work on it in August, 1895, but construction was delayed by the onset of winter, and it was not until September 20th, 1896, that Bishop Young was able to conduct the first service in St. Matthew's, Athabasca Landing. On the next day he conducted the first marriage service in the new church—the Reverend William White of the Anglican mission at Whitefish Lake took as his wife Louisa Wooster, who had come to the Landing the previous September to take over teaching the ten Indigenous children who attended the mission school fairly consistently.[41]

This development meant a doubling of personnel at Whitefish Lake, and the need for a new school teacher at the Landing. Bishop Young appealed for help to his sister Eva, who took over the school late in 1896, assisted by other members of the Young family—the Bishop's wife Julia, and daughters Juliet and Eirene. Mrs Julia Young also took much of the day-to-day responsibility for another of her husband's projects, the mission printing press. From 1895 onwards this small but serviceable operation—initially located in the Bishop's study—turned out a series of pamphlets and devotional literature, even a Bible, in the Cree language. Much of the actual printing was done by a young lay reader named George Weston, who came to the Landing in 1896.[42]

By 1897, Bishop Young's initial goals for the mission at Athabasca Landing had been fulfilled: St. Matthew's Church was completed, the mission house



The Gospel according to St. John (title page). Publication in Cree by the Athabasca Mission Press. 1897. Athabasca Archives, 00494.


HYMNS
in the
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for the use of
THE CREE INDIANS
in the
DIOCESE OF ATHABASCA

1901
PRINTED AT
ST. MATTHEW'S MISSION
ATHABASCA LANDING

61

Galatians 1.. 20.
"Jesu lover of my soul" 8-7's

Hymns in Syllabic Characters for the use of the Cree Indians in the Diocese of Athabasca (title page and page 61). Athabasca Mission Press. 1901. Reproduced from Agnes Deans Cameron, *The New North*, 1910. Public domain via Internet Archive.

was occupied by energetic and enthusiastic staff, the day school was running successfully, several Indigenous children were boarding with the Youngs and attending classes regularly, and the Cree printing press was supplying the dioceses of Athabasca and Mackenzie River with devotional literature. Moreover, with the gradual increase in population at the Landing, the beginnings of a future Anglican parish could be detected. A church register had been begun even before the mission house and little log church had been built, and the first baptism recorded had been that of Margaret Jane Gullion, born June 30, 1893, to parents John and Ann Margaret Gullion; while the first marriage recorded had been that of William McLeod and Maria Gullion on December 18, 1894.[43] Hence, even as early as the mid-to-late 1890s, the Anglican mission at Athabasca Landing had a dual function: it was the organizing centre for the effort to convert the Indigenous population of the diocese, and it was also the focus of the spiritual (and social) life of many of the Landing's small group of permanent European and Métis inhabitants.

At this time the Anglicans had little competition in Athabasca Landing from other denominations. The Roman Catholic missionaries were the only rivals that Bishop Young and his coworkers saw as a threat, but, although the Order of Oblates of Mary Immaculate was well established at St. Albert, St. Paul, Lac La Biche and Grouard, it had no permanent mission at the Landing. The small storage house constructed by Bishop Grouard at the Landing in 1891—apparently without written permission from the HBC, and against the wishes of clerk George Kinnaird—was used primarily as a warehouse, since the Catholics did their own freighting to their northern missions. Occasionally a priest or group of nuns would stay there overnight while travelling through the Landing, but these missionaries were usually anxious to reach their posts further north and so remained at the Landing as short a time as possible. A few of the more important figures in the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Western Canada apparently did visit the Landing while on general tours of the northern missions: Bishops Clut, Grouard and Breyant. and Rev. Father Husson, the Procurator

A general view of Athabasca Landing, showing St. Matthew's Church and Bishop Young's mission house, 1898. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2590.

of the Northern Missions. And, conscious that the HBC employed several dozen Métis from Lesser Slave Lake and Lac La Biche as loggers and boatmen at the Landing and at the Grand Rapids, some of the Oblate fathers based in St. Albert occasionally paid flying visits to celebrate the Mass, hear confession, or give the sacraments. But this activity was an attempt to hold on to previous converts, not a concerted effort to bring the faith to the Landing's residents or to the cultural groups at Baptiste and Calling lakes. It was therefore hardly surprising that these "casual visits" did not produce significant results.[44]

It would seem, then, that on the eve of the Klondike Gold Rush, Athabasca Landing was a very small but growing hamlet that clustered around the log buildings erected by the HBC to service its main transportation routes to the North-West. The Landing was the stopping-place where travellers transferred from horseback or cart to steamboat for the trip north, and where the HBC stored the trade goods that the S. S. *Athabasca* would carry to Lesser Slave Lake or to the Grand Rapids. By 1896, the settlement included not only the HBC's wharf, stables, store, warehouses, and clerk's dwelling house, but also primitive cabins that served as sleeping quarters for off-duty members of the Athabasca brigade; the NWMP barracks; a small boarding house run by Isaie Gagnon; a small store run by free trader Colin Johnston; a storage cabin belonging to the Roman Catholic missionaries; Bishop Young's mission house, which also served as a print shop and boarding school, and the Anglican Church of St. Matthew. There was no permanent Indigenous encampment at the Landing, but Cree groups from Calling Lake and Métis from Baptiste Lake often visited the settlement and camped close by when seasonal work was available from the Company.

CHAPTER 4

Staging Post for the Klondike, 1897–1898

In the summer of 1897 John Segers, captain of the S. S. *Athabasca*, declined to renew his contract with the HBC and began making preparations to lead a ten-man party of prospectors to Dawson City in the Yukon. Segers's decision, motivated by desire for adventure as much as the lure of gold, was the first of many changes that Athabasca Landing would witness during 1897 and 1898 as it became caught up in the fever and frenzy of the Klondike gold rush. News of rich gold strikes near the Alaska border reached the Landing in May, 1897, some two months before the major American daily newspapers latched on to the discovery and made "Klondyke" a household word.[1] Segers's party—and the thirty other groups of local prospectors who set off downstream from the Landing that summer—thus had a head start on the main stampede from California and on the other 700 or so Klondikers who would pass through Athabasca during the next twelve months. But why did Segers and the rest suddenly go

Klondikers preparing to leave for the Yukon goldfields, 1898 Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 5200.

goldhunting? And why did nearly 800 prospectors choose the Athabasca River as their road to riches in 1897–98? The explanation lies in what had happened in the Yukon during the previous ten years, and also in the geography of the Canadian North-West, British Columbia and Alaska.

For most newspaper readers the Klondike strike came as a total surprise, a bolt from the blue similar to the California gold rush of half a century before. But to thousands of frontiersmen/prospectors laboriously panning the streams and rivers of the Canadian Rockies (including those working the North Saskatchewan and those who had recently, and unsuccessfully, panned the Athabasca between Mirror Landing and Athabasca Landing) there was nothing surprising about the Yukon discoveries except their richness. Between 1860 and 1872 there had been three gold rushes in the remote mountain ranges of British Columbia. These strikes had established the Caribou, Omineca and Cassiar fields, each new location several hundred miles further north than the last.[2] This geographical pattern made the Yukon the logical place to expect a new strike, and prospectors had been exploring and panning its waterways since 1873.

By 1887, when a moderately rich discovery was made at Forty Mile on the Yukon River near the Alaska border, several hundred gold miners were scratching a living in the far North-West, and during the 1890s the thriving mining camps had become sufficiently populous to warrant the attention of policemen and clergy: NWMP Inspector Charles Constantine, Roman Catholic missionary Father William Judge, and Anglican Bishop William Bompas. Forty Mile was supplied, during the short Alaskan summer, by the steam-powered sternwheelers of the Alaska Commercial Company that plied the Yukon River between St. Michael on the coast near the Bering Strait and the various mining camps strung out on both sides of the Canada/U.S. boundary.[3]

Gold panning and mining were therefore well-established activities in the Canadian North-West when trapper/prospector Robert Henderson found a fairly rich deposit of placer gold in a tributary of the Klondike River that he named, too optimistically, Gold Bottom Creek. Only days later, on August 17th, 1896, a Siwash, Skookum Jim, and his American companion, George Carmack, panned an even more promising deposit on Rabbit Creek, soon to be renamed Bonanza Creek by jubilant prospectors.[4]

News of the Henderson/Carmack discoveries spread gradually by word of mouth through the mining communities of the Yukon and Alaska during the fall and winter of 1896, and more and more inhabitants of Forty Mile and the Alaskan town of Circle City moved their operations to the junction of the Yukon and Klondike rivers, where the boom town of Dawson City quickly sprang up. These "old-timers" systematically staked claims along the Bonanza, Eldorado and other creeks that flowed into the Klondike and Indian rivers, so that by the spring of 1897 the entire Klondike field was alive with mining activity, and by mid-summer the best panning and mining sites had been located and registered.

Two gold panners in the Yukon. Pen and ink impression by Vi Kowalchuk.

The first bunch of newly wealthy miners shipped out of the Klondike in June and July, 1897, buying passage downriver on the steamboats of the Alaska Commercial Company and the Northern American Trading Company, and travelling thence by coastal steamer to Seattle or San Francisco. Their arrival in California sparked the Great Stampede, with 9,000 hopeful Klondikers leaving Seattle for the Yukon in the month of August alone.[5] Ironically, they were already too late, and for most the Klondike proved an expensive and dangerous chimera.

In total, nearly 100,000 men and women started out for the Yukon in 1897 and 1898. About a third of them eventually reached Dawson City, although many did not arrive until 1899, much too late to stake out prosperous claims. Approximately one in thirty actually found some gold, but only a few hundred prospectors mined enough to become really wealthy. A few hundred more Klondikers made their fortunes as businessmen in Dawson City. The other ninety-nine per cent found adventure—and hardship—but not riches.[6] But perhaps adventure was what most of them, in their heart of hearts, really desired.

Eric A. Hegg. "Front Street, Dawson, Yukon Territory, July 1899." University of Washington Press. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Indeed, part of the attractiveness of the Klondike seems to have been the challenge of getting there. It was not easy. There were eight main routes, four of which were entirely through Canadian territory. One of these—the best Canadian route—passed through Athabasca Landing. None of the eight was ideal, and the real problems that existed (and were quickly publicized) with the American routes induced a minority of Canadian Klondikers to try the patriotic options touted by such newspapers as the Hamilton Spectator, the Winnipeg Free Press, the Edmonton Bulletin and the Victoria Daily Colonist. Since three of the American routes seem at first glance to be obviously preferable to any of the Canadian ones, it is only by examining the disadvantages of these that we can understand the attraction that the Athabasca Landing/Mackenzie River route had for prospectors riding the CPR west from Winnipeg.

The easiest way by far to get to Dawson City was by boat from San Francisco or Seattle up the Pacific Coast, through the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea to the mouth of the Yukon River. Here, one could transfer to a river steamer for the long haul up-river to the Canadian border and to the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike rivers just beyond. In 1898–99 this route was used bv eccentric tourists for whom Dawson City was the new eighth wonder of the world. It was easy, to be sure, but also very long and expensive. The total distance was almost 5,000 miles, 1,700 of which were upstream on the Yukon River, a waterway free of ice for only a few months of the year. Given luck, sternwheelers could make two trips to the mining camps in one summer, but in the fall of 1897 winter closed in early and no Klondikers who left California in August reached Dawson before the river froze. Passenger capacity on the coastal steamers and riverboats was in any case extremely limited, and a black market in tickets sent the price of passage soaring into the thousands of dollars. The American all-water route, although theoretically the best, was thus not viable until the summer of 1898 and was, moreover, the prerogative of the rich.[7]

On a small-scale map of Alaska an obvious alternative appeared to be to take a boat up the coast to Prince William Sound and then travel overland from Valdez some 300 miles north-east to Dawson, thereby cutting the total distance from Seattle in half. About 3,500 Klondikers attempted this short-cut, but they had underestimated the difficulty of crossing the Ghugash Mountains and especially the

Routes to the Klondike, 1897–99. Map by David Gregory and Alan Brownoff. Revised by Margaret Anderson.

treacherous Valdez Glacier. It was a route for trained mountaineers, not inexperienced prospectors. Furthermore, the ice field was not the only hazard: the Kluteena River was a horrendous series of rapids, and the weary slog through the Copper, Tanana and Fortymile valleys was a severe test of bushmanship and endurance. In practice this route was the worst of all possible ways to the Klondike, and only a handful of quite exceptional individuals successfully struggled over it to Dawson.[8]

The White Pass and Chilkoot Pass routes were the ones used by the vast majority of Klondikers.

Essentially they were variants of the same approach. Boats plying up the coast of British Columbia to the Alaska Panhandle negotiated the long fiord called the Lynn Canal and disembarked tens of thousands of potential prospectors and their gear on the mud-flats of Skagway or Dyea Inlet, two hamlets that mushroomed into wild and lawless boom towns in the fall and winter of 1897. Skagway, the larger and more unsavoury of the two, was run for nearly a year by Denver gangster "Soapy" Smith, whose gang robbed or cheated thousands of Klondikers of the banknotes and valuables they were counting on to pay for the horses, guides, packers, equipment and food they needed to traverse the coastal range and reach the inland rivers that flowed north to the Yukon.

This man-made hell was the gateway to the White Pass, over which a forty-five mile switch-back trail climbed to the NWMP customs post on Summit Hill before plunging down to Lake Bennett, a few dozen miles south of the present B.C./Yukon border. The White Pass—and the Klondikers' inexperience, exhaustion and callousness—caused the death of thousands of the pack horses used to transport each prospector's mandatory one ton of supplies, the entry requirement enforced by Canadian customsmen. By September, 1897, it had become impassable, thereby condemning thousands of gold-seekers to winter in "Soapy" Smith's Skagway. Only when a wagon road was completed the next summer did the White Pass become a viable route into north-western Canada for any but the most reckless or experienced travellers.[9]

By contrast, the nearby Chilkoot Pass from Dyea Inlet to Lake Bennett, although higher, steeper and prone to avalanches, did remain open throughout most of the winter of 1897-98 and thus proved a better bet for those Klondikers who had chosen an overland American route. But it was not an easy option. Its worst feature was the last four miles to the summit, 3,500 feet above the town of Dyea. Four miles of steep rock, snow and ice that could not be traversed by pack horses or even dog sleds. Over this section the average Klondiker had to make several dozen treks, carrying fifty pounds of his supplies on each trip and making one, or at most two, trips per day. It was a hard test of stamina and determination. And then, of course, when the Klondiker had braved the pass, paid customs duties on his American-purchased "outfit," and descended the slippery trail to Lake Bennett, he still had 500 miles to go. An experienced prospector, properly equipped, could mush his way in winter down the frozen creeks, lakes and rivers

The Chilkoot Pass. Provincial Archives of Alberta, P7164.

that led to the Yukon River and eventually to Dawson City, but most Klondikers lacked dogs and dog sleds. They had to wait until spring melt, then whip saw lumber, build a boat and, with some help from the watching NWMP detachment, float downstream to the goldfields, negotiating a few dangerous sections of white water on the way. According to NWMP records some 28,000 Klondikers in over 7,000 home-made boats did just that in the summer of 1898. They were the main body of the Klondike Stampede.[10]

Compared with that figure, the total number of Klondikers who took Canadian routes was small: probably about 6,000. Of these, approximately one-half attempted the Canadian equivalent of the Chilkoot and White passes, the Stikine Trail, a route heavily promoted by the merchants of Victoria and Vancouver. About 250 miles south of Skagway it was possible to sail through the Sumner Strait and up the Stikine estuary into Canadian territory, thus avoiding U.S. customs and landing within 600 miles (as the crow flies) of Dawson. From Stikine a gruelling overland trail of sorts led via the tiny communities of Glenora and Telegraph Creek to Teslin Lake, where boats could be constructed for the downstream journey to the Yukon. The initial long haul up the Stikine River discouraged some Klondikers, but the major problem with the route was a 150-mile stretch of trackless, barren, marshy land between Telegraph Creek and Teslin Lake, difficult country that a well-provisioned man could negotiate on foot but which defeated pack horses and carts. More than two-thirds of the prospectors who attempted the Stikine Trail gave up somewhere along the way, and the route quickly developed a bad reputation.

Nonetheless, it is likely that more Canadians reached the Klondike by the Stikine Trail than by any other route.[11] It was certainly preferable to either of the other two all-Canadian overland routes, the even more gruelling "Telegraph Trail" (or "Long Trail") from Ashcroft, B.C. (125 miles north-east of Vancouver), through the Fraser River country and the lengthy Skeena River valley to Telegraph Creek and Teslin Lake; or the equally formidable "trail" (which, for the most part, existed only in the imaginations of journalists and mapmakers) from Edmonton through the Peace district, the upper Liard basin and the Pelly River valley. These two routes, almost as disastrous as the Valdez Glacier trail, were literally deadly for horses and men alike. Only a handful of men, and no horses, made it to the Yukon over the Telegraph Trail, while of the 775 prospectors who attempted the overland route from Edmonton at least thirty-five perished on the way, perhaps 160 eventually reached Dawson (mainly in 1899), and all the rest turned back or were rescued by relief expeditions.[12]

In short, if expensive sea passages, U.S. customs officials, gangster-run boom towns, steep, icy mountain passes and furious rapids made the American routes to the Klondike look unattractive to many Canadian prospectors, the three overland Canadian alternatives were, if anything, worse. Most Canadian gold seekers who did attempt them underestimated, or ignored, their difficulties, and found out the hard way. Probably as few as twenty per cent of those who tried them reached the Klondike.[13] It is therefore hardly surprising that more than 750 Klondikers, mainly but not exclusively Canadians, sought a third method of reaching the Yukon, not via the U.S.A., but not overland through B.C. either. Their solution was the all-Canadian water route, which started at Athabasca Landing.

One of the earliest prospectors to use it successfully was R. H. Milvain, an Englishman who had settled in the Pincher Creek area. After nearly drowning in Great Slave Lake, Milvain reached Dawson in the summer of 1898, teamed up with a mining engineer, staked and worked a moderately lucrative claim, sold it to a larger company, and remained in the Klondike as a well-paid manager for the same company until the First World War.[14] His memoir of the expedition provides an insight into how casually some Klondikers undertook the 2,500 mile journey, and why they decided on the Mackenzie Valley route rather than an American or overland Canadian route. Here Milvain recalls his initial decision to go to the Klondike, and the idyllic beginning of the trip at Athabasca Landing:

> Coming back to the lake . . . I found an old friend, Jack Garnett, waiting for me. He had just heard of the great gold strike in the KIondyke. The papers were full of the news and a lot of lies, which we were to find out later; but at that time it appeared that all we had to do was to go to Dawson City and pick up as much gold as we wanted. My friend wanted me to start with him at once, so thinking it would be a fine trip and hoping to get some of the gold, I said goodby to Mr. Lumsden and the ponies and started off on our long journey. The first thing to do was to determine which way to go, for there are three ways of getting into the KIondyke. We consulted our friend Major Wood, and he told us he had heard very bad accounts of the Skagway Trail, so we went off to Edmonton and from what we heard there we decided to go in by the Mackenzie River route. We built a big fine boat, bought sufficient provisions to last a couple of years, put the lot in two wagons and started off for Athabasca Landing. The wagon road to the landing was good and we made the 100 miles in four days. After a couple of days to put things right and land the boat, we started out down the Athabasca River on the 2nd September, 1897. The weather was lovely, the mosquitoes all gone, the sun shining warm and bright. We were off on our 4,000 mile journey, carried along by a good four knot current.[15]

Klondikers' camp at Athabasca Landing, with S.S. *Athabasca* in the background. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2588.

Milvain's year-long journey took him down the Athabasca River to Fort McMurray and Lake Athabasca, northwards from Fort Chipewyan along the Slave River to Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake, westwards across the Lake to Fort Providence at the head of the great Mackenzie Valley, and then down the Mackenzie River through Fort Simpson, Fort Norman and Fort Good Hope to Arctic Red River and Fort McPherson at the southern end of the Mackenzie Delta. Apart from two major sets of rapids—at Grand Rapids on the Athabasca, and near Fort Smith on the Slave—this was a relativelv easy downstream voyage. The most difficult part of the route was a fifty-mile slog up the Rat River to the height of land between the Mackenzie Valley and the Porcupine River basin, but once the fairly low McDougall Pass through the Richardson Mountains had been traversed, it was downstream again on the Bell and Porcupine rivers to Fort Yukon at the confluence of the Porcupine and Yukon rivers. The last stage, 300 miles south-east to Dawson, was a steamboat ride or a wearisome but not dangerous pull against the current of the broad Yukon River to its confluence with the Klondike.[16]

This Canadian water route was half the length of the American one, and although it did involve a few portages—at Grand Rapids, Smith Rapids and the McDougall Pass—these covered no more than twenty miles in all. It was therefore possible to build a boat at Athabasca Landing, sail it all the way to the Mackenzie Delta, cut it in two for easier tracking up the shallow and turbulent Rat River, and then rebuild it for the last part on the Bell, Porcupine and Yukon rivers. In this way, most of the labour involved in transporting the klondikers' "outfits" would be done by water and gravity, not by man and beast. Moreover, there was a second great advantage to the Mackenzie route: all the way to Fort McPherson it followed the HBC fur-trade route into, and out of, the far North-West, with the result that the travellers would never be too far from a post, where emergency food and medicine might be obtained and, if necessary, a passage back to civilization purchased. Even on the route's most difficult section, from the Rat to the Bell rivers, Indigenous trappers had beaten a trail, and the HBC trading post at LaPierre's House offered sanctuary and a good boatbuilding site just where the Bell became navigable.

The Canadian water route thus shared some of the advantages of the American one: it was well-

established and relatively easy, and the Klondiker need not lose contact with civilization for months on end. It shared some disadvantages too: it was roundabout, lengthy and slow, and, if substantial use were made of HBC boats, guides and stores, potentially rather expensive. The fare on the HBC riverboats from Athabasca Landing to Fort McPherson and back was $296.00 per person, plus 75¢ per day for meals, and this did not include freight charges.[17] Nonetheless, if the Athabasca way to the Klondike was far from perfect, it was the best choice for Canadian Klondikers determined to avoid Dyea and Skagway. In the event, it proved the most effective Canadian route: of the 785 Athabasca Klondikers, nearly 500 reached the Dawson area. This completion rate, about sixty-five per cent, was dramatically better than that achieved on any other Canadian route. So, despite thirty-five deaths, mainly from drowning or scurvy, and the failure of any prospector to reach the Klondike before 1898, the all-Canadian water route from Athabasca Landing was, on balance, a success.[18]

Neither Milvain's party nor Segers's was the first to leave the Landing bound for Fort McPherson and the McDougall Pass. That honour fell to a group of five French-Canadian rivermen from the Fort Saskatchewan area: Baptiste Pilon, E. St. John, M. Yerrault, and Israel and Louis Lamoureaux. They possessed a wealth of experience as freighters, packers, riverboat hands and HBC scowmen, and had the advantage of familiarity with the Athabasca River and its rapids. By August 2nd, 1897, they had assembled and loaded their scows at the Landing and set off downstream. They reached Dawson City just under a year later, having wintered in the Mackenzie Valley.[19] The Segers party was not far behind. Equipped with two York boats, it left the Landing on the 18th of August, and had reached Fort Chipewyan by the end of the month. Initially there were ten men in the group, including Dr. G. Macdonald, Frank Hardisty (son of HBC Chief Factor William Hardisty), and F. M. Robertson, who kept a log of the expedition.

The most colourful character was John Segers himself, a crusty, domineering, but experienced and resourceful riverboat pilot who had learned his trade on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. In 1884 Segers had taken part in the Canadian Nile Expedition to relieve General Gordon at Khartoum. Back in Western Canada the next year, he had captained the HBC paddle-wheeler S.S. *Northcote* in the battle of Batoche.[20] He transferred to the S.S. *Athabasca* when she was constructed in 1888, and since then had captained her on the Athabasca River between Mirror Landing and Grand Rapids. After ten summers at this relatively

Wood & McNeil boatyard at Athabasca Landing, 1898. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2584.

routine job, Segers understandably was itching for a change. Drifting down river in a York boat was undoubtedly different from commanding a steamer, but the Segers expedition's progress was uneventful during August and September, 1897. Hardisty's and Segers's HBC connections ensured warm welcomes at each of the Company's trading posts in the Athabasca, Slave and Mackenzie valleys, and by the first of October the party had reached Arctic Red River. Here it split up: Robertson and three others, anxious to reach Dawson as quickly as possible, went on by dog-team to LaPierre's House, while Segers and the other five wintered in more comfort at Fort McPherson. Robertson's group was in fact the first to arrive in Dawson City via the Mackenzie Valley, on June 9th, 1898, whereas Segers's party, encumbered by a rather large boat, took until August 3rd. Segers himself never took up gold-mining in the Yukon; a few days after reaching Dawson he signed on as captain of a Yukon riverboat, and, according to his own testimony in a letter to his daughter in Edmonton, was soon making more in a day than he had in a month with the HBC at Athabasca Landing.[21]

The Pilon, Segers and Milvain groups were only three of the thirty or so parties of Klondikers who had left Athabasca Landing by the fall of 1897. Most of these adventurers stayed at the Landing only a day or two, although a minority camped in the area for a few weeks while constructing their boats from local timber. The demand for timber stimulated the Landing's only industry apart from furs and freighting—boatbuilding. Alex Fraser began operating a commercial sawmill, and then newcomers J. H. Wood and S. B. McNeil opened a boatyard on the north bank of the river.[22] A dozen more parties of Klondikers poured in during the last months of 1897, and, learning that further progress to the Yukon was impossible until next spring, settled down to wait out the winter at the Landing. Most of them lived under canvas—the winter, luckily, was a mild one—so the Landing was temporarily metamorphosed from a hamlet into a tent city. This Canadian Skagway was described in early April by an anonymous correspondent of the *Edmonton Bulletin*:

> Less than three months ago the "Klondiker" upon descending the winding slope leading to the river bottom which constitutes the location of the village, saw only the Hudson Bay fort warehouse and out-buildings, the Athabasca, saw mill and English church, the police barracks, two houses, a few shacks, and train dogs galore; high hills, snow two feet deep and all is told. Today the scene is changed. The scores of white tents that dot the hill side and the river bottom almost succeed in sustaining the snow impression of two months back … East and West Chicago are places or camping grounds east and west of the village proper and so called because of the Chicago men there who outnumber their fellow campers four to one. The north town is on the north side of the river where Wood & McNeil have their boat building yard, and several other parties—mostly from Ontario—are camped. There is only one street and that revels in the name of

"West Chicago," part of the Klondikers' tent city at Athabasca Landing, April, 1898. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2586.

> "Fifth Avenue" … . A row of shacks southeast of the H.B. fort enjoys the distinction of being the first thing in the village to resemble a street and it bears the title of Bohemian Row. Every shade of opinion, on topics ranging from gold mining down to the qualities of pain killer cordial, is here nightly discussed. Ten different languages are spoken among the tenants of this row, and they boast among their number an artist, two miners, three carpenters, two ex-tramps, one actor, an ex-policeman from Boston, one reformed temperance lecturer, an Englishman who plays the banjo very well, one boat builder, one butcher, two old men occupation unknown destination Peel River, and seventeen dogs of every species known to science. To reside in Bohemian Row is considered an honor and room is at a premium. All things considered the Landing is about as orderly a place as a man would care to live in. Bishop Young, of the English Church, is a very familiar figure and can be seen daily walking from camp to camp, where his counsel, both spiritual and practical, is well given and received. The church is well filled every service night by men of all denominations.[23]

The population of this tent city was probably no more than a couple of hundred at the end of the winter, but during April the third, and largest, flood of Klondikers arrived, and Athabasca Landing became a boom town. At its height the transient population probably reached 1,000 and certainly there was a large enough demand for goods and services to stimulate considerable expansion in the village's business sector. By early May new buildings were up and new stores open for customers. There were now two hotels, one restaurant, one butcher shop, two bakeries, four general stores, a barber shop, the sawmill and several boatyards.[24]

Good money could be made at the Landing during this spring by merchants, carpenters and experienced boatmen, and a handful of Klondikers decided that they had already found their gold mine and travelled no further than Athabasca. In addition to Alex Fraser and J. H. Wood, several men who would become well-known local figures first came to the Landing in 1897–98: "Peace River Jim" Cornwall who worked as a river pilot; Joseph Daigneau who began his career in Athabasca as a carpenter; C.B. Major, a French-Canadian freighter who subsequently homesteaded north of Baptiste Lake; fur-trader Peachy Pruden who ran one of the general stores; and jack-of-all-trades William Rennison who was initially employed by Pruden in his store and a few years later became the Landing's first postmaster.[25]

Guiding and boatbuilding were the two most lucrative occupations open to Athabasca's more permanent residents during the Klondike Rush, and

James H. Wood, boatbuilder and future mayor of Athabasca Landing. Athabasca Archives, 00488.

William Rennison, storekeeper and future postmaster of Athabasca Landing. Athabasca Archives, 00489.

Boatbuilding at Athabasca Landing. Glenbow Archives, NA-1044-28.

as the demand for carpenters and pilots mushroomed in the spring, so did their fees and wages. River guides such as Captain Shot had charged the first Klondikers in the summer of 1897 twenty-five dollars per party for safe passage through the Grand Rapids and the other white water between the Landing and Fort McMurray. By April, 1898, that fee had quadrupled. Similarly, the flurry of boatbuilding meant high wages for loggers, sawmill workers and carpenters, and good profits for the boatyard owners. These new boatyards were not only constructing scows and York boats: at least four steamboats (most, perhaps all, of them sternwheelers)—the *Sparrow*, the *Enterprise*, the *Chesrown* and the *Alpha*—were built by Wood & McNeil, by Fraser & Co., and by the Alaska Mining & Trading Co.[26]

HBC clerk Leslie Wood was used to watching carpenters getting the S.S. *Athabasca* and the Company's scows ready for launching at spring melt each year, but even he must have found impressive the huge flotilla being readied in April and May of 1898. This is how the *Edmonton Bulletin*'s correspondent described the scene:

> The different steamboat companies are busy on their boats. The *Sparrow* is very nearly complete and will be without a doubt a splendid boat, built on graceful lines. She is 65 feet over all, twelve foot beam, six feet depth of hold and 60 horse power screw engines, with Scotch marine boilers. The Alaska Mining & Trading Co.'s yard is a very busy place and work on their boats is being pushed ahead rapidly. Their machinery comes from Chicago. Mr. John Fraser has a staff of men working on the Wilson & Macdonald boats and work is being pushed along with all speed. Their machinery is from the C.H. Willard Co. of Chicago, and the Polson Iron Works of Toronto. Hundreds of other boats, after the York, the scow, and sturgeon head models are being built by the smaller parties. ... The number of boats is legion, and their names varied and peculiar. I notice one bearing the pretty name of *May*. It is far from appropriate as she is built like a cart horse and will carry ten tons. The *Shamrock, Thistle* and *Rose* are the names of three boats built exactly alike, only one is painted green. They belong to one party. The *Anna* is a launch and as pretty as her name. She is certainly a beautiful little craft and it seems too bad that her destination is where it is. As a pleasure launch she is ideal. The *Montana* is the name of a boat owned by the Buck Co. of Great Falls. A rather staunch looking boat built after the scow pattern. The *Enterprise* is a stern wheeler belonging to a Detroit party and is very strongly built and manned by some practical sailors from the Great Lakes. She sports a big staff and pennant. Peterborough canoes are strongly in evidence here, also all kinds of punts and every conceivable kind of row boat darting here and there across the river, up and down and nowhere in particular, just trying the current and testing their boats; some out on shooting trips. Game is scarce, but poor shots very numerous.

> After looking over the different kinds of boats that are here and going down the river, I must confess that I think no port in the world, Liverpool included, can boast so many different models. It looks as though every man who ever had an idea that he was a boat engineer was here and had tried his hand, and the result is boats—beautiful, practical, pathetic, ludicrous boats, all the owners, however, with one end in view, and one man's chances are about as good as another's.[27]

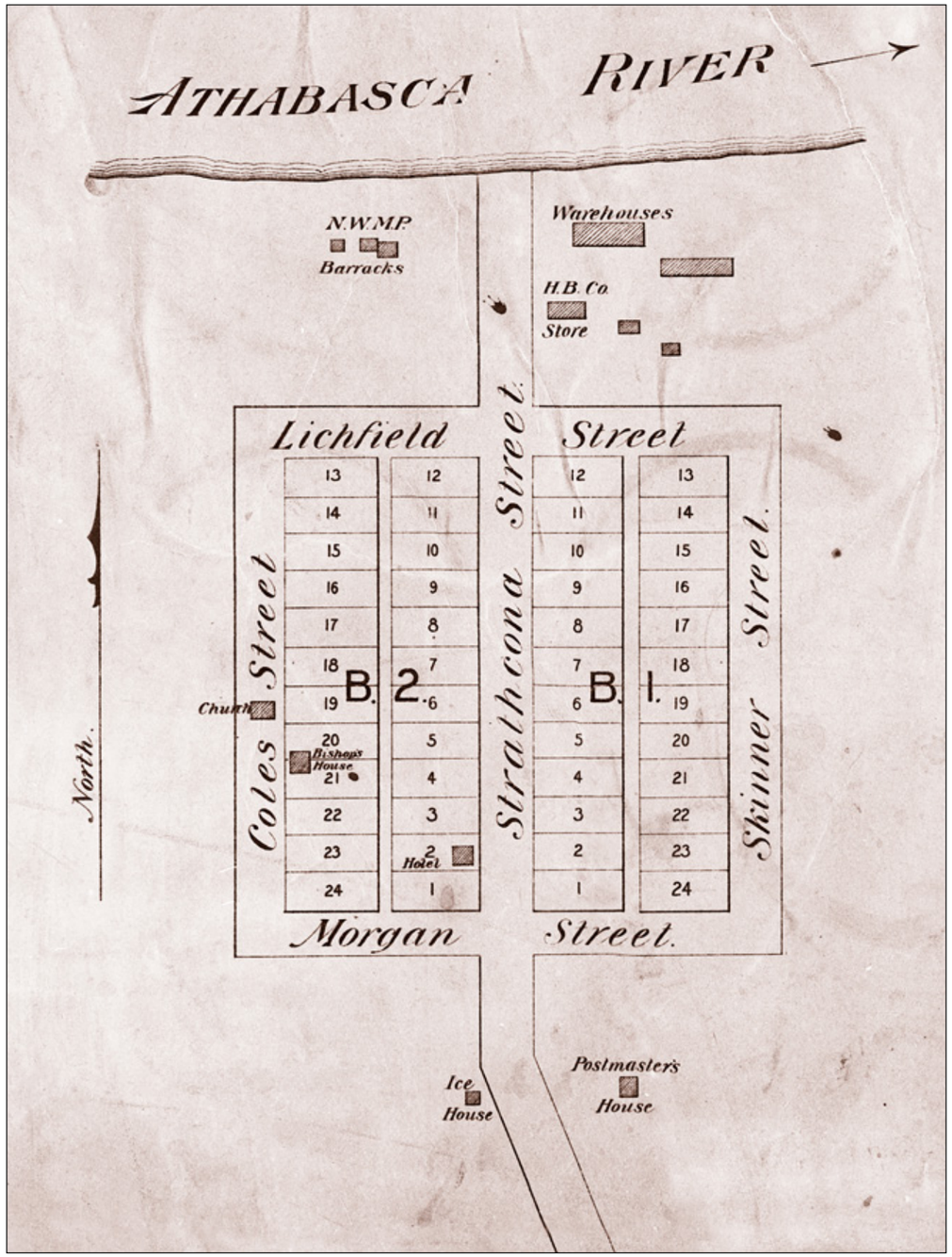
That was the scene on the river banks and the river itself. If we can believe the memoir of Klondiker George Mitchell, life in the mining camp that Athabasca Landing had temporarily become was just as confused and colourful. Mitchell was one of the second wave of adventurers who reached Athabasca during the winter of 1897–98, and he witnessed the transformation of a "tiny settlement ... with a transient population of forty or fifty white people ... (and) a couple of hundred Indians" into a cosmopolitan tent city of "at least a thousand strangers.[28] In *The Golden Grindstone* he recalled one of the more sensational incidents in the night-life of the tent city:

> The days at Athabasca Landing were brilliant, extremely cold, and full of activity. The nights were equally brilliant but vastly more lurid. Between night and day I don't think I ever got more than three hours' sleep: we were on for poker, fan-tan, or any legitimate gamble, but the decent class of miners absolutely tabooed any rotten monkey-business. There were mysterious little camps out in the bush where very decent fellows were lured by free rum and high gambling, or very attractive dancing: if these places went too far we simply went and cleaned them up and ran the ladies and gentlemen concerned back to where they came from.
>
> There was one large tent which was very, very cheerful and active, but in passing by one night I heard the shrieks of a woman in trouble. The flap of the tent was securely tied, so I slit the canvas with my knife and jumped in. To my disgust there was a very handsome young girl tied up to the tent-pole by her hands, stripped to the waist and getting an awful licking with dog-whips. I immediately jumped out of the tent again, fired four or five shots and yelled 'Murder', which brought all the miners on to the scene and my particular old friend Sergeant McGillicuddy of the Mounted Police. He went into the tent through the cut and there was a damned good free-for-all. When the mess was cleaned up we found that this was a rotten bunch of snipe from the Chicago sewers. The poor girl had a damned good heart, whatever her morals may have been, and had put up all the money for the outfit, and the men were now trying to make it so hot for her that she would go home. However, the next day we had a miners' meeting, took eighty per cent of their outfit and gave it to the girl, and let her pick up another gang to go north with her.[29]

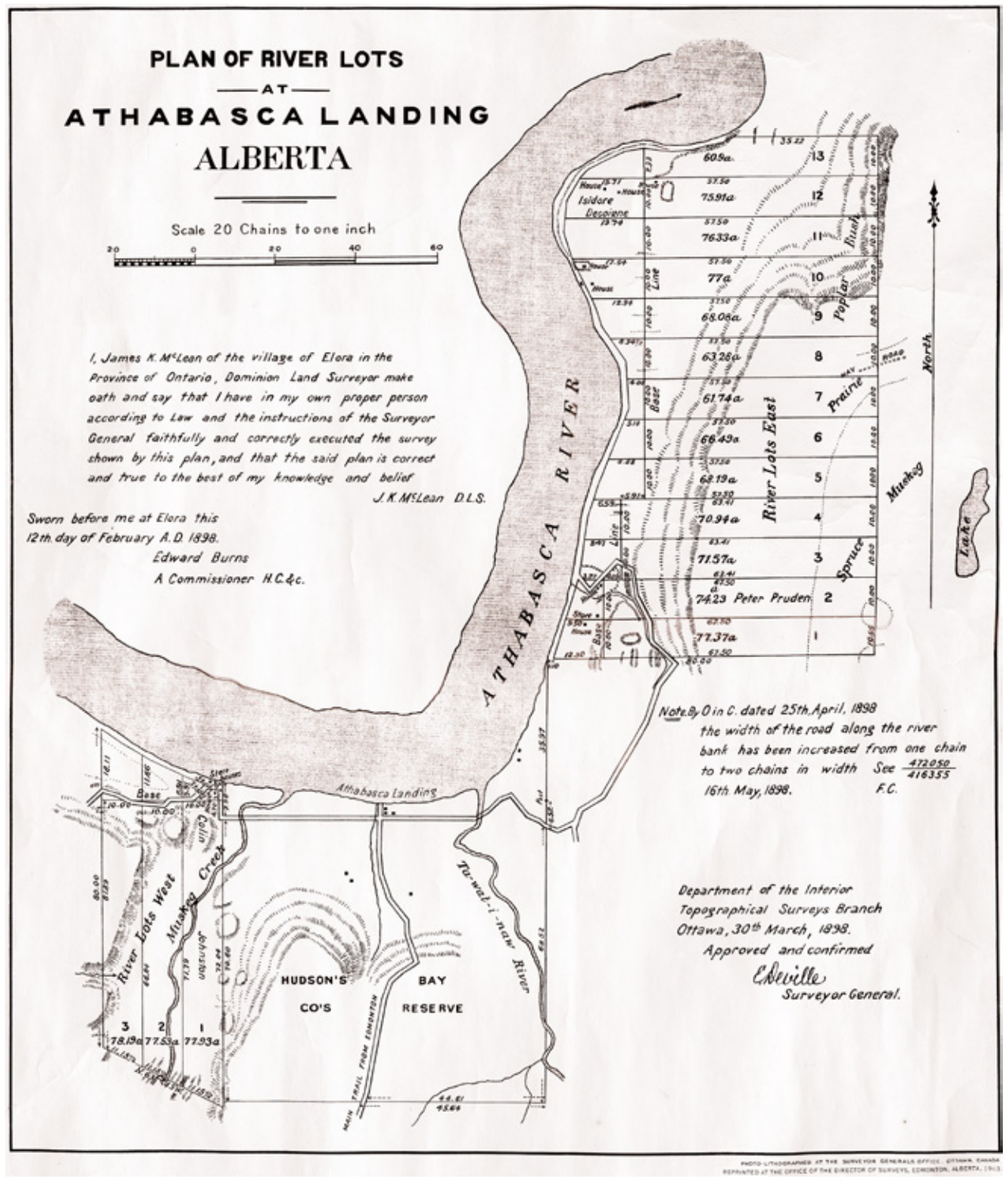
According to Mitchell, this was by no means the only violent incident at Athabasca Landing that spring. Disputes arose over "cards and ladies and dog-teams," and the nastiest ones quickly escalated into shoot outs since many of the prospectors carried guns. But the miners' meetings resolved these quarrels, a few desperate characters were run out of town, and ultimately "there was no fellow really killed at Athabasca Landing." Apparently the NWMP, Bishop Young, Leslie Wood and "the decent class of miner" just succeeded in keeping the lid on this simmering cauldron of violence and vice.[30] In any case, Athabasca Landing played the role of Canadian Skagway only until the early summer of 1898. The frozen Athabasca River broke up on April 22nd, and for the next two months parties of Klondikers set out downstream to Dawson.

A group of French Canadians, the Lamoureaux and Lamire brothers, set the record for the fastest journey to the Yukon, leaving the Landing on May 1st and arriving in Dawson on July 25th, at much the same time as the Pilon party which had departed the previous August.[31] The Lamoureux/Lamire expedition, however, travelled light, whereas most of the 1898 Athabasca Klondikers were encumbered by a ton or more of supplies and equipment, and hence found their progress slowed to a crawl at Grand Rapids and Smith Rapids, and above all when tracking up the Rat River and portaging the McDougall Pass. Nonetheless, two-thirds of them did eventually get to the goldfields, if only in 1899 when Dawson was already past its peak.

The Klondike Rush was an extraordinary phenomenon, a flash-in-the-pan. When it was over Athabasca Landing returned to being much as before—a frontier village that housed an important HBC transshipment post, an Anglican bishopric, a NWMP post, and a handful of stores, hotels and houses. Nonetheless, the Klondike Rush made a difference to the Landing. Most important of all, it put it on the map: from 1898 onwards Athabasca Landing was much more widely recognized as a gateway to the far North-West, and the transportation route along the Athabasca and Mackenzie Valleys to the Arctic became almost a tourist attraction. That development, and the stage-coach service from Edmonton to Athabasca started by J. H. Kennedy in 1898, helped the Landing's hotels and stores stay in business. The Landing Trail was further improved, and stopping houses, such as Newton Egge's Half-way House and Billy Smith's at Meanook, were



"Plan of Athabasca Landing." 1898. Archives of Manitoba Hudson's Bay Company Archives, G. 3/705 (iii).



"Plan of River Lots at Athabasca Landing." 1898. Athabasca Archives.

opened along the way.[32] The HBC's claim to the Trail was finally extinguished when it was surveyed by Dominion Lands Surveyor J. K. McLean, and in 1898 was declared a public road under the jurisdiction of the North-West Territorial government.[33]

While this turn of events was not to the Company's liking, it made the best of a bad job and took the opportunity to have its mile-square reservation at the Landing surveyed too. The object was to subdivide the best portion of land for a townsite, and a twelve-

Left behind by the great exodus: Dr. O. Edwards in his tent at Athabasca Landing, 1899. Glenbow Archives, NA-4035-107.

acre site was chosen near the centre of the reserve. The main street down to the riverboat wharf and HBC stores was named Strathcona Street, and forty-eight 60 x 120 foot lots were measured off and offered for sale at prices ranging from $200 to $250 each.[34] Most remained unsold initially, but several local proprietors invested part of their Klondike profits to secure ownership of the land on which their stores or hotels had been built. The little village of Athabasca Landing was beginning to take on a more permanent appearance. Although it had lost Captain John Segers to the Klondike, it had gained such shrewd and energetic residents as J. H. Wood, Jim Cornwall, Alex Fraser, Joseph Daigneau and William Rennison, all of whom would contribute greatly to its growth as a community during the next decade.

CHAPTER 5

Paving the Way for Expansion, 1899–1905

The Klondike rush through Athabasca Landing was essentially over by mid-summer of 1898, although a trickle of tardy gold seekers continued to arrive during the spring and early summer of 1899. During those same months, handfuls of ragged and dejected prospectors straggled back to the Landing, having either failed to reach Dawson, or found nothing there but influenza, sky-high prices, and already-staked claims.[1] At the Landing's hotels, restaurant and general stores the returned prospectors mingled with Métis boatmen, freighters and a few tourists. One of these travellers, David Hanbury, has given us a thumbnail sketch of Athabasca Landing in the wake of the Klondike extravaganza, a trading village back at work on the serious business of shipping freight to the Mackenzie Valley and to the Peace Country:

> At the Landing I found my men in camp; everything had got through safely, and the canoes were lying in water to soak. This post, at the head of the navigation of the Athabasca River, serves as the port of shipment for freight to the north. It has been in existence for

Strathcona St., Athabasca Landing, 1900. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2569-70.

Athabasca Landing from the river, 1899. Glenbow Archives, NA-949-7.

many years, and, besides a saw-mill for cutting the timber required for building scows to carry supplies for the many trading-posts scattered over the country, it possesses three stores, a boarding-house and a church. The maintenance of order seems entrusted to a member of the North-West Mounted Police, while a bishop upholds the dignity of the Church. The place had a busy appearance, for now large cargoes were being dispatched.[2]

Hanbury made his trip in 1901, and from his description it sounds as though Athabasca at the beginning of the new century appeared to be much like the pre-Klondike HBC post of the 1890s. In reality, however, major changes had begun that would transform the Landing and the countryside surrounding it. One of the most important of these changes was political. A Liberal government, headed by Wilfred Laurier, had been elected in the federal election of 1896, and in the course of the next decade it evolved policies affecting the newly settled western prairies and the still unsettled North-West that differed markedly from those pursued since Confederation. Laurier was persuaded to give in gracefully to the persistent, vocal and increasingly angry demands of politicians, businessmen and journalists in the North-West Territories for full provincial status. He speeded up the process of devolution of power, and in 1905 sanctioned the creation of two new provinces, Saskatchewan and Alberta.[3]

As a result of that action party politics came to Athabasca Landing. Furthermore, Laurier—following the enthusiastic advice of his Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton—decided that the time had come to settle the remainder of the western prairies and also to open the far North-West to settlement and to other forms of economic development. The Klondike gold rush seems to have precipitated this decision: it alerted Sifton and Laurier to the mineral wealth of the Territories, and it persuaded them that development of the area was bound to occur in the near future. Sifton and Laurier concluded that if development was inevitable, then the government had better try to control, and profit from, the process.[4] And that meant applying the Dominion Lands Act to the territory north of the region covered by Treaty #6, that is, north of the Athabasca River.

In 1898 the entire North-West, from Athabasca Landing to Dawson City and the Mackenzie Delta, was still "Indian territory," land protected by the Proclamation of 1763. In theory at least and possibly, even probably, in law too, the Government of Canada still had an obligation to protect the "Persons and Property … Possessions, Rights and Privileges" of the Indigenous peoples, and to guard their hunting land from "Invasion or Occupation."[5] In short, the Indigenous peoples (and perhaps also the Métis) of the North-West had retained their aboriginal title and usufructuary rights to the land. To clear the way for settlement in the potentially excellent farming land of the Peace Country, and for the building of railroads to exploit mineral deposits in the North, these aboriginal rights would have to be extinguished. Further treaties would be required, and Métis land rights would have to be dealt with in order to avoid a repetition of the troubles of 1869–70 and 1885. The Laurier government therefore appointed an Indian Treaty and Scrip Commission to start the process of extinguishing Indigeous land title in the North-West, and it made use of Roman Catholic priests, Anglican missionaries, HBC clerks and NWMP officers to communicate to the Indigenous peoples of the area that the Commission would arrive to do business with them in the summer of 1899.[6]

Two members of the Commission at Athabasca Landing: J.A. Coté of the Scrip Commission and Father Albert Lacombe of the Treaty Commission. Glenbow Archives, NA-949-91.

The commission arrived at Athabasca Landing on June Ist, after a four-day struggle in torrential rain over the morass of mud called the Landing Trail. Headed by the Lieutenant-Governor of the Territories, David Liard, the government party actually consisted of two associated groups: an Indian Treaty Commission, with the power to negotiate with the Cree and Athapaskan living south of the 60th parallel; and a Half Breed Scrip Commission, with the task of enumerating the Métis of the same region and offering them compensation in the form of land or money scrip. The Half Breed Commission, presided over by a retired NWMP officer, Major James Walker, began work first, setting up a large tent near the Tawatinaw River at the east end of the HBC reserve, where Métis boatmen and freighters usually camped.[7]

These Athabasca Métis, and the Métis of Baptiste Lake, were offered a choice between certificates ("scrip") redeemable in cash (usually $160.00 or $240.00) or in land (160 acres for adults, 240 acres for children). In theory money scrip and land scrip were equal in value, since the face value of a quarter-section land grant was $160.00, but in practice things were a little more complicated. Land scrip was potentially worth considerably more than $160.00, since it entitled the Métis bearer to go to a Dominion Lands office and obtain fee-simple ownership of a vacant quarter section without having to fulfill the fairly arduous homesteading requirements. But it could not legally be assigned (i.e., sold) to anyone else, and this restriction reduced its marketability. Money scrip, on the other hand, was, from a legal point of view, personal property and therefore "alienable;" the recipient could easily sell it, at a discount, to a shrewd, literate purchaser willing to deal with the government bureaucracy and wait a while for his money.[8] Most Métis, in Athabasca and elsewhere, opted for the convenience of money scrip, and most sold their certificates immediately to local traders or to opportunistic "scrip-dealers" from Edmonton

The Indian Treaty and Half Breed Scrip Commission camp at Athabasca Landing, 1899. Glenbow Archives, NA-949-8.

for anything from twenty- to seventy-five per cent of the face value. Some then spent their money wisely on horses or farming implements and seed, but the majority (according to the reports of local missionaries) wasted it in wild, drunken orgies that stimulated a resurgence in the illicit whiskey trade.[9]

Even the minority of Métis who chose land scrip were not immune from the depredations of wily "scrip speculators." Occasionally the certificates were simply stolen from their owners, as in this episode related by Big Joe Cardinal:

> Jim Cornwall went up there. They went up there with my dad, interpreting more to the old lady. … They asked the old lady. They said: 'Give us that scrip and we'll bring a lot of money for you.' 'Well,' the old lady said, 'I don't know.' The old man was cutting hay just across the river from there. 'Well, let me see.' Jim Cornwall was saying. So he took it. 'Yeah, I'll bring a lot of money for you!' He put it in his pocket and he got out of there. So this young fellow started running and yelling to his dad. The old man came across the river with the saddle horse. 'They took my grandmother's scrip,' the young one said. The boat was there beside the river and there was a bridge, so they raced up there. Just as they came to the boat, the boat started. He told the other guys: 'Let's go up to Willow Point. That's where they're supposed to stop.' Both of them went up there. The boat was coming and both of them were standing there and that pilot, by God, he saw them standing there waiting. So he never stopped; he went right through. So they sold that scrip … and they never brought the money.[10]

More often, the valuable land-scrip documents were purchased by white traders or taken in return for debts. But then the new owners faced the problem that only the named bearer of the certificate could convert it into the title deed for a quarter section of land. They had to either transport the seller to the nearest Dominion Lands Office (Edmonton), have him or her choose land and then sign a quit claim in their favour, or they had to evade the law in some way. The most common fraud involved in scrip speculation was to pay an Edmonton Métis to impersonate the bearer named on the scrip and to sign all the documentation. This practice, almost unavoidable if white homesteaders were to benefit from the issuance of land scrip to Métis, was apparently well known to police, politicians and government land agents alike, and they all turned a blind eye to it.[11]

One scrip dealer, Richard Secord, was eventually (in 1921) charged with this kind of fraud, when Métis

Money scrip being issued to Métis at Athabasca Landing, 1899. Athabasca Archives Wright Collection, 00446.

John Graham of Wabasca provided information that Secord had "bribed a half-breed woman with $10.00 and a grey shawl to go with him to the Dominion Lands Office and there present herself to be the holder of the particular scrip certificate in question and make her mark on behalf of the person named in the script, who was then living at Fort Rae." However, the case was dropped a couple of months later when Parliament hurried to vote into law a new three-year statute of limitations on cases involving scrip, which was then applied retroactively to Secord's case.[12] Scrip fraud was a can of worms no one but a few Métis and lawyers wanted to open. It remains a skeleton in the closet of several otherwise distinguished Alberta pioneer families, not to mention the federal government. Athabasca Landing had the dubious distinction of being the place where the 1899 epidemic of scrip speculation began.

The Indian Treaty Commission, finding only Métis at Athabasca Landing, moved on to Lesser Slave Lake, where the first negotiations for Treaty #8 were conducted during the last week of June with the help of Richard Secord and Jim Cornwall; several Anglican clergy, including the future Bishop of Athabasca, George Holmes; and the prominent and

Tracking Commission boats up the Athabasca River towards Lesser Slave Lake, 1899. Glenbow Archives, NA-949-88.

Commission boats leaving Athabasca Landing for Lesser Slave Lake, 1899. Glenbow Archives, NA-949-89.

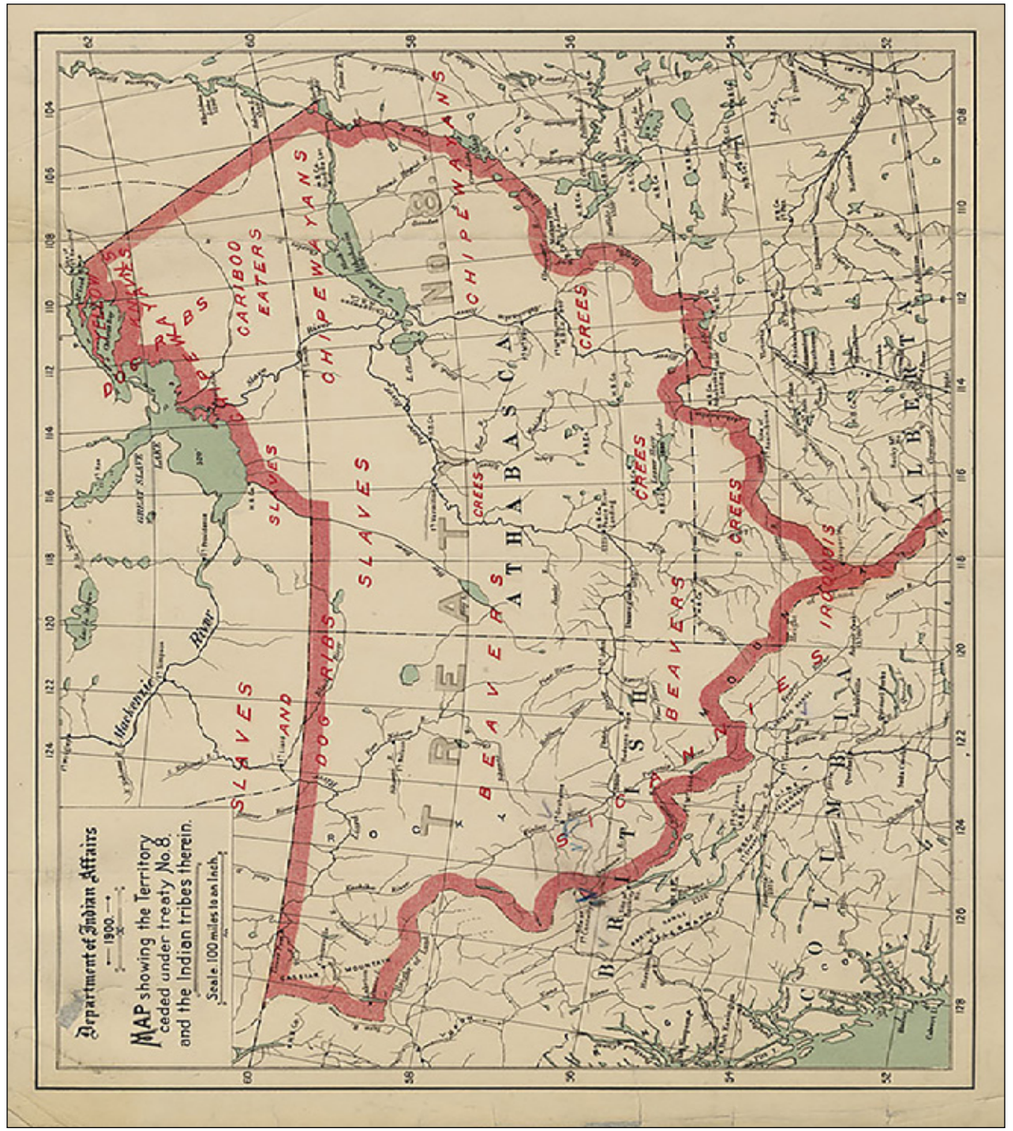
influential Roman Catholic priests, Father Lacombe and Bishop Grouard.[13] The Commission found the Beaver of the area divided over whether to take treaty: a minority was suspicious and hostile, while the majority, although interested in negotiating, was clearly disappointed by the terms offered by the Commission.

Recognizing that a take-it-or-leave-it attitude concerning the proffered written treaty (which had been modelled on earlier treaties with Plains cultural groups) would spell disaster for the Commission's work, Liard and his fellow commissioners, J.A. McKenna and J. H. Ross, made a variety of concessions and promises that, while never explicitly included in the text of Treaty #8, were nonetheless regarded as binding contracts by both the Indigenous peoples and the clergy who played a crucial role in psuading the Slave Lake and Peace River bands to accept.[14] These provisions included a guarantee that Indigenous peoples would not be forced onto reservations, plus promises of schools, medical services and famine relief. Jim Cornwall subsequently recalled the negotiations—and concessions—in an affidavit:

> I was present when Treaty 8 was made at Lesser Slave Lake and Peace River Crossing.
>
> The Treaty, as presented by the Commissioners to the Indians for their approval and signatures, was apparently prepared elsewhere, as it did not contain many things they held to be of vital importance to their future existence as hunters and trappers and fishermen, free from the competition of white men. They refused to sign the Treaty as read to them by the Chief Commissioner.
>
> Long discussions took place between the Commissioners and the Indian Chiefs and headmen, with many prominent men of the various bands taking part. The discussion went on for days, the Commissioners had unfavourably impressed the Indians, due to their lack of knowledge of the bush Indians' mode of life, by quoting Indian conditions on the Prairie. Chief Moostoos (the Buffalo) disposed of the argument by telling the Chief Commissioner that "a Plains Indian turned loose in the bush would get lost and starve to death." …
>
> The Commissioners finally decided, after going into the whole matter, that what the Indians suggested was only fair and right but that they had no authority to write it into the Treaty. They felt sure the Government on behalf of the Crown and the Great White Mother would include their request and they made the following promises to the Indians:-
>
> a. Nothing would be allowed to interfere with their way of making a living, as they were accustomed to and as their fathers had done.
>
> b. The old and destitute would always be taken care of, their future existence would be carefully studied and provided for, and every effort would be made to improve their living conditions.
>
> c. They were guaranteed protection in their way of living as hunters and trappers from white competition; they would not be prevented from hunting and fishing as they had always done, so as to enable them to earn their living and maintain their existence.
>
> Much stress was laid on one point by the Indians, as follows:
>
> They would not sign under any circumstances, unless their right to hunt, trap and fish was guaranteed and it must be understood that these rights they would never surrender.
>
> It was only after the Royal Commission had recognised that the demands of the Indians were legitimate, and had solemnly promised that such demands would be granted by the Crown, also after the Hudson's Bay Company officials and Free Traders, and the Missionaries, with their Bishops, who had the full confidence of the Indians, had given their word that they could rely fully on the promises made in the name of Queen Victoria, that the Indians accepted and signed the Treaty, which was to last as long as the grass grew, the river ran, and the sun shone—to an Indian this means FOREVER.[15]

The Slave Lake negotiations set the pattern for similar encounters, promise making, and signing ceremonies at Vermilion, Dunvegan, Fond du Lac, Fort Chipewyan, Fort McMurray, Slave River and Wabasca (then called Wapiscow).[16] The Wapiscow band's adherence covered the Bigstone Cree at Calling Lake, and hence it was by virtue of the terms of Treaty #8 that the Jean Baptiste Gambler reservation at Calling Lake was eventually created. In 1899, however, neither the Calling Lake Cree nor any other cultural group wanted reservations, and the only reservations the Indian Commission made provision for at the time were two small areas near Slave Lake, in case the area suddenly filled up with white homesteaders. In all, 2,217 Indigenous peoples took treaty in 1899, and another 1,218 when the Commission returned the next year.[17] The Half Breed Scrip Commission granted nearly twice as many scrip certificates, 6,377, in the same two-year period.[18]

It seems clear that the various Cree, Beaver, Slave and Chipewyan bands who signed Treaty #8—and not all did so—believed that they would lose little, since their traditional mode of life was apparently guaranteed, and would gain not only the small



"Map showing the territory ceded under the treaty No. 8 and the Indian tribes therein." 1900. Library and Archives Canada Department of Indian Affairs, NMC12240.

government pension of $5.00 per person per year, but also increased access to medical services and education. Whether they understood what they were giving up in exchange for this promised paternalism is less clear. On the whole it seems doubtful. The written treaty was read to them and it explicitly stated that "the said Indians do hereby cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada, for Her Majesty the Queen and her successors for ever, all their rights, titles and privileges to the lands" designated in the Treaty.[19] But the Cree and Athapaskan languages lacked the

technical concepts of English land law implicit in distinctions between ownership of land, ownership of mineral rights, and ownership of hunting, trapping and fishing rights. The latter were the only things important to the Indigenous peoples, and those the text of the Treaty seemed to give them when it affirmed that "Her Majesty the Queen hereby agrees with the said Indians that they shall have right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping and fishing throughout the tract surrendered."[20] The Indigenous peoples, then, believed that they were giving up some abstract shadow that Europeans deemed important, but were themselves retaining the substance: the right to use the land as they always had done. The Canadian government, on the other hand, understood that the Indigenous peoples were essentially selling their land, and thereby extinguishing, once and for all, their aboriginal rights. They were also agreeing to allow settlement and resource extraction (mining and lumbering) to proceed unhindered in the North-West south of the 60th parallel. And they were agreeing to be subject to Canadian law, and, in particular, to the Indian Act.[21]

Treaty #8 and the related work of the Half Breed Scrip Commission were of fundamental importance to the future of Athabasca Landing. Prerequisites for the opening of the Peace District for settlement and for the further economic development of the Athabasca, Slave and Mackenzie valleys, they made possible the huge increase in the flow of people, goods and equipment that the Landing would witness in the next decade and a half. Athabasca Landing's hinterland was to the north; by 1899 the settlement had probably reached its natural limit as an HBC post, and further expansion could come only as a result of new developments in its hinterland. Once the commissioners had done their work, Athabasca Landing had a new opportunity for growth, and the Klondike rush had already given impetus to that growth. The fruits of scrip speculation provided more of the capital needed for economic expansion since, while Secord and Cornwall were the most prominent of the businessmen using the Landing who amassed considerable wealth and property from scrip dealings, they were almost certainly not the only ones.[22]

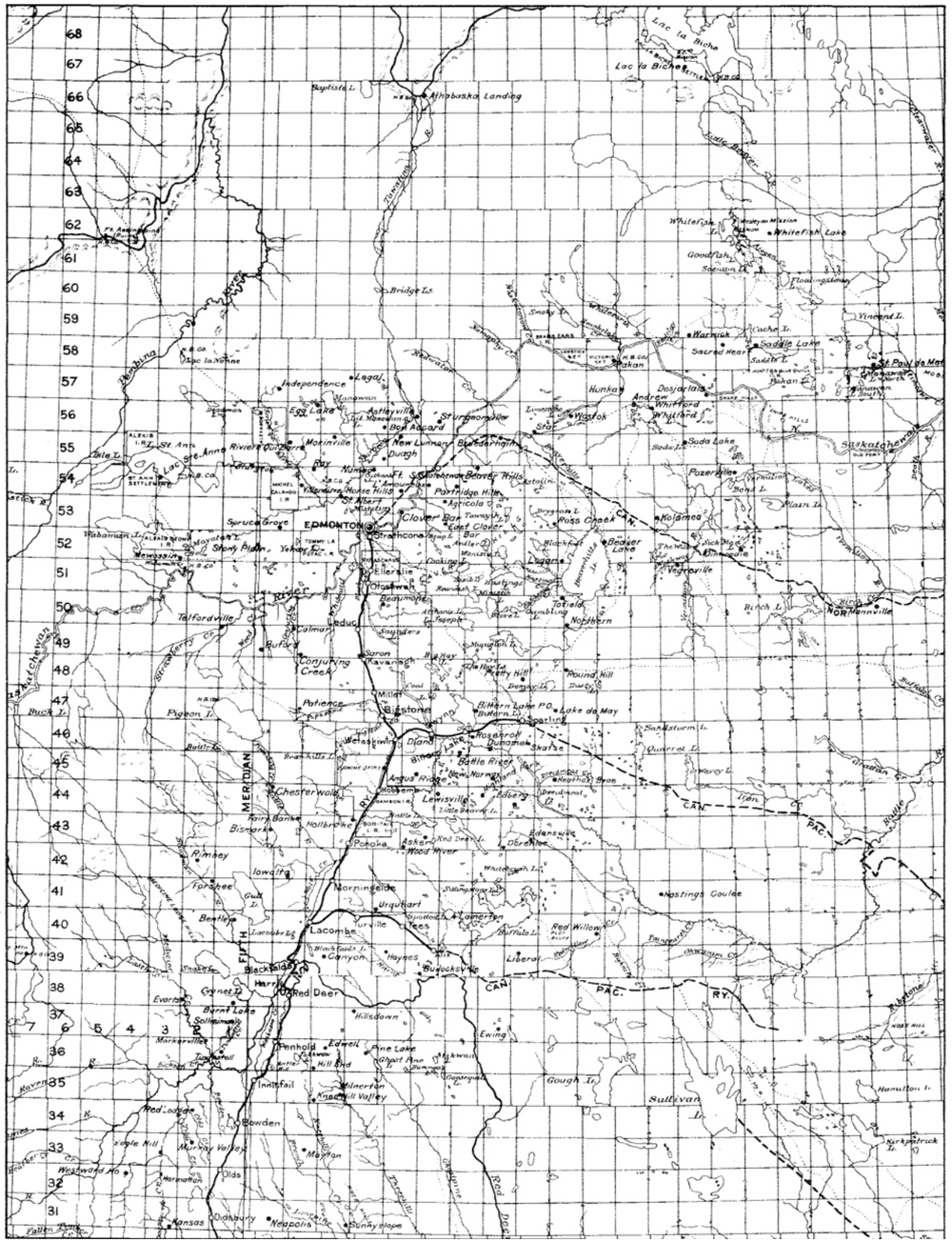
Once the legal impediments to further expansion in the West had been removed, Laurier and Sifton cranked up their campaign to settle the remaining farmlands east of the Rockies. As Minister of the Interior, Sifton controlled both immigration policy and land policy. He simplified homesteading regulations, relaxed immigration rules, and initiated a wide-spread publicity campaign advertising the opportunities to be found in the western prairies.[23] This campaign coincided with the closing of the American West to further settlement, so it found a ready response in the USA as well as in overcrowded Europe. Sifton also encouraged railway building by continuing the generous land grants initiated by previous governments, and this policy resulted in the formation of numerous railway companies, some of which actually constructed lines, the most important being the Canadian Northern route from Winnipeg to Edmonton, which was completed in 1905.[24]

At the beginning of the new century large tracts of unsettled land remained in the Alberta District of the North-West Territories, but by the time Alberta became a province, the southern and central regions were filling up fast, and a huge crescent of settlement stretched from Lloydminster, Smoky Lake and Westlock in the north to Cardston, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat in the south, bounded by Rocky Mountain House in the west and by Stettler and Drumheller in the east. Between 1895 and 1906 the total population of the Alberta district grew from around 30,000 to over 185,000, and two-thirds of the newcomers were homesteaders.[25]

The new settlers went where the railways were, and where the land had been surveyed into quarter-sections on which homesteading claims could be filed. Those requirements ruled out, for the time being, the area around Athabasca Landing, which still awaited the steel rails and the surveyors' chains. Nonetheless, the Athabasca Trail lured some adventurous spirits north, often in the hope of finding work or business opportunities at the Landing, and between 1900 and 1905 a handful of them squatted on unsurveyed land in the Athabasca area. One of the earliest such settlers was Billy Smith at Meanook, who, in the aftermath of the Klondike rush, supplemented the earnings of his stopping house and sawmill with the proceeds of a small farm.[26] Further south, the Whiteley family opened another stopping house at Sandy Creek in 1900, and renamed the area Perryvale.[27]

At this time there were very few settlers north of Morinville, and none in the immediate vicinity of Athabasca Landing, but in 1901 a man who was not interested in gold, fur trading, freighting or river transportation came to Athabasca Landing. His name was George Shank and he cleared land on the east hill overlooking the Métis camp, cultivated it by hand, and grew the first wheat in the area. Shank would sell out and return to the USA in 1910, but other members of his family remained as farmers in the Athabasca region.[28]

The year 1903 saw other new arrivals. Not all were farmers, and some that were went on to the Peace



"Stoval's Map of Alberta." 1905. This map shows the lack of settlement north of Edmonton compared with that between Edmonton and Calgary. Courtesy of Iain Taylor.

Scottie Willey (right) and another pioneer homesteader, Forest Day. Athabasca Archives, 00378.

Country. Others worked at the Landing for a year or two until they had located their farm sites and earned enough money to buy implements and seed. Pierre and Justine Bellerose, for example, initially made ends meet by opening a livery stable and a cafe and by doing occasional freighting with their fine team of horses, but by the end of the decade members of the Bellerose family were established on a homestead in the Colinton area.[29] Another early Colinton homesteader—perhaps the first—was William Brown, who built a log cabin there in 1903.

In 1904 Englishman David Hay arrived penniless at the Landing. Hay supported himself by doing labouring and freighting jobs for the HBC, but his main aim was to locate a good homestead site, so, after many months tramping the countryside south and east of the Landing, he chose one in the Colinton area and, with the help of Billy Smith, built a log cabin there in 1905.[30] Meanwhile, others were establishing themselves west of the Landing village. Fur-trader Colin Johnston squatted by Muskeg Creek, just outside the HBC reserve, and Jack Secord (the brother of Richard) settled on the higher ground further west.[31] French-Canadian freighter, C.B. Major, who had come to the Landing as a gold-seeker, turned to farming in 1904 and squatted in the Lahaieville area, north of Baptiste Lake.[32] Another Klondiker, Joseph Daigneau, after working as a carpenter at the Landing for five years, built himself a log house and began homesteading in 1905.[33] Other French Canadians, such as Joseph La Clare and the Paquette family from St. Albert, also began farming in the Athabasca region that year, while just before, in 1904, James Minns (who later became postmaster and a prominent Freemason) settled about two miles south of the village.[34]

Strictly speaking, farming around Athabasca Landing was illegal until the land had been surveyed for homesteading. The first grid-survey team appeared in 1904 and staked out township 66-22-W4M, the thirty-six square-mile unit that included the Landing. During the next four years the team completed eight more townships—65-23,22, 21-W4M; 66-23,21-W4M; and 67-23,22,21-W4M—before moving on to Baptiste Lake, where the grid pattern had to be modified to accommodate the long, narrow lake-front lots of the existing Métis settlement.[35] From 1905–06 onwards it was therefore possible to homestead legally in the Athabasca area, with all quarter-sections open to be filed upon, except sections 11 and 29 of each township, which were reserved to provide revenue for school districts.[36]

We know relatively little about the pioneers of this early wave. One of them, however, has left us a memoir of his first years at the Landing. Scottie Willey, one of the first homesteaders in the South Athabasca area, came to the Landing in 1903.[37] Here are some extracts from his reminiscences, written more than fifty years later:

> It was in July 1903 when I first saw Athabasca Landing. After eight days of travelling by teams loaded with freight from Edmonton. Eight days of almost continuous rain plagued by bull dogs and sand flies in daytime and mosquitoes at night we reached our destination. We took turns keeping fires to make a smudge to protect our horses. We were stuck many times and had to double teams to get out. I remember pulling one wagon in two and having to brush a path to carry our loads out on our backs. … In the fall of the year we came back to the Landing with loads of grain from McLeod and Perry. … My Dad and Mother had the first restaurant or boarding house, as it was called and was headquarters for the stage and mail route. We also looked after the spare horses used on the stage coach. This building was located at the present site of the Macleod Store. The barn which housed the horses was in the alley behind the restaurant.
>
> That fall we drove Bishop Young and his wife and daughter, Miss Irine, to Edmonton on their way to England, where he went to retire. This trip took four days.

The flood of 1904 at Athabasca Landing. Athabasca Archives, 00757.

> He and his family lived in a log house on the church property, where the log church stood. This street is named for Bishop Young. … After the stage line was established the mail was brought in on Saturdays and Wednesdays when on time. Wm. Rennison was the first postmaster, in the building where he managed a store for Ross Bros., of Edmonton. I distinctly remember patiently waiting for the mail to get the news of the Russo-Japanese war which was being waged at that time. This news would be several days old when it reached Athabasca.
>
> The first school was built in the winter of 1903 and 1904. I worked on this school. The first teacher, Duglas Dean, came after the new year from Nova Scotia. He boarded with us. All but a few of his pupils were Métis children and he used an interpreter to teach. This school building was used for a town hall for many years afterwards and is still in use as a town residence.
>
> On New Year's Day in 1904 we squatted on unsurveyed land in what is known as the South Athabasca district. It was surveyed several years later. That winter we took a contract to cut and deliver thirty miles of telegraph poles for the first telegraph line to Edmonton. The spring of 1904 after an extra severe winter, making the ice very thick, the ice jammed on an island down the river, causing the water to back up and flood the town. This lasted for three days before the jam broke and the water released. The water backed up as far as the H.B. Store, now the Parker Store. There was six feet of water in the hotel on the corner. Boats were used for transportation in the street. … At that time of year the warehouses were full of goods and the river bank was lined with boats being built to take this cargo north. Many boats were smashed and goods in post and warehouses were lost or damaged. H.B.Co. brought in a crew of men from Edmonton to unpack and dry out these goods. They were most of the summer at this job. The late David Hay, of Colinton, came here on that work. … At this time a steam boat was being built across the river. The builder was Sam Emmerson, who afterwards homesteaded in West Athabasca. … This was one of the several boats plying the river at that time and later. These boats went up the river as far as Little Slave river (now Smith) and down the river to Pelican Rapids. … Athabasca Landing was the distribution point for all freight going north. By boats in summer and teams on ice in winter.[38]

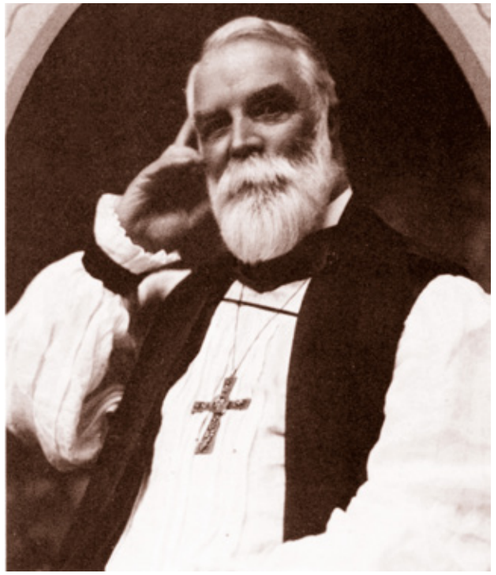
Scottie Willey's memoirs not only remind us of the still primitive condition of the Athabasca Trail in 1903 and paint a graphic picture of the catastrophic flood of the spring of 1904, they also touch on several of the main events at the Landing during these years. For example, Willey mentions the retirement of Bishop Richard Young. Since 1895, when Young had transferred the diocesan seat from Fort Vermilion, the Landing had been the nerve centre of the Anglican bishopric of Athabasca. The Anglican mission at the Landing was a family affair: the bishop was aided by his energetic and courageous wife Julia, his daughters Juliet and Eirene, and his sister-in-law Eva. With the help of printer George Weston they continued to run the Mission Press, and they shouldered most of the burden of keeping the mission school operating. Bishop Young divided his time between the needs of a growing local parish and the administration

of his bishopric, which he toured most summers. In late 1898, in the wake of the Klondike boom that had placed severe demands on his time and energy, Young fell sick, and in the next year he had to be hospitalized in Winnipeg. After partly recovering from this illness, and instead of taking the time he needed to recuperate fully, he went on an exhausting fund-raising tour of England.[39] Meanwhile, some of his duties at Athabasca Landing were taken over by a young lay reader, Richard Cox. Cox had to supervise the publishing operation, hold the church services, teach in the mission school, and manage the school's boarding house.

Cox's monthly reports to Young tell us a little about the school routine, and about the night life at the Landing. The school, which ran from nine to noon daily, was attended by between a dozen and twenty children, many of them Métis. There was also an evening class for adults once a week, plus a Bible class on Wednesdays. As for the night life, Cox reported that "there is a dance every night at Gordon's Restaurant which is kept up till 1 and 2 o'clock. Quite a quantity of liquor is sold on the 'quiet' though it becomes very noisy in a short time."[40]

By 1900 Bishop Young was back in his diocese, and that summer made an extended tour of his northern mission stations, travelling by canoe and accompanied by the intrepid Mrs. Julia Young.[41] Mrs. Young did not always go on these gruelling treks, but she was obviously a tower of strength upon which the ailing bishop came to rely heavily. One of her many duties was entertaining other missionaries, and their wives, passing through the Landing on their way to or from stations in the northern part of the diocese. One such traveller, the wife of Rev. Robert Holmes, has left us a pen portrait of Mrs. Young in the late summer of 1902:

> At Athabasca Landing we met other missionaries who were going to Wabasca and Chipewayan. Bishop and Mrs. Young at Athabasca lived in a comfortable log shack and we stayed a week there waiting for more freight to arrive from Edmonton. There were very few houses at the Landing in 1902. The bishop was up the Mackenzie River visiting the different mission stations but Mrs. Young didn't always go on these long treacherous trips. She was a charming lady. Never shall I forget our morning and evening prayer and readings; and the singing of the Doxology each morning after breakfast. Two lady missionaries were also in the house waiting for their boat. … They told us about their experiences with the Indians. Mrs. Young overhauled our outfit of provisions and clothing for our journey up the river. She had had much experience in this work for her home



Bishop William Reeve. All Saints Anglican Church, Athabasca.

> was a sort of junction for those engaged in North-West missions. Her life had been a very practical one, and her parting word of cheer to all the missionaries made one feel what a privilege it was to give of our best for God's work. One of her favorite hymns was "Work for the Night is Coming", and she set us all that worthy example.[42]

As Mrs. Holmes mentioned, Bishop Young toured the Mackenzie diocese that summer, substituting for his old friend Bishop William Reeve of Mackenzie River who was on furlough in Britain for a year. It was Young's last extended trip through the Canadian north, and it overtaxed his waning strength. A few months after his return to the Landing he was forced to recognize that his health was breaking down again, and he reluctantly submitted his resignation as Bishop of Athabasca. He and his family left the Landing for good in December, 1903, returning to England, where Richard Young died less than two years later.[43] During his eighteen years as bishop (eight of which were spent at the Landing) he had increased the number of Anglican missions and missionaries from three to seven (at Fort Chipewyan, Fort Vermilion, Lesser Slave Lake, Shaftesbury, Whitefish Lake, Wabasca and Athabasca Landing), and the number of lay workers from two to thirteen. He had also overseen the creation of four First Nations boarding schools and three day schools in his diocese.[44] Temporarily, at least, Young

The first public school house, Athabasca Landing, built in 1904. Athabasca Archives, 01264.

could not be replaced. Bishop Reeve returned from Britain to administer both his own Mackenzie diocese and the vacant Athabasca See. Initially he made the Landing his headquarters, but in 1905 moved back north, leaving the Rev. Malcolm Scott as Archdeacon of Athabasca.[45]

While Reeve and Scott together kept the parish of St. Matthew's and the bishopric of Athabasca functioning, they could not maintain the Anglican Church's erstwhile monopoly over education at the Landing. In 1903 the villagers organized a public school district (#839), and built a one-room log school in the centre of the community. As Scottie Willey mentioned, the first teacher was a Nova Scotian called Douglas Dean, but he stayed only one year, being replaced in 1905 by a man named Webb.[46]

Nor could Reeve and Scott maintain the quasi-monopoly the Anglican confession had enjoyed at Athabasca Landing during Young's "reign" there. In 1904 the Methodists, in the person of an itinerant preacher, Pastor Chequin, established a presence in Athabasca, holding Sunday services and purchasing three lots from the HBC for the site of a future church and parsonage.[47] But another four years would elapse before the first resident Methodist pastor, Reverend C. F. Hopkins, finished building the wooden structure that would serve both as a meeting hall and as a boarding house for travellers and newly arrived settlers.[48]

Meanwhile, the Roman Catholics had at last decided to do a better job of serving the French-Canadian and Métis population of the Landing. Since 1891, when Bishop Grouard had erected a log shack that doubled as warehouse and lodging place for itinerant priests, the Roman Catholic mission in Athabasca had been impermanent, a matter of flying visits by Father Lestanc from Cold Lake or Father Boulenc from Lac Ste-Anne, who prepared children for their first communion, heard confession and conducted mass.[49] The Klondike rush and the

School children at play, Athabasca Landing, 1909. Library and Archives Canada RCMP Archives, e999916224-u.

Father P. Beaudry (left) with Athabasca Landing's first medical doctor, Dr. Joseph Boulanger. Athabasca Archives, 00487.

growth in the Landing's population underlined the inadequacy of this arrangement, and on September 11th, 1899, the Vicarial Council responsible for missionaries in the North-West resolved that:

> there should be a permanent mission at the Landing. This locality has become during the last few years an important centre, especially during five months of the summer when it is a rendez-vous for all kinds of people. Bishop Legal will therefore visit that mission and choose a place to build what is needed.[50]

Bishop Legal of St. Albert had more pressing business to attend to, however, and it was 1903 before he finally reached Athabasca Landing. After that the flying visits became more frequent, and in 1905 the Bishop purchased a ten-lot-sized piece of land from the HBC for $100.00, and appointed Father P. Beaudry as the Landing's first resident parish priest.[51] Father Beaudry was lucky enough to have a relative living in the village who was a carpenter by trade, and by 1906 they had erected the first Roman Catholic church in Athabasca—St. Gabriel's.[52] The Landing's small community of practicing Christians was now firmly divided into three rival confessions.

Scottie Willey's reminiscences also mention the great flood of 1904, and the trouble and expense it caused the HBC post. This catastrophe was only the culmination of a series of problems encountered by Leslie Wood and his staff since 1897. In that year he had lost Captain John Segers to the Klondike and the S. S. *Athabasca* had run aground, incurring such extensive damage to her hull that Wood had decided that she was not worth repairing. [53] That decision had meant a return to scows and teams of Métis boatmen, but in 1897–98 the boatmen could also find lucrative work guiding Klondikers through the rapids of the Athabasca River, which meant Wood had to pay more for their labour. To compound his troubles, the fur harvest was poor for several years running, and competition from the free traders was fierce.[54]

Wood, taciturn and phlegmatic as ever, soldiered on, using the old methods. Charles Mathers, a well-known photographer who used the HBC transportation network to visit the Arctic Ocean in 1901, described the small flotilla in which he travelled as follows:

> The scows numbered four, and were all of the same pattern, being about fifty feet long, twelve feet wide, and four feet deep. Each boat's crew consisted of seven Indians, one of whom acted as guide or steersman, and handled the ponderous "sweep". One was bowsman, and the five others were oarsmen whose duty it also was to pack the goods across the portages. Each scow carried about 180 pieces, each piece representing 100 pounds on average. All the goods for the north are put up in hundred pound lots, or as near that quantity as possible, so that they may be the more easily packed on the portages.
>
> The first thing in the boat was a tier or two of bags of flour, extending from bow to stern. Then came sides of bacon, sacks of rice, caddies of tobacco, bags of shot and bags of balls, boxes of rifles, boxes of raisins, crates of hardware, pails of candles, stoves, medicine chests, kegs of powder, bales of twine for net making, blankets, ready-made clothing, dress goods, tea, etc., all piled in without much order; the only care exercised in their placing being to see that the boat rides level.[55]

This might have been a description of an HBC scow on the Athabasca twenty years earlier.

Obviously the HBC at Athabasca Landing was no longer in the forefront of transport technology, and the steamboat that Scottie Willey recalled seeing constructed on the north bank of the Athabasca in 1904 was not commissioned by Leslie Wood. Most probably it was the *Midnight Sun*, the first stern-wheeler operated by the Northern Transportation

Rivermen loading boats for the North, early 1900s. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2861.

Company (NTC), an enterprise formed in 1903 by Jim Cornwall, Fletcher Bredin and J. H. Wood.[56] Apart from the relatively small-scale operations of such older, established free traders as Peachy Pruden and Colin Johnston, the Northern Transportation Company was the first serious rival to the HBC's monopoly at the Landing since Richard Secord's attempt to muscle in on the local fur trade in the late 1880s. At that time the Company had had the drive, determination and financial power to buy off or otherwise annihilate the competition. Now, in the mid-1900s, it was unable to maintain either its transportation monopoly or its monopoly of the fur trade at the Landing.

A marine boiler, destined for a Northern Transportation Company steamboat, being hauled over the Athabasca Landing Trail. Athabasca Archives, 01793.

Revillon Frères warehouse and store, Athabasca Landing, September, 1907. Glenbow Archives, NA-1338-11.

Kennedy's mail stage, Athabasca Landing, n.d. Glenbow Archives, NA-352-8.

The Northern Transportation Company expanded rapidly. The *Midnight Sun* operated on the Athabasca River, taking over almost all of the non-HBC freight and passenger traffic to and from Fort McMurray, traffic that had once been carried by the S. S. *Athabasca*. Soon Cornwall and his partners had enough capital to construct The *Northern Light*, a shallow-draught sidewheeler designed to operate on the shallower Little Slave River and on Lesser Slave Lake.[57] The HBC, in contrast, had to make do with scows, and the crowning humiliation came when Captain John Segers, newly returned from the Yukon, signed on with the Northern Transportation Company.[58]

The energetic activities of such capitalists as Cornwall, Bredin and Wood were not the only thorn in the HBC's flesh during these years. In 1904 a French fur-trading company called Revillon Frères, which had previously purchased furs in the Edmonton

market, decided to reduce costs by cutting out the middlemen who had acted as intermediaries between its buyers and the Indigenous and Métis trappers. This was bad news for the likes of Colin Johnston and Peachy Pruden, but good news for Fletcher Bredin and Jim Cornwall, who sold off their fur-trading company to Revillon Frères and put the proceeds into The Northern Transportation Company. In July Revillon Frères purchased three lots and opened a trading post in Athabasca Landing. The post served both as a general store and as a freight distribution point for Revillon posts in the Lesser Slave, Wabasca and Peace River areas.[59] The HBC now had a significant rival in the local fur trade as well as in the transportation business. In the event, however, Revillon Frères experienced a tough time trying to break into the Company's established territory: Leslie Wood's heart may never have been in the steamboat business, but he was an old master at fur trading and his firm had the resources to allow him to keep the competition at bay in this area. Revillon seems to have been successful enough to retain—and possibly expand somewhat—the corner of the fur trade carved out by Cornwall and Bredin in the 1890s, but it was unable to break the HBC's hold on the larger part of the business. Nonetheless, from July 13, 1904, Revillon Frères was an established part of the commercial life of Athabasca Landing.

Other developments aided the expansion of the Landing as a transportation and communications centre. The post office and regular mail service for which Bishop Young had campaigned for several years were finally instituted in 1901. As Scottie Willey recalled, William Rennison was the postmaster until 1905, when he left to take up farming on a homestead.[60] The Landing Trail, too, was gradually being improved, although it still left much to be desired in wet weather. NWMP officer, Superintendent Constantine, in his report on the "General State of the District in 1902," made the following comments that aptly sum up the situation:

> During the past year, the condition of the district has been one of steady and consistent progress. The trails and roads generally are much improved. Local work has been more thorough and permanent than heretofore, the farmers having realised from bitter experience that to dump a load of straw or willows into a mud hole does not improve matters but makes them very much worse. … Owing to the high water in the early part of the summer nearly all the bridges over the smaller streams were carried away. It was perhaps a good thing that they were, although interfering with traffic for a time it had the result of new and substantial ones being built, and doing away with the fear of a like cleaning out for some years. Considerable work has been done on the trails, but in most places not of a permanent nature. Good roads will not be until the country is drained, and good ditches made at the road sides.[61]

As Constantine's use of the plural suggests, the Landing Trail was no longer Athabasca Landing's only road; other freighting trails had been made north-west to Lesser Slave Lake and east to Lac La Biche, and, with the growing numbers of settlers passing through the Landing on their way to the Peace district, the Slave Lake Trail in particular was incurring considerable use.[62] In fact, the area between Grouard and Peace River Crossing was attracting so many new inhabitants that the NWMP decided in 1905 to create a new "Athabasca Police District" with a division based at Slave Lake, a change that resulted in the temporary loss of the Landing's NWMP detachment and the closure of the NWMP barracks.[63]

This setback was balanced, however, by the opening of a new communications link with Edmonton and the rest of Canada: the telegraph. The new telegraph line was constructed during the summer of 1904, and put into operation on October 1st, with James McKernan as the Dominion telegraph agent in Athabasca.[64] In the next year Athabasca Landing, now no longer an isolated outpost but a flourishing commercial and communications station on the way to both the Peace Country and the Far North, was incorporated as a village, and appeared for the first time in Henderson's Gazeteer and Directory. The entry read as follows:

> ATHABASCA LANDING, Athabasca. Situated on the Athabasca River, Sec 20, TWP 66, RGE 27, W4M, 97 miles north of Edmonton which is the nearest railway station. Has government telegraph office. Is the head of navigation and trans-shipping point for the Peace River and the Mackenzie River basins. Mails weekly by stage from Edmonton. Has Anglican and Methodist church. Industries, two saw mills and boat building. The steamer "Midnight Sun" runs to Lesser Slave Lake, 220 miles west and to Grand Rapids 156 miles north. A government road is being constructed to Lesser Slave Lake and Peace River Crossing.
>
> Population – 1905 – 250
>
> Postmaster – William Rennison
>
> Public School – Teacher Webb
>
> R.N.W.M.P. – Corp. Guerney
>
> Justice of the Peace – William Leslie Wood
>
> Government Telegraph Service – James McKernan agent

Telegraph agent James McKernan, later Athabasca Landing's postmaster and Dominion Lands agent. Athabasca Archives, 00230.

Meteorological Observer – Bishop Reeve

Methodist Church – vacant

Church of England – St. Matthew's mission – R. Rev. W. D. Reeve, Bishop of Mackenzie River, Rev. C. B. Beck (Deacon) assistant

Attison, Philip – river & freighter pilot

Beaudry, Frank – carpenter

Belleros, Octave -–Belleros hotel

Belleros, Peter – livery

Brown, Magnus – carpenter

Brown, William – carpenter

Chillet, Claude – blacksmith & mechanic

Cohra, A. – river freighter & pilot

Descoigne, Isadore – river freighter & pilot

Emerson, Samuel - engineer, steamer "Midnight Sun" & boat builder

Gagnon, Frederick – saw mill

Gagnon, Isaiah – hotel

Gullion, George – boat builder

Hislop & Nagle general store (of Fort Resolution) – F. Hilker manager

Hudson's Bay Company – W. Leslie Wood, manager general store and saw mill

Lambert, L. – local manager, Revillon Brothers Limited

McKernan, James – agent government telegraph

McLeod, George E. – mail contractor

Midnight Sun (stern wheel steamer, 50 hp 160 feet) – James H. Wood & Cornwall props, Samuel Emerson engineer

Ralis, R. S. – hotel

Reeve, Right Rev. W. D. (Anglican), Bishop of Mackenzie River and Acting Bishop of Athabasca

Rennison, William – postmaster & trader

Revillon Brothers Ltd., wholesale and retail merchants, dry goods, shoes and groceries, hardware dealers and exporters of furs, produce and raw hides – L. Lambert, local manager

Russell, John – lumber & boat builder

Smith, William – ranch and stopping place (7 miles south)

Williams, Edwin – feed stable

Wood, James H. – boat builder[65]

This list gives an indication of the main trades in which the Landing's permanent inhabitants were engaged in 1905: lumbering, river freighting and piloting, trading, running sawmills, livery stables and hotels, and boatbuilding. The men listed were presumably the Landing's most established and successful businessmen, craftsmen and rivermen. Apart from a few pillars of the community, such as Bishop Reeve, HBC manager (now Justice of the Peace) Leslie Wood, and capitalist J. H. Wood, these were rough-and-ready frontiersmen building up their businesses or making their living by supplying the skills and services needed in this trading village on the edge of civilization. In 1905, when Alberta became a full-fledged province and Athabasca was officially incorporated as a village, the Landing's population of 250 consisted of these men, their employees, their womenfolk and children, and the Métis families that still camped east of the HBC townsite in the shadow of the east hill.[66] They were to witness a transformation in the Landing itself and in the countryside surrounding the village during the next decade.

CHAPTER 6

Settling the Land—The Homesteading Boom, 1906–1914

BY 1906 the new province of Alberta had been homesteaded from Cardston in the south to the hamlets of Morinville, Sturgeonville and Legal in the countryside north of Edmonton. Yet, although the grid-survey crews of the Dominion Lands Office had already reached Athabasca Landing and staked out township 66-22-W4, the number of farmers in the Athabasca area was still very small. Indeed, they could almost be counted on the fingers of two hands. In 1906 a few newcomers, such as Louis Menard, Louis Coutre, James Milne, Bill Dav, Albert Gyte, Harry Wilt and Eddie Shank, joined such earlier pioneers as George Shank, Billy Smith, Colin Johnston, C. B. Major, Joseph Daigneau, Joseph La Clare, James Paquette, Jack Secord, William Brown, James Minns and David Hay, but most of the newly surveyed quarter-sections remained open for homesteading claims.[1] Moreover, by 1909 a much larger area, stretching from Baptiste Lake in the west to Flat Lake in the east, and from Perryvale in the south to ten miles north of the Athabasca River, was available for settlement. In 1907 postmaster and telegraph operator James McKernan began acting as a land-agent employed by the Department of the Interior to advise prospective settlers, and by 1909 he was in charge of a sub-office where homestead claims could be filed.[2]

Thanks to the Laurier government's policy of promoting rapid settlement of the West, the regulations governing homesteading were relatively simple and generous, and they were well publicized in such newspapers as the *Edmonton Bulletin* and the *Northern News*. In 1909 the official synopsis of

Homesteaders on a trail east of Athabasca Landing, 1912. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-27.

A Dominion Lands Office survey party near Athabasca Landing, 1909. Glenbow Archives, NA-3471-26.

the Canadian North-West Land Regulations read as follows:

Any person who is the sale head of a family, or any male over 18 years old, may homestead a quarter-section of available land in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta. The applicant must appear in person at the Dominion Lands Agency or Sub-Agency for the district. Entry by proxy may be made at any agency, on certain conditions, for father, mother, son, daughter, brother or sister of intending homesteader.

Duties—Six months' residence upon and cultivation of the land in each of three years. A homesteader may live within nine miles of his homestead on a farm of at least 70 acres, solely owned and occupied by him, his father, mother, son, daughter, brother or sister.

In certain districts a homesteader in good standing may pre-empt a quarter-section alongside his homestead. Price $3.00 per acre. Duties—must reside six months in each of six years from date of homestead entry (including the time required to earn homestead patent) and cultivate fifty acres extra.

A homesteader who has exhausted his homestead right and cannot obtain a pre-emption may take a purchased homestead in certain districts. Price $3.00 per acre.

Duties—must reside six months in each of three years, cultivate fifty acres, and erect a house worth $300.00.

W. W. Cory.
Deputy of the Minister of the Interior.[3]

In short, for a few years after Athabasca Landing officially became a village, it was easy enough to find an empty and potentially farmable quarter-section in the surrounding area, and equally easy to file a homesteading claim for the land of one's choice. By the beginning of World War I, almost all the good farming land and much of the inferior land within a fifteen-mile radius of the Landing had been filed upon. So, although some settlement did take place after 1914 on abandoned quarter-sections, on poor-quality land and on land further away from the Landing, the main Athabasca homesteading boom really lasted for little more than half a decade. The crucial years were 1909 to 1914.

How many settlers came? Where did they come from? What areas and which types of land did they prefer? How many of them "proved up" on their homesteads? We do not possess statistics full and reliable enough to answer these questions definitively, but we do know enough to make some provisional estimates. The only way to determine exactly how many homesteaders arrived in the Athabasca region before the First World War would be to search the original land title for each quarter-section—that massive task has yet to be done. However, the numbers of homestead claims filed at the Athabasca sub-agency were reported in the local newspaper, usually on a monthly basis, while annual figures were compiled by the local RNWMP for their routine "survey of the state of the district" submitted each year to the federal government in

Athabasca Landing as seen by newly arrived homesteaders, 1911. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-4.

Ottawa. Unfortunately the RNWMP's figures and those reported in the Northern News do not quite agree, but they are close enough for us to make some estimates. It would seem that there were about sixty new homestead entries in 1909, somewhere between 100 and 150 in 1910, at least 275 in 1911, about 365 in 1912, between 350 and 400 in 1913, and nearly 400 in 1914.[4] In short, it appears that at least 1,500 settlers and their families—a population of perhaps 5,000—moved into the Athabasca region (an area rather smaller than that covered by the present County of Athabasca) between 1909 and 1914. This was a fairly massive influx, and it transformed not only the countryside around Athabasca but also the character of the Landing itself.

Where did they come from, these would-be homesteaders, and where and why did they choose their lands? An analysis of all the early (pre-1914) settlers mentioned in the family history, *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, reveals that thirty-one per cent were born in the U.S., twenty-two per cent in the British Isles, sixteen per cent in English-speaking eastern Canada, sixteen per cent in French-speaking eastern Canada, and fifteen per cent in continental Europe (mainly in the Austro-Hungarian Empire).[5] A similar analysis based on a random sample of quarter sections throughout the Athabasca region gives the following statistics: U.S. thirty-six per cent, U.K. twenty-two per cent, Canada twenty-seven per cent, Europe fourteen per cent, West Indies one per cent.[6] Given the relative similarity of these figures, it is reasonable to conclude that about one-third of the newcomers were from the United States, at least one-fifth were British, around one-seventh were from Central Europe, and the remainder had come west from Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes. About seventy per cent of the new settlers were anglophones, the rest dividing roughly equally between francophones and immigrants whose first language was Germanic or Slavonic.[7]

By and large the earlier settlers (those who arrived before 1911) tended to be British and Canadian, especially French Canadian; most of the Americans and Europeans came during the latter part of the boom. Thus, the British and Canadian settlers had first pick of the available quarter sections, in terms of both locality and type of land. In the main they had to be content with land rated only mediocre for grain farming, since the Dominion Land Survey ratings of land quality in the nine townships surrounding Athabasca Landing were as follows: excellent, one per cent; good, fourteen per cent; fair, forty per cent; and poor, forty-five per cent.[8] But they had a choice between four main types of vegetative cover (scrub, brule and windfall, woodland, and swamp), and between five main soil types (chernozems, luvisols, brunisols, gleysols, and sedge and moss peats). The early settlers tended to choose scrubland or, as a second choice, brule and windfall areas, and to avoid woodland and swamp because of the time and trouble involved in logging or draining them. The pioneers tended to prefer black soils (chernozems) and

A Dominion Lands Office survey party near Athabasca Landing, 1909. Glenbow Archives, NA-3471-26.

Sargent's homestead near Colinton, 1912. Athabasca Archives Wright Collection, 00451.

luvisols, and to avoid organic soils (peats) associated with muskeg; however, soil quality does not appear to have been a major factor in their decisions about where to homestead.[9] Rather, the ease with which the land could be cleared and its proximity to existing cart roads and to anticipated railway stations (at Meanook, Colinton and Athabasca Landing) seem to have been the decisive factors.[10] At any rate, the first quarter sections taken up lay within three miles of the Landing, in the Tawatinaw valley between Perryvale and Athabasca, or on the table lands east of Billy Smith's stopping-house at Meanook and David Hay's post office at Kinnoul (renamed Colinton when the railway arrived in 1912). The area north of Little Pine Creek and Canoe Lake was also settled early, and quickly became known as the Keyes school district.[11]

Secord's Trading Post showing a detail of log construction of a homestead building. Athabasca Archives, 00817.

Secord's Trading Post near Athabasca Landing. Athabasca Archives, 00816.

From 1910 onwards the pattern of settlement changed. Now the homesteaders began looking farther afield. They moved east from Athabasca Landing and north from the Keyes district, meeting in the Pine Creek area and forming the Rodger's Chapter school district. They also pushed south from the nucleus of farms in the Keyes area, creating the Dover school district in 1912 and the Atlanta school district two years later. Meanwhile the lands south and south-west of the Landing were also filling up. The Tawatinaw school district between Colinton and Athabasca was set up in 1911, and South Athabasca followed in 1912.

Settlement proceeded more slowly west of the Landing. Much of the land around Baptiste Lake had already been taken by Métis in the 1880s, and the grid-survey of townships 66-24-W4 and 67-24-W4 recognized their long, narrow water-front lots. By 1912 additional settlers had located in the area, and the school district of Lahaieville (north of Baptiste Lake) was formed in 1912, followed by West Athabasca in 1914 and, rather belatedly, Baptiste Lake (covering the area south and east of the lake) in 1918.

Settlement was also relatively slow north of the Landing. The Parkhurst district to the immediate north-east of Athabasca filled up during the boom years 1911-1912, and from then on homesteaders in that area were forced to go further east into the Forest district, which was occupied by 1914.[12] But the muskeg around Jackfish and Camping lakes discouraged homesteading, while the difficulty with land north of Athabasca River was its isolation. That problem was mitigated, if not completely solved, by the installation of a ferry in 1906, after one of the first farmers north of the river, Louis Menard, campaigned successfully for both a ferry and a road to link himself and his handful of neighbours to the Landing.[13] Menard, who also ran a barber shop in the village, was one of the most competent farmers in the region—according to the *Northern News*, he was the first to grow winter wheat and in June, 1911, had a twelve-acre crop standing 2' 6" high and ready for harvesting. His achievements encouraged a minority of settlers to file claims in what would eventually become the Fairhaven, Greyville and Youngville school districts.[14] For example, in 1912, a Mr. Sawdy brought his family to homestead the locality now named after him, and after a summer of living under canvas while they built a log house and began clearing land, the Sawdys were ready to visit with a few of the other sixty-six people living north of the river. In the next spring, they put in their first crop of oats, barley and potatoes.[15]

In prospering north of the Athabasca River, however, the Menards and Sawdys were an exception; the main body of settlement in the Athabasca region on the eve of World War I formed a giant V-shape. The apex of the V was at Meanook, and from there one broad line of settlement flowed north-west through South Athabasca, West Athabasca, Baptiste Lake and Lahaieville to Grosmont while the other flowed north-east through Colinton, Tawatinaw, Keyes and Rodger's Chapter to Forest, with a subsidiary spar heading directly east through Dover and Atlanta to Plumb Lake. East of the Forest district, but cut off from it by a band of muskeg, was an isolated community of black Americans who homesteaded near Pine Creek from 1910 onwards. They formed the Toles school district in 1913, and later renamed their hamlet Amber Valley.[16]

It was one thing to file a homestead claim and quite another to "prove up" and obtain freehold title to the land. To do so, the homesteader had to fulfill three main conditions: build a house worth at least $300, clear and cultivate fifty acres or more, and live on the homestead (or on a nearby relative's farm) for six months in each of three successive years. These rules were eased somewhat in 1914 to aid the settler who lacked capital and who had to subsidize his farm by working for part of the year in lumbering, mining or freighting (a very common occurrence). The house no longer had to be valued at $300 provided that it was "habitable," the eighteen-months residency could be at any time within a three-year period, and that period could commence at a date later than when the claim was filed, for example, when the homesteader actually had his shack built and was ready to start living on the land and clearing it for cultivation.[17]

These changes undoubtedly helped the poorer settlers, but they did not, and were not intended to, change the basic principle that a homesteader would receive title to his land if and only if he cleared and

Louis Menard's fall wheat field, 1909. The first crop grown north of the river. Athabasca Archives Gorman Collection, 01788.

The first ferry at Athabasca Landing being launched in spring, 1906. Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 3311.

The ferry crossing the Athabasca River with a cargo of horses, 1909. Glenbow Archives, NA-3471-28.

farmed about one-third of it. And that was no easy task, especially if he lacked horses and machinery and had to break the land and erect his log cabin using only picks, shovels, forks, rakes, axes, saws and hammers. Relatively few homesteaders succeeded in "proving up" in the minimum time of three years from the date of filing their claim. Those who set to work with a will at clearing scrub or draining muskeg usually required about four years before they could show the government inspector the requisite fifty acres under cultivation, while those who had to cut down woodland often took at least six years. The average time taken to patent land in the Athabasca area was approximately five years, a reflection of mixed terrain which included large areas of swampland, scrub and light forest cover.[18]

With the benefit of hindsight we can see that scrubland was by far the best choice a homesteader could make: some forty-four per cent of all first homesteaders in the region who eventually patented their land had cleared scrub, while twenty-eight per cent had drained swampland, eleven per cent had cleared woodland, and nine per cent had cleared brule. One's chances of actually getting to farm the land were thus much higher if one's homestead consisted predominantly of scrub and, since the earliest homesteaders were mainly Britons and Canadians who tended to prefer scrubland, it is not surprising that they were less likely to abandon their holdings than the later Americans and Europeans who took poorer (swampy or wooded) lands. The abandonment rates by ethnic origin for the period 1904–1915 (initial filings only) were as follows: Continental Europeans sixty-seven per cent, Americans sixty per cent, Canadians forty-one per cent, and Britons twenty-nine per cent.[19] In all, rather less than half the pioneers who homesteaded in the Athabasca region before the First World War succeeded in winning full title to their chosen quarter-sections. On the evidence of a random sample of 105 quarters, about fifty-six per cent of those 1,500 or so early settlers despaired of ever making a living as small farmers, packed up their few possessions, and moved on to pastures

Ploughing with oxen. Pen and ink impression by Vi Kowalchuk.

Farmer Eddie Jedeon Shank, originally from Quebec, homesteaded a few miles south-east of Athabasca Landing in 1906. One of the most successful farmers in the Athabasca district, he won numerous prizes for his grain crops in the 1920s and 1930s. Athabasca Archives Shank Collection, 06966.

new.[20] Other hopeful prospective farmers came to take their places, which is why settlement continued in the area into the 1920s and even the 1930s, well after the main homesteading boom was over.

For those who stayed, it quickly became evident that, notwithstanding some excellent initial yields from grain crops obtained by such skilled and fortunate farmers as Mr. Sawdy, Mr. Underwood; Louis Menard, George, Eddie and Phillip Shank, and Mr. J. Fobarty, the Athabasca area could not compete with the southern prairies or the Peace country as a locale for the growing of spring wheat. The land simply was not rich enough, and the growing season was too short to make monoculture a viable option. The alternative was mixed farming. By World War I the erection of numerous corrals, milk sheds, pig pens and hen houses indicated that the raising of dairy cows, beef cattle, horses, pigs, sheep and chickens would henceforth be a regular characteristic of homesteading and small farming around Athabasca.[21]

New settlers who had farmed elsewhere and who possessed some horses and other livestock thus had a distinct advantage over their poor neighbours. Most immigrants from Britain or Europe, although they might have some cash saved from previous jobs in freighting, mining or railway construction, brought no cattle with them. Eastern Canadians coming from farms in Quebec or Ontario, on the other hand, could bring their stock on the CNoR, and immigrants from the western U.S. could drive or ship their animals north. Fairly typical, perhaps, was the experience

Herding cattle on the East Hill overlooking Athabasca Landing, 1912. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 12.

Travel in 1912: the Overholt family in front of their homestead north of the river. Athabasca Archives: Overholt Collection, 00284.

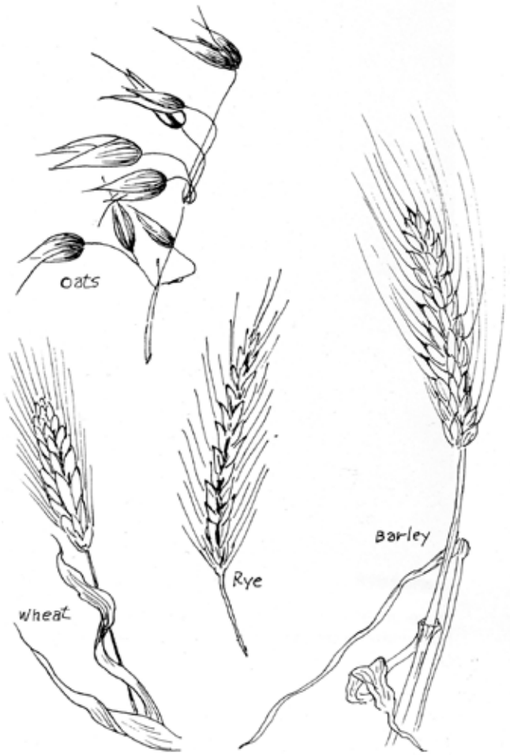
A moosemobile, Athabasca Landing, 1909. Marie Guennette's father-in-law, Billy Day, homesteaded near Colinton, and worked as a bartender in one of the Athabasca Landing hotels. He successfully raised two abandoned moose calves and trained them to pull a sleigh. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-17.

of the Watson family, Ontarians of Scottish stock who moved west in 1906 and came looking for a homestead in the Kinnoul/Meanook area the next summer. The Watson family included five children, and the youngest (then aged nine or ten) has given this account of their arrival and first years here:

> In July (1907), Mr. and Mrs. Watson, Mrs. Watson's brother, George Russell, and her uncle, John Bell, drove to Athabasca over the famous Landing Trail. They got good advice from Jim McKernan, who was Land Agent, Telegraph Operator and Post Master; also from Leslie Wood of the Hudson's Bay Company and from Mrs. Wood, who was a daughter of the famous pioneer family of George McDougall. They were told that excellent bread could be obtained from the Mounted Police Baker, Mr. Johnstone. At that time Athabasca Landing was one of the most important of the Police Posts, commanded by Colonel Sanders. Mr. & Mrs. Watson selected the quarter section N.W. 9-65-21-W4, thirteen miles southeast of Athabasca and five miles east of where Colinton was later located. This area was not yet subdivided by survey, so was not then open for filing. They used the usual squatter's claim with four logs in a square for the start of a building. Several more trips were made that year. In October the land was surveyed and the claim was registered. This land had some meadow land, some young tree growth and fire-killed trees, in one case up to 100 feet tall. In May of 1908, Mr. & Mrs. Watson and the family moved to the homestead. … In the travelling arrangement Mr. Watson generally drove a team and had with him Mrs. Watson and Helen. Cecilia drove the other team. Bertram and Russell drove the cattle which included some wild western stock. William was put in charge of the sheep and told to keep them near the wagons. The weather was generally good without much rain. … The party left the trail near Billy Smith's where they crossed the river and went east to the homestead. On the homestead clearing land and building occupied much of the time.[22]

Thomas and Cassie Watson were obviously experienced mixed farmers who came well supplied with cattle and wagons. Others were not so lucky. For example, Jerry Mellot from Oklahoma homesteaded in the Colin ton area in 1911, but for the first few years made ends meet by trapping and by taking any odd jobs he could find. His wife, Marian, has provided the following account of his first years in the Athabasca area, based on a diary kept by Jerry at the time:

> At the border line, June 1, they left for Edmonton on the train, arriving on June 19. They left July 4 for Colinton with some other settlers, six wagons in all. It took them thirteen days. The Athabasca Landing Trail was just a series of mudholes. They got stuck, put all six teams on each wagon and pulled each one through the mudhole, by that time they were in another mudhole. On July 25 Jerry went to Athabasca, on August 4 to Pine Creek and on August 16 he filed on a homestead in Section 22-64-21-W4. On September 14 he dug potatoes for Cassidy on shares, October 1 he went to work for F. Hume and November 1 he went to work on the railroad as cook for $2.00 a day. He worked there until February 28, 1912. He worked in Athabasca until March 20, then he came home and trapped. He got 84 pelts which he sold for $41.50. April 30 to May 30 he worked for Dick Norder for $2.00 a day.
>
> He and some Indians went hunting and shot a moose. While skinning it around a fire his feet got wet. The Indians let him off the sleigh to walk half a mile to his shack. His ankles got stiff and he fell several times. He built a fire and got a pail of water, then he could not get his overshoes off. He put the water in the dish pan and put his frozen feet in it. When he could get his overshoes off he got into bed. In the morning



Rye, oats, barley and wheat. Pen and ink impression by Vi Kowalchuk.

A binder pulled by a four-horse team on a farm near Colinton, 1915. Athabasca Archives Goodwin Collection, 00269.

> the Indians came to see how he was. If they had not he would likely have died there. They wrapped his feet in moss and blue vitriol and took him to the hospital in Athabasca. He was there all winter. When his feet got well enough, he painted the inside of the hospital to pay for his hospital bill. His big toe on his left foot bothered him for eleven years until he had it amputated. His hospital bill was $106.00 and his doctor bill $25.00.
>
> He worked for Pete Bellerose from May 1, 1913, to June 30 and again from August 1 to September 30. He trapped in season. He got a fox and 40 muskrats which sold for $27.50. He treated the Indians as friends and they told him many things about hunting and trapping. He went to trap muskrats with 90 traps. They told him not to use so many as he would not look at them often enough and the muskrats would chew off their foot and escape. They said to use twelve traps and look at them every hour. In December 1913 he got a deer, a moose, a fox, 31 muskrats and ten weasels. He sold the fur for $51.60. In January he got a wolf, 42 muskrats, 15 weasels, one lynx, two foxes and one bear which sold for $116.00. In February 1914 he got 25 muskrats, five weasels, three skunks and one fox. In March 1914 he got 72 muskrats and 16 weasels.
>
> From June 11 to July, 1914 he worked for M. Villeneuve for $2.00 a day. From July 8 to August 31 he worked for the Hudson's Bay Company for $3.00 a day. From October 6 to 11 he worked for George Jones for $2.50 a day. From October 12 to 25 he worked for Joe Shubert for $3.00 a day.[23]

This account of Mellor's first years as a homesteader shows the vital role played by casual labour in the domestic economy of the poorer pioneer. It also shows that trapping for furs was still a most important source of income in the Athabasca region, and that the new form of land use, farming, had by no means totally supplanted the old, hunting and gathering. Mellot, however, appears to have done relatively little land dearing and cultivation during the period from 1911 to 1914, so his adoption of a traditional life style very similar to that of the Métis living near the Landing may have been untypical of the new breed of settler. All homesteaders did some hunting to fill the stew-pot and to supplement their meagre incomes, but to those determined to "prove up" as soon as possible, hunting and casual labour were secondary activities, a means to an end rather than a way of life.

Another interesting glimpse of what it was like to be an early homesteader arriving in the Athabasca region has been provided by Marie Laure Day who was one of twelve children in the Guennette family from St. Jerome, Quebec. In 1912 she recalls:

> My Dad got itchy feet and decided to go west with that

many boys, as he did not want them to work in factories. He had heard all about that cheap land at $10.00 for a homestead. My Dad went first as he had met a French family from L'Original who had already gone to settle around Athabasca-Colinton, which was to be our home. So Bruno went by freight, what they call settlers—with all the belongings: horse, a few cows, machinery, etc. It took him three weeks to get to the destination. Then the family followed in a month or so. I was the only one that could speak a little English. It took us a week. It was sure rough travelling—no beds, just lay on our seat to sleep. Mother had prepared bread and butter to make sandwiches. I never ate so many sandwiches which included salmon, and sardines. Luckily there was a stove to make tea. We all survived; arrived at Morinville which was the end of the steel. We stayed there for another week at the hotel. Then we hired two teams of horses and democrat. There was ten of us then. It took two days rough travelling in springtime with bad roads. At night we would stop at a stopping place and had to sleep on the floor. Sometimes I wonder how my mother ever stood all of this. When we landed in Colinton Mother had $67.00 in her pocket.

We got to Athabasca Hotel around midnight; all the rooms were taken so we had to sleep on the floor again. So the next day they drove us to Jos. Lamoureaux's and stayed with them for a month. They helped organize a bee to build a log house; then we had only strawticks and beds made of rough lumber—just a dirt roof—every time it rained we had to move everything into the middle of the shack. A few years after, we managed to get a slab roof. We had to put up with bed bugs—they were so thick, they were almost able to carry our house away. They came out of the logs. We tried to destroy them with coal oil.

We picked roots to open land to plant a garden. We got some groceries—flour, dried prunes, bacon, syrup from Vermilion Bros.; they gave us credit for the summer. Then to pay for it, Bruno and Jules went out freighting from Athabasca to Grouard in the winter. We ate lots of wild meat including rabbits, prairie chicken, fish, duck and geese. When we first lived in our log house we had to fight the flies and mosquitoes. They were so thick we had to build a smudge to walk in the bush and sometimes get up at two or three in the morning to build a smudge so we could sleep.[24]

Here again, although the Guennette family did possess some capital in the form of stock and agricultural tools, the off-the-farm income provided by the older boys was crucial to the family's survival during the first years before the farm was fully productive. For the Guennettes, as for all homesteaders, the biggest problem was to clear a dozen or more acres so that sufficient land could be put into cultivation the first summer to provide feed for the animals, vegetables for domestic consumption and, if possible, a cash crop to allow the family to pay its bills and to buy essentials such as seed and farm machinery. No farmer could do for long without a plough, a binder (for harvesting) and a team of horses (or oxen) to pull these machines.

Harvesting was a joyous time, and a time of cooperation between neighbours, but it was also a time of financial strain for the homesteader. He ploughed and sowed his own fields, and at harvest time he could cut and bind his cereal crops with his own horse-drawn binder, but for threshing he needed help. At least one pioneer, C.B. Major, initially did his threshing by hand using the traditional flail, but hand threshing was an extremely labour-intensive, time-consuming and wearisome business. Major also experimented with horse-powered threshing; he constructed a mechanism that included a tread mill worked by three horses walking around and around in a circle. It was, no doubt, as tedious for the horses as hand threshing was for humans.

The best answer to the problem lay in cooperation and steam power; therefore, most pioneers worked on a threshing crew, and hired it to do their own harvest. About a dozen men—hard-working men who laboured from dawn to dusk and whose ravenous appetites for food had to be satisfied by the lady of the house—gathered the sheaves tossed out by the binder, stacked them into stooks, carried them to the thresher, and fed the voracious machine. The machine itself was either steam powered or gasoline powered, and it was owned by the team leader (Joe Chabot, Billy Smith, Phillip Shank or Scottie Willey).

A steam engine used for threshing. Athabasca Archives Overholt Collection, 00287.

Threshing near Athabasca Landing, 1925. Athabasca Archives, 00776.

Belching smoke and emitting a tremendous racket, it separated the kernels from the stalks, producing a steady stream of grain ready for storage in bin and elevator, and simultaneously shooting a cloud of chaff through the air to form a huge pile of straw that the farmer would use for fodder and bedding.

Bill Pearson, a pioneer homesteader in the Colinton area, recalled the endless labour of threshing crew work in his memoir, *The Homestead*:

> I worked that fall (1911) threshing. My job was pitching bundles. We worked from seven in the morning until nine or ten at night. Wages were one dollar a day and I worked for eighty-one days. The last of the threshing was done from stacks. There were not many machines in the country and some of the farmers would put their grain into stacks so it would keep dry. This was threshed later in the fall. Some of the steamers burned straw to heat the boiler. It kept one man working steady putting straw in the firebox. At night bundles were packed in tight to keep a head of steam. Another man and team were kept busy hauling water. They had to have clean soft water. Alkali water would bubble up and come out of the overflow pipe. At harvest time extra workers were brought from Toronto and Montreal. They would stook or drive binders and later work on the threshing machines. I never had a change of clothes all summer.[25]

Another early settler, Rayner Whiteley, has recalled his early years as a homesteader and threshing-crew member:

> I filed first on a quarter just west of Athabasca and the Department sent my application back and the $10.00 and told me that it was an odd number and it was not open for entering and they would notify me as soon as it was; so I waited a year and did not get it. When I inquired, they had forgotten and it was homesteaded by another chap. In the meantime, the boom came along and he sold it for $19,000. In 1912 I filed east of Athabasca, proved up on it and kept it. … Some old timers sold their places and left and others passed on. … The first farm equipment

Rayner Whiteley on horseback, 1908. Athabasca Archives, 00504.

Threshing near Colinton, 1915. Athabasca Archives Hay Collection, 00964.

> came in from Edmonton about 1907 or 08 with teams. Jim Daniel was the International agent in Athabasca. … About livestock in the area: Mr. Minns, Bryce's brother, and his uncle bought a bull in Edmonton and started walking him out in the hot summer. They walked him too far and he died; that was in 1904 or 05. … About raising crops: we started raising crops on a few acres at Perryvale about 1904 or 05. I had a lot to do with the threshing. Billy Smith got the first threshing machine in the country; he lived at Meanook. … Billy Smith hauled this threshing machine from Edmonton to Meanook with a team of horses. It was actually hauled up by another old timer, Bill Brown, uncle to Wilfred Flack. Billy used to thresh all around the country, at Pine Creek and west of Colinton. Mr. Keir and Mr. Willey brought in the second threshing outfit; they did all the threshing, east, west and north of Athabasca.[26]

If Billy Smith owned the first steam threshing machine in the Athabasca area, and Messers Keir and Willey shared the second, the third seems to have been purchased by Phillip Shank in 1912, and the fourth by Joe Chabot the next year.[27] These investments, plus the opening of a farm machinery dealership at the Landing, demonstrate that, by the eve of the First World War, farming was becoming a profitable business for some homesteaders. There were quite a few success stories printed in the local newspapers, and 1910 and 1911 seem to have been particularly good years. For example, in early July, 1910, Joseph

Farmer Bob Vance with realtor A. A. Greer holding stalks of rye grown near Athabasca Landing. n.d. Athabasca Archives Gorman Collection, 00766.

Tobaty's oat crop, two and one-half miles from the Landing, was reported to be forty-three inches high already, while in that same year Mr. Underwood, a homesteader in the Pine Creek area, obtained over 300 bushels of #1 grade wheat from only seven acres.[28] In January, 1911, the *Northern News* published a tally of the total cereal crop in the area: 45,121 bushels of oats, 1,612 bushels of barley, and 798 bushels of wheat, nearly triple the output of the previous year.[29] As homesteaders succeeded in clearing more farmland, the total acreage under cereal crops kept increasing, approximately doubling each year.

The extent of this boom in acreage cropped and yields obtained did not escape the Athabasca Landing Board of Trade or the editors of the *Northern News*. By 1911 they had instituted a concerted publicity campaign, extolling the countryside around the Landing as "the agricultural Garden District of Central Alberta" with the "choicest soil" in the province and much better grain handling and marketing facilities than the Peace River area. This promotional effort also billed the Athabasca area as excellent for dairying on account of its climate, its supply of fresh water and its abundance of wild hay.[30] The boosters' claims were not a complete fabrication, since more independent observers of the new farmers' achievements were also impressed. For example, R. C. Ward, a hardware traveller for Revillon Frères, visited the Landing in 1910 on a business trip and commented that "one of the finest wheat fields he had ever seen grew a few miles out" from the Landing.[31]

However, neither Ward nor the newspapers that echoed his sentiments had taken into consideration the fact that the yields of which they boasted were obtained from virgin land in hot, fairly dry summers, when growing conditions were optimal. The first wave of homesteaders had been blessed with good weather; later they would have to cope with late spring and early autumn frosts that froze their crops, and with violent summer thunder storms that flattened them. By 1913 the *Northern News* had begun to change its tune and was no longer promoting Athabasca as the grain-growing capital of the North West; instead, the emphasis was on mixed farming, and on the profits to be made from growing potatoes.[32]

Nonetheless, despite the relatively short growing season, grain farming around Athabasca continued to be fairly, if not spectacularly, successful, so that by 1913 the local homesteaders were clamouring for the construction of a grain elevator and flour mill. Recognizing the need for grain storage facilities at the Landing, the Board of Trade contacted the Farmers' Independent Elevator Board for information on how to construct and run an elevator, and then called a public meeting to discuss the project with local grain producers. The Landing's new MLA, A. G. MacKay, was then lobbied to obtain a grant from the provincial government, and eventually work began on a grain

Homesteaders passing through Athabasca Landing en route to Grande Prairie, 1910. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-7.

Athabasca Landing Immigration Hall, 1913. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 10.

elevator and an attached warehouse.[33]

Meanwhile two other important developments were in the works, and both came to fruition that same year. As early as 1909 rumours had circulated in the village that the Department of the Interior was going to fund the construction of an immigration hall to provide cheap accommodation for newly arrived settlers from Eastern Canada, the U.S, and Europe. Then, next spring, word was received that the funding would be forthcoming: plans were drawn up, a caretaker was appointed, and construction began.[34] But the money from the federal government failed to arrive and the project was shelved for several years. The need for more and cheaper accommodation at the Landing remained, however, and the great influx of settlers in 1911–12 exacerbated the problem. So the Board of Trade renewed its campaign for an immigration hall, and Ottawa finally came through with the money in May, 1913. Two large tents were erected to accommodate the latest wave of settlers while construction of the wooden building went ahead. A new caretaker, Otto Cautschi, was appointed, and by August an impressive new immigration hall stood on the waterfront near the CNoR watertower, a symbol of the Landing's eagerness to welcome yet more homesteaders, and a very practical, if belated, aid to the Athabasca area's new residents.[35]

The other important development that occurred during these years was primarily the work of the Landing's previous MLA, J. R. Boyle, an influential member of the provincial government. Boyle persuaded his cabinet colleagues that Alberta's seventh and last Demonstration Farm should be located near the Landing. These government-owned and run farms were established so that experiments could be made with cultivation methods, new varieties of grain and other new crops (e.g., legumes), and animal breeding. They were also intended to provide homesteaders in the region with practical advice on how to cultivate their land more efficiently. The local availability of such useful advice made an area more attractive to homesteaders, so Boyle's success in obtaining a Demonstration Farm for Athabasca was quite a coup: it meant better yields, more settlers, and higher land values.

Officials from the Department of Agriculture arrived at the Landing in May, 1912, to conduct soil tests and select a site for the farm. They chose three quarter sections on the East Hill, about one and one-half miles out of town. A Mr. Murray was appointed manager of the enterprise, and the task of clearing the timbered land began that summer.[36] It took until the end of 1913 to clear the first 100 acres and prepare them for seeding, but by the next year the Demonstration

The Department of Agriculture's demonstration farm near Athabasca Landing, 1914. Glenbow Archives, NC-6-1315.

Farm was in operation: horses and machinery were purchased, seed was brought in, various cereal and leguminous crops were planted, and two herds of cattle (one comprising fourteen Holsteins, the other twelve Shorthorns) were established. The first harvest apparently brought excellent yields, and the operation was expanded in 1915 with the erection of a well-equipped, modern barn, and the cultivation of additional acreage with such less common crops as rape (canola), corn (maize) and flax. Yields in this year were good but not spectacular, and after a further series of soil tests, it was concluded that the chosen land was by no means the best in the Athabasca area. Nonetheless, by 1917 the government farm was in full operation, and successful enough to justify its existence in the eyes of its promoters.[37]

The grain elevator, the immigration hall, the farm machinery dealer, the steam threshing machines and the demonstration farm: these were the symbols of the fundamental change that took place in the Athabasca area between 1906 and 1914. A virgin land of forest, scrub and muskeg, in which Indigeous peoples and Métis still roamed at will and trapped for furs, was transformed gradually into farmland with log houses at half-mile intervals and a market town, Athabasca Landing, in the centre. The tide of rural settlement was not the only reason that the Landing village grew into a frontier town during these years. Equally significant was the expansion of the Landing's role as a transportation and commercial centre. But in the hard decades after World War I, it would be the settlers who homesteaded the Athabasca area in 1906–1914 and their successors who would save the town from complete collapse. If the history of Athabasca Landing reaches back to 1877, when the first HBC warehouse was built on the "elbow of the Athabasca River," the history of modern Athabasca really begins in the 1900s, when the Landing became a market town serving a population of approximately 5,000 settlers in the surrounding countryside.

Chapter 7

Gateway to the North—The Commercial Boom, 1906–1914

The decade before World War I was a time of rapid economic growth and massive population expansion for the young provice of Alberta. Between 1906 and 1911 the population of Edmonton rose from about 14,000 to 31,000; and Calgary's increase during the same period was even more impressive, from about 13,500 to over 43,500.[1] Athabasca Landing was not in the same league as these two centres, but it, too, experienced substantial expansion, in both population and commercial activity during these boom years, growing from a village of around 200 souls to a frontier town with a population approaching 2,000.

It is difficult to give exact and reliable population figures for the community during this period, but the general picture is fairly clear. Between 1906 and 1910 the Landing's population increased only slowly: it was probably no more that 450 in the summer of 1911, despite the beginnings of the homesteading boom in the Athabasca area and a significant growth

The commercial core of Athabasca Landing viewed from the north bank of the Athabasca River, 1914. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 13.

Athabasca Landing viewed from the East Hill road, 1913. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 8.

in business activity in the village during the two previous years. But the imminent arrival of the Canadian Northern Railway, and the speculative boom and influx of settlers associated with it resulted in a quadrupling of the Landing's population by the end of 1913. The Athabasca Times reported a figure of 1,100 for 1912, while the *Northern News* claimed a population of 1,900 for 1913.[2] Since both newspapers were prone to boosterism, these numbers may be exaggerated; nonetheless, it seems probable that when the new town's name was changed officially from Athabasca Landing to Athabasca, on August 15, 1913, its population may have been only a few hundred short of the present-day figure of nearly 2,000.

Although the large, rapid increase proved temporary (by 1916 the town's population had slumped to less than 500), during the frenzied boom of the pre-war years no one suspected that a sudden and drastic decline was lurking around the corner.[3] Rather, it seemed as though Athabasca Landing was experiencing the same kind of economic and demographic take off that Edmonton had undergone in the 1890s, when its population had climbed from a few hundred to several thousand. The period from 1906 to 1914, and especially the years 1912 and 1913, thus marked the heyday of Athabasca Landing as a trading and communications centre, the "gateway to the North."

The Landing's economy in this decade remained dependent on the Hudson's Bay Company, its main rivals, i.e., the Northern Transportation Company and Revillon Frères, and the spin-off industries, such as lumbering, freighting, boatbuilding and hostelry, generated by these shipping and trading concerns. The continued importance of the HBC at the Landing may explain why the village's economic growth was relatively slow before 1912, since the Company's operations at the Landing underwent a steady decline in the half decade before the death of Leslie Wood in 1910. Under the management of the ageing Wood, the HBC retained the tried and tested method of transporting freight downriver by scow in the summer and by horse or dog team in the winter. It was as if Wood and his Métis boatmen were stuck in a time warp: each year they did as they had always done, apparently quite indifferent to the transformation that was occurring around them.

A traveller to the Landing in 1908, Agnes Deans Cameron, in her book *The New North*, captured the phlegmatic resistance to modernity characteristic of the Athabasca Brigade:

> It is at this point we join the Fur-Brigade of the Hudson's Bay Company making its annual transport to the posts of the Far North, taking in supplies for trading material and bringing back the peltries obtained in barter during the previous winter. The big open scows, or "sturgeon-heads," which are to form our convoy have been built, the freight is all at The Landing, but for three days the half-breed boatmen drag along the process of loading, and we get our introduction to the word which is the keynote of the Cree character,—"Kee-am," feebly translated, "Never mind," "Don't get excited," "There's plenty of time," "It's all right," "It will all come out in the wash."
>
> When the present Commissioner of the Hudson's Bay Company entered office he determined to reduce chaos to a methodical exactness, and framed a time-table covering every movement in the northward traffic. When it was shown by the local representative to the Cree boatmen at The Landing, old Duncan Tremble, a river-dog on the Athabasca for forty years, looked admiringly at the printed slip and said, "Aye, aye; the Commissioner he makes laws, but the river he boss." It is only when the ice is out and current serves that the brigade moves forward. Old Duncan knows seven languages,—English, French, Cree, Chipewyan, Beaver, Chinook, Montagnais,—he speaks seven languages, thinks in Cree, and prevaricates in them all.[4]

Wood may well have been correct in maintaining that it was cheaper for the HBC to transport its trade goods by scow than by steamer, but his narrow focus on the fur trade meant that the HBC gradually lost its one-time pre-eminence in northern transportation. By 1908 over 1,000 tons of freight were shipped northwards through the Landing during the summer navigation period, and about one-third of this amount, the cargo destined for Lesser Slave Lake and beyond, was carried by the steamboats of the Northern Transportation Company.[5]

If Leslie Wood stands as a symbol of the old Athabasca Landing of the fur-trade days, Jim Cornwall, a tough minded, energetic and unscrupulous capitalist, appropriately symbolizes the new Athabasca Landing of the boom years. Cornwall's business venture, the Northern Transportation Company, gradually expanded its operations late in the first decade of the twentieth century, and probably generated much of the limited economic growth the village did experience before 1912. In his report on the state of the Athabasca district in 1908, the new RNWMP Commander at the Landing, W.H. Routledge, stated that although fur trading was still the main business there, the previous two years had seen a "marked improvement" in transportation on the Athabasca River and Lesser Slave River, with the inauguration of a weekly service provided by the NTCs steamers *Midnight Sun* and *Northern Light*. Routledge was clearly much impressed by Cornwall's business acumen, commenting that:

> The president of the Northern Transportation Company, Mr. J. K. Cornwall, a gentleman of much experience in northern affairs, is fully alive to the possibilities of the country, and the importance of the

Revillon Frères boats beached at Athabasca Landing, 1907. Glenbow Archives, NA-1338-9.

Panoramic View of **ATHABASCA**, Alberta. Since this Picture was taken Last

Athabasca is splendidly situated on the most southern bend of the Athabasca River, a mighty stream navigable for 4,000 miles. This growing town is the point of entry and the distributing centre for the vast Peace River Country, with its millions of acres of rich farming land, great mineral deposits, rivers teeming with fish, and inexhaustible wealth of forest and fur. General farming, stock raising and dairying are profitable occupations around ATHABASCA.

Municipal Work...

1912

Fire Hall $500.00.

-:-

Site for Pumping Station Donated.

-:-

Completed fencing, surveying, and clearing of Cemetery.

-:-

Isolation Hospital $1,500

-:-

Installation of firstclass Waterworks, and Fire Fighting System $50,000.

-:-

Grading Roads $10,000.

-:-

Sidewalk laid during past year $2,000.

1913

Now Under Construction

Completion of Sewage System and Septic Plant

-:-

Two Stage Centrifugal Pumps with a capacity of 500 gallons a minute.

-:-

Building Sedimentation Basin and Filter with a capacity of 500,000 gallons.

-:-

Completion of Waterworks.

-:-

Extension of the town limits half a mile in every direction.

-:-

Cutting down and grading new streets.

-:-

Additions to the mileage of the sidewalks.

Athabasca, the Distributing Point of the North

The town of Athabasca, formerly known as Athabasca Landing, is an incorporated town located on the most southerly point of the big bend on the Athabasca river. It is within twentyfive miles of the exact centre of the province of Alberta, and one hundred and five miles north of Edmonton.

The location of the town is significant, and it was on account of the unrivalled water facilities that Athabasca was selected in 1884 by the Hudson's Bay Company as their northern distributing point. From the Landing they could ship supplies by water to the Arctic ocean, two thousand miles to the north, while to the west they could supply their numerous trading posts in the Peace river country.

Athabasca Landing soon became the outfitting point for the hunters and trappers of the great north country. They came there from all directions to obtain their supplies, and they also congregated there each spring to dispose of their winter's catch of furs. Other firms opened up in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company, and Athabasca quickly developed into one of the most important fur markets on the continent. Later on homesteaders began to come in, and the Landing soon became known as a great distributing point, as a great fur market, and as the centre of a fertile farming country.

The Finest Mixed Farming Country in the World

The Athabasca district has gained the reputation, a well-deserved one too, of being the richest, most fertile and safest crop bearing district in the west, and being well watered has no rival as a wood growing country.

It is surrounded by a first class agricultural land which is producing wheat, oats, barley, timothy, alfalfa, rye, pumpkins, squash, vegetable marrow and potatoes. In fact all kinds of grains and vegetables that are grown in the Prairie Provinces in the North Western States are being grown here successfully.

The soil is a brown loam, with a gray clay subsoil, that retains the heat and absorbs the moisture, and, with the low altitude (1470 feet above the sea level,) and the long summer days, making increased sunshine over points south, the crop matures rapidly and ripens earlier than in districts farther south.

In this fertile district, wheat averages 40 bushels to the acre, and has not infrequently yielded as high as 45 to the acre. Oats range from sixty to eighty bushels to the acre, and have been known to go 117 bushels to the acre. Barley yields forty to fifty bushels to the acre, and when it is said that a crop failure is absolutely unknown in this district, and that frosts do not catch the grain, owing perhaps to the tall clumps of trees that are scattered over the country here and there, acting as natural barrier against severe weather, it will be appreciated that Athabasca offers the farmer one of the safest and most ideal districts to be found anywhere in the west.

That this is so may be judged by the fact that in 1911 when so many crops were devasted by frosts, the grain in the Athabasca district was left untouched and graded as high as ever, and the farmers are unanimous in their belief that there are no farm lands so good as the Athabasca farm lands. In 1912 the Athabasca exhibit won first prize at the Edmonton Exhibition, and contained the only ripe wheat of that season's crop at the fair.

Country Being Well Settled

Although the Athabasca district, in comparison with other districts in the west, is well, and even closely settled, there is yet plenty of good land at low prices open to the farmer, and also many thousands of acres in that wonderful new empire of which Athabasca is the gateway, and for which it is the distributing point. An account of the progress made in 1912 is illustrating.

Homestead entries in 1912, more than doubled those of 1911, although the Land office was closed during March and April, the two months which were the busiest in the previous year. The crop in the district for 1912 were extremely successful considering the adverse weather conditions prevailing throughout the entire west. The yield per acre was not as large as in 1911, but the acreage under crop was fully 12% more than in 1911, and sufficient new soil has been turned to warrant the expectation that the acreage for 1913 will be double that of 1912.

Another indication of the progress of the agricultural districts was the very successful fall fair held by the North Alberta Agricultural Society at Kinnoull, a few miles south of town, the past autumn. The exhibits at this fair were undeniable evidences of the farming possibilities of this district.

Athabasca, the Assured Terminal Point for Seven Railroads

When the rush to the Peace river country began, Athabasca Landing sprang into prominence as the gateway to that vast inland empire. Passenger steamers were put in operation to carry the incoming settlers from Athabasca Landing to the heart of the Peace river country. The only link required to couple the outside world with the Peace river country was a railway to the "The Landing," and several lines were soon under construction. The first to be completed was the Canadian Northern from Edmonton to Athabasca. The last rail on this line was laid in May, 1912, the first passenger train being in operation in the fall.

For some time the C. N. R. only ran a tri-weekly passenger service, but owing to the enormous influx of traffic of all kinds, a daily service is being instituted from the first of May. Other railways are now being built into Athabasca from the south, and the Alberta government has guaranteed the bonds of railways which are to run from Athabasca to the west east and north, so that this town will be one of the largest railway centres of Western Canada.

The remarkable resources of the Athabasca district have attracted the railways to Athabasca. The C. N. R. from Edmonton is now completed. The C. N. R. from Battleford is under construction, also the C. P. R. from Wilkie through Lloydminster, the G. T. P. from Prince Albert, and the Trans-Pacific, McKenzie Basin and Western to McMurray, and the Canadian Northern Western to the Peace river crossing. The Government has guaranteed the bonds of the last two mentioned railroads. It is felt that the constantly increasing grain crop will make necessary the building of another transcontinental railway across Northern Saskatchewan and Alberta, passing through Athabasca.

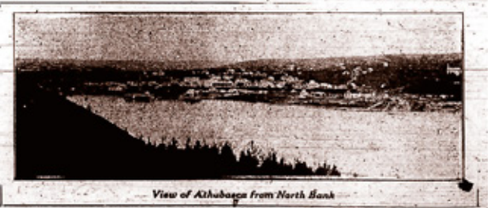
The Athabasca and Peace river Railway company, is the name of a new railway line making application to the Dominion Government for charter. The city has been so advised through the secretary of the union of Canadian municipalities. The line is said to be planned from Athabasca up through Mirror Landing around Lesser Slave Lake, through Grouard and into the Peace river country.

It has already been pointed out that this town is practically the centre of the province of Alberta, and it has naturally followed that Athabasca with its great railway facilities, present and future, and its most advantageous location, has become the centre for an enormous district, and furthermore than the channels of its business are growing every day in distance and in volume. The reason for this is the fact that an outstanding feature of the ever progressive city in the

ASSESSMENT

1911	- -	under $500,000
1912	- Exclusive of School Assessment	$1,187,295
1913	Estimated over	$3,000,000

Water Transportation on the Athabasca River



View of Athabasca from North Bank

The Canadian Northern R

Year many Buildings, both Business Houses and Residences, have been added.

Building Statistics...

1912

The Most important buildings erected in 1912:

Hudson's Bay Store	$25,000
Imperial Bank	15,000
C. N. R. Depot	15,000
Crystal Lodge	7,000
A. C. Sawle in Coronation Park	8,000

The total value of the 1912 building program was $125,000

1913

Methodist Church	$20,000
Times Office	2,000
A. A. Greer Office	2,000
Gagnon Block, Litchfield Ave	30,000
Olivier Block, Main St.	5,000
C. N. R. Freight Sheds	2,500

Several business buildings and residences under the value of $1,000 each.

Proposed in the Near Future

Post and Customs Office	$3,000
Immigration Hall	10,000
Rex Theatre Company	15,000
New Public School	40,000
Brick Hotel on Litchfield Ave.	35,000
Daigneau Block	20,000
Wood Block	35,000
Addition to Kier Hall	10,000

In the vicinity of Athabasca are found some of the world's greatest deposits of asphalt and tar sands. It has been estimated that there are 6 1-2 cubic miles of asphalt beds along the Athabasca River. Companies are now developing this valuable asset. Practically unlimited water power is here awaiting development. Natural gas, coal, gold, iron, petroleum pulp wood and timber in great quantity are natural resources that will make Athabasca rich and a great manufacturing centre for the new Empire of the North.

POPULATION

1911	- -	about 450
1912	- -	1,100
1913	- -	over 2,000

dway Depot at Athabasca

general conversion of vast areas of undeveloped country into farms of varying degrees of cultivation. This general development is also emphasized by the birth of many new towns all over this area, which participate in the building up of their respective territories, and also, ipso facto, of the great centre to which they look for their supplies, and to which they send their produce to be marketed.

Athabasca a Convenient Centre

That Athabasca is a good commercial centre is obvious when one considers the various lines of business that are represented. The enterprise and optimistic faith shown in the town, and its possibilities by its professional and business men is a good criterion of its status as a firmly established and recognised centre of commerce. The business enterprises include:—

Three chartered banks, five real estate offices, two doctors, one dentist, one veterinary surgeon, two lawyers, one public stenographer, one public accountant, two licensed hotels, one wholesale liquor store, seven boarding houses, six restaurants, three pool rooms, three barber shops, two bakeries, four confectioners, two clothing stores, one drug store, ten general stores, three wholesale and retail groceries, three hardware stores, two furniture stores, two printing offices, two jewelry stores, two butcher shops, five blacksmith shops, three livery and feed stables, five licensed dray businesses, five implement agencies, one sewing machine agent, two plumbers and gas fitters, four painters and decorators, two millinery and dressmaking parlors, three laundries, one theatre, two photograph galleries, two sawmills, several building and contracting firms, two steamship and navigation companies; one tailor, two retail lumber yards, two dairies, one local land office. Besides these the fraternal and social institutions are represented by the following:— Lodge Tawatinaw, A. F. and A. M., Canadian order of Foresters, Independent Order of Oddfellows, the Canadian Club and the Athabasca Club.

Beyond, however, the present list of business firms just enumerated, there is a future for Athabasca which cannot be overlooked. It is going to be more than a railway centre, more than the distributing point for a rich farming district, it is rapidly growing to be a manufacturing centre of no mean importance to the development of the northern section of western Canada, and it is already the biggest distributing point for farm implements in the north country. This brings us to another prominent feature in the town's resources, namely, the ability to supply cheap power for manufacturing projects of all kinds.

Athabasca's Gas Fields Inexhaustible

While drilling for oil in 1894, representatives of the Dominion government tapped a heavy flow of gas at a depth of 240 feet. This had to be shut off by casing before proceeding; then gas was again struck at a depth of 267 feet, also a heavy flow, and again it had to be shut off before operations could be continued. Then again they struck gas at 780 feet. The government log reports of this boring for 1894 "Gas within a thousand feet in great quantities."

It was not until the middle of 1912 that any definite steps were taken to materialize this valuable asset. In July of that year, the Athabasca Natural Gas Company was formed, and given a twenty year's franchise by the town. Under this franchise the company are bound to furnish gas to the town for domestic purposes at twenty-five cents per thousand cubic feet, and for manufacturing and civic purposes at fifteen cents per thousand. Should, however they supply any other town or city with gas, the town of Athabasca has a twenty-five per cent preference under the price given any other point.

The Athabasca gas company have now struck gas in four wells situated in different parts of the town, and propose to bore at least eight more this year. The third strike was made on March 17, and the following is an excerpt from the "Edmonton Capital" with reference to this important event:—

"Two million feet of gas discovered in third well at Athabasca Landing. Geyser of rocks and mud shoots from well when drillers tap what they believe to be main gas strata.—With a roar that could be heard a mile over the Athabasca Drilling Company to-day struck a gas gusher which is estimated at 2,000,000 feet every twenty-four hours. The company, which is composed for the most part of local men has put down two wells besides this one with only indifferent success. When the gas strata was tapped this morning, the derrick and other machinery over the well was hurled to one side and mud and water hurled fifty feet in the air. Those in charge of the drilling are greatly elated over their success and predict that the well will run at least 2,000,000 feet per day. Arrangements have been completed for capping the well and in the near future the question of using it for industries in the town will be taken up. A pressure of this size would lead to indicate that the main gas strata has been tapped and not a pocket. This being, so the amount of gas which would be available for use, through this and other wells, cannot be estimated.

Very shortly after this strike another one was made on the east side of the town at a depth of about 300 feet; this was capped and boring continued with the result that a second stratum was struck on the first of May in the same well.

The flame from this last strike was left burning, and illuminated the whole town.

Experts state that Athabasca is built on enormous gasfield, and that the output is inexhaustible.

Athabasca Has Coalfields

This lauds us to another of the main factors in industrial growth. Besides her magnificent natural gas resources, Athabasca is also rich in coal. Two prospects have been made and in both instances good deposits were discovered, and financial arrangements for the development of these are now under way.

Industrial Progress

From an industrial standpoint Athabasca has made remarkable progress. A brickyard has been established, and will shortly commence turning out 15,000 bricks per day. The lumber business has made exceptionally rapid strides. One of the West's largest lumbering companies has established a fully equipped yard at this point. One of the local saw mills has increased its capacity to four times the capacity on its old plant, and their output for 1913 will undoubtedly be four times that of 1912. At present more than 200 men are engaged in the lumber camps above the town. The railways now building into the north country are taking advantage of the timber along the Athabasca, for their ties, and contracts for over 200,000 ties to be delivered this summer are now being filled. We have reason to believe that this point will be made a tie station on the Canadian Northern railway. Shipbuilding, from small skiffs to freight and passenger steamers, for river and lake traffic is another of the local industries, and this also shows a marked increase this year on any previous record.

In addition to all these a sash and door factory is locating here at the time of writing and will be in working order as soon as possible. Another enterprise opening up shortly is a tent and mattress factory under the management of H. Cook late of Calgary; this company has obtained a lease to build on the works in the west end of the town, and have already received shipment of the greater part of the machinery.

Space will not permit of going more definitely into the wonderful resources of the Athabasca district which is now coming into such prominence. A glance at the statistical figures oh this page, will, however, prove that Athabasca has all the main factors, which have been instrumental in building other great cities, not only in Canada, but all the world over.

Crown Lumber Company's Yards

First Passenger Train to reach Athabasca, Fall of 1912

"Athabasca, the distributing point of the North: Assessment/Population," a centre-fold spread from the Athabasca Times, 1913. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

HBC scows leaving Athabasca Landing, 1911. Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 7889.

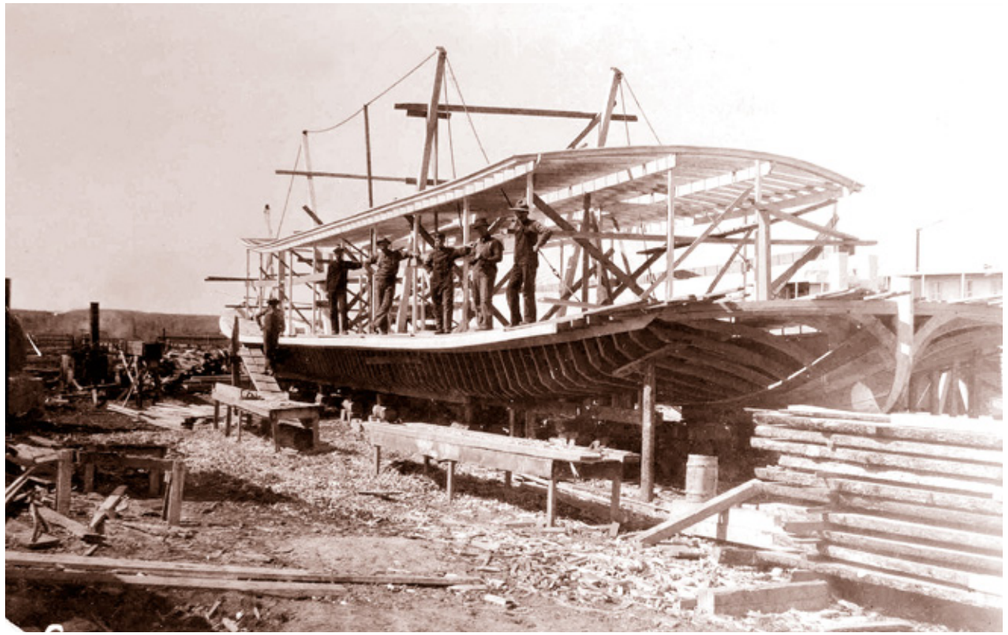
> improvement of its transportation methods, as shown by the extensive additions to the company's steamers during the past winter.[6]

This last reference is to the construction of the *Northland Sun*, which began operating in the spring of 1909. A fourth paddlewheeler, the *Northland Call* was built in 1910; a fifth, the *Northland Star*, in 1911; and a sixth, the *Northland Echo*, in 1912.[7] Since J.H. Wood, Athabasca Landing's first mayor and leading boatbuilder, was a major shareholder in the Northern Transportation Company, it is not surprising that his boatyard on the north bank of the river was a hive of activity during these years. The three additions to the NTC's fleet made it possible for Cornwall to capture not only the freight and passenger traffic to Lesser Slave Lake and the Peace Country but also some of that to Fort McMurray and the Mackenzie Valley. So, by the time of Leslie Wood's death, the HBC at Athabasca Landing was decidedly on the defensive, fighting with outdated weapons to retain its lucrative shipping trade to Lake Athabasca and the Great Slave Lake.

The new HBC transportation manager at the Landing was A.C. McKay. He quickly recognized that the HBC operation at the Landing was in a state of crisis, and that the Company would have to choose between two possible strategies. First, it could rely entirely on the Northern Transportation

Loading HBC scows at Athabasca Landing, 1912. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-20.

Rivermen and boatbuilders at a construction camp, Athabasca Landing, 1913. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 33.



Steamboat construction at Athabasca Landing, 1916. Athabasca Archives George Collection, 00940.

Launching the NTC steamer, S.S. *Northland Call*, at Athabasca Landing, 1911. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-21.

The smallest member of the NTC fleet: the S.S *Northern Light* a side-wheeler that operated on the Lesser Slave River. Library and Archives Canada RCMP Archives, e999916231-u.

Company for shipping to Lesser Slave Lake and allow the NTC to expand its business downstream to Fort McMurray. While this tactic would involve the loss of a share of the market to a dangerous and aggressive rival, it would avoid the necessity for large capital expenditures and would permit an easy change over to the use of the new railway lines being built to Fort Dunvegan and Fort McMurray. The alternative, McKay's preference, was to re-establish the Company's steamboat network on the Athabasca River, and to fight the NTC head-on for the northern shipping trade. McKay urged a quick decision, but it was not forthcoming, since his superiors in the HBC bureaucracy felt unable to authorize major capital expenditures without approval from the London head office. On November 21, 1911, R.H. Hall, HBC Fur-Trade Commissioner in Winnipeg, wrote for authority to proceed, reporting that "because of years' neglect, lack of definite policy, initiative and enterprise, the Company's affairs in Athabasca District are in poor shape," and emphasizing that "if steamers are to be built, they should be done soon."[8]

This ultimatum did the trick: London HQ replied on December 9, 1911, decreeing that "every effort must be made to maintain if not to develop the Company's position in the District," authorizing an immediate expenditure of $7,000 to re-establish an HBC presence on the Lesser Slave Lake route, and recognizing that a further capital expenditure of $32,500 would be needed to carry out McKay's program of putting "the Northern Transport system on a proper basis."[9]

This instruction was the green light that McKay had been waiting for, and he lost no time in commissioning two new steamboats. The first to be completed, the S.S. *Slave Lake*, designed to carry fifty tons of freight and twenty passengers on Lesser Slave Lake, was launched in June, 1912, and captained by E.B. Haight. The other, the S.S. *Athabasca River*, was a larger boat with cabin accommodation for forty passengers and a freight capacity of 100 tons.[10] Essentially a belated replacement for the S.S. *Athabasca* of pre-Klondike days, this new sternwheeler made her maiden voyage in August, and was soon plying regularly between Mirror Landing and the Grand Rapids. By the fall

Two NTC steamboats: the SS. *Midnight Sun* and the S.S. *Northland Call*. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 9.

The S.S. *Northland Sun* in action on the Athabasca River, passing an unidentified smaller steamboat. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00687.

A steamboat on the Athabasca River, probably the S.S. *Northland Star*, Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00686.

of 1912, therefore, the HBC river transportation of the 1890s had been reestablished. Together, the two steamers had cost $36,956.61, quite a large sum, but not an unreasonable investment when compared to the price of carrying the Company's northern supplies from the Landing to Fort McMurray. In 1911, the trip, which had taken thirty-two days, and required sixty-three scows and several hundred boatmen, had cost a total of $33,828.32.[11] The Athabasca Brigade had become so numerous and expensive that, once its creator and champion, Leslie Wood, was gone, it was only a matter of time before the HBC would again resort to more modern transport technology. From 1913 onwards the Métis boatmen were relegated once

River steamers docked at Athabasca Landing: two NTC boats, the S.S. *Northland Call* and the S.S. *Northland Echo*, and the largest HBC boat, the S.S. *Athabasca River.* n.d. Glenbow Archives, NA-1044-29.

A smaller river steamer, probably the S.S. *Slave Lake*, after launching, 1912. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-22.

more to a difficult stretch of white water north of the Grand Rapids. For a few more years, but only a few, they would remain a key link in both the HBC's and the NTC's northern transportation systems.

Ever since the Calgary & Edmonton railway had been completed in 1891, and especially since the Canadian Northern had reached Edmonton in 1905, HBC officials had looked forward eagerly to the time when that other weak link in their transportation network, the Athabasca Landing Trail, would be superseded by a road of steel. The Canadian Northern's progress northward from Morinville seemed excruciatingly slow in the late 1900s, but eventually the rails reached Meanook and the newly christened Colinton, and railway fever began to take hold at the Landing.[12]

The burning issue for the HBC and other land holders was where would the railway company site the station? The logical place was on the riverside, near the steamboat wharf, but that would require an additional bridge over the Tawatinaw River, which the undercapitalized Canadian Northern was reluctant to build. From 1911 the pressure was on the HBC to come up with sufficient inducement to persuade the railway company to extend the line west across the Tawatinaw and to build the station on the HBC reserve. The bargaining between the two corporations was acrimonious and hard, but the cards were stacked against the HBC. The Company's negotiators knew that if the station was built on the existing townsite, the HBC stood to reap hundreds of thousands of dollars from the sale of the town lots it owned. But if the station was built elsewhere, that potential fortune would be lost. So, although they grumbled about the deal, Land Commissioner Thompson and the other HBC officials had to swallow the CNoR's terms.[13] These were indeed draconian: the HBC had to give the railway free right of way through the reserve, an eighteen acre plot for the station and its grounds, an additional five-and-a-half acre plot, and a fifty percent interest in the proceeds of the sale of all the remaining lots owned by the HBC within the townsite (except for the eighteen lots on Strathcona and Young streets that had already been developed, and a parcel of land already leased to the Northern Transportation Company). In short, the price of the railroad was about half the HBC's total assets at the Landing.[14]

The deal was signed in early December, 1911. Commenting on the document, Land Commissioner Thompson remarked:

> It is admitted that in this agreement great concessions have been made to the Railway Company—in that it will receive an interest in a very much larger area than obtained in regard to Battleford & Fort Frances. The location of the railway and station at landing has created values which would not otherwise be obtained. Therefore in accepting the proposal of the Railway Company the HBCo stands to reap a pretty rich harvest. Now that the agreement has been reached it is in the best interests of all concerned that the property be put on the market without delay.[15]

That statement summed things up exactly: in return for a huge concession, the HBC stood to make a bundle from the land speculation that always accompanied the almost instantaneous eruption of a railway town. Ever since the mini boom of the Klondike years, the Company had been hoping and expecting to sell its townsite lots at a goodly profit, but although lot prices had crept up over the years (from about $100.00 to $300.00), demand had remained fairly weak, and the expected bonanza had never occurred. But now, with the coming of the railroad, the HBC would not be denied. The famous poet and traveller Robert Service visited the Landing in 1911, and in his book *Ploughman to the Moon*, recreated the scene he witnessed there:

> The Landing was abustle with spring activity and the Company was the centre of all movement. I went into the office where two men were standing over a blueprint. It was a plan of the newly conceived townsite. "There's a corner lot you can have for three hundred dollars. In time it will be worth three thousand." If he had said "thirty thousand" he might have been nearer the mark. At that time I think I had enough money to buy up the whole townsite; but I am glad I did not, for then I might have become a multimillionaire, and such a fate I would not wish anyone.[16]

Service may not have wanted to get rich quick, but plenty of the Landing's inhabitants did. As soon as the

Lining up on the sidewalk to buy HBC and CNoR lots, December 15, 1911. Athabasca Archives Falconer Collection, 00748.

Ekins & Co. one of the new real-estate firms to set up shop in Athabasca Landing in 1911–12: Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2618.

ATHABASCA

The Gateway City to The Last New Land

Offers the Same Opportunities Now that Calgary and Edmonton did ten years ago. If you missed Your opportunity then, Don't miss it now. The Populating of 50,000,000 acres of Wheat Land is Certain to build Cities, Towns and Villages with their accompanying Industries and Businesses and

Athabasca Comes First

It Has The Gas — It Invites You

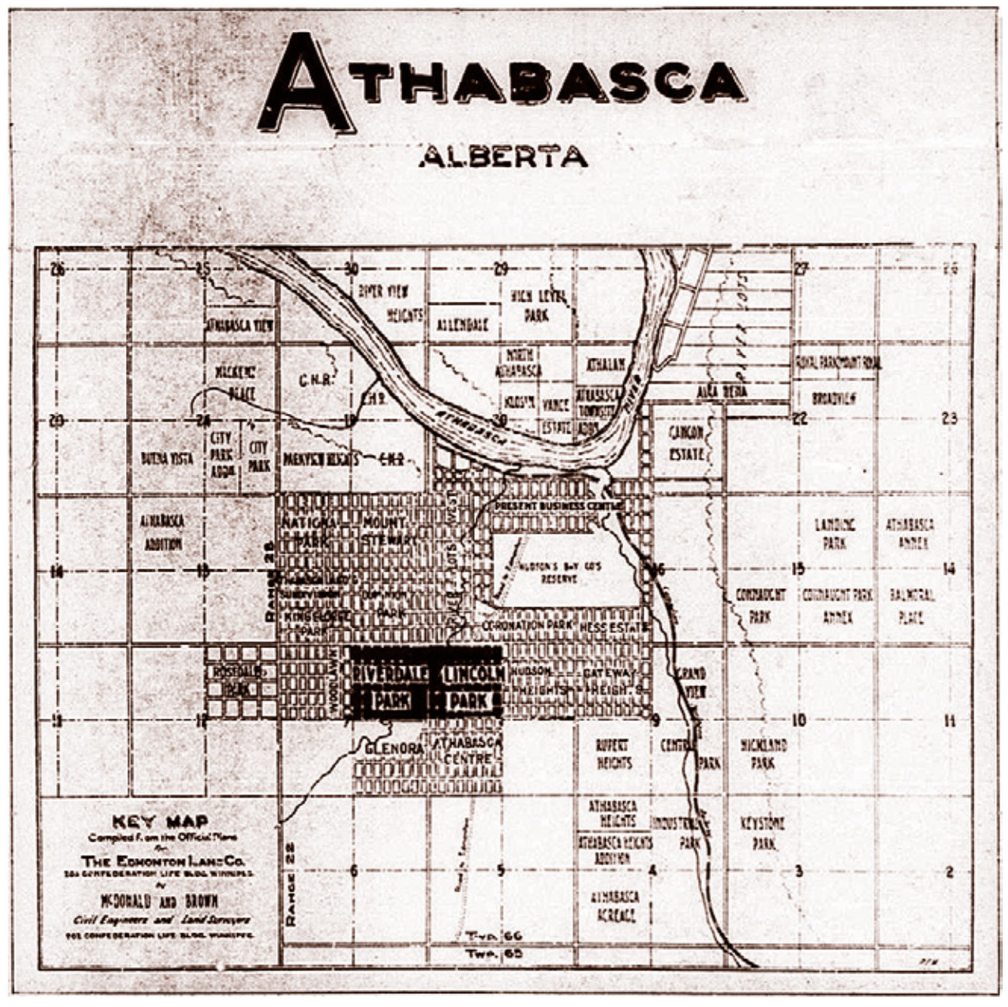
The Gateway Office

The above beautiful hand painted design speaks for the enterprise and business ability of this Firm. The same Foresight that caused us to come to Athabasca when the Population was less than 250 has maintained the lead it then gained and secured for us the exclusive agency of the Canadian Northern and Hudson's Bay Co's Townsites, which are always the Closest and Best Buys to be had. We are also exclusive agents for the Hyslop and Nagel Estates, which are the front of River Lot One, West. Views of these original Properties and Others will appear in a subsequent issue. These and other reasons make it to your interests to deal with us. We solicit your patronage.

"Athabasca: The Gateway City to the Last New Land," a promotional spread by the A. A. Greer Real Estate Company. *Northern News*, 1913. Athabasca Archives.

HBC/CNoR deal became public knowledge, they lined up on the sidewalk outside the Company's office to snap up the choicest lots. By the end of the year, the HBC had sold off 145 lots for a total of $152,150.00.[17] Within a month the average price of a lot had nearly quadrupled, but this was only the beginning. The arrival of the first train at the Landing, on May 25th, 1912, strengthened the illusion that Athabasca would become an important railway town and gave another twist to the speculative spiral; by early that summer an average town lot was worth over $2,000.00.[18]

Demand exceeded supply, and several new real estate firms were formed to handle the business and to cream off some easy profits while the madness lasted. Much of the speculative pressure came from out-of-town buyers who had never even seen the properties in which they were dealing. For example, in August, 1912, the real estate firm of A.A. Greer sold nine lots, at an average price of $3,622.00, to a purchaser from Eastern Canada who had never visited the Landing.[19] By this time, a new subdivision had been created—on paper, at least—along the riverside north-east of the HBC townsite, and was being sold, sight unseen, to speculators in British Columbia or Ontario who were unaware that they were paying outrageously high prices for sections of virgin muskeg.[20] No doubt this kind of land speculation was within the letter of the law, but it was capitalism at its most unscrupulous,



"Sub-divisions planned for Athabasca City," a promotional map issued by the Edmonton Land Company, one of Athabasca's several real-estate firms. *Athabasca Times*, 1914. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

and it was recreating the atmosphere of crazy unreality that had pervaded the Landing during the Klondike years.

Some of the more sober and stalwart members of the business community worried about the bad image the speculative fever and exorbitant prices were giving their town. Under the guise of reporting a visit to the Landing by a party of American writers and manufacturers, the *Northern News* gave expression to this sentiment in July, 1912, quoting one of the writers, Charles Major, as saying:

> We are going through the country, not with the object of investing, but, of course it is in human nature for one to have an eye open for possible investment. Here around Athabasca Landing you have beauty of scenery and wealth of soil. There is no reason you should not have a vast population. You have wonderful rivers, and are in close touch with inexhaustible ore beds and within reach of oil, as I understand. There is absolutely no reason why the people of the town should not reap a rich harvest if they will only encourage the people

to come by the proper methods. To create values you need population. Induce people to come; if necessary give them inducements free. If property goes beyond natural value here investors and business men will seek elsewhere. Don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg.[21]

Such warnings fell on deaf ears. Land prices in downtown Athabasca Landing apparently did not go much higher, but they stayed artificially high, buoyed up by the constant stream of new settlers dismounting from trains at the new station, by the sizeable number of new businesses being started in the town, and by a building boom that saw numerous local merchants erecting bigger and better stores in anticipation of more customers and larger profits.[22] Local farmers grumbled about the high prices and poor service offered by the Landing's storekeepers, but the merchants had no incentive to keep prices down when their stock found ready buyers among the thousands of newcomers setting up house in town or on homesteads in the surrounding countryside.[23]

The land boom went on throughout 1913. The settlers kept coming in ever increasing numbers, and the dream of Athabasca as a major railway junction was kept alive by the news that the Canadian Northern was planning to extend its Athabasca spur north to Fort McMurray and north-west to Grande Prairie, and that the Grand Trunk Pacific Railroad had begun building a line west from Battleford that would pass through the Landing and might eventually link Athabasca to the Peace Country and even to Prince Rupert on the British Columbia coast.[24]

The town's Board of Trade actively encouraged this railway fever. On November 6, 1913, it published a map in the *Northern News* that depicted the Landing at the hub of a future network of lines converging from all points of the compass, and launched a new publicity slogan, "Athabasca—the town to tie to!"[25] This kind of boosterism, a heady mixture of facts, promises, hopes and fantasies, had helped spark the town's expansion ever since the *Northern Light* had begun publishing in November, 1908, and the Landing's second newspaper, the *Northern News*, which took over from the *Light* in January, 1909, often read more like a propaganda pamphlet for the Board of Trade than a news sheet. Not that the boosterism was dishonest; on the contrary, it expressed, albeit in exaggerated form, the tremendous enthusiasm, optimism, and faith that the Landing's promoters had in its golden future. The following extract from an article titled "Some Reasons Why Athabasca Landing Will Be a City," which appeared in the July 22, 1911, edition of the *Northern News*, gives a first-hand account of the arguments deployed to rationalize this

Gateway Heights

ATHABASCA LANDING

"WHERE RAIL AND WATER MEET"

EVER since the fur trade has been a factor in the west, Athabasca Landing has been in the foreground. In a few days steel will be laid and the iron horse will land thousands of settlers at the Landing. Then lots will soar—Lots that we now sell for $125 will be worth $500.

Factories---Shipping---Fishing
Lumbering---Warehouses

Cheap power assures industries and the assembling of implements and machinery for the Athabasca Landing, Grand Prairie and Peace River all are tributary to the Landing and will be for all time to come.

Water transportation solves the problem of cheap freight. Thousands of men will be employed and it's time you owned a lot. For an investment nothing as good is offered at the price.

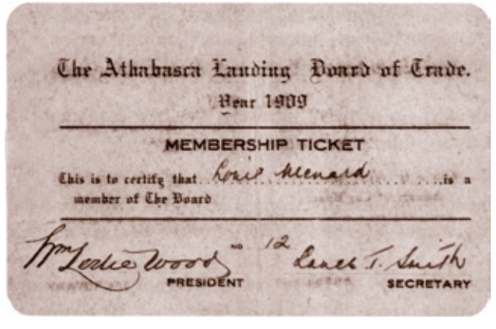
1500 inhabitants. Terminus of C.N.R. for two roads. 3000 miles of navigable water. In the heart of Alberta's best farming district. Natural gas. Tar sands and asphalt.

Everything that is required to warrant a city of activities such as Pittsburg or Chicago and a far better climate.

ATHABASCA LAND COMPANY

Open Evenings Until 10 O'Clock — 648 FIRST STREET PHONE 4925 — Open Evenings Until 10 O'Clock

"Athabasca Landing: Where Rail and Water Meet," a promotional advertisement for Gateway Heights, a project-ed new sub-division, by the Athabasca Land Company, a local real-estate firm. 1911. Glenbow Archives, NA-2092-1.



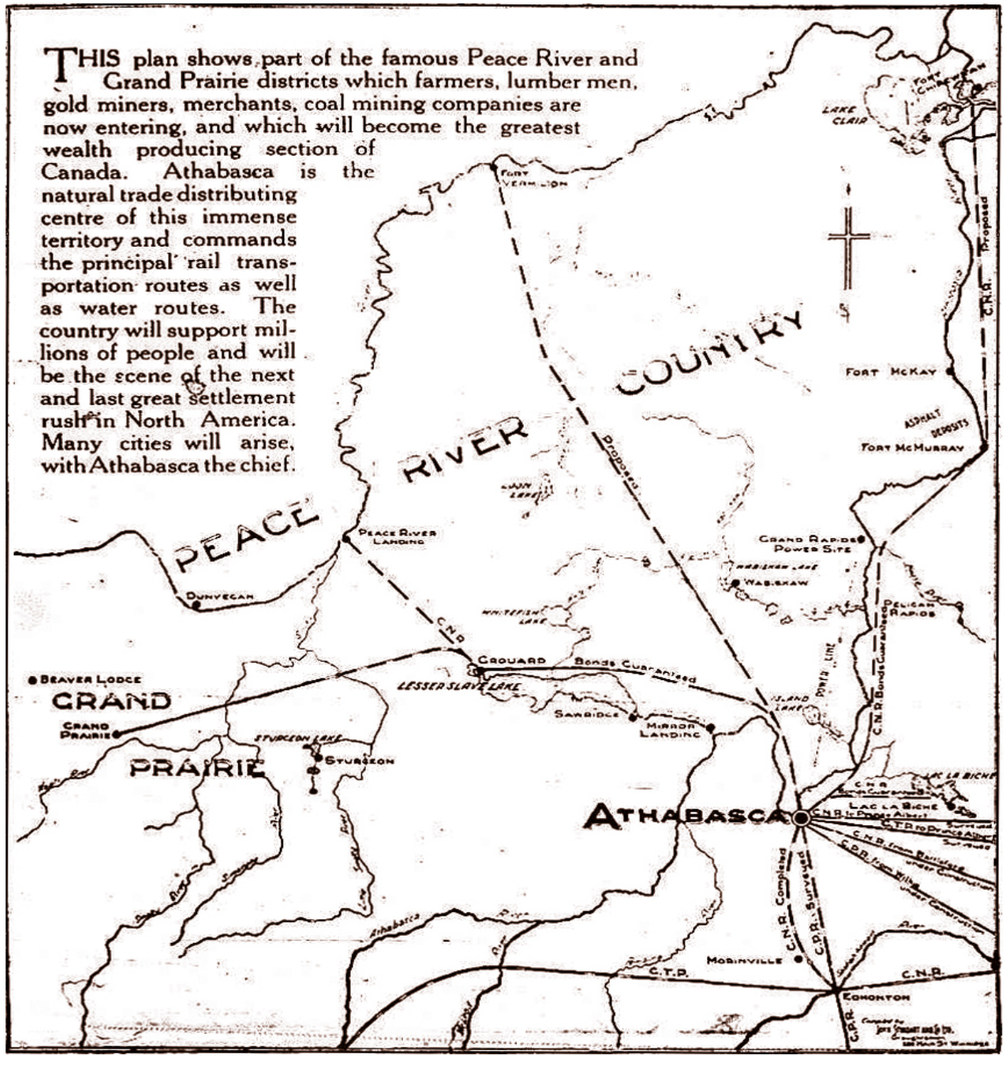
The Athabasca Landing Board of Trade.
Year 1909

MEMBERSHIP TICKET

This is to certify that Louis Menard is a member of The Board

Wm Leslie Wood PRESIDENT — Lance T. Smith SECRETARY

Louis Menard's membership card in the Athabasca Land-ing Board of Trade, signed by President Leslie Wood and Secretary Lance T. Smith, 1909. Athabasca Archives.

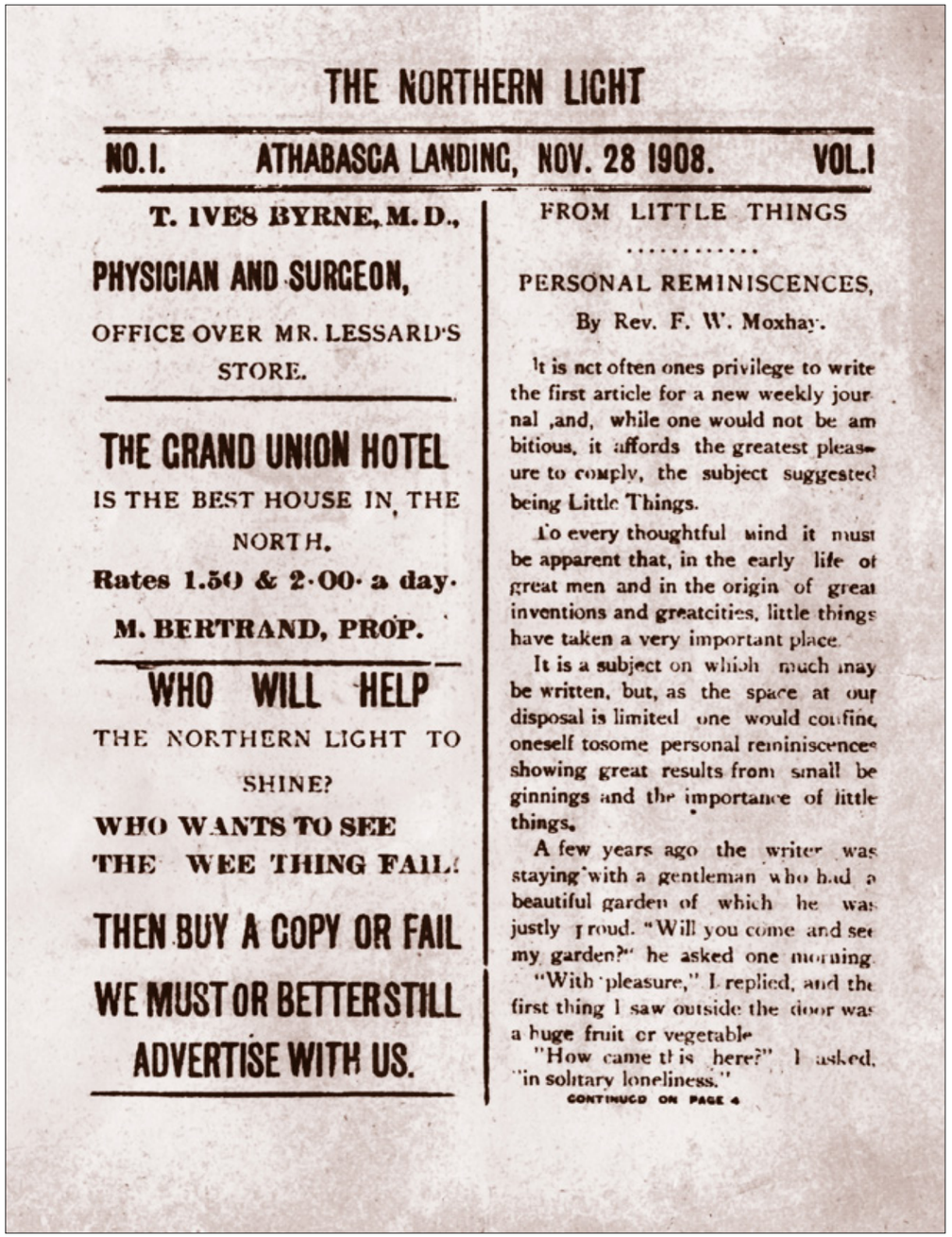


THIS plan shows part of the famous Peace River and Grand Prairie districts which farmers, lumber men, gold miners, merchants, coal mining companies are now entering, and which will become the greatest wealth producing section of Canada. Athabasca is the natural trade distributing centre of this immense territory and commands the principal rail transportation routes as well as water routes. The country will support millions of people and will be the scene of the next and last great settlement rush in North America. Many cities will arise, with Athabasca the chief.

Railway fever: map of the network of railway lines expected to reach Athabasca Landing. This appeared in the *Athabasca Times* on several occasions during 1913. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

emotional commitment to rapid growth:

> Being repeatedly asked what we expect is going to make Athabasca Landing a city we have decided to answer thro' the columns of the "Northern News". … The Athabasca River is 900 feet wide, and this town is located at the most southerly point of the big loop, making it important, as from here the river carries freight to the west and north, commanding over 3,000 miles of inland waterway. Six railroad charters are either in course of construction or applied for to this point, namely, 2 from Edmonton, 1 from Battleford, 1 from Ft. McMurray, 1 from Peace River Crossing and 1 from Ft. Vermilion.
>
> We believe this place will break all records to date for rapid growth of Western towns for the following reasons: It is starting at a time when all of Alberta



THE NORTHERN LIGHT

NO. I. ATHABASCA LANDING, NOV. 28 1908. VOL. I

T. IVES BYRNE, M. D.,

PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON,

OFFICE OVER MR. LESSARD'S STORE.

THE GRAND UNION HOTEL

IS THE BEST HOUSE IN THE NORTH.

Rates 1.50 & 2.00 a day.

M. BERTRAND, PROP.

WHO WILL HELP

THE NORTHERN LIGHT TO SHINE?

WHO WANTS TO SEE

THE WEE THING FAIL?

THEN BUY A COPY OR FAIL

WE MUST OR BETTER STILL

ADVERTISE WITH US.

FROM LITTLE THINGS

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES,

By Rev. F. W. Moxhay.

It is not often ones privilege to write the first article for a new weekly journal ,and, while one would not be ambitious, it affords the greatest pleasure to comply, the subject suggested being Little Things.

To every thoughtful mind it must be apparent that, in the early life of great men and in the origin of great inventions and greatcities, little things have taken a very important place.

It is a subject on whioh much may be written, but, as the space at our disposal is limited one would confine oneself tosome personal reminiscences showing great results from small beginnings and the importance of little things.

A few years ago the writer was staying with a gentleman who had a beautiful garden of which he was justly proud. "Will you come and see my garden?" he asked one morning.

"With pleasure," I replied, and the first thing I saw outside the door was a huge fruit or vegetable

"How came this here?" I asked, "in solitary loneliness."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Vol 1 No. 1, the *Northern Light*, Athabasca Landing's first newspaper. November 28, 1908. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

Northern News

Published in the interests of Athabasca Landing and the East West

VOL. I. NUMBER 9 ATHABASCA LANDING, THURSDAY, MARCH 4th 1909. PRICE FIVE CE . TS

Railway To Athabasca Landing is Now Assured

Bonds Have Been Guaranteed and Road will be Commenced Within a Year.

(Special to Northern News)

Edmonton, Feb. 26—Bonds for the following lines of railway in Northern Alberta have been guaranteed:

The C.N.R. from Elmsmere north-west towards Peace River, 50 miles; Morinville to Athabasca Landing; The Great Waterways Railway to Fort McMurray; C.N.R. from Vermilion north-west to Whitford Lake, 40 miles; C. N. R. from a point near Morinville to north-west of township 61. All roads to be commenced within a year.

The road to Fort McMurray is to be commenced within a year and is to be completed within four years, $400,000 have

SAVED FROM DEATH BY LASSO

Italian Laborer Narrowly Escapes Death by Drowning in New York Tunnel.

New York, Feb. 20th.—Falling into a rapidly flowing sewer from an open manhole, and later shooting through a narrow pipe for a distance of 250 feet, to be finally fished out of the East River, was the unusual experience here today of Jerrico Tonsi, an Italian laborer engaged in repairing a bulkhead at 11th Street, on the East River. The flow of the sewer at the point where Tonsi fell in is strong and he was finally shot through an aperture cover. A dock employee was waiting for him with an improvised lasso and when Tonsi's body battered and came rushing out of the mouth of the sewer, it was neatly caught by a well directed throw of the rope, and in-

KILLED BY WALRUS

Well Known Police Officer Meets With Untimely End In Unusual Manner.

(Special to Northern News)

Ottawa, Feb. 2.—Sergt. Donaldson, R.N.W.M.P. in company with Corpl. Reeve and an Indian Interpreter named Cook while crossing from Churchill to Fullerton on Hudson Bay were attacked by a walrus which put its tusk through their boat. They pulled pluckily towards shore and Donaldson jumped out to swim ashore and was lost. It is thought the walrus attacked and killed him in the water.

Inspector Pelletier and party are reported safe. An unfounded rumor was started early in January that he and his party were lost.

PRESIDENT TAFT'S

ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS COMMENCED

Conventions are Now Being Held and Contest Promises to be Exciting—A. F. Ewing is Conservative Candidate.

(Special to Northern News)

Edmonton, March 2.—The provincial election campaign is on in earnest. Conservative leaders claim that every riding will be contested by the opposition. They hold conventions in Vermilion Wednesday Lamoureux Thursday, Leduc Saturday, Vegreville Friday night, Stoney Plain Saturday. They claim there will be a candidate in Stony Plain.

A. F. Ewing has been nominated for Edmonton City. The Liberal ranks are solid and all working smoothly and effectively towards a great victory.

CURLING COMPETITION

SAWLE TROPHY

The finals in the Sawle Trophy between Messrs Gibson's and Keith's rinks, resulted in a win for the former by the score of 12-10.

F. Dubord	
Geo. Lemg	12
A. V. Barkman	
T. H. Gallon, skip	
F. M. Watt	
Jos. Cousineau	10
A. D. Ferguson	
John Keith, skip	

BERTRAND CUP COMPETITION

The most important competition of the season, for the Bertrand Cup was commenced on Tuesday night, when Mr. T. H. Gallon's rink defeated Inspt. Deming's rink in a very close game by the score of 13-10

Macquarrie, J. C.	
Cousineau, J.	10

The ninth issue of Athabasca Landing's second newspaper, the *Northern News*, celebrating the news of the CNoR line to the Landing. March 4, 1909. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

has passed the experimental state. Its location is to the country west and north what Winnipeg's is to the country west. There is as much arable land beyond the Athabasca as there is between here and Winnipeg and in a better agricultural climate because of lower altitude and longer summer days. By the end of this year there will be very few homesteads to be had south of the Saskatchewan, therefore immigration will have to go north. … [W]hat may we not reasonably expect from the natural populating of this country, to the north and west of Athabasca Landing, from the agricultural development alone? It has also an abundance of natural gas, which is the greatest asset any city can have. With the guarantee of cheap power we may in the future compete with towns and cities twice our size for the western branches of the manufacturing concerns that will be wanting to penetrate this new half-continent with their wares. No doubt lumbering will be in the near future a leading industry in the Landing . … We believe that the development of the natural resources of so large an area of what is freely admitted by every traveller of knowledge and good repute that has gone through it to be one of the most marvellously fertile districts in the world, a district whose mineral wealth is undoubted, is certain to build up large cities and towns, and we see many reasons why "The Gateway" should be the chief.[26]

Articles of this type continued to be a regular feature of the *Northern News* and, from May, 1913, well into the summer of 1914, of its rival, the *Athabasca Times*, as well. Most readers probably took them with a large pinch of salt and laughed at the more outrageous claims, but they had a cumulative effect which helped keep up the head of steam upon which the locomotive of expansion was running. By early 1914 the momentum showed some signs of slackening, so it was necessary to stoke the boiler ever more furiously. The result was the following gem, titled "Athabasca The Great—A Citizen's Microcosm of What We Are and Vision of What We Will Become:"

If Aladdin came to Athabasca, he would throw his

THE ATHABASCA TIMES

A NEWSPAPER NOT AN ORGAN

VOLUME 1. ATHABASCA, ALBERTA, WEDNESDAY, MAY 14th, 1913. NO. 1

Rich Natural Resources Surrounding Athabasca Assure Rapid Growth of City

Unlimited Supply of Gas Means Facility for Operating Important Industries, and Cheap Power for all Purposes Assured to Intending Manufacturers. Magnificent Farming Country Rapidly Being Settled by Finest Type Farmer

The Gateway City

Not the least distinctive thing about Athabasca is its name. There are few cities in the world which have the advantage of possessing the picturesque quality and poetic flavor that rings in the name Athabasca; the name in itself is a distinction.

Then again take the qualifying sentence which truly describes Athabasca; "The Gateway to the Peace River country, the last best west." There is a fine ring to that also. Let us analyse this a little J. K. Cornwall, ex-M. P. P. the man who stands foremost among the workers for the northwest says "With the connection of steel with the great waterways of Athabasca, one hundred million acres of good agricultural land will be opened up, to which Athabasca is the natural, logical gateway."

Mr. Cornwall points out that there are fifty-seven million acres of arable land in the Peace river country alone, the product of which must find its outlet to the west. ... the west last year, and it is nearly twice as much as the whole crop area of the whole Dominion, which was last year 23 million acres.

... geometrical progression trade and business as a whole will increase in the near future.

Rich Farm Lands

Tributary to Athabasca, and for which this city-to-be is the logical distributing point there is an agricultural district unequalled for fertility and productiveness.

The country is rolling and more or less covered with brush and small poplar, which makes an ideal farming country, and which is not difficult to clear when necessary. With the exception of a few weeks in winter, cattle are able to roam at large without attention, since the chinook breezes from the Pacific temper the climate so that it is much milder than many places hundreds of miles further south.

Pasture is everywhere plentiful peavine growing luxuriantly and to a great height in all portions of the district.

As this town is the northern distributing point for Alberta, an excellent market is offered for all farm produce. ... packing plants ... assuring a ready market for cattle and hogs from this district, while the mining camps of the north country will soon require a tremendous supply.

The last great west was the land they turned their eyes to, and their proposition is one which should prove of great benefit to the whole district as they intend to take up mixed farming in all its branches. Even the most casual observer cannot fail to be struck by the number of new comers arriving at the Gateway City by every train, and it is a remarkable fact that those who come to invest do so without any hesitation after a few hours spent in the Gateway City, while those who come up for the purpose of making their home here become absolutely fixed in their determination to live in Athabasca and nowhere else.

The Town to Tie to.

The foregoing will prove to all the natural advantages possessed by Athabasca, all of which are gone into in more detail on pages four and five. There is however, yet another advantage the value of which is beyond measure, and that is the unbounded belief of the townspeople in the capabilities of of their town, and the fact that they are ready to back its claims to the utmost. What will be done in the near future with the enthusiasm which has been born of the success which has attended past efforts, is something which one can only judge by reference to the history of other and older cities in the west. As everybody here says "Athabasca is the town to tie to."

Gasfield One of Athabasca's Most Valuable Assets

Supply of Gas Inexhaustible

Much has been said, much has been written, and many theories have been advanced as to the cause, probable extent, and life of natural gas fields. Theory, however, appears to be futile, and the only solution of the presence of gas and the extent of the field lies in practice with the assistance of the drill bit.

Athabasca has done with the theorizing, and is now busy with the genuine facts; however this is getting ahead a little, and perhaps it would be of interest to give a short history of the Athabasca gas fields from the time of their discovery.

In 1894, the government when boring for oil struck gas at three depths, 260, 640 feet and 860 feet, and the official reports record a hefty flow of gas with each strike. The engineers lost their drills at a depth of 1730 feet and gave that well up, the hole being plugged by William Pearce.

Ever since that time gas has always been escaping in small quantities, and in has always been possible to set fire to it, producing a small flame.

Gas Franchise Granted

In July of 1912 the town granted a gas franchise to the Athabasca Natural Gas Company, Doctor H. A. Bonnar of Toronto being the president. This company capitalized at $300,000, divided as follows:— $50,000 in preferred stock, guaranteed at 7 per cent, and $250,000 in common stock which is unassessable and draws all over the seven per cent.

This franchise covers a period of twenty years, on the expiration of which the entire plant can be taken over lock, stock, and barrel, by the town at an ... valuation.

... in August started to drill; a depth of 325 feet was reached, when suddenly owing to the insolvency of the Banner company, the whole work was tied up. The Athabasca Natural Gas

Father: "My dear, please give that young man who comes to see you in the evening a message."
Daughter (blushing) "Yes, dad."
Father: "Tell him that I've no objection to his running up our bill for lighting, but that I'd rather he didn't carry away our Athabasca Times with him when he leaves."

Social Jottings by Our Unreliable Reporter

On Wednesday at St. Margaret's church, a marriage was ...

Interesting Facts About Athabasca

THE GATEWAY

To the Peace River Country

Athabasca has over three miles of sidewalks in the town.

Athabasca has two hotels and many boarding houses.

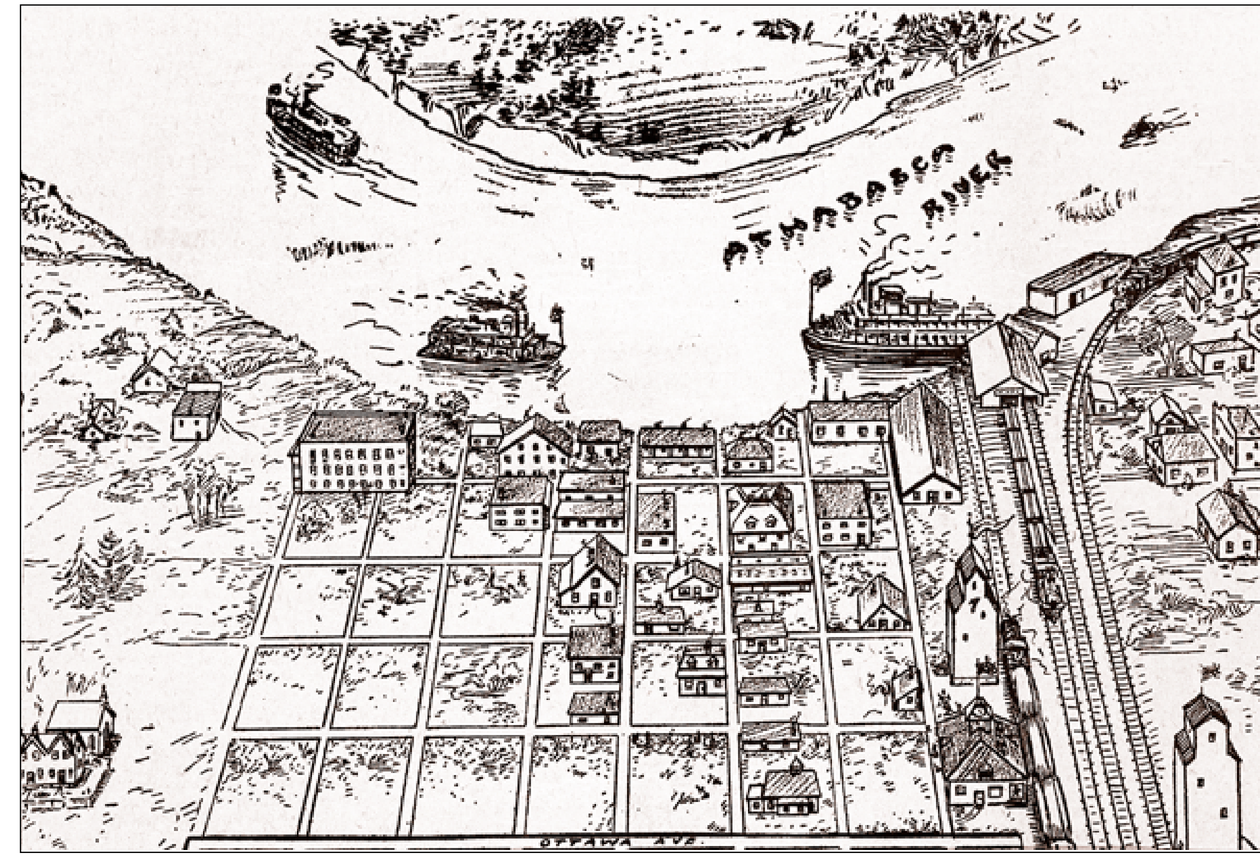
Athabasca has a well-conducted and up-to-date picture theatre.

Athabasca is not a "boom" town, but enjoys a steady, healthy and natural growth.

The first issue of Athabasca's third newspaper, the *Athabasca Times*. May 14, 1913. The headline is a typical piece of local boosterism. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

lamp away as unnecessary and get to work for himself and thus increase his self respect. There is no town which offers so many opportunities to the man who is willing to work as this good old town of Athabasca. … In the lobbies of Athabasca hotels you will see trappers and hunters fresh from the wilderness, oil men from California and Pennsylvania, merchants from the north, west, east and south here to purchase stock from the wholesale houses … freighters, chauffers … and to add color to this, the uniforms of the fine looking officers and men of the famous North West Mounted Police. This scene typifies the varied resources of this wonderful town. There is buoyancy and hope and confidence. … The tremendous resources of Athabasca are such as to defy the imagination to predict what will happen here in ten years. There are so many reasons why this is so that it is impossible in this letter to undertake to enumerate them. Get a map of western Canada, place your finger on Athabasca, study the resources that are inevitably tributary to her and then calculate for yourself what the probabilities are for a dense population at this point. A good mixed farming country with plenty of timber, plus the hydrocarbons and other minerals, plus a navigable river have been considered sufficient to make large cities. Athabasca has these and innumerable more advantages. This year 1914 is expected to be the most prosperous in its history. If the citizens will stand together as they have in the past this town may be depended upon to hold her position as the leader of Northern push and enterprise.[27]

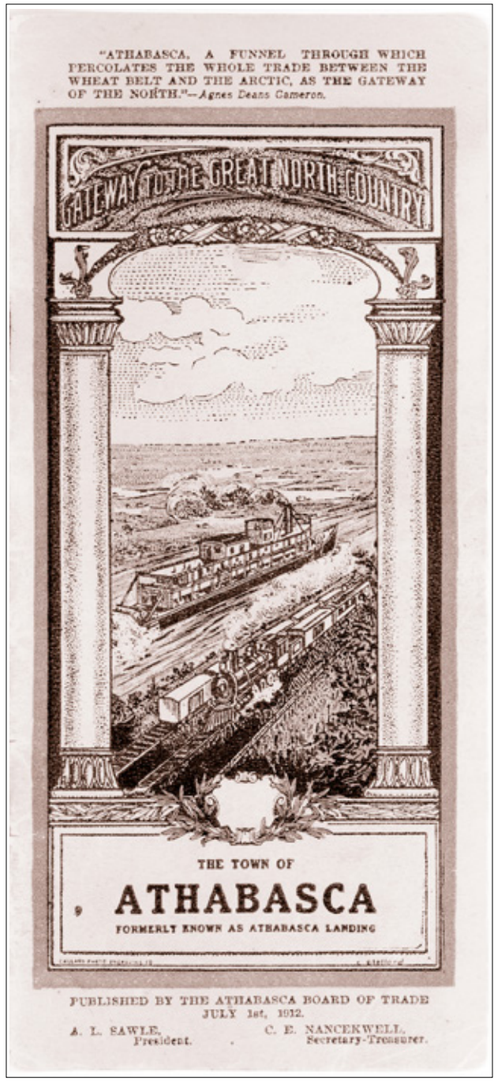
If hot air of this variety did help create and sustain the psychological climate of optimism and growth so evident among Athabasca businessmen during 1908 to 1914, there were also more solid and prosaic reasons for the economic boom at the Landing and for the fact that it continued for almost a year after the Canadian economy had fallen into recession. The most important reason was demographic: the massive influx of settlers



A thoroughly erroneous promotional map of Athabasca Landing issued in July, 1912. Glenbow Archives, NA-2092-2.

into the Athabasca region itself and, via the Landing, into the Peace Country. Within the space of three years Athabasca Landing had become a market town serving a rural population of several thousand. A second reason was the steady increase in trade and transportation through the Landing as the northern prairies and the Far North were opened up. The rapid expansion of Cornwall's Northern Transportation Company and the resurrection of the local HBC operation under McKay were tangible manifestations of this growth in northern trade and transport. A third factor was establishment of some new industries at or near the Landing, and the further development of some old ones.

In 1907, on the eve of the commercial boom, Athabasca Landing possessed, apart from its RNWMP barracks and Federal Government building (which housed a post office, a telegraph office, and an embryonic land agency), two transportation companies, five fur-trading firms, three or more boatyards, a couple of lumberyards and sawmills, two smithies, five general stores, three hotels, a livery stable, a stagecoach line, a bank, a farm machinery dealer, several carpenters, a painter, a barber and a ferryman. The transportation companies were, of course, the HBC and the NTC; the fur traders were the HBC, Revillon Frères, the Hislop & Nagle Co. and two smaller independents, John Secord and James McKinley. The biggest boatyard was that owned by James H. Wood, but others were run by John Griswold, George Gullion and John Russell. Russell also managed one of the lumberyards, while William Pierce and Frederick Gagnon were the two sawmill proprietors. The blacksmiths were Peter McDougall and Claude Chillett, and the hotel owners were Pierre Bellerose (who also ran the livery stable), Isaie Gagnon (whose establishment was now named the Grand Union), and a newcomer called Mr. Ralls. The five general stores—along with the hotels and churches the scene of much of Athabasca's social intercourse—were run by the HBC, Revillon Frères, Hislop & Nagle, and two independent merchants: John Lessard and Philip Walker, the latter on behalf of Ross Bros. Ltd. The bank was a branch of the Imperial Bank and its local manager was H.H. Reid; the farm-machinery dealer was Joseph Daigneau, who was combining this line of business with homesteading. The stage-coach line was run, as it had been since Klondike days, by John Kennedy. Some of the more prominent local artisans and tradesmen were painter



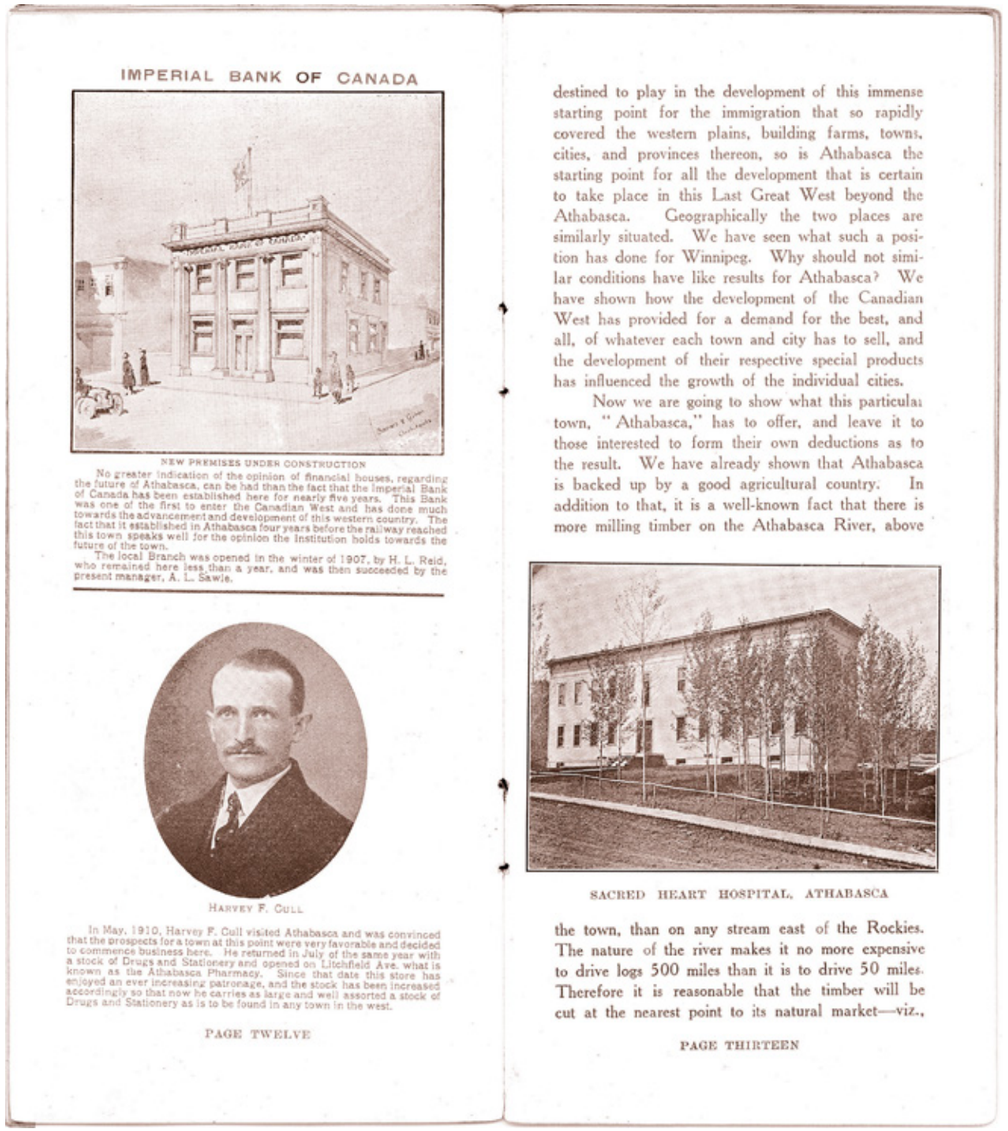
One of the Board of Trade's more effective contributions to Athabasca boosterism: a thirty-two page promotional booklet "Gateway to the Great North Country: The Town of Athabasca, formerly known as Athabasca Landing," 1912. Athabasca Archives, accession no. 85.42.

William Onworth, carpenters Magnus Brown and Frank Beaudry, barber John McGilvery, liquor merchant Thomas Kirk, and billiard-parlour operator George Hees. The ferryman was John Tyndell.[28]

1908, the year that the NTC began running the *Midnight Sun* and the *Northern Light* as passenger boats with regular schedules, and the year that Agnes Deans Cameron visited the Landing, saw a modest but significant growth of business activity in the village. Anglican minister Rev. F.W. Moxhay began publishing the *Northern Light* newspaper late in the year, and by the time the first edition hit the streets Athabasca Landing had seven new businesses. Mrs. Ryan opened a boarding house and M. Bertand assumed proprietorship of the Grand Union Hotel. A new blacksmith, G.H. Leng, provided competition to McDougall and Chillett, and helped persuade Claude Chillett to concentrate on working as a gunsmith and silversmith. William Chisholm set up a harness and horse-goods store, and Joseph Cousineau opened a meat market. Hoy Kee somewhat curiously combined selling silk clothing with baking bread, while general merchant John Lessard moved into the fur trade to supplement business at his grocery store. Louis Couture started another general store, and ex-hotelier Isaie Gagnon used the capital he obtained from selling the Grand Union to launch a building supplies firm.[29] Obviously he anticipated, quite correctly, that there would be a lot of construction taking place at the Landing and in the surrounding countryside during the next few years.

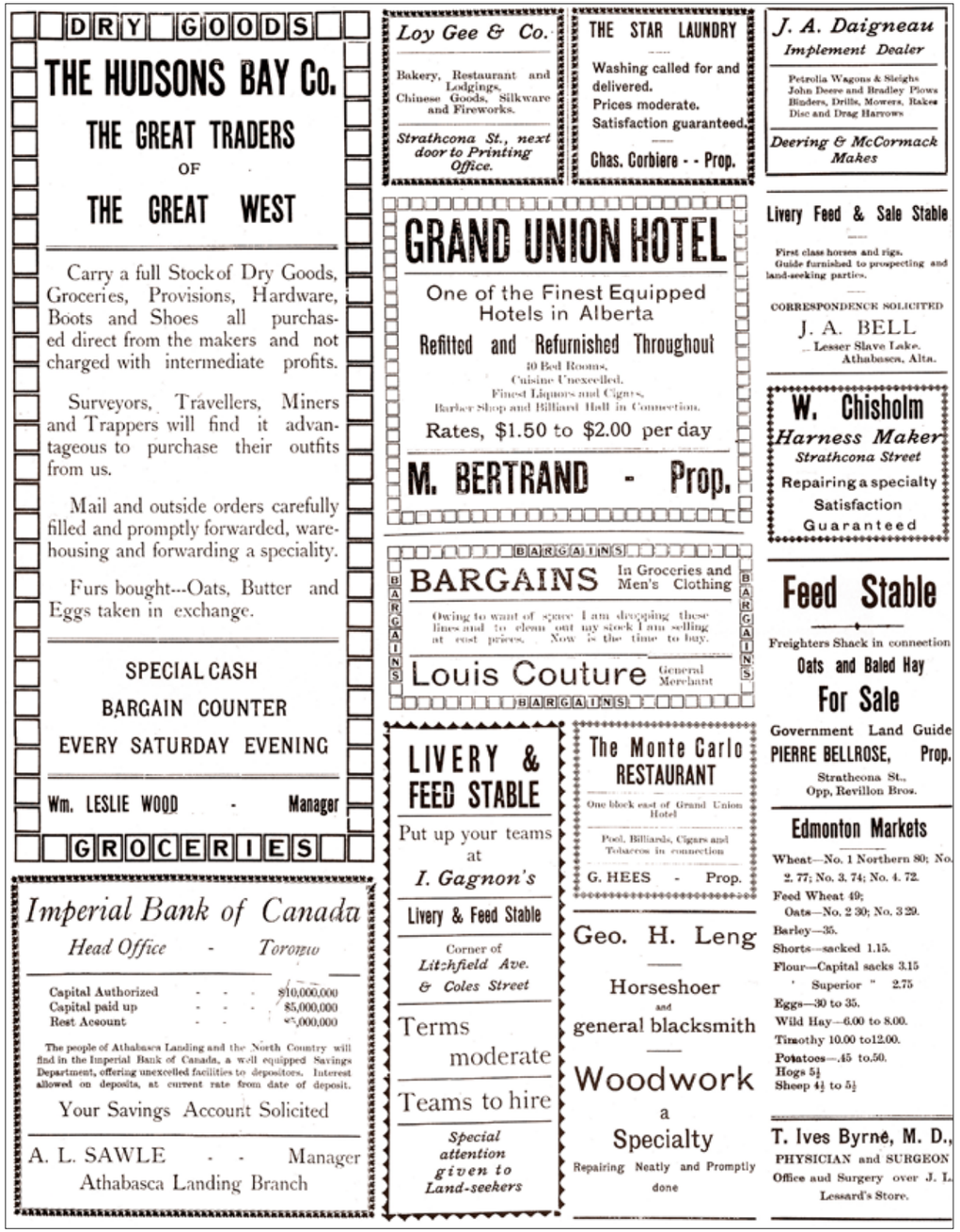
Other businessmen soon came to the same conclusion. The next year, 1909, saw the arrival of another building contractor, the firm of Warner & Pratt, and the starting up of George Green's new brickyard, which used clay from a quarry just east of the village. New businesses established in this year included William Rennison's real-estate and insurance office, Roy Knowlton's jewellery store, Charles Corbiere's laundry, George Hees's butcher shop and Monte Carlo Restaurant, and Isaie Gagnon's livery stable.[30] The construction of the *Northland Sun* kept the lumber and boatbuilding industries busy, and the building firms vied for the work of erecting Athabasca Landing's first firehall. This was the year, too, that the Board of Trade (run mainly by Leslie Wood, James Wood, Isaie Gagnon, John Lessard, Lance Smith, and new bank manager A.L. Sawle) gained a more firmly established publicity organ, the *Northern News* published by Frederick Watt and edited by J. C. Macquarie.[31]

The moderate but steady expansion of the years 1907–09 continued in the first year of the new decade. The NTC commissioned the *Northland Call*, two more general stores opened their doors (one owned by McLeod Bros., the other by R.C. Farrell), Frank R. Falconer started the Landing's first hardware store and Harvey Cull the first drug store, A.A. Greer (who was also an auctioneer) set up the second



Pages 12–13 of "Gateway to the Great North Country," showing the new Imperial Bank building, the Sisters of Providence hospital, a portrait of a successful local businessman, and one of the Board of Trade's favourite promotional lines, a comparison between Athabasca and Winnipeg. Board of Trade, July 1, 1912. Athabasca Archives, accession no. 85-42.

real-estate and insurance firm, and a new bakery (Colin Johnston's) and restaurant (Joe's) appeared.[32] The Board of Trade lobbied for an immigration hall and for a railway station, and printed hundreds of pamphlets extolling the virtues of the Landing as a place to do business profitably.[33] But, relatively speaking, 1910 was the lull before the storm. 1911, the year homesteaders began to pour into the Landing in droves and the village decided that henceforth it was officially a town, was the time when moderate



DRY GOODS

THE HUDSONS BAY Co.

THE GREAT TRADERS OF THE GREAT WEST

Carry a full Stock of Dry Goods, Groceries, Provisions, Hardware, Boots and Shoes all purchased direct from the makers and not charged with intermediate profits.

Surveyors, Travellers, Miners and Trappers will find it advantageous to purchase their outfits from us.

Mail and outside orders carefully filled and promptly forwarded, warehousing and forwarding a speciality.

Furs bought---Oats, Butter and Eggs taken in exchange.

SPECIAL CASH
BARGAIN COUNTER
EVERY SATURDAY EVENING

Wm. LESLIE WOOD - Manager

GROCERIES

Loy Gee & Co.

Bakery, Restaurant and Lodgings.
Chinese Goods, Silkware and Fireworks.

Strathcona St., next door to Printing Office.

THE STAR LAUNDRY

Washing called for and delivered.
Prices moderate.
Satisfaction guaranteed.

Chas. Corbiere - - Prop.

J. A. Daigneau
Implement Dealer

Petrolia Wagons & Sleighs
John Deere and Bradley Plows
Binders, Drills, Mowers, Rakes
Disc and Drag Harrows

Deering & McCormack Makes

GRAND UNION HOTEL

One of the Finest Equipped Hotels in Alberta

Refitted and Refurnished Throughout

40 Bed Rooms.
Cuisine Unexcelled.
Finest Liquors and Cigars.
Barber Shop and Billiard Hall in Connection.

Rates, $1.50 to $2.00 per day

M. BERTRAND - Prop.

Livery Feed & Sale Stable

First class horses and rigs.
Guide furnished to prospecting and land-seeking parties.

CORRESPONDENCE SOLICITED

J. A. BELL
Lesser Slave Lake.
Athabasca, Alta.

W. Chisholm
Harness Maker
Strathcona Street
Repairing a specialty
Satisfaction Guaranteed

BARGAINS

BARGAINS In Groceries and Men's Clothing

Owing to want of space I am dropping these lines and to clean out my stock I am selling at cost prices. Now is the time to buy.

Louis Couture General Merchant

Feed Stable

Freighters Shack in connection
Oats and Baled Hay
For Sale
Government Land Guide
PIERRE BELLROSE, Prop.
Strathcona St.,
Opp, Revillon Bros.

Imperial Bank of Canada
Head Office - Toronto

Capital Authorized	$10,000,000
Capital paid up	$5,000,000
Rest Account	$5,000,000

The people of Athabasca Landing and the North Country will find in the Imperial Bank of Canada, a well equipped Savings Department, offering unexcelled facilities to depositors. Interest allowed on deposits, at current rate from date of deposit.

Your Savings Account Solicited

A. L. SAWLE - - Manager
Athabasca Landing Branch

LIVERY & FEED STABLE

Put up your teams at
I. Gagnon's
Livery & Feed Stable
Corner of
Litchfield Ave. & Coles Street

Terms moderate

Teams to hire

Special attention given to Land-seekers

The Monte Carlo RESTAURANT

One block east of Grand Union Hotel

Pool, Billiards, Cigars and Tobaccos in connection

G. HEES - Prop.

Geo. H. Leng

Horseshoer and general blacksmith

Woodwork a Specialty

Repairing Neatly and Promptly done

Edmonton Markets

Wheat—No. 1 Northern 80; No. 2. 77; No. 3. 74; No. 4. 72.
Feed Wheat 49;
Oats—No. 2 30; No. 3 29.
Barley—35.
Shorts—sacked 1.15.
Flour—Capital sacks 3.15
' Superior " 2.75
Eggs—30 to 35.
Wild Hay—6.00 to 8.00.
Timothy 10.00 to12.00.
Potatoes—.45 to.50.
Hogs 5½
Sheep 4½ to 5½

T. Ives Byrne, M. D.,
PHYSICIAN and SURGEON
Office and Surgery over J. L. Lessard's Store.

Various advertisements by local businesses in the *Northern News* during the boom years. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

On the eve of the real-estate boom: Skinner Street. Athabasca Landing, 1909. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-6.

Strathcona Street, Athabasca Landing, just before the beginning of the main construction boom in 1911. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-5.

growth turned into frenzied expansion. The long-awaited commercial boom was really here at last, and it antedated—although of course it also anticipated—the HBC/CNoR deal and the coming of the railroad.

The business life of Athabasca Landing in 1911 witnessed the continued expansion of the town's staple industries, plus a certain broadening of its economic base. The Nothern Transportation Company kept on with its strategy to wrest a larger share of the northern freighting and passenger business from the HBC. Its fifth paddler wheeler, the *Northland Star*, was aimed particularly at the passenger market, and was equipped with quite luxurious cabins, complete with baths and electric lights.[34] The HBC, on the other hand, was in a state of limbo: its scow brigades were temporarily under the management of river pilot E.B. Haight, while the Company's regional office in Winnipeg decided on Leslie Wood's replacement and on how to fight the enterprising and energetic Jim Cornwall. Since the HBC was no longer aggressively

Lichfield Avenue, Athabasca Landing, before construction of the CNoR station. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2582.

Freighters loading on Strathcona Street between the Revillon Frères warehouse and Bellerose's livery stables, winter, 1912–13. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 34.

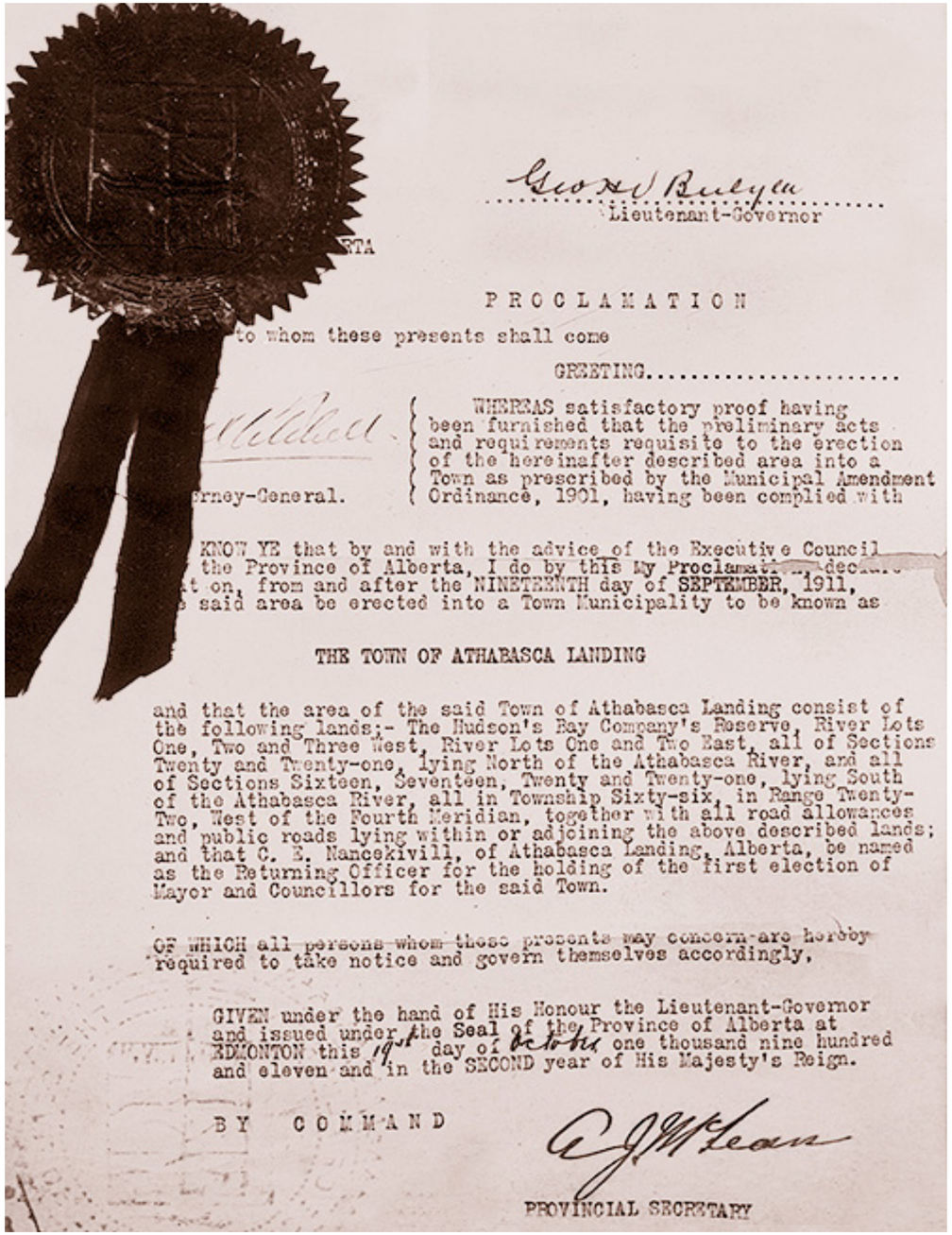
pursuing the local fur trade, this enterprise was now shared between Revillon Frères, the Hislop & Nagle Trading Co., and a relative newcomer to the fur business, John Lessard, who later that year sold his general store to the Peace River Trading Company. Yet another general store, the Athabasca Trading Store, opened in town, as did two more hotels, Svenson's Restaurant & Rooms and the Great Northern

Athabasca Landing's first bank, the Imperial Bank of Canada Building, constructed in 1907. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection B 2571.

The S.S *Midnight Sun* beached for the winter of 1908–09 after completing a first summer of regular service on the Athabasca River. Library and Archives Canada RCMP Archives, e999916221-u.

The S.S. *Northern Light* unloading supplies up river; the steamer began regular service in 1908. Library and Archives Canada RCMP Archives, e999916230-u.

The *Northern News* office and Hoy Kee's restaurant and bakery. c. 1910. Athabasca Archives, 01786.



Geo. H. Bulyea
Lieutenant-Governor

PROCLAMATION

to whom these presents shall come

GREETING.....

WHEREAS satisfactory proof having been furnished that the preliminary acts and requirements requisite to the erection of the hereinafter described area into a Town as prescribed by the Municipal Amendment Ordinance, 1901, having been complied with

rney-General.

KNOW YE that by and with the advice of the Executive Council the Province of Alberta, I do by this My Proclamation declare on, from and after the NINETEENTH day of SEPTEMBER, 1911, said area be erected into a Town Municipality to be known as

THE TOWN OF ATHABASCA LANDING

and that the area of the said Town of Athabasca Landing consist of the following lands:- The Hudson's Bay Company's Reserve, River Lots One, Two and Three West, River Lots One and Two East, all of Sections Twenty and Twenty-one, lying North of the Athabasca River, and all of Sections Sixteen, Seventeen, Twenty and Twenty-one, lying South of the Athabasca River, all in Township Sixty-six, in Range Twenty-Two, West of the Fourth Meridian, together with all road allowances and public roads lying within or adjoining the above described lands; and that C. E. Nancekivill, of Athabasca Landing, Alberta, be named as the Returning Officer for the holding of the first election of Mayor and Councillors for the said Town.

OF WHICH all persons whom these presents may concern are hereby required to take notice and govern themselves accordingly,

GIVEN under the hand of His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor and issued under the Seal of the Province of Alberta at EDMONTON this 19th day of October one thousand nine hundred and eleven and in the SECOND year of His Majesty's Reign.

BY COMMAND

C. J. McLean
PROVINCIAL SECRETARY

Athabasca Landing officially proclaimed a town by the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Alberta, September 19, 1911. Provincial Archives of Alberta, GR1980.0022.

The S.S. *Northland Sun*, constructed in 1909, Athabasca Landing. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00695.

Harvey Cull's drug store, c.1910. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00703.

The S.S. *Northland Call*, constructed at Athabasca Landing in 1910. Athabasca Archives Thorne Collection, 00303.

Restaurant and Rooms. The variety of retail outlets was increasing considerably, with a tailor shop, a millinery store, a menswear store, a cigar store, and Rennison's Fresh Fruit & Confectionery. Another response to the increase in local farming activity was the establishment of the Athabasca Grain & Produce Co. which appears to have been a seed retailer and grain wholesaler. The Landing's building boom also encouraged the creation of the Athabasca Concrete Works, to rival Green's Brickyard. More service

Harvey Cull and the interior of his drug store, 1913. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00702.

Roy Knowlton outside his jewellery store, Athabasca Landing, n.d. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00707.

industries were in evidence too: a branch of the Royal Bank; Athabasca Investments Ltd; Thompson Realty; another insurance agent; the firm of Coté & Smith, surveyors; a lawyer, J.C. Hendry; another barber shop and pool room; a movie theatre; a shooting gallery; and even a boxing academy.[35] And, as we've seen, in the last month of 1911 railway fever and land speculation combined to send property values sky-high, and allowed the HBC to begin reaping its huge profits from selling the building lots within the town-site.

1912—Athabasca's year of steel and steam—witnessed not only the coming of the CNoR and rampant land speculation but also some more durable

Falconer's hardware and the Peace River Trading Company stores. Athabasca Archives Falconer Collection, 01254.

Athabasca Meat Market, 1911. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2594.

economic advances. The railway made possible the development of a commercial fishing industry in the Athabasca area, which led to the establishment of a fish market in town. The trains brought more and more settlers, so another hotel was built (the Crystal Lodge Rooming House), and another farm machinery dealer opened when Pratt's General Store became the agent for Frost & Wood Farm Implements. Two new lumber firms opened for business; the Athabasca Lumber Co. run by Lance Smith; and the Crown Lumber Co. whose local manager was J.P. Evans. The demand for lumber was stimulated by the HBC decision to build the steamers *Slave Lake* and *Athabasca River*, and by a building boom at the Landing. Green's brickyard also profited from the boom, but now had to face competition from a rival brickyard, owned by Claude Thillet. Another resource, natural gas, seemed ripe for development, and H.A. Bonner formed the Athabasca Natural Gas Co. to drill for gas and to pipe a supply into town. New retail outlets

The HBC/CNoR vision of Athabasca City, as promoted by the real-estate firm of A. A. Greer & Company, 1913–14. Map by the Coté & Smith Company that opened an office in Athabasca Landing in 1912 and re-surveyed the town site in order to plan the new sub-divisions. Athabasca Archives.

Romeo Farrell's general store, 1909. Lance Smith (left), Louis Menard (second left), Farrell himself, and his wife Athela standing outside. Athabasca Archives Pylypiuk Collection, 01784.

Inside the Farrell & Daigneau general store, 1911. Joseph Daigneault second from the left, Romeo Farrell on the right. Athabasca Archives Pylypiuk Collection, 01785.

in town included M.J. Gauthier's furniture store, William Couture's boot and shoe repair, William Joynt's livery stable, H. Parent's laundry, and a fourth realtor. Additional services included another lawyer, Frank Pottage, a public accountant, S.R. Farquharson, a dentist, and an eye specialist. Other ventures of note were the Rapid Transit Company's (winter only) automobile line to Peace River (which used Ford "tin lizzies"), and the rather belated introduction of a long distance telephone service to supplement the telegraph.[36]

Yet, above all else, 1912 was Athabasca Landing's year of the railway. When the last yards of track were laid ceremonially on May 14, local businesses closed

Crowds awaiting the arrival of the first train at Athabasca Landing, May 25, 1912. Athabasca Archives Gorman Collection, 00768.

The first train to Athabasca Landing leaving Edmonton on May 25th, 1912. Glenbow Archives, NC-6-79.

for the event and a crowd of several hundred gathered to celebrate. The first train arrived at 11:30 pm on the 25th, carrying fifty passengers who had embarked from Edmonton at 8:30 that morning; the journey had taken fourteen hours because of heavy rain and lengthy stops for celebrations at all the country stations on the way. Regular service was inaugurated on September 3, with the first train consisting of four passenger coaches carrying seventy-five people, plus sixteen freight cars. Thereafter, the trains arrived thrice a week, on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, often bringing special carloads of homesteaders and their livestock, such as the party of fifty-five French-Canadian families from Maine, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, led by Father Giroux,

The CNoR station at Athabasca Landing at the time of a visit by then Minister of Municipal Affairs Charles Stewart and local MLA A.G. MacKay. 1912. Athabasca Archives Falconer Collection, 00739.

The Tawatinaw Creek trestle bridge with Athabasca Landing in the background, 1912. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2596.

Businessmen at Athabasca Landing railway station on the eve of the Great Fire of August, 1913. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2562.

who arrived in May, 1913, en route to Little Smoky River. Indeed, the tide of immigration was so strong in the first half of 1913 that Athabasca received a daily train service from Edmonton beginning on June 1st.[37] If 1912 was the year of steel and steam for Athabasca Landing, 1913 was the year of gas and fire. There is no direct proof that the attempt to pipe natural gas into town for lighting and heating purposes was the cause of the rash of fires that afflicted the Landing between 1912 and 1914, but it is difficult to believe that the two things were entirely coincidental. At any rate, the first major fire to test the town's volunteer fire brigade occurred in January, 1912. HBC manager A.C. McKay, routinely checking his store's furnace one Thursday evening, was confronted with a dense cloud of black smoke. He and his two clerks saved a consignment of furs and some valuable papers, but the building was lost. Nor could the fire brigade prevent the flames spreading to the nearby Imperial Bank building, which was also of log construction, although they did save the post office and postmaster McKernan's house by dousing them with water.[38] The damage, while considerable, was thus limited to two buildings, and both the HBC and the Imperial Bank rebuilt in grand

The new Imperial Bank of Canada building, erected after the first Imperial Bank branch at the Landing was destroyed in the fire of January, 1912. The new bank survived the Great Fire of August, 1913. Mail carriers are leaving for Calling River with a loaded sled and dog team. Athabasca Archives, 00967.

The HBC general store that perished in the fire of January, 1912. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2349.

The new HBC store, built of brick in 1912, that survived the Great Fire of August, 1913, and remained in business until 1924. Athabasca Archives Minns Collection, 00358.

style the following summer.

This fire, dramatic though it was, was nothing compared to the great fire of August, 1913, that destroyed about half of downtown Athabasca. The *Athabasca Times* described the results of the catastrophe in the following terms:

> The greater part of the business section of Athabasca was wiped out by fire during the early hours of Tuesday morning, involving a loss estimated conservatively at $335,000. Thirty-two places of business including the municipal offices and mounted police barracks were destroyed, together with a considerable portion of their contents. In some cases nothing was saved from the burning buildings, owing to the rapidity with which the fire spread. The burned area extends from Skinner to Cole streets along Litchfield Avenue and for half a block south on Strathcona, Cole and Skinner, and today this formerly well built up section of town presents a scene of desolation with still smouldering heaps of ashes and charred debris.[39]

The new HBC store and Imperial Bank both escaped, but among the buildings destroyed were the Town

THE ATHABASCA

A NEWSPAPER NOT AN ORGAN

VOLUME 1. ATHABASCA, ALBERTA, THURSDAY, AUGUST 7TH, 1913.

Part of Athabasca's Business Section Reduced to Ashes by Furious Fire

ED

The

OVER $300,000 WORTH OF PROPERTY DESTROYED IN THREE HOURS

Grand Union and Athabasca Hotels, the Gagnon Block, Two Banks and Twenty other Buildings Wiped Out—Heroic Efforts of Citizens to Stop the Progress of the Flames Futile, Owing to Lack of Fire Fighting Equipment—Guests Compelled to Flee Hastily From Hotels Lose Their Personal Effects—Few Goods Saved from Destroyed Buildings—Insurance But Small Percentage of Enormous Loss—The Situation Faced Bravely and Business is Already Being Resumed—List of the Sufferers and the Losses.

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The burned area extends from Skinner to Cole streets along Litchfield avenue and for half a block south on Strathcona, Cole and Skinner, and today this formerly well built up section of the town presents a scene of desolation with still smouldering heaps of ashes and charred debris.

The fire was discovered about 2.30 in the morning by Bert Millington, who was at work [illegible] and a couple of strings of freight cars, some loaded, were now in the path of the flames and heat and their destruction appeared imminent. However, the trainmen got busy and pulled the cars out of the danger zone, though not before one car had been burned and another was ablaze.

The south-east corner of the depot verandah also caught and the south side of the building was badly scorched, but further damage was averted by the timely application of water pumped from a nearby pond.

While the fire was in progress there was great activity on the part of owners and others in the work of removing goods and chattels from buildings in the danger zone. Drays were requisitioned to haul stuff away and men were running hither and thither carrying what they could to places of safety, and soon the streets for a couple of blocks [illegible] were piled up and strewn

Emmanuel Papathedosion, confectionery store.

Filteau Block—Municipal Corporation; J.C. Hendry, barrister; Athabasca Club, I. Gagnon, office; Fred Dubord, grocer; R. Genereaux, pool room, tenants.

Olivier Bros., livery stable.

Northern Trading Store, Hyman Bros., props.

STRATHCONA STREET, WEST SIDE

Hackett's Cigar and News Stand, corner Litchfield Ave.,

W. J. Wyssman, prop.

T. Stoker, general store.

Canadian Bank of Commerce.

Hughes Bros., butcher shop.

Royal Bank of Canada.

H. F. Cull, druggist and telephone central.

James Friedman, tailor.

Revillion Bros., warehouse.

LITCHFIELD AVENUE, WEST OF STRATHCONA

E. G. Gibbons, lunch counter.

P. Neys, ice cream parlor and

H.B.Co., two small buildings	1,000
James Friedman, tailor	1,000
Building owned by Isaie Gagnon	1,000
Opportunity Trust Co.	1,000
E. Papas, Olympia cafe	1,000
Building owned by Dr. MacDonald, Edmonton	1,000
Gagnon Block	30,000
Goods stored in A.F. Co's warehouse	25,000
Building	4,000
Gagnon block	30,000
Grand Union hotel	50,000
Verdeau's barber shop, bowling alley including building owned by C. Thillett	9,000
Building occupied by the Atha. Trading Co., and Atha. cafe, and a pool room, owned by Miss C. Gordon, Fort McMurray	3,000
C. N. R.	1,000
Dubord, Atha. grocery, stock and fixtures	16,000
Genereaux barber shop and pool room	3,500
Empire store, loss in sal-	

Reporting the Great Fire of August. 1913: the front page of the *Athabasca Times*, August 7, 1913. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

Still smouldering: the Great Fire of August 5, 1913. Athabasca Archives Falconer Collection, 01155.

The old Grand Union Hotel that burned down in the Great Fire of August, 1913. Athabasca Archives, 00218.

The new Grand Union Hotel, built of brick during the winter of 1913–14. It still stands in Athabasca. Athabasca Archives, 01018.

The Olivier Block, one of the business buildings built from brick after the Great Fire of August, 1913. The Royal Bank operated at Athabasca Landing from 1912–1916. Glenbow Archives, NA-3774-11.

office, the Grand Union Hotel, the Athabasca Hotel (Isaie Gagnon's most recent venture), the Revillon Frères warehouse, the Athabasca Trading Company's warehouse, several general stores (including McLeod's and Dubord's), Cull's drug store, and two banks, the Royal Bank and the Canadian Bank of Commerce.

Most of the smaller merchants whose stores and stocks burned, such as druggist H. F. Cull, grocer F. Dubord, hardware merchant P. W. Dueck, tailor James Friedman, and general merchants Brault & Viens, were either uninsured or underinsured, and were therefore heavy losers from the disaster.[40] The larger enterprises, on the other hand, either carried full insurance or possessed enough capital to overcome the setback. Some, including Revillon Frères, rebuilt, either during the next few months or in the summer of 1914. The new Grand Union Hotel, for example, was ready to be opened with a grand ball and banquet in early February, while the Town Hall was reconstructed by the end of 1913, in time to burn down again in another, smaller fire the next year.[41] Others seem to have called it quits, concluding that Athabasca was not, after all, destined to be the Calgary of the North, and that the great fire had fortuitously provided them with an easy way out of a questionable business venture. The *Athabasca Times* assured its readers that "Athabasca will rise from the ashes like a phoenix and will soon outstrip her former self in all lines of progressive development," but by 1914 some of the town's businessmen were beginning to realize that this brave rhetoric might be very wide of the mark.[42]

1914 was a deceptive year in the economic history of Athabasca. On the surface things still looked good: settlers streamed into the area, land prices kept up fairly well, a considerable amount of rebuilding occurred, and the Canadian government provided the town with a much more spacious post office and government building.[43] By now the main services which the town council had authorized in 1912/13 were either in place or well under construction: the town already had or was constructing sidewalks, gas mains, street lamps, a town hall, a fire hall, and waterworks, and it even had two police constables of its own—the infrastructure for future expansion had been lad.[44] But there was a negative side to this picture: the modernization program had been costly, and had been financed by substantial borrowing by the newly incorporated municipality. Part of the reason for the high cost was that the town had had to pay inflated prices for the land it required to build

A newly-built business block in Athabasca Landing that housed the Brault & Viens general store, a hardware store, and an ice-cream parlour, 1913. Glenbow Archives, NA-2831-21.

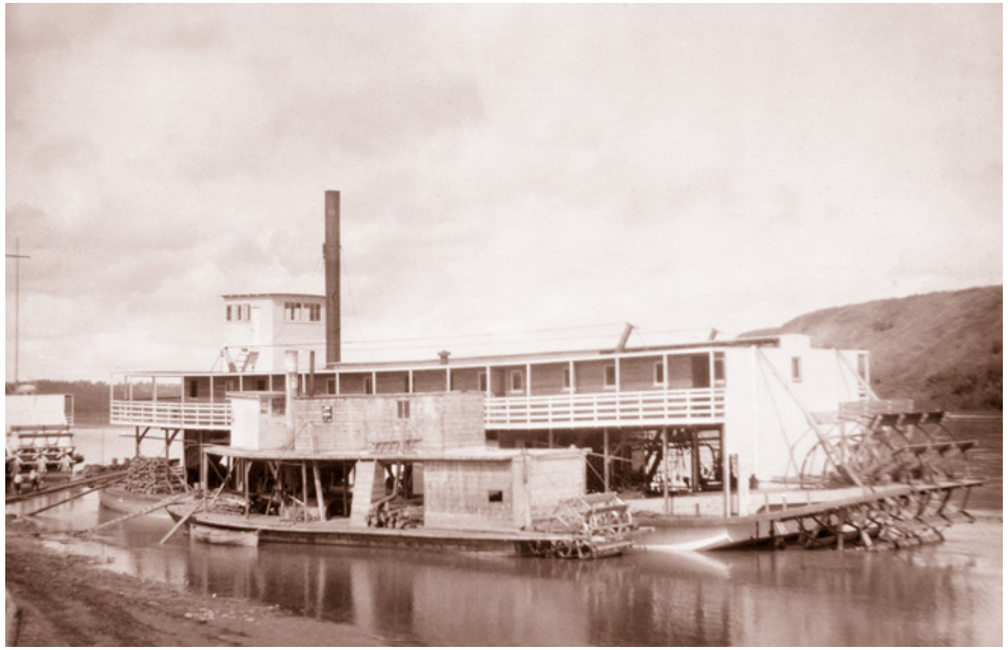
the fire hall and town hall; the HBC had let those lots go at half the market price, but the market price had been determined by the speculative boom associated with the arrival of the CNoR.[45] Then, too, major problems had been experienced in constructing the gas and water systems. The Athabasca Natural Gas Company's initial drillings failed to produce sufficient quantities of gas and, when it did find natural gas under sufficient pressure, one of its wells blew and could not be capped.[46] By November, 1913, it had apparently abandoned the project, and Athabasca's new street lamps were temporarily converted to gasoline fuel. Refusing to be defeated by this setback, local businessmen formed a new Gas Development Company and imported drilling machinery from Edmonton to get the job done.[47] Athabasca eventually got its supply of natural gas for lighting and heating, but only after considerable time, trouble and expense. Much the same was true for the town's water supply. Although water mains were laid during the summer of 1913, the system proved virtually useless in the great fire of August of that year. The job had been bungled, and the Board of Trade's ad hoc Waterworks Committee soon determined what was wrong: the pipes needed to be dug deeper for better protection against breakage, and a reservoir was required to increase the water pressure.[48] These improvements, undertaken in 1914, ensured that Athabasca obtained its water supply, but again at exorbitant cost and trouble.

In the long run these teething problems in the early development of the town—and the financial headaches they caused the Town Council and Board of Trade—would not have mattered had the continued expansion of Athabasca as a major trading and communications centre been assured. In the summer of 1914 most Athabascans still believed that their town had a rosy future, but a few wiser ones were beginning to perceive that the writing was on the wall. There were four main negative factors to which the optimists were turning a blind eye. First, the homesteading boom, although still going great guns in 1914, was nearly over. Most of the best land anywhere near the town was already gone, and the limits of Athabasca's agricultural hinterland were pretty well established. The local farmers would sustain the community in the future, but homesteading as an engine of growth was nearly played out. Second, there were rumours—accurate ones, as it turned out—that the Grand Trunk Pacific Railroad was near bankruptcy. Its new line west from Battleford had proceeded as far as Turtleford, but construction had stopped short of the Alberta/Saskatchewan border.[49] The Canadian Northern Railway was also in financial trouble, and was now shelving its plans to extend the Athabasca spur to

Athabasca Landing at the height of the commercial boom, 1913. Glenbow Archives, NA- 1044-26.

Fort McMurray. The vision of Athabasca Landing as the junction point of a transcontinental line and a line opening up the Far North was fading fast.[50] Third, Alberta, like Eastern Canada and indeed the Western capitalist economy as a whole, had gone into recession, and this meant that, for a few years at least, Athabasca would be hard pressed to extract further capital for expansion from bankers or government, that its traditional industries would face weak demand for their products and services, and that there would be few new industries starting up in the region. For a town that had just taken off demographically and that had spent a lot of money improving its facilities, this enforced "marking time" had come at just the wrong point. Last, but not least, the ghost of the Grand Rapids had come back to haunt the Landing. The new railways were not going to supplant completely the network of steam-powered river transportation in the North that the HBC and NTC had successfully established. But the section of the Athabasca River between Grand Rapids and Fort McMurray had always been a troublesome and expensive weak link in the system, and it could, and would, be bypassed by rail. The line that was going to do so was already under construction, but the Alberta & Great Waterways Railway from Edmonton to Waterways (near Fort McMurray) would pass through Lac La Biche, not Athabasca. By 1914 it had reached Boyle, and by January, 1915, it would be at Lac La Biche.[51] When it reached the Athabasca River near Fort McMurray in 1917, the end would be at hand for the greater part of the Landing's northern transportation business. To make matters worse, the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway, which would soon link Edmonton to Lesser Slave Lake and the Peace Country, had already bridged the Athabasca River at Mirror Landing and would soon reach the shores of Slave Lake, so that third of the town's transportation business would be gone by the end of the year.[52] Together, the ED & BCR and the A. & GWR were transforming Athabasca Landing almost overnight from a transportation headquarters to a transportation backwater—and in so doing, plunging a knife straight into the heart of Athabasca's economy.

James Cornwall was one of the first to recognize the impending doom. In March, 1914, he gave a public lecture spelling out the harsh realities of the railway situation, and explaining that the Northern Transportation Company would not only not be rebuilding its warehouse facilities at the Landing, but would also be closing down its steamboat operations.[53] At high water that summer, Cornwall personally undertook a dangerous and daring exploit that underlined his decision to quit Athabasca: he ran two of the NTC steamers through the Grand Rapids. This drastic step, taken on the premise that it was better to risk damaging the boats in order to get them to Fort McMurray where they could keep working than leave them to rot at the Landing, proved a lucky gamble. The steamers did suffer some damage but they were repairable, and thenceforth the NTC operated profitably from Fort McMurray, carrying everything from bison to war supplies.[54] The HBC rather reluctantly came to a similar decision. At the end of the 1914 freighting season, the S.S. *Athabasca River* also steamed away from the Landing for the last time, bound for Lake Athabasca and a difficult journey to the Peace Country. In 1915 she started a new life at Peace River Crossing.[55] With the departure of the steamboats, the most colourful, exciting and prosperous period of Athabasca Landing's economic history was over. From now on Athabasca would have to make it as a market town and, later, as an administrative centre.



The S.S. *Athabasca River* docked at Athabasca Landing. It was one of many steamboats to leave the Landing, not to return, at the end of the 1914 freighting season. Glenbow Archives, NA-3544-15.

CHAPTER 8

Life in a Frontier Community, 1906–1914

Transportation, merchandising and, increasingly, farming, were the mainstays of Athabasca Landing's economy, but during the boom years before World War I there was more to life in Athabasca than trading and cultivating. Religion, politics, education and, above all, entertainment, these were the things, apart from homesteading and business, that occupied most Athabascans. No one has left us a comprehensive description of everyday life at the Landing, but we do have a few clues. Glimpses, but only glimpses, of the social structure and culture of this frontier community can be found in visitors' accounts of the village and its inhabitants, in a few private papers (a diary and some letters), and in the local newspapers (the *Northern Light*, the *Northern News*, and the *Athabasca Times*). Such meagre sources are hardly adequate, but they help us go some way in reconstructing the atmosphere of the Landing in these bustling years of expansion, when the villagers became townsfolk. Not all travellers

Dressed up for the ceremony of laying the corner stone of the new, brick public school building, Athabasca Landing, September 26, 1913. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 001789.

A general view of Athabasca Landing, 1911. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2620.

who passed through the Landing on their way north were complimentary about what they found. Ernest Thompson Seton, who visited the village in the spring of 1907, made these rather caustic comments in his book *The Arctic Prairies*, "Athabaska Landing is a typical frontier town. These are harsh words, but justified. We put up at the principal hotel: the other lodgers told me it was considered the worst hotel in the world."[1]

A typical frontier town, with the worst hotel in the world? Well, maybe. Isaie Gagnon's Grand Union Hotel did garner an unenviable reputation for crowded, dirty rooms and a leaky roof before it burned down in the great fire of August, 1913. But what about the rest of the town? How typical was it really? Most travellers seem to have been impressed by the uniqueness of the Landing, with its special role as "gateway to the North," its steamboats, its Athabasca Brigade, its ethnic mix of Cree, Métis, British and French-Canadians, its RNWMP headquarters, and its active Anglican mission. Schoolteacher and writer Agnes Deans Cameron visited Athabasca in 1908, and provided a more detailed and more sympathetic account in her book *The New North*:

> Athabasca Landing, a funnel through which percolates the whole trade between the wheat-belt and the Arctic, is the true gateway of the North. Seeing our baggage tucked away in the bar-room of the Grand Union Hotel, and snatching a hasty supper, we walk down to the river, its edges still encrusted with fragments of winter ice. It is an incomparable sunset, the light a veritable split spectrum, spreading itself with prodigality over the swift river. … Off a little jetty some lads are fishing. There is a camaraderie felt by all fishermen, and soon I have a rod and access to the chunk of moose-meat which is the community bait. Within half an hour, rejoicing in a string of seventeen chub and grayling, we wend our way back to the little village. The elements that compose it? Here we have a large establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company, an Anglican and a Roman Mission, a little public school, a barracks of the Northwest Mounted Police, a post office, a dozen stores, a reading-room, two hotels, and a blacksmith shop, and for population a few whites leavening a host of Cree-Scots half-breeds.
>
> Athabasca Landing is part of the British Empire. But English is at a discount here; Cree and French and a mixture of these are spoken on all sides. …
>
> If local colour and local smell is what we have come north for, we find it here. Mr. Brabant came up with "I wonder if that bunch of nuns is going to get here in time to take scows with us," and we pass into the billiard room [of the hotel] and watch the game. The players gliding round in moccasins are all half-breeds. The exclamations are for the most part in Cree or bad French, and as I crowd in looking for some local terms all that I hear intelligible is, "That is damn close, I think me."[2]

For Agnes Cameron the most noteworthy—and untypical—things about Athabasca Landing were the dominance of the HBC. the large number of Métis employed on the river, the very visible presence of the mounties, and the missionary work among the Indigenous peoples still being done by the Anglican Church. Her description of the Landing is the most extensive we possess for this period, but it can be supplemented by other accounts, such as that given by author Janey Canuck (the pen name of Emily G. Murphy) in her travel book, *Seeds of Pine*. These are some of her impressions of the town in 1912:

> Here at the Landing, it makes no difference where one goes in search of diversion, for it is to be found in all directions and every foot of the way. This morning

Cree women being visited by a white woman, Athabasca Landing, 1912. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-28.

> I preferably take to the hill back of the town, for the water has drained off it to the river and the footing is good. The hill is held by the Honourable the Hudson's Bay Company, who have owned it time out of mind. … Ignorant people like the wheat sellers of Winnipeg, speak of this settlement as a new place, a mushroomic upstart of yesterday, whereas it was an old post before Winnipeg was thought of. North of the Landing, there are thirty thousand people who depend on the local rivermen to bring down their year's supplies, so that this is a place of no small concernment and it has seven streets, you might say. As yet, its houses and public buildings do not run to paint or useless ornamentation, and there is a stolid practicability about its front doors. … On this hill, the Hudson's Bay Company, "the world's old trust," have erected their store-house and the factor's residence. These are log buildings, austerely square and ugly in the extreme. In the factor's garden is an old sundial which adds the needed touch of romance to the place also it connotes a fine leisureliness.[3]

After inspecting downtown Athabasca and the HBC property, Janey Canuck wandered farther afield, to the outskirts of town where the log shacks of Métis families were located. She even found an Indigenous camp, and was moved to comment on the difference in living conditions enjoyed by Athabasca's whites and natives:

> The Indian's idea of a house is a different one to the trader's. It is not a place to be lived in, but exists merely as a shield from the weather. Accompanied by Goodfellow, a frowsy, stump-tailed dog from the hotel, I visit the Indian houses here-about. … A thin, pock-marked squaw invites me into a shack or, more properly, into a baby-warren which fairly bristles with a flock of semi-wild children, for, as yet, the squaws have not deliberately ceased from having children. What I said awhile ago about the Indian's house applies equally to his children's wearing apparel. It shelters rather than ornaments. Their clothes seem to have no visible supports, but are held to their small fat bodies by some inexplicable attraction. … An unsavoury mess of entrails is stewing in a back pot and filling the house with an unpleasant odour. I try not to show my repugnance lest my hostesses consider the white woman to be proud-stomached with no proper appetite for lowly faring. I tell them as I take down the blanket from the door—not untruthfully you understand, but as a small matter of immediate expediency—how it is light one desires rather than fresh air, and that it is hard to see aright when one has been walking in the sunlight. This Hudson's Bay blanket is, next to *uskik*, the kettle, the one indispensable thing in an Indian Household. It serves as a door, a coat, a carpet, a bed, and for other things which it boots not to mention. It is, therefore, well to be explanatory when one removes it from its place."[4]

Janey Canuck's account of the Landing also describes HBC rivermen loading scows, the frustrations of the RNWMP in dealing with the liquor traffic, the arrival of the first train, and the optimism of new homesteaders preparing to conquer their land, but what fascinated her most was the everyday lives of native women. She talked not only to residents of the camp but also to Métis women, the wives, girlfriends and daughters of the men of the Athabasca Brigade. One especially informative conversation was with a girl whom she identified in *Seeds of Pine* as "Justine." Her description of Justine, and of the local RNWMP officer's contemptuous attitude towards her, reveals something of the uneasy mistrust that underlay the superficially amicable relations between whites and natives at the Landing:

> She is the prettiest breed-girl in the country and, by the same token, the frailest. "Believe me, Madame," explained an old officer of the Mounted Police, the other day, "those eyes were never given her for the good of her soul. She is a little worth-nothing person like all the other breed-girls." This man despises breed-women and he has made a sufficiently intimate study of them to form an opinion. He wishes they were all dead. …
>
> Justine's white father must have had a head and shoulders of the most perfect classical type. As she

Cree family in camp on the outskirts of Athabasca Landing, 1912. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-29.

sits on the beach with a light shawl drawn down over her head, this girl resembles greatly the Madonna of Bouguereau. I tell her this, and we talk for a long while. She thinks my suggestion that she marry a riverman, or a trapper, and have quite a large family, a wholly foolish suggestion. It causes her to think little of both my discernment and my knowledge of men. Rivermen, she would have me understand, hardly ever come home, and when they do, only to get drunk and beat their wives. A white man won't marry a breed girl, nowadays, and if he should give her his heart, he expects it to be returned sometime. Still, Justine considers his transient affections to be preferable to those of the breed's, in that a white man seldom strikes his girl.[5]

No doubt Janey Canuck's perceptions were influenced by Emily Murphy's strongly held Social Darwinist views; however, if Justine's testimony is accepted, the male/female relationships between Métis at the Landing were brutal, while those between white men and Métis girls, while less violent, were casual and exploitative. Probably the men didn't see it quite this way, and most likely there were, in any case, exceptions to the rule. Agnes Cameron, for instance, witnessed a scene that implied a more affectionate bond between

Métis rivermen, under the command of Magnus Brown, building a small steamboat for the Anglican mission, Athabasca Landing, c. 1912. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 15.

one riverman and his woman:

> In a store near the hotel we see a Cree boatman purchasing a farewell present for his sweetheart. As he turns over the fancy articles, we have bad form enough to observe his choice. He selects a fine-tooth comb, for which he pays fifty cents, or as he calls it, "two skins" and asks, as he tucks it into his jerkin, if he can change it "if she doesn't like it."[6]

Like Janey Canuck, Agnes Cameron was intrigued by the appearance and customs of the non-white inhabitants of the Landing, and also by the efforts of missionaries to convert them. In her opinion, the presence of the Métis rivermen gave Athabasca its distinctive atmosphere:

> The swart boatmen are the most interesting feature of the place,—tall, silent moccasined men, followed at heel by ghostlike dogs. From this point north dogs are the beasts of burden; the camel may be the ship of the desert, but the dog is the automobile of the silences. The wise missionary translates his Bible stories into the language of the latitude. As Count von Harnmerstein says, "What means a camel to a Cree? I tell him it is a moose that cannot go through a needle's eye." The Scriptural sheep and goats become caribou and coyotes, and the celestial Lamb is typified by the baby seal with its coat of shimmering whiteness.[7]

As curious and eccentric outsiders, Cameron and Canuck may have seen more of Cree and Métis life than did most respectable white women living at the Landing, since the town's "ladies" did not mix with native women or have anything to do with lumbering, boatbuilding and river transportation. Reading between the lines of their accounts, we can see that the community of Athabasca Landing exhibited a fairly well-defined system of social stratification. At the bottom of the social ladder were the Indigenous families. One step higher were the ordinary Métis boatmen and labourers, and their women and children. A cut above them were the smaller group of river pilots, the men such as Captain Shot who led the scow brigades and who supervised the annual ritual of boat construction at the Landing. They were the only non-whites who had won and retained the grudging respect of white society. By 1912, when Janey Canuck met him, Shot was revered as a venerable institution. Her recollection of the encounter underlines Shot's prestige, and the extent to which cultural and racial barriers had, in a few cases, been broken down by decades of cooperation in the business of northern transportation:

> Antoine presents me to Captain Shot, an Indian who has been on this river for forty-eight years. The captain is seventy-three. ... I say that Antoine "presents me" and I say it advisedly, for the North levels people, by which is meant the primitive north where they live with nature. In this environment, the man who builds boats and supplies food or fuel, is the superior of the

Some of Athabasca Landing's social elite on a NTC pleasure excursion, including Captain Barber, Mrs. Leslie Wood, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Falconer, Mrs. Harvey Cull, Mrs. A. Greer, and Romeo Farrell. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00694.

> man or woman who writes, or pronounces theories. I may be able to hoodwink the people up south as to my importance in our community, but it is different here.[8]

Captain Shot may have been at the pinnacle of the native status ladder, in European eyes, but he was nonetheless not a regular social visitor to the homes of the elite of Athabasca society.

Moreover, in addition to this racial-cum-linguistic barrier, the Landing's social structure exhibited a strong degree of class stratification among those of European extraction. At the bottom of this social hierarchy were the wage labourers and other paid employees who could be dismissed at will when their services were not required: the loggers, freighters, sawmill hands, carpenters, painters, shop assistants, transportation clerks, waitresses and cleaning women. Their status was higher than that of the Métis boatmen, but lower, perhaps, than Captain Shot's. Above them in the social pyramid came the skilled craftsmen, such as blacksmiths and harnessmakers; the independent fur traders, such as Peachy Pruden and Colin Johnston; and the smaller shopkeepers. They were usually uneducated and deficient in social graces, but they had won sufficient economic freedom to stand proudly and defiantly independent in the world, and they were respected for that. By and large, however, they did not participate in the bridge parties, tennis matches and afternoon tea parties held by the upper layer of white Athabasca society.

Entry into the Landing's social elite required wealth, education, or a professional job. This respectable stratum included Athabasca's most successful businessmen, bank and trading company managers, government officers, police inspectors, doctors and clergymen, and, of course, their wives and offspring. It supplied the Landing with its mayor and village (or, from 1911, town) councillors, its Board of Trade members, School Board members, churchwardens and Sunday-school teachers, as well as the presidents of such local societies as the Canadian Club, the Overseas Club and the Freemasons. Among the elite during the years 1909–1913 were such pillars of society as HBC manager Leslie Wood, who served as President of the Board of Trade, and local capitalist James H. Wood, who was elected Mayor. Then there were bank manager A. L. Sawle, hotelier Isaie Gagnon, and the local manager of the Northern Transportation Company, Captain Barber, not to mention such prominent Athabasca merchants as J.L. Lessard, Louis Couture, George Hees, Lance Smith and Harvey Cull. At least three businessmen/farmers were part of this frontier bourgeoisie: Joseph Daigneau, Louis Menard, and James Minns; while the professions supplied lawyer Frank Pottage, accountant S.R. Farquharson, and doctors Joseph Boulanger, John Giller and Joseph Olivier. Other members of Athabasca's most respectable social circles were NWMP officers G.E. Sanders, T.A. Wroughton, and A.C.E. McDonnell, and the Reverends Moxhay, Scott, Robins and White (Anglican), Beaudry and Desmarais (Roman Catholic), and Hopkins, Hautin, Haywood and Bole (Methodist). The wives and daughters of these influential men were known collectively as "the ladies of the Landing," and were the behind-the-scenes organizers of much of the community's respectable social life.[9]

The presence of several police inspectors and their families in Athabasca "society" was the result of the reorganization of the RNWMP in the new province of Alberta. In 1905 a new police district, called the Athabasca District, was created to cover the area north of the Athabasca River. Initially the RNWMP division, "N" Division, assigned to patrol this area was based on Lesser Slave Lake, and Athabasca Landing continued to be served by two constables from "G" Division, whose headquarters was at Fort Saskatchewan. But the Landing's growing population

Mrs. Leslie Wood (right) and her niece, Nellie Young, Athabasca Landing. Library and Archives Canada RCMP Archives, e999916227-u.

and improved postal and telegraphic services soon dictated a change in this arrangement. In October, 1908, the headquarters of "N" Division was transferred to Athabasca Landing, and the command was given to Superintendent W.H. Routledge. His force comprised thirty-one officers, eight of whom were stationed at the Landing. "N" Division had responsibility not only for the Athabasca and Peace Districts, but also for the entire Mackenzie Valley as far north as Herschel Island in the Arctic Ocean, a vast region of 620,000 square miles that was equivalent to one-fifth of Canada's entire land mass. So although the number of mounties in "N" Division was quite small, it was an important and difficult command, a posting given only to a senior and seasoned officer of the Force. Superintendent Routledge's tour of duty came to an end in May, 1909, and, later that year, he was replaced by Colonel Gilbert Sanders, D.S.O., a prestigious addition to the Landing's social elite.

Superintendent Sanders organized several extended patrols in the North West Territories and the Yukon, including one 1,700 mile overland journey with pack horses to Whitehorse, Y.T., and he spent several months each year travelling in the north, visiting the men under his command. But for most of the remainder of his two and one-half year stint with "N" Division he lived with his family at the Landing.[10] For part of this time, his teenage daughter, Constance Sanders, kept a diary that affords us some glimpses of the everyday life and social activities of respectable, middle-class women at the Landing in 1909–1910.

The first half of Miss Sanders's diary covers the months of August to December 1910, before Colonel Sanders received a furlough and took his family on holiday to England. She recorded her daily routine of helping her ailing mother with the shopping, cooking, housecleaning and entertaining, and also her weekly round of church going (the family were Anglicans) and Sunday-school teaching. She spent much of her leisure time writing letters, riding her pony, playing tennis or skating, and playing bridge or other card games. On the whole her life was not onerous, although there sometimes seemed to be an endless amount of dusting, baking, washing, sewing, dressmaking and embroidery to be done, tasks that Miss Sanders referred to as "my regular work" and rarely bothered to describe in detail. To judge from her entries, she had virtually no contact whatsoever with the Indigenous peoples, Métis, or lower-class whites at the Landing, except the handful of children to whom she gave religious instruction each Sunday, but she did listen with interest to her mother's reports of her social visits to poorer neighbours, and to her father's remarks about the problems of law enforcement in the North, She enjoyed watching the Métis boatmen at work, but apparently had no higher opinion of them than had Colonel Sanders; one laconic diary entry read: "The halfbreeds are having a great time tonight, all drunk and making a great row, about 4 in guardroom."[11]

Family quarrels occasionally disturbed the tranquility of the Sanders home, when the stress and responsibility of the Superintendent's job affected his nerves. A warm hearted but irascible man with a choleric temper, the Colonel sometimes released his pent-up frustration in bitter arguments with his wife, who did not relish her enforced absence from sophisticated society.[12] Mrs. Sanders was in fragile health, and during her frequent bouts of illness her daughter was left to run the house and to cope with visitors, some of whom (such as the Anglican parson, the Reverend Scott, one of Miss Sanders's least favourite persons) seemed to turn up with unnecessary frequency and, as she put it, "don't seem to know when to go home!"[13] But these periods of strain and unhappiness were infrequent, and as a rule Miss Sanders's life was pleasant and relatively easy, although she complained that it lacked excitement. Her first diary entry was a synopsis of her nine months at the Landing since her arrival in

Superintendant Gilbert Sanders of the RNWMP, Athabasca Landing, 1909. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-9.

November, 1909:

> Came here Nov. 6: thought it awful at first. Now like it. Spent a pretty dull winter. Dad was away for about three weeks—had one dance just after we came. Used to have some one in now & again for bridge—Smith or Box. Used to skate nearly every afternoon by ourselves, P[hoebe] & I. Sometimes Dad, Mrs. Leslie Wood & Nell Young were here, used to see a lot of them. They left here in June. Poor Mr. Leslie Wood died in May. P. & I each got ponies earlier in the spring, about April after P. had been into Edmonton for a couple of weeks—we used to ride every day. ... Met a lot of people this summer passing through—Dad was away two months up north, went in scows down river. Phoebe left with Archdeacon & Mrs. Robins for Ireland on the 21 June (sailed) about a month before Dad came home—the first time she had been further east than Winnipeg—she loved it all. I miss her terribly.[14]

Subsequent diary entries recorded a great deal of letter writing to sister Phoebe and other friends, much dressmaking and baking, innumerable bridge parties, occasional excursions for berry picking, picnicking or riding in the countryside, and a lot of social visiting.

Most of this visiting and entertaining was simply with friends and neighbours, but Mrs. Sanders also paid calls on local residents known to have suffered family bereavements or to be in financial distress. For example, the diary entry for September 22nd states that "Mother went to see a poor little Mrs. McK. who lives about a mile out with no floor to their shack or anything & her husband does nothing but drink—he is practically destitute—they did all they could for her, mother & Mrs. Walker.[15]

In sharp contrast to such reports of poverty and unemployment in the community were Miss Sanders's accounts of dinner parties given by members of the Landing's social elite, such as this one welcoming the new Bishop of Athabasca, Bishop Holmes, and his family:

> Mrs. Cull came to call, she found us in a great state as we had not had time to tidy ourselves up—then in the evening we all except mother and dad went to McKernans to dinner. Oh such a dinner—first we had hot roast beef sliced on the table & a cup of tea at each place, then we had rhubarb with nuts in it, & cake. Mother & Dad were at Walkers playing crib.[16]

Other dinner parties were less formal, such as this impromptu affair in celebration of a successful hunting trip by a family friend:

> Box brought us three (prairie) chicken, so we asked him and Hautin in for dinner—we had to pluck and fix the chicken & it kept us working till about four. We lay down a few mins—Mrs. Barber came and rang at the bell four or five times but we were not dressed so could not let her in—they came for dinner & afterwards we played all sorts of kiddies games. Methodist parsons are hard to entertain.[17]

If Miss Sanders had trouble entertaining clergymen, whether Anglican or Methodist, she had no difficulty whatever in amusing Lance Smith, the youthful secretary/treasurer of the Board of Trade and owner of a local lumber company. He obviously found her very attractive, and was always eager for her company, playing bridge, making up a tennis foursome, dancing at the hotel, or riding in the countryside. Miss Sanders greatly enjoyed riding and could usually be persuaded to fetch her pony from the nearby livery stable. This is

Constance Sanders (right) with elder sister Phoebe (left) and friend Jen Cummings, visiting a survey camp at Athabasca Landing, 1911. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-11.

Superintendant Sanders and party leaving Athabasca Landing on an inspection patrol of the Athabasca and Mackenzie districts, 1910. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-18.

RNWMP detachment, Athabasca Landing, 1913. Glenbow Archives, NA-2928-52.

Nellie Young at the water pump, Athabasca Landing, 1912. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-16.

A hunting trip on the Athabasca River HBC manager A.C. McKay (second from left) led the party. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00716.

Lance Smith (left) and friends on a fishing trip. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00720.

Constance Sanders (right), with sister Phoebe and friend Jen Cummings, Athabasca Landing, 1911. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-13.

her record of one such expedition with Mr. Smith:

> Saturday morning we made marmalade, Smith came & asked if I would go for a ride in afternoon so I said yes, though I should have stayed home & worked. We started at 2.30 & rode up Milns trail about 2 miles or more, then we rode up the Edmonton trail to meet Dad who was expected home. I got off my pony to try Smith's gun & then he wanted to try my pony so I let him—I never thought anything about it but I suppose people who heard might make up great stories, m[other] said so. We met Dad about 7 miles out & escorted him home. Smith shot 1 partridge—we asked Smith into tea, & we played bridge for a little while afterwards.[18]

Miss Sanders also teamed up with Miss Barber, daughter of NTC manager Captain Barber, for excursions outside the village, as on this berry-picking expedition in the fall:

> Got up 7-30. Washed out dress & couple of blouses—about one Mr. Haughton came in & said he was getting up a crowd to go berry picking, so I went. There was Mrs. Jim Wood—Mrs.Cull—Mr. & Mrs. Walker—Miss Leng & Miss Barber—Mr. Haughton & me. We walked all over the place (across the river), over fallen timber & everything, & hardly got a berry—but we had a good ramble, Miss B. & I on the lead. Came home at four,

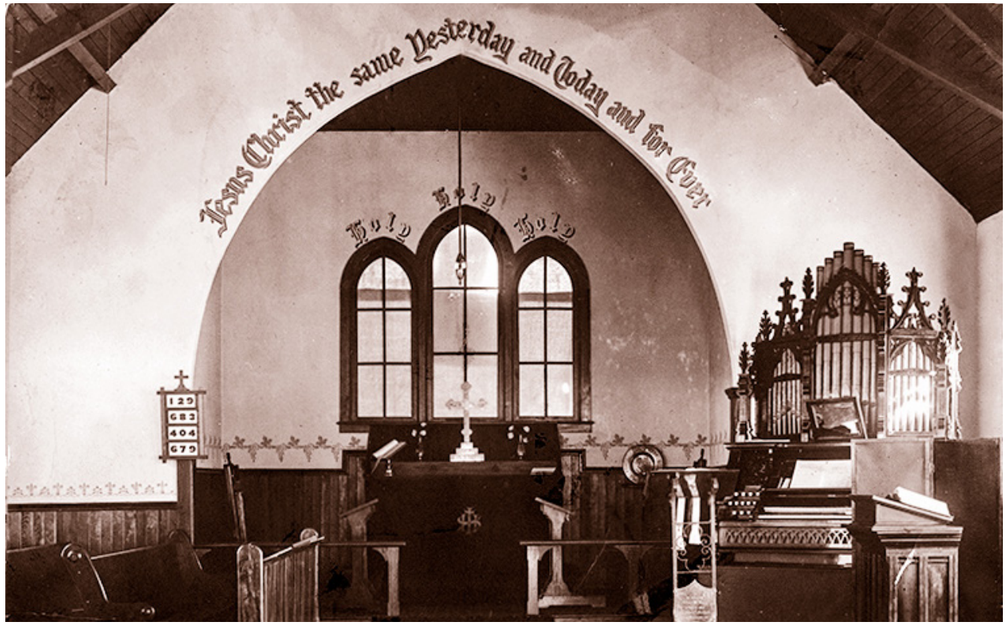
Constance Sanders (right) and Jen Cummings, Athabasca Landing, 1911. Glenbow Archives, NA-2788-15.

School teacher H. H. Hall playing tennis, Athabasca Landing, c. 1910. Athabasca Archives, 00448.

> wrote P[hoebe] & got tea, then went up & played tennis, Mr. Haughton & me against Box & Miss Barber. Came home, found Mr. Jackson & Inspector Metel: so we four played bridge—Mr. McDonald came in also & watched, he does not care for the game. Gave them coffee & cake & they left at 11 o'clock.[19]

The way that evening ended, with a coffee party and bridge playing, was typical of the Sanders family's social life. Indeed playing cards was the activity most recorded in Miss Sanders's diary during August to December, 1910: it was not only a means of whiling away the autumn and winter evenings, it was also a social gambit, a way of breaking the ice with the various NWMP officers, judges, clergymen, businessmen and other local personalities (such as Jim Cornwall or Mayor Wood) who came to call on the Colonel and his pretty daughter. Yet it would be wrong to give the impression that Miss Sanders's life was just a pleasurable whirl of bridge, tennis, riding, picnics, dances and entertaining. She had her serious side, too: she performed her household duties conscientiously, she successfully deputized for her sick mother on many occasions, and she was a regular church goer and Sunday-school teacher. Indeed the Sanders family appears to have been among the staunchest members

All Saints Anglican Church, Athabasca Landing, 1907. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2576.



Interior of All Saints Anglican Church, Athabasca Landing, 1907. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 56.

of the Anglican congregation at Athabasca Landing, sometimes turning up for Sunday service when no other parishioners did, and even, on one occasion, when the Reverend Scott himself failed to arrive in time to officiate. During a brief period when there was no Anglican clergyman at the Landing, Mrs. and Miss Sanders even attended the Methodist church, although Colonel Sanders, a churchwarden of the Anglican parish, could not bring himself to do so. But when the Anglican church was functioning, Miss Sanders was there each Sunday, often for both morning and evening service. This is an extract from a typical Sunday entry in her diary:

> Got up at 8. & Dad, Edith & I went to Church … mother stayed home to cook … In afternoon I took the Sunday School, the whole thing, & then came home & went for a walk away up to Brazeaus, then came home and showed the girls my pony & got tea. Mr. McDonald stayed, he is really going tomorrow I think. Went to Church & we had about 40—we all went & the Bishop & Mr. McD. came in afterwards, we gave them coffee & cake & they left about 11.30.[20]

Sometimes the congregation was considerably smaller, and the service did not proceed so smoothly, as on this occasion, when the congregation had to resort to hymn singing at the Sanders's home:

> Went to church in morning, all of us—then to Sunday School, we had about 8. Came home & wrote to Gladys Perry to congratulate her on her engagement to Inspector Jennings. Wrote to Phoebe to thank her for Photos we got last night, she looks very different. … Went to Church in evening & all the lights went out just before the sermon, it was funny to see Dad and Smith stalking around in the dark with torches trying to light them but the gasoline had run out so it came to an abrupt finish. All the congregation except the two police and Rennison came over to the house. Miss Barber, Smith, Stanton, Scott & Fisher, also Mr. Hantin. We had quite a musical evening & they never left till 12.[21]

The church the Sanders family attended was All Saints, a wooden clap-board building that had been built in 1907 to replace the small log church of St. Matthew's Mission which had done service since 1897. The new parish church had been authorized in 1906 by Bishop William Reeve, who had taken over the Athabasca See from Bishop Young two years previously.

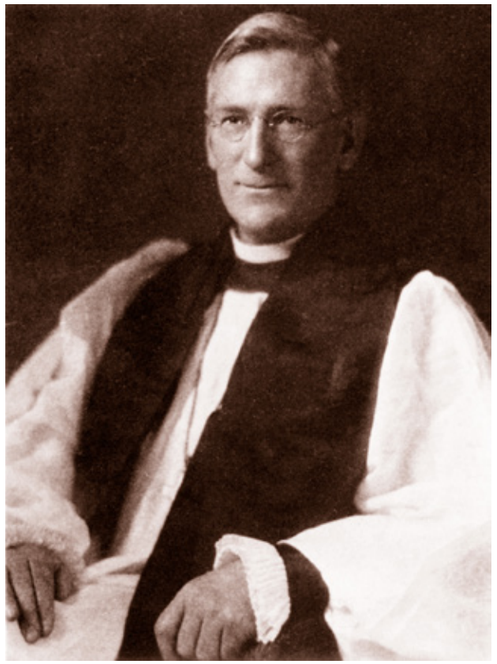
Bishop Reeve administered the diocese of Athabasca and the diocese of Mackenzie River from his headquarters at Athabasca Landing for three years, but he was frequently away from the Landing visiting mission stations in the Far North and organizing the expansion of the Anglican Church's activities in

The *Northern News* office, c. 1910. Athabasca Archives Roberts Collection, 00220.

the Peace district. He therefore appointed a parish priest to take care of the congregation at Athabasca Landing and in the newly settled areas south and east of Athabasca. The Reverend Charles Pritchard was the last rector of St. Matthew's and the first of All Saints', and he supervised the moving of the old log church across Young Street and onto the three-lot site purchased from the HBC, where it served for several more decades as a parish hall. The Reverend Pritchard was the first Anglican clergyman at the Landing to spend a considerable portion of his time riding out into the countryside to serve his rural parishioners: from 1906 onwards he held regular monthly services at various homesteads in the Pine Creek, South Athabasca, and Colinton districts.[22] When he left the Landing in 1908 he was replaced by the Reverend F.W. Moxhay, who took an active interest in the social and business life of the Landing, and founded its first newspaper, the *Northern Light*, in November.

Moxhay printed the paper himself on the old printing press that Bishop Young had kept in his study, and he also used the press to keep up the Church's missionary work among the cultural groups of the region. Agnes Cameron was impressed, and slightly amused, by his missionary zeal among the Indigenous peoples and their children when she visited in 1908:

Bishop George Holmes. Photograph courtesy of All Saints Anglican Church, Athabasca.



Bishop Edwin Robins. Photograph courtesy of All Saints Anglican Church, Athabasca.

> At the foot of the hill we visit the English parsonage, with its old-time sun-dial at the garden-gate. Within, we find what must surely be the farthest north printing press. Here two devoted women have spent years of their lives printing in Cree on a hand-press syllabic hymns and portions of the Gospel for the enlightenment of the Indians. We wander into the school where a young teacher is explaining to his uneasy disciples the intricacies of Present Worth and Compound Interest. Idly we wonder to what use these bare-footed half-Cree urchins will put their exact banking knowledge.[23]

Moxhay only produced a few issues of his newspaper, as businessmen Frederick M. Watt and J.C. Macquarie began publishing the *Northern News* in January, 1909, and his stay at the Landing was fairly short. In the summer of 1909 he was sent to the Peace Country to establish a mission at Lake Saskatoon, and the parsonage at Athabasca Landing once again temporarily housed a Bishop. This was the Reverend George Holmes who had taken over in an acting capacity the previous year after Bishop Reeve had resigned to become Assistant Bishop of Toronto. Holmes had been confirmed as the new Bishop of Athabasca in April, 1909. After a few months at the Landing, however, Bishop Holmes, much to the regret of the Sanders family, decided to move his headquarters to Lesser Slave Lake. Why he did so is uncertain, but he seems to have been influenced by three factors: the rapid growth of settlement in the Peace country, the lack of a resident minister at Lesser Slave Lake (where he himself had previously served as minister and missionary), and the decrepit condition of the mission house at the Landing (which he decided to rebuild).[24]

Bishop Holmes's decision to move meant that the Parish of All Saints needed a new rector, and his choice fell on the Reverend Edwin Robins. Robins quickly proved himself to be one of the most dedicated, hard working and efficient of Bishop Holmes's coworkers in the see of Athabasca, and by June, 1910, he had been appointed Archdeacon. After a holiday-cum-fundraising trip to Ireland and England (the journey on which he and Mrs. Robins were accompanied by Phoebe Sanders), Archdeacon Robins threw himself into his new duties which effectively consisted of administering the diocese of Athabasca, since Bishop Holmes also had the vast Mackenzie River diocese to look after. In fact Holmes spent much of 1911 in the Far North, and then journeyed, via Winnipeg and Toronto, to the British Isles, where he undertook a speaking tour for the Missionary Society for the Church of England in Canada. His death in England, in February, 1912, again left the Diocese of Athabasca without a bishop until Archdeacon Robins was consecrated in November of that year.[25]

Meanwhile, however, Robins's duties as archdeacon and acting bishop had left All Saints, Athabasca Landing, without a resident clergyman, which was why there was occasionally no ordained minister available to take Sunday service in the fall and early winter of 1910. The gap was filled, temporarily, by lay readers and theological students, and then by the Reverend Malcolm Scott, the clergyman whom Miss Sanders so disliked entertaining. The Rev. Scott supervised the construction of a hostel for missionaries and immigrants and a new residence for Archdeacon Robins at the Landing.

After his appointment, Bishop Robins did return to Athabasca periodically, and he kept the Diocesan See at the Landing until 1916, when it was moved to Peace River Crossing.[26] But Athabasca Landing's Anglican congregation saw relatively little of its new bishop during these years since he directed most of his energies to constructing churches and to creating new parishes in the Peace District.

A new rector, the Reverend A.S. White, took over All Saints early in 1913, and was instrumental in obtaining a pipe organ for the church. He also created the Wider Parish of Athabasca by encouraging his rural flock to build small churches in their own localities to serve the spiritual needs of the thousands of new settlers pouring in to the Athabasca region. The results of his policy of decentralization and expansion were the consecration of Holy Trinity Church in Pleasant Valley, St. James's at Pine Creek, St. Mark's at Flat Lake, St. Andrew's in Colinton (all built in 1913), and St. Alban's at South Athabasca (completed in 1915). By this time the work of the Wider Parish required more than one minister, and the Rev. White was aided by several younger clergymen, one of whom, the Reverend Robert Little, would become the rector of All Saints and Archdeacon of Athabasca in 1928.[27] Clearly the Anglican Church, although plagued as always by a lack of funds, was flourishing in the town of Athabasca and in the Athabasca area on the eve of the First World War.

Much the same can be said of the Landing's Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches. The Methodist minister whom Miss Sanders found "hard to entertain" was the Reverend Hautin, the second resident pastor of that denomination in Athabasca. The first, the Reverend C.F. Hopkins, had arrived in 1907 and had immediately set about constructing a church hall, a parsonage, a stable and a reading room. The hall was designed not only for worship on Sundays but for social gatherings and public meetings through the week, while the upper floor accommodated travellers passing through the Landing or settlers waiting to take up homesteads. The attached reading room was an important acquisition for the Landing's cultural life, and it impressed many visitors, including Agnes Cameron:

> Opposite the hotel is a reading-room built by a Methodist parson who also made the furniture with his own hands; magazines, books, writing-material, games are available to all. This practical work of one man who accepted the responsibility of being his brother's keeper appealed to us.[28]

The Rev. Hopkins was obviously a determined and energetic man, so it is not surprising that he quite quickly assembled a Methodist congregation of several dozen of the Landing's small businessmen, craftsmen and labourers, among both the whites and the Métis of Scottish ancestry. By November, 1908, he was conducting the first wedding service in his church (that of John Keith and Elvira McKernon), and the next April saw him baptizing two baby girls, Daisy and Violet, twin daughters of parishioners Christopher and Elizabeth Johnston. When the Rev. Hopkins moved to open a church in Grande Prairie in the spring of 1910, he left behind him at Athabasca Landing not only the

Christopher and Elizabeth Johnston with eldest daughter Letitia and twins Violet and Daisy, born April 14, 1909, the first white twins born at Athabasca Landing. Athabasca Archives, 00615.

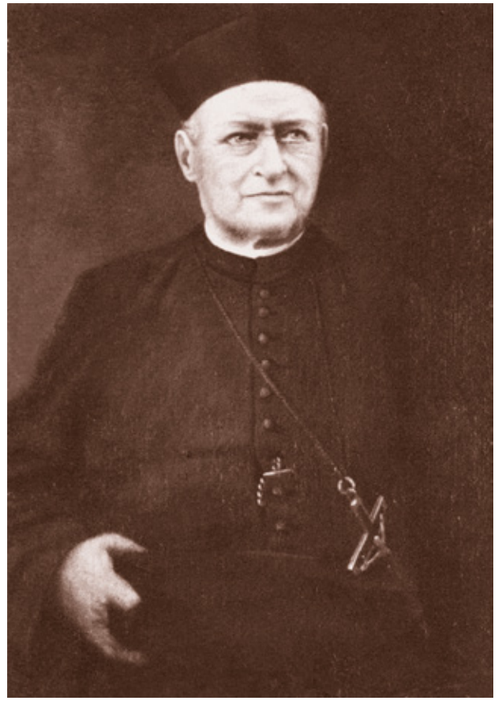
fruits of his labours as a carpenter but also a rapidly growing flock that would soon require a bigger church than that first, multi-purpose hall.[29]

Hopkins's successor, the Reverend Hautin, stayed less than a year, and in June, 1911, was replaced by the Reverend Ernest Haywood. Haywood was confronted with the same dilemma as his Anglican counterparts: there was a flourishing parish to serve at the Landing, but there were also many rural communities springing up around Athabasca that he wanted to visit, and he found that he spent most weekdays riding from homestead to homestead, to the neglect of his charges at the Landing.[30]

The next Methodist minister, the Reverend A.T. Bole, placed greater emphasis on his work in the town of Athabasca, and soon decided that a larger church was essential. He sold the old Methodist Hall (it was converted into a hotel, but then burned down in the great fire of August, 1913), purchased land for a new church site from the HBC, and hired an Edmonton architect, E.W. Morehouse, to design a building capable of seating over 200 worshippers. Construction of the new church took the entire winter of 1912/13 and was carried out by two local building contractors, Barrow and Tarrant.[31] The result was the finest example of wood-frame Gothic Revival architecture in Alberta, and, with the possible exception of the smaller and slightly older All Saints

The new Methodist Church built at Athabasca Landing in 1912/13. Athabasca Archives, 01266.

St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic Church and Father Beaudry's residence, Athabasca Landing. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 2568.



Father A. Desmarais, parish priest of St. Gabriel's, 1911. Athabasca Archives Gorman Collection, 00765.

Anglican Church, the most beautiful building still standing in Athabasca today.

The very size of the new church expressed the faith that the Rev. Bole shared with so many other townsfolk in 1912/13, that Athabasca was destined to become the largest town in Northern Alberta, and the opening ceremony on May 18th, 1913, resembled a victory celebration more than a religious service. This is how the *Northern News* described the event:

> The opening of the new Methodist church last Sunday was a brilliant function, many important people from Edmonton and other large cities being present. The Rev. J.E. Hughson, pastor of the McDougall Methodist Church, Edmonton, assisted by the Rev. Mr. Lewis, preached morning and evening and addressed a public meeting in the afternoon. Representatives of almost every denomination were present and showed great interest and admiration in the splendid new church and its appointments. Religious differences seemed to be forgotten in the great common cause and a hearty response was given to an appeal for funds to carry on the heavy undertaking.
>
> On Monday evening the ladies of the congregation gave a banquet in the basement of the church which lasted from six to eight, after which the evening was given over to a splendid entertainment of songs and speeches. The program rendered was as follows: anthem, choir; report, by the secretary-treasurer, Oran Mills; solo, Miss Pilkie: address, Rev. J.E. Hughson; solo, Mr. Stanton; address, Bishop Robins; solo, Miss Pilkie; address, Mayor Wood; solo, Mr. Stanton; address, Rev. Mr. Lewis; solo, Miss Pilkie; anthem, choir. Miss Pilkie is soprano soloist for McDougall Methodist church, Edmonton, and has a most beautiful voice, while Mr. Stanton, who is organist for All Saints church here, has a splendid baritone. …The ladies cleared about $200 at the banquet, and over $2,000 was realized during the two days' festival.[32]

Even after the erection of the new Methodist church, the building that dominated the skyline of Athabasca Landing, looking southwards from the river, was St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic Church. Built in 1906, one year before All Saints, on the south-west hill, St. Gabriel's was set apart from the village that clustered around the HBC warehouses and the stores and hotels that later became the heart of downtown Athabasca. This first Catholic church was a small, wooden hall with an adjoining vestry, and both buildings were constructed by Father Beaudry, the priest who had been placed in charge of the Oblate mission at the Landing in 1905. He added a small presbytery in 1908, but by the time that he was replaced by Father A. Desmarais in 1911, the original St. Gabriel's was proving inadequate to the needs of a congregation that had grown to 260 souls. Most of these Catholics were recent settlers of French-Canadian origin, or Métis of French or Irish extraction; few of them actually lived within the Landing townsite, most being located at either Baptiste Lake or east of Athabasca in the Pine Creek area. However, the Landing was a convenient site for a church intended to serve both these rural communities, and Father Desmarais soon decided to double St. Gabriel's seating capacity and to make improvements to the presbytery. By 1914 the church was equipped with a new bell and an organ, and could accommodate all the Catholics among the Athabasca Brigade when they poured into the Landing each spring to begin working on the HBC scows.[33]

The greatest achievement of the Roman Catholic missionaries at the Landing, however, was not the creation of St. Gabriel's parish and church, but the building and operation of the Sacred Heart Hospital. The first Sisters of Providence came to the Landing from Montreal in 1908, and they began their work in a boarding house owned by Isaie Gagnon, who provided

The Sisters of Providence Sacred Heart Hospital, Athabasca Landing, 1911. Athabasca Archives, 00620.

The Brick School, built in 1913/14 to replace the original wooden public school, Athabasca Landing. Athabasca Archives, 01276.

them with the entire third floor of the building and had his employees supply them with fresh milk, water and wood.[34] The nuns then looked for a permanent site to build a new hospital, initially considering a location east of the Tawatinaw River, but later rejecting this site in favour of lots within the HBC townsite. Negotiations with the Company proved difficult, but eventually Sister Sosthene, the first mother superior, accepted an HBC offer to let, on a ninety-nine year lease, land on the hillside, east of the Roman Catholic church.[35] Construction began in 1910, and by April, 1911, although the building was still incomplete, the sisters moved in and opened the hospital to its first patients. By this time the $5,000 initially raised for the project ($1,000 of which came from local donations) had been used up, and for the next few years Sister Sosthene and her small staff of four nuns and one secular nurse struggled to raise more funds and to keep their charitable operation going.

Local businesses provided credit, and individuals donated food and money, while three residents of the Landing, Isaie Gagnon, Anaclete Gauthier and Captain Barber, each paid for the equipment and furniture required to furnish a ward. Work on the second half of the building continued slowly, with local carpenters Joseph Langlais, Anaclete Gauthier and G. Ovelette donating their skill and time to the cause. Dr. Joseph Olivier also championed the project, helped design the up-to-date operating room, and donated a sterilizing outfit.[36] In 1912 the Landing's MLA, Mr. J.R. Boyle, visited the hospital and undertook to obtain a subsidy of thirty-five cents per day per patient from the Liberal government in Edmonton to help cover running costs. Yet, notwithstanding all this generosity, the Sisters of Providence had to borrow another $4,000 in order to see the hospital building completed. By the time it was officially opened in 1914, the Sacred Heart Hospital had cost an estimated $12,000.[37] It was a monument to the sisters' faith and determination, and to the optimism and generosity of the townsfolk of Athabasca who had refused to allow financial difficulties to ruin a noble enterprise.

Hon. Justice R. Boyle. MLA for Athabasca Landing from 1905–1913. Provincial Archives of Alberta Brown Collection, B 6860.

The same kind of almost visionary optimism lay behind the decision to proceed with another large and expensive building that is one of the landmarks of modern Athabasca, the Brick School. The Athabasca public school district (#839) had been organized in 1903, and the first one-room log school opened shortly thereafter as a rival to the Anglican mission school. With the growth in the Landing's population during the next decade, the initial building soon proved inadequate, and an extra room was added to house additional classes. In 1908, when the teacher was Alexander McLeod, the public school had forty-three children divided between eight grades, and the next year the number was forty-nine.[38] Each fall more students crowded into the wooden building, and by 1911 the School Board knew it had to act to solve the crisis. But it faced a severe problem: where to rebuild, and how to finance the project? Land in downtown Athabasca was by now very expensive, but the school, like the Sacred Heart Hospital, could not be located outside the townsite. Negotiations began with the HBC, and by Christmas a deal had been worked out: for five lots the School Board would pay $3,250.00, one quarter immediately and the remainder in instalments over the next three years. [39]

Now the School Board had to raise the money. An appeal for help went to local MLA, Justice Boyle, who happened to have been appointed Minister of Education in the Alberta government. Boyle could not provide much direct government funding for construction of the school, but he could, and would, provide a large loan guarantee. So, on November 16, 1912, debentures amounting to $40,000 were authorized by the Ministry of Education, and the construction of a multi-room school building could go ahead.[40] The Brick School was built during the winter of 1913/14, and by the next fall was ready

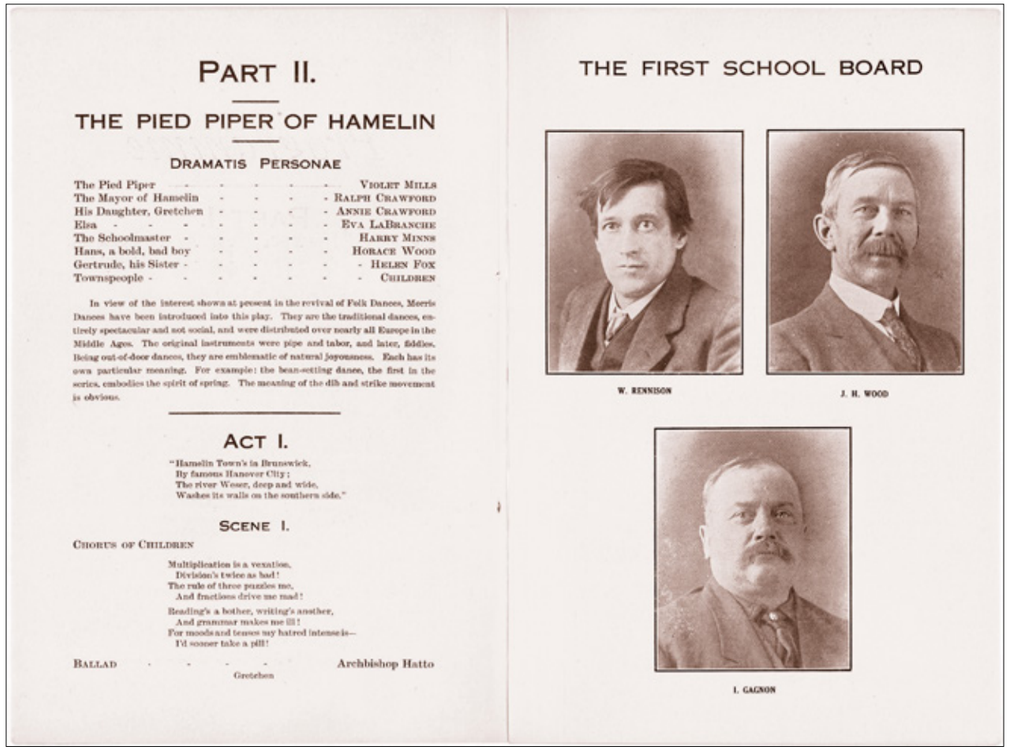
Laying the foundation stone of the new Brick School, September, 1913. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 42.

to accommodate its first 118 students. A special ceremony, held in September, 1913, provided an opportunity for self-congratulation by the town fathers who had worked so hard to obtain the land and to put the financing into place. Most of Athabasca's social elite was there, and several prominent people played roles in the ceremony, as this report in the *Northern News* indicates:

> On Friday afternoon last a unique ceremony was held which marks another epoch in the history of Athabasca. It was the laying of the cornerstone of the new and splendid public school building. It was also the laying of the stone of the first public building in Athabasca. The ceremony started at 3 p.m. and the stone was officially laid by Mr. Harvey F. Cull, Chairman of the Board. Under the shade of the old Union Jack the stone was laid, a silver trowel being used for the purpose. The trowel was presented to Mr. Cull by Mr. H.A. Barrow, the contractor. The trowel was suitably inscribed and the platform decorated with flags by Messrs. Cull, Farqueson and Benkie.
>
> Mr. Cull thanked the school board for the honor bestowed upon him. The school children sang O Canada under the direction of Miss Gill, the principal. A band was also in attendance. Speeches were made by Rev. A.S. White, Rev. T.H. Bole, who impressed upon the parents to send their children to school and that the truant system should be enforced to make education compulsory. Mayor J.H. Wood spoke of the first schoolhouse which was erected for $700. His child was the first white child to go to school in Athabasca. Other speakers were Mr. Rennison, Dr. Olivier, and Mr. Gagnon. The RN.W.M.P., commanded by Inspector McDonell, were in full dress. The children sang The Maple Leaf. A vote of thanks to Mr. Minns who acted as chairman. Mr. Daigneau proposed the vote of thanks, seconded by Mr. Barrow. The band played God Save The King.[41]

Like the Methodist Church, the Brick School was built big in anticipation of continued rapid growth in the town's population. It proved something of a white elephant and a financial millstone after World War I, when this anticipated growth failed to occur, but only in the 1960s, five decades after its construction, was it declared inadequate to the School Board's needs.

The Brick School was not the only new school opened in the Athabasca region in these years of expansion before the First World War. As homesteaders became established on their farms and made contact with their neighbours, they also began forming School Districts and building log schools to ensure that their children would receive



PART II.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Pied Piper - - - - - - VIOLET MILLS
The Mayor of Hamelin - - - - - RALPH CRAWFORD
His Daughter, Gretchen - - - - - ANNIE CRAWFORD
Elsa - - - - - - - EVA LABRANCHE
The Schoolmaster - - - - - - HARRY MINNS
Hans, a bold, bad boy - - - - - HORACE WOOD
Gertrude, his Sister - - - - - - HELEN FOX
Townspeople - - - - - - - CHILDREN

In view of the interest shown at present in the revival of Folk Dances, Morris Dances have been introduced into this play. They are the traditional dances, entirely spectacular and not social, and were distributed over nearly all Europe in the Middle Ages. The original instruments were pipe and tabor, and later, fiddles. Being out-of-door dances, they are emblematic of natural joyousness. Each has its own particular meaning. For example: the bean-setting dance, the first in the series, embodies the spirit of spring. The meaning of the dib and strike movement is obvious.

ACT I.

"Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover City:
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its walls on the southern side."

SCENE I.

CHORUS OF CHILDREN

Multiplication is a vexation,
Division's twice as bad!
The rule of three puzzles me,
And fractions drive me mad!
Reading's a bother, writing's another,
And grammar makes me ill!
For moods and tenses say hatred intensis—
I'd sooner take a pill!

BALLAD - - - - - Archbishop Hatto
Gretchen

THE FIRST SCHOOL BOARD

W. RENNISON

J. H. WOOD

I. GAGNON

The programme booklet for the concert celebrating the opening of the Brick School in February, 1914. Athabasca Archives, accession no. 95.19.

a basic education. The first School District formed outside the Landing was Keyes, some ten miles to the southeast, in 1908. A one-room, log school was constructed the next summer at a price of $144.00, and furnished with desks, a blackboard, and two maps—one of Alberta, and one of Canada. The first teacher hired was Miss Jettie O. Day, who later married freighter Scottie Willey. After four months the school had to close down temporarily because of poor attendance caused by particularly cold weather.[42] Nonetheless, the Keyes school continued, and when the main settlement boom occurred in the Athabasca area from 1911 onwards others like it sprang up in a large semicircle around the Landing. The Golden Sunset district, which covered the area between Athabasca and Kinnoul (Colinton), was the second to build a rural log school, about two miles north-east of the present-day village of Colinton. That was constructed in 1911, beating by a year the schools of the South Athabasca, Dover, Parkhurst, Lahaieville districts. Atlanta and Toles followed in 1913, and West Athabasca, Meanook, Colinton, Rodger's Chapter, and Forest in 1914.[43] So, by the eve of World War I, the Brick School in the town of Athabasca had thirteen smaller rivals serving most of the farms to the north-east, east, south-east, south, and west of the Landing. Only south Baptiste Lake and the lands north of the Athabasca River still lacked basic educational services.

Construction of the Brick School would not have been possible without help from the Ministry of Education, and the government's decision to locate one of its demonstration farms near the Landing was definitely a boost to the local economy. These "plums" were the work of the town's MLAs, the Hon. Justice R. Boyle (1905-1913) and the Hon. A.G. MacKay (1913-1920). Provincial politics thus impinged on the Landing occasionally, but, perhaps surprisingly, except for big matters such as these, it does not seem to have played much of a role in the everyday lives of Athabascans. Boyle and MacKay were both members of the governing Liberal Party,

Athabasca Landing MLA A.G. MacKay, with Minister of Municipal Affairs Charles Stewart, and several local politicians and businessmen, including store-owner Frank Falconer, Sr., and HBC manager A.C. McKay. Athabasca Archives Falconer Collection, 00740.

led by A.C. Rutherford (1905-1910) and by A. L. Sifton (1910-1917), so there was no reason why the Landing should not receive its share of patronage.[44] But, given the fact that the Liberal government's power base was in Edmonton, it was also highly unlikely that the Landing's interests would be protected when—as in the case of railway building—they conflicted with those of the provincial capital.

Oddly enough, for the first two provincial elections, in 1905 and 1909, the village of Athabasca Landing was not in the constituency of Athabasca, the southern border of which was an arbitrary straight line that passed just north of the Landing. That meant the Landing's inhabitants voted in the constituency of Sturgeon, and their first MLA (J.R. Boyle) was an Edmonton lawyer and something of a power in the Liberal Party. Elected by a large majority in 1905 and by acclamation in 1909, he became Minister of Education in 1912 and leader of the Liberal Party in Alberta in later years.[45] Preoccupied with less parochial matters than day-to-day events at Athabasca Landing, Boyle visited the town infrequently and only occasionally intervened to stimulate its development. Nonetheless, he seems, on the whole, to have done a good job for his most northerly constituents. That, at least, was the opinion of Frank Falconer Jr., who wrote this lively, if somewhat partisan, account of Boyle's term as the Landing's MLA:

> Politics was no place for the faint-hearted at the turn of the century. A rose was a rose and a spade was a spade. The member—if he were a Liberal—was venerated, respected and applauded. The candidate opposing him, if he were a Conservative, was probably a scoundrel. Boyle worked hard for Athabasca. Good roads were the number one priority and he got grants for "a trunk road west to Baptiste Lake, well graded the whole distance; a similar road east to Lac La Biche although the exact location has not been decided; the Edmonton Trail to be put in first class condition as far as Smith's crossing (about where Otterbein's farm now stands); and a good trunk road west towards Slave Lake." Mr. Boyle supported development of the natural gas which would make Athabasca a second Medicine Hat; obtained the Demonstration Farm (now the property of Verne Lewis) and promised that our railroad, soon to arrive, would be followed by many more.[46]

One of Justice Boyle's rare visits to Athabasca Landing occurred in March, 1912, and the local Liberals held a "smoker" in his honour at Keir's Hall. It was an all-male gathering, since women did not receive the vote until 1916, and it consisted mainly of speeches and musical performances. Mr. F. Stanton sang "Long Live the King," lawyer Frank Pottage played an instrumental on the piano, and then (according to the

Auto party at the old Grand Union Hotel in 1912, Athabasca Archives Roberts Collection, 00221.

Northern News report of the event) "came the inimitable Mr. Farquharson, whose comic songs time and again brought round after round of cheering." Mayor Wood then introduced the speaker, and the honourable member gave his standard pre-election speech which the *News*, a Liberal paper, dutifully described as "a most encouraging and interesting address."[47]

As it turned out, Boyle had no need to keep his political fences mended at Athabasca Landing, He was lost to the town in 1913 when redistribution placed the Landing in the Athabasca constituency. In the election of that year the Liberal government, although it still won handily, saw for the first time the emergence of a Conservative opposition party with some strength, seventeen seats to the ruling Liberals' thirty-nine.[48] The Conservatives' candidate in Athabasca was a well-known and popular personality, Mayor J.H. Wood, so the new Liberal candidate, A.G. MacKay, could hardly expect a walk-over despite his endorsement from Boyle. MacKay, in fact, had only just moved to Alberta from Ontario where he had served four terms in the Ontario legislature, had been a cabinet minister, and had served as Leader of the Opposition for five years. This seasoned politician was now an Edmonton lawyer, and in just a few months' work in Edmonton he had made himself so useful to the provincial government that Premier Sifton and his colleagues had insisted that he run for the Alberta legislature. MacKay had therefore never seen Athabasca Landing before when he turned up for an election meeting in Keir's Hall during the 1913 campaign. The *Northern News* reported that meeting as follows:

> Mr. MacKay ... was received with cheers, and in a voice that commanded attention, plunged into a defence of the government of Alberta. Mr. MacKay is a tall, heavy chunk of a man, with a face bronzed by the Eastern and western suns, and beginning to show the furrows of the strenuous life he has undergone. Piercing eyes, and with a nose that a French general would covet, he stands out ... as a leader of men.[49]

According to MacKay's supporters, the campaign in Athabasca was a dirty one, with the Conservatives using "desperate political tactics" and resorting to "wild and desperately untrue statements" in a "flimsy and discreditable manner," and three of them were arrested for having in their possession intoxicating liquor while engaged on a political errand. With a total electorate of around 2,000 potential voters, bribery was not impossible, and both sides probably tried all the persuasive tactics they could command. In the end, the cry of "local man" and "Old Timer" was insufficient to break the Liberal machine, and Mayor Wood went down to defeat, 414 to 221.[50]

This is Frank Falconer Jr.'s estimate of the new member for Athabasca, A.G. MacKay:

> MacKay proved to be a Godsend to the district, chiefly because he knew how to build roads. Until that time the road allowance (66 feet) had been cleared and cultivated, and ditches dug at the extreme outside limits of the road allowance. Furthermore, the ditches were not sloped, and appeared to be for the purpose

The Athabasca Landing lodge of the Oddfellows Society, c. 1913. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00724.

Colin Fraser, third from the right, leaving Athabasca Landing on an expedition to Fort Chipewyan, 1910. Athabasca Archives, Gorman Collection. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00767.

> of holding water. MacKay personally supervised some road construction, and insisted that no road be over 12 feet wide, that it be crowned, that ditches be next to the roadway, and that they be for the purpose of draining, competent engineers being brought in to run levels, On August 13, 1915, the *Northern News* was able to state, "We wish to note one fact and that is that two years ago there were about two miles on either side of this town fit to drive on. All other roads were impassable. Today you can leave the eastern limit of the Athabasca district at Sherron (sic) Lake and comfortably proceed with an automobile to the westerly limit of the Athabasca District at Long Lake, a distance of 62 miles, Decidedly the worst part of the sixty-two miles is within the town limits."[51]

With such an achievement to his credit, it was hardly surprising that MacKay easily won the election of 1917, and was taken into the cabinet in 1918 as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Health. He died of a heart attack in 1920.

While politics was a serious business to such people as Justice Boyle, A.G. MacKay, and James Wood, to most Athabascans it was, in George Bernard Shaw's phrase, a balloon that went up every four or five years, that is, a spectacle or entertainment. The free alcohol that circulated at election time certainly helped to make the candidates' antics on the hustings seem amusing, but even such grandstanding could not compare with a real spectacle like a Wild West Show. Athabascans were treated to one of those on July 7th, 1913, when Arlington and Beckmann's Oklahoma Wild West Ranch with its cast of hundreds of cowboys and Indigenous peoples, equipped with horses and dressed in the finery of the Old West, came to town.[52]

This was no doubt one of the highlights of entertainment in Athabasca before World War I.

Normally, the inhabitants had to make do with movies—the Star Theatre was opened in 1911—and the brass band concerts organized by local composer and music teacher, A. Archambault. There was also a circulating library, which from 1911 onwards operated from Harvey Cull's drugstore, and, for those who wanted to exercise their bodies rather than their minds, such sporting events as curling, skating, baseball, football, athletics, and even boxing.[53] For the wealthier members of Athabasca society, the Grand Union Hotel regularly put on balls or dinner-dances, and these seem to have been considered the most fashionable social events in the town. Furthermore, as the Landing's population expanded, it became possible to organize social clubs, such as the Canadian Club, the Overseas Club, the Oddfellows and the most secretive and exclusive of all such societies, the Freemasons, the roots of which extended back to seventeenth century England. The biggest and most successful of these groups seems to have been the Canadian Club, founded (in Athabasca) in the summer of 1911. Its first president was none other than Colonel Sanders of the RNWMP, and his inaugural address at the Club's first luncheon meeting was a vigorous defence of Canadian patriotism, federalism, and continued membership of the British Empire.[54]

However, in spite of these formal clubs and sporting organizations, most social activity at Athabasca Landing was still informal, and most entertainment was of the do-it-yourself variety. In the experience of Agnes Cameron, the principal social activity—at least when it rained heavily—was storytelling, and she found that one of Athabasca's champion storytellers was Mrs. Leslie Wood:

> For thirty-six hours on end it rains. That roof was full of surprises; you never knew where it would spring a fresh leak. One room is a little better than the rest, and we all gather there and make the best of it, smoking, writing, telling yarns. Mrs Leslie Wood of Athabasca Landing adds her quota to the tales of a Wayside Inn. We could have listened to her for a week and regretted neither the rain nor the waiting scows. As a girl she remembers being shocked at seeing men hold tin cups to the throats of newly slaughtered buffalo, drinking with gusto the warm blood. "What are the two greatest things on earth? Mrs. Wood, as a young girl, asked the dusky disciples of her Sunday School class. "The Queen and The Company" was the ready response. "And of these, which is the greater?" Little Marten-Tail rubbed one moccasin over the other, and the answer came thoughtfully in Cree, "The Company. The Queen sometimes dies, but the Company never dies."[55]

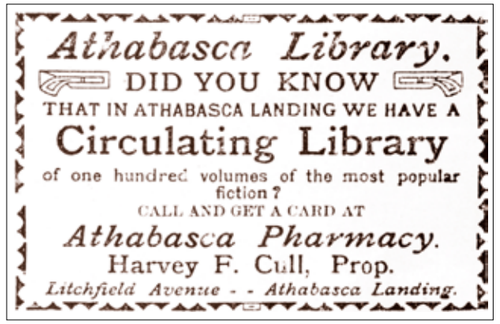
Another visitor, Gladys Curtis, discovered that some of the Landing's residents were fond of singing, and soon found herself involved in an impromptu musical evening. This is an extract from a letter she wrote while staying in Athabasca in July, 1911:

> We reached Athabasca Landing that night about 10 o/c and we never were so glad to see any place as we were that dirty tough jumping off place. The idea of spending another night in the canoe or anywhere but in a dry bed appalled us! We had quite a reception, and I think we were admitted members of the Brotherhood of the North on the strength of having done that trip in 27 hours paddling. … We slept like logs and awoke much refreshed. Our time at the Landing was quite pleasant. We got to know the daughters of the R.N.W.P. colonel, very pleasant jolly girls and there were half a dozen pleasant boys, lay readers, camp missionaries, etc. etc. at the Rectory, all very young and earnest and enthusiastic and boyish and all pining for someone who could play the piano and accompany their songs. We had one quite amusing evening which lasted till nearly midnight having a sing-song. The boys being mostly English knew all the songs that were ever sung at village concerts etc., so I was able to vamp the

accompaniments and the Sanders girls and a friend were roped in and the Hudson Bay Co. men and one was a Dane with a glorious voice and I even attempted "The Two Grenadiers" for him and we got through it quite average successfully, tho' he never gave me time to put in those little interpolations of accompaniment that are part of it.[56]

Further evidence that such musical evenings were a fairly regular feature of middle-class social life in Athabasca Landing is provided by Miss C.J. Sanders's diary. Her account of a fairly routine Sunday the previous November shows the delight that she, too, took in such amateur performances. The accompanist this time was Mr. F. Stanton, the Anglican Church organist:

> In the afternoon went to Sunday School, came home and wrote letters to P[hoebe] & Nell Young to ask her the name of a good place to stay in London as they are there. Mr. Fisher came to tea, we felt bound to ask him, went to Church. M[other] wouldn't leave the house as we had a big fire & she thought it would burn the house down. Smith, Stanton & that horrid little Fisher came in. We had quite a nice evening as Stanton brought over some of his songs, he sings beautifully, and plays the organ, piano & violin, he used to belong to some bands in England & is … certainly a wonderful musician. They all left about 12.[57]



Advertisement for Athabasca Landing's first library, located at Cull's drug-store. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

A few weeks later Miss Sanders was source of musical entertainment, a phonograph borrowed from Colin Fraser:

Women playing pool at the Grand Union Hotel, Elizabeth (Vilsmeyer) Richards, on the right. Athabasca Archives, 00383.

A baseball game at Athabasca Landing in 1911. Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 7884.

> In afternoon went for a stroll with Dad, then Box came in & we asked him in for bridge in evening. Fraser sent over his phonograph & about 300 records so I kept the thing going all afternoon as he wanted it back on Sunday. [Rev] Scott came in in evening so we let him read Kipling while we were bridging it, then I got the phonograph going again & they never left till twelve.[58]

If the sing-songs and phonograph sessions were spontaneous and informal get-to-togethers, and the balls at the hotel were sophisticated occasions when the ladies of Athabasca's "high society" wore their finest gowns and the gentlemen formal evening dress, there were also social gatherings that fell half way between and which drew in a wider cross-section of the local white population: events such as barn dances and box socials. On one occasion, Miss Sanders was a hostess at an all-night dance held at a friend's homestead, and has left us this account of the festivities:

> We were up rather early, we made sandwiches & tidied up the house, & scrubbed. We were so tired & we went up to dress at 7, & if you please the people started to arrive at half past, they were all there before half past eight, the time they were asked to the dance. There must have been about 50 people there, it was very crowded, but the music was splendid, the floor good & also the caller, & everyone seemed to enjoy it. I came home with Mr. Smith who had a load from the Landing: Mr. & Mrs. Cull, Ruth, Ethel, Melvin McKernan & J. Wood, we came home at a fine rate, we left there at 4.20 & reached home about 6.30. I was done out.[59]

The pressing need of the Sacred Heart Hospital for funds provided an excuse to organize another event that was characteristic of rural Alberta before World War I, the box and basket social. Miss Sanders was involved in one of these a couple of weeks before Christmas, 1910, and found the whole thing quite exciting:

> I didn't do much in the way of work except make a box for the Social. I made a huge Xmas cracker with white crepe paper & lots of wide pale pink ribbon & one or two roses & green leaves, it looked very pretty, but I was greatly surprised when I got the prize for the best one: three of us had to draw & I got it. It was a very pretty souvenir spoon of the Landing. The boxes went awfully high, mine for $15, & one for $20, others for $16 & $17, it was great fun watching them go. We finished our supper etc. about 11 in the School house, then we went over to the hotel & danced till one, I went over with Mr. Farrel as he got my box, & Smith took me home.[60]

This was the first box social in Athabasca Landing of which we have record, and it was apparently very successful. Miss Sanders's box was one of eighteen donated for the occasion, and a sum of $269.00 was raised for the hospital.

Social life and entertainment at the Landing before the First World War thus consisted mainly of "at-homes" and other forms of social visiting, card playing (especially bridge and cribbage), billiard tournaments, sing-songs and other musical evenings, luncheons and dinners organized by such groups as the Canadian Club, box and basket socials, picnics and berrying expeditions, skating parties, barn dances, and dinner-dances and formal balls at the

Athabasca Landing Junior Baseball Team, c. 1910. Athabasca Archives Hay Collection, 00973.

hotel. The range of activities available expanded during the period from 1911 to 1913, with the arrival of movies at the Star Theatre and of the circulating library at Cull's drugstore, the construction of a skating rink, the formation of a social dancing club, the organization of a brass band, and even the opening of a boxing academy.[61]

There were plenty of opportunities to be involved in sports, too: skating and curling on the Tawatinaw creek were the most popular outdoor sports in winter, giving way to tennis, baseball, football and foot-racing in summer. On Dominion Day each summer the village or town council organized a fête in which outdoor sports figured prominently, and, provided that the weather was favourable, this celebration must have seen the Landing at its most colourful, with a rich profusion of summer flowers and foliage in full bloom. Agnes Cameron was impressed by both the wildflowers around the Landing and its inhabitants' fondness for dancing and outdoor sports:

> Everywhere around us the wild flowers are a great joy; we hail with the gladness of released children the posies that sweetened childhood meadows—the dwarf cornel (Cornel Canadensis), dandelions, strawberry blossoms, wild roses, the pale wood violet on its long stem, and amid these familiars the saskatoon or service-berry bushes, with blueberry vines, and viburnums of many kinds. On the street the natty uniforms of the Mounted Police are in evidence, and baseball has penetrated as far north as this. In the post office we read,
>
> "It is decided to hold sports on the first day of July. The Committee promises a splendid programme,—horse-races, foot-races, football match, baseball game. There will also be prizes for the best piece of Indian fancy-work. Dancing will be in full swing in the evening. All welcome."[62]

This was life in pre-war Athabasca at its most idyllic. There was, of course, a darker side as well. The Landing did not escape its share of drunken brawls, shooting accidents, violent crime, chronic alcoholism, murder, drowning or suicide, and, much more serious before the advent of antibiotics, epidemics of influenza, measles, chicken-pox, small-pox, diphtheria and tubcrculosis.[63] But those were the standard hazards of everyday life in the "good old days." They were endured, if not gladly at least with resignation, and Athabascans, like ordinary people elsewhere, tried to forget them and find as much joy and pleasure in life as they could. The fragmentary evidence they left behind suggests that many of them succeeded, at least some of the time. Athabasca Landing during the period from 1906 to 1914 seems to have been, on the whole, a remarkably

Athabasca Landing Football (soccer) Team, 1910. Athabasca Archives Willey Collection, 00783.

happy and optimistic community. If it did not impress Ernest Seton, it certainly did Agnes Cameron, Janey Canuck, and one other distinguished visitor who, by his own testimony, spent an enjoyable vacation at the Landing in the spring and early summer of 1914. Addressing the Ottawa Canadian Club on July 2nd, 1914, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, concluded his speech as follows:

> Before I sit down I will read a verse or two in which I was able, perhaps, to compress a little more of that feeling which Canada has awakened, than can be done in prose. Poetry is like the pemmican of literature: it is compressed thought, and one can mingle emotion with it, which one cannot always do in prosaic speech. I will read you, if I may, these few lines before I take my seat. I call it "The Athabasca Trail" since Athabasca is the place where we have for some time been living an open-air life.
>
> My life is gliding downwards; it speeds swifter to the day,
> When it shoots the last dark canon to the Plains of Faraway,
> But while its stream is running through the years that are to be,
> The mighty voice of Canada will ever call to me.
> I shall hear the roar of rivers where the rapids foam and tear,
> I shall smell the virgin upland with its balsam-laden air,
> And I shall dream that I am riding down the winding woody vale,
> With the packer and the packhorse on the Athabasca Trail.
>
> I have passed the warden cities at the eastern water-gate,
> Where the hero and the martyr laid the corner stone of State,
> The *habitant, coureur-des-bois*, and hardy *voyageur*,
> Where lives a breed more strong at need to venture or endure?
> I have seen the gorge of Erie where the roaring waters run,
> I have crossed the Inland Ocean, lying golden in the sun,
> But the last and best and sweetest is the ride by hill and dale.
> With the packer and the packhorse on the Athabasca Trail.
>
> I'll dream again of fields of grain that stretch from sky to sky,
> And the little prairie hamlets, where the cars go roaring by,
> Wooden hamlets as I saw them—noble cities still to be,
> To girdle stately Canada with gems from sea to sea;
> Mother of mighty manhood, lands of glamour and of hope,
> From the eastward sea-swept Islands to the sunny western slope,
> Ever more my heart is with you, ever more till life shall fail,
> I'll be out with pack and packer on the Athabasca Trail.[64]

Paradoxically, while Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was

thus celebrating the joys of rural Alberta, the most prominent citizens of Athabasca Landing (recently renamed Athabasca to symbolize its glorious future as much more than just an inland port for the HBC and NTC) were desperately struggling to keep alive their fading vision of their hometown as a great metropolis. They failed, and, for good or ill, Athabasca was to remain essentially a rural community for several more decades.

Athabasca Landing Curling Club, c. 1913. Athabasca Archives Falconer Collection, 00736.

CHAPTER 9

Crisis and Collapse, 1914–1921

It was business as usual in the town of Athabasca in the summer of 1914. Local merchants were worried about the loss of customers that would result from the closing down of the Northern Transportation Company's steamboat service, and a handful of prescient individuals followed reports of the slow but seemingly inexorable progress of steel rails north from Lac La Biche, and shuddered at the thought of what might happen when they reached Fort McMurray. But the immigration hall was full, and the homesteaders still kept pouring in. And the hope was still alive that Athabasca might yet become an important railroad centre. The Town Council and the Board of Trade remained optimistic about Athabasca's long-term prospects: there were problems—the natural gas supply was still not working properly, and the waterworks needed reconstruction—but, given time, these would be fixed. The town had already run up some large debts, but its credit was good, and more

A farewell ceremony at Athabasca train station for local men leaving to fight in World War I, c. 1915. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 53.

The Northern News

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA

VOLUME 6 — FRIDAY, AUGUST 21, 1914 — NUMBER 33

Laurier's Trumpet Call to Canada and Empire!

Seige and Surrender Overhang the Beautiful Cities of Brussels and Antwerp---The German Legions Now in the Fierce Grip of an Unparalleled Holocaust--Russian Corps Marching to Overwhelm its Historic Enemy ---A 250 Mile Battle Line Baffles Experts---One great Key, Upper Alsace, held by French---Mulhausen Re-Captured--German Fleet Bottled Up--Her Coast Trade Paralysed--Austria Makes no Headway--Too Soon to Forecast Result of Million Men Battle---Latest News Shows Allies Relied on Belgium to give them time

BRUSSELS IN THE HANDS OF THE GERMANS

The realization that the European war was also Canada's: the *Northern News* banner headline for August 21, 1914. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

money could be borrowed to deal with pressing concerns. For example, the streets were wet and muddy, so $3,200 worth of debentures were issued to pay for several miles of wooden sidewalks.[1] The Moose Lake and Athabasca Oil Company, eager to develop local reserves of natural gas and the oil fields assumed to be connected with them, was also trying to raise capital, offering 500,000 shares of stock at ten cents a share.[2] No one knew that the company would be bankrupt one year later.

The local newspapers were preoccupied with more trivial concerns. The editor of the *Northern News* complained that it was not seemly for chickens to wander at large on Main Street. A few weeks later the chickens were gone, but the owner had not removed them. This was crime, and the *News* ran a darkly intimidating item in its gossip column: "We happen to know who stole the chickens. There is going to be trouble unless they are returned."[3]

Feathers flew over the chickens, but not a soul in Athabasca was really interested in events in the Balkans. No one knew and no one cared about the gathering storm clouds in Europe until they read the July 31 headline: "Terrible European Crime. Great Powers May Raise Hell. Austria Has Declared War!"[4] Even then, few Athabascans understood the significance and the potential consequences of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Bosnian student Gavrilo Princip.

World War I turned out to be an immense human catastrophe. Eight and one-half million people were killed in it, and some thirty million more were wounded, physically or psychologically. In retrospect, the war demonstrated—or should have—the futility of resort to arms as a means of "solving" international conflicts: if some of Europe's contentious ethnic, economic and political issues were partially resolved by the Treaty of Versailles, other problems of equal magnitude were created or left unresolved, problems that led, only two decades later, to an even more horrendous cataclysm. Further, the war showed—for those willing to learn—that the traditional methods employed by great powers to deter other nations (alliance systems, arms build-ups, and "diplomacy" by threat and ultimatum) did not always work, that in fact these imperfect instruments might help cause war rather than prevent it.

Part of the tragedy of World War I was that it could have been avoided. No great power actively wanted it to break out. It began slowly, and there had been a time, in July, 1914, when the conflict could have been localized in Eastern Europe. But those who did foresee the worst and tried to prevent it were powerless, while the most influential figures in the ruling circles of Austria, Germany, Russia and France did little or nothing—some were even quite happy to watch events unroll a they did. Yet only when Germany declared war on Russia on August 1st and on France on August 2nd, and invaded neutral Belgium on August 4th, did a world war, as opposed to a local clash in the Balkans, become inevitable. These events triggered British intervention, and when King George V made the British declaration of war, Canada, as a Dominion within the Empire, found itself at war with Germany and with the Hapsburg Empire.[5]

Germany, of course, was no threat to Canada, but the Conservative government in Ottawa, led by lawyer Robert Borden, took the state of war very seriously, and moved swiftly to impose the notorious War Measures Act that suspended civil liberties, allowed the Cabinet to bypass Parliament and the

One of the first Athabascans to leave home to fight In France: Charles Corbierre (front row, third from left). Corbrie, a clerk in a local furniture store, survived the war and returned to Alberta after his ordeal in the trenches. Athabasca Archives Walker Collection, 00935.

Courts, and provided for the internment of "enemy aliens" (i.e., those immigrants from Germany or the Austro-Hungarian Empire who had not yet become British citizens). The government also undertook a recruiting drive, with the aim of creating a volunteer army to send to France. By October the first Canadian Division, 30,000 strong, was sailing for England, and by February, 1915, these soldiers, many of whom were recent immigrants from Britain, were taking up positions in the trenches near Ypres in Belgium. Within two months they would be involved in their first large-scale action of the war, the Second Battle of Ypres, and would acquit themselves commendably in the face of a mustard gas attack. So commendable was the behaviour of the Canadian troops, in fact, that they earned the rather questionable honour noted in this tribute from the British prime minister, David Lloyd George:

> The Canadians played a part of such distinction that thenceforward they were marked out as storm troops; for the remainder of the war they were brought along to head the assault in one great battle after another.[6]

The courage—and casualties—of these soldiers brought the fact of war home to Western Canadians in a far more direct fashion than had earlier events, and the Borden government's campaign for recruits, war bond subscriptions, and other contributions to the war effort began to gain momentum in the Prairie Provinces as well as in Ontario, British Columbia and the Maritimes.

The volunteer Canadian divisions took part in several of the biggest, bloodiest and most futile battles of the war, including the abortive invasion of Turkey in 1915, the lengthy and demoralizing Somme campaign of July–November, 1916, and the disastrous Nivelle offensive of April, 1917. The Canadians' role in this last was a successful but costly assault on Vimy Ridge, and, although it was a victory of sorts, it made no difference to the outcome of the main battle. Much the same was true of the Third Battle of Ypres in August–November, 1917: the Canadians suffered heavy casualties in gaining their tactical objective, the Passchendaele Ridge, but since Haig's offensive was a huge and bloody failure, the Canadian victory was futile.[7]

The decimation of the Canadian army during this lengthy war of attrition on the near-static Western front eventually forced the Borden government to risk the wrath of French Canada by imposing conscription. The Military Service Act was passed by the federal parliament in the summer of 1917, and by the end of the year the surviving Canadian volunteer soldiers were being joined in France and Belgium by reluctant conscripts. Prairie farmers, however, were not usually among the first to be called up, and

Athabasca volunteers lined up for home-guard duty in front of the HBC warehouse, before departing for military training, 1914. Athabasca Archives, 00936.

many did not receive their papers until 1918. By the end of the war Canada's total contribution of troops (conscripts as well as volunteers) had reached over 600,000. Of these, approximately 60,000, one in ten, were killed; and another 230,000 were wounded badly enough to be hospitalized.[8] Viewed in global terms, the Canadian war effort may have been marginal to the final outcome of the conflict. The Canadian soldiers represented only three per cent of the Allied armies' manpower on the Western front, and although the four Canadian divisions' casualty lists seemed alarmingly long to those anxiously scanning the newspapers, in fact the Canadian dead added up to less than one per cent of all who lost their lives in the great tragedy. Nonetheless, because so many of the earliest volunteers did not return, because so many of those who did come home were physically maimed or emotionally scarred, because of the bitter political crises brought on by the War Measures Act, the Military Service Act and the Wartime Elections Act (which disenfranchised many immigrants and opponents of the war while enfranchising some, but not all, women), and because of the high inflation and other economic dislocations caused by Borden's methods of financing the Canadian Expeditionary Force, World War I had a tremendous impact on Canadian society.[9] That impact was probably less in the prairies than elsewhere, but it was still substantial.

The town of Athabasca was no exception. It too played its part in the war, sending first volunteer soldiers and later unwilling conscripts. It too was seized with patriotic fervour, its men investing money they could ill afford in government war bonds while its women sewed shirts and knitted socks.[10] It too suffered from inflation, shortages of consumer goods, insufficient manpower, and, above all, the bankruptcy of the Canadian Northern Railway, one of the casualties of the war on the home front. Worst of all, perhaps, the war exacerbated tensions between the Athabascans of British extraction, who wholeheartedly supported the war effort, and all those other recent newcomers to the Athabasca area-French Canadians, Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, and even Americans—who simply wanted to be left alone to get on with the difficult task of making a success of their new homesteads. These people found that Canada (and Athabasca) had suddenly become much more British than they had ever expected. Frank Falconer Jr. captured this aspect of Athabasca's war years in the following account of the opening eighteen months of the conflict:

> The Canada of 1914 was not like the Canada of today. Since 1897 a million immigrants from the British Isles had poured into Canada, most of them to the west. Another million and a half had come from other areas, many of them from Ontario. Even Canadians who had been born here were not sure whether they were Canadians first and then British, or the reverse, so strongly were loyalties divided between the new country and the old. The Orange Lodge of Ontario was one of the most powerful forces in the politics of the day. Most Canadian army officers were English. Outside of Quebec, the educational system was British; Western Canada used the Ontario readers, which bristled with Imperialism, Empire and militarism. Kipling and Byron, Southey and Macaulay wrote the poems that Canadian school boys had to memorize. "What matter one gone, if the flag float on, and Britain be lord of the main." Canadians were proud that the sun never set on the British empire and truly the amount of red [then the colour of Empire territories] on the map of the world was impressive.
>
> A Canadian mother said, "My country is at war and my boys must go." Sir Wilfrid Laurier said, "When England is at war, Canada is at war." For three years the Canadian parliament had debated whether Canada should have its own navy or should send money to England instead, and a young and arrogant Winston Churchill sent a message to the Canadian prime minister Borden telling him that Canada was not capable of building naval vessels and if it did it was not capable of manning them. Borden agreed. The Northern News was caught up in the general hysteria. Its first article started:
>
> "Germany is mad. … The virus of hate has transformed the land of Handel, Goethe and Science into one mammoth subdivision of hell. She has converted her admirers into legalized murderers. The Kaiser … appeals to the God of Love to aid his armies to butcher innocent men and cause Christ to be crucified afresh by the hands of his Pharisees. Such is the moral aspect of a situation which has staggered humanity."
>
> Indeed, never before in history had a Christian nation dishonored its treaties as did the Germans in 1914. The violation of Belgium was perceived as a crime against normal international morals greater than had ever been perpetrated. It was easy to believe stories of terrible atrocities being committed by the Huns. Also, times were tough. The army paid $1.10 a day, the food was good, there was a chance to see the world, and men flocked to the colors. Probably the first to go was J. H. B. Will, a young Scottish lawyer. He was a reserve officer in Scotland, and he left immediately to join his regiment, as did Charlie Corbierre, an employee of the Grand Union Hotel, who was in the French reserve. Will Will, the cashier for the Bay, joined a Canadian unit.
>
> Athabasca mobilized. Led by Major McLelland, officer commanding the local police detachment and Captain (Dr.) Olivier, a corps of local sharpshooters was

The Athabasca contingent of the 31st (Calgary) Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, c. 1915. Athabasca Archives, 02695.

organized with an initial complement of 74 men. They drilled, and practised shooting, in the warehouse of the Bay. In October there was an opportunity for more men to join the army, and because of their superior training, 20 of the sharpshooters were accepted, most into the 63rd battalion. The Independent Order of Oddfellows, a very active fraternal organization, had 21 of its 74 members join up. Six did not come back, A. M. Coy, G. J. Haight, E. W. Herbert, R. Jeffeon, A. W. Milne, and C. H. Tory. One, S. R. Farquharson, the former town secretary, soon became a captain.

The ladies mobilized too. Led by Mrs. Billy Rennison and Miss Gill, the school principal, later Mrs. Little of hostel fame, they organized the Ladies of the Needle, to make pillows, shirts and socks. A pair of manufactured socks, it was said, would last three days in the trenches, whereas hand knit socks would last two weeks. Later, they donated two hospital beds to the English hospital which had been set up in Lord Astor's house. One they called Colinton, Alberta and the other Athabasca, Alberta.

The *Northern News*, soon to become the *Athabasca Herald*, posted bulletins daily in the Grand Union and the Athabasca Hotel until the Athabasca Hotel was forced to close its doors, a victim of Prohibition which arrived in 1915. The *News*, under a remarkably forgettable quotation from the Duke of Wellington, "He who dies for his country preserves the honour of his country" ran a box showing the names of Athabasca boys who had been killed in action.

The Patriotic Fund was organized to care for the families of married men who had enlisted, and $2,000 was raised by the Athabasca executive in the first campaign. Affluent business men pledged $5 a month, apparently quite a large sum. Chong Lee pledged .25, the Methodist minister .75 and a labourer who had earned only $4.50 the week of the campaign gave $1.50. For Christmas, 1915, the Bay called for austerity and for practical gifts. They suggested a $5 box which they had made up:

24 lbs. Royal Household Flour
1 sack Sugar
8 lbs. Rolled Oats
1 lb. Tea
1 lb. Coffee
2 lbs. raisins and 2 lbs. currants
1 lb. Baker's Chocolate
2 pkgs. Mincemeat
2 pkgs. Corn Starch
l lb. Candies, Christmas Special

Almost every newspaper carried reports of new recruits, most of whom joined the 63rd battalion, a few the 49th. On October 15, under the heading, "Nine More Boys Off, Fine Fighting Material", are listed William Minns, James Minns, C. O. P. Nock, Bill Scofield, Frank Shaw, Seymour Lewis, Arthur Coy, Arthur Fisher and William Duval. On September 17, Tom Wood, H. Diggory, H. F. Sparling of the Northern News, Walton Lewis, a lively romping fellow at home on a horse, and Ralph Crawford from the Athabasca Pharmacy, a young, smart, well set up lad, enlisted.[11]

Wartime in Athabasca, September, 1915: a reception committee to greet soldiers on leave from training camp. Athabasca Archives, 00303.

Altogether Athabasca and Colinton supplied more than 110 soldiers to fight in Belgium and France, and that figure does not include recruits from Calling Lake, Grosmont, Baptiste Lake, Meanook, New Pine Creek, and other hamlets in the wider Athabasca region. Statistically, it is probable that at least twelve of these men were killed in action, but we know the names of only eight dead, mostly the members of the Oddfellows society mentioned earlier by Frank Falconer Jr.

The *Northern News* and the *Athabasca Herald* down played the horrors of war, and made no concerted effort to report local casualties, but occasional glimpses of the fate of Athabascas "boys in the trenches" can be found in their pages. Private David Walsh of the 49th Battalion, "an Athabasca lad respected for his quiet spirit and industry," seems to have been the first local man to lose his life in General Joffre's and General Haig's grim war of attrition. By prearrangement, when the sad news reached his home town, the "Dead March in Saul was played in the Anglican Church by Mrs. Farquharson and in the Methodist Church by Mrs. De Lancey, while the congregations stood in silence."[12] No details of Private Walsh's death were ever available to the *Herald*, but occasionally the relatives of soldiers at the Front allowed the paper to reproduce extracts from letters received from husbands and sons in the trenches. Mrs. Mills, for example, passed on to the *Herald* this letter from her son, Seton, who had written to reassure her that he had survived the long and bloody Somme offensive:

> Received your letter of Sept. 22nd but was not able to answer it as we were in the trenches and I had no paper, but we will be going to a quiet place now for a while so I will try and write more than I have been doing for the last two months. You mention Major Holland's death—well that man was a hero if ever there was one! He didn't have to go in the trenches in the first place, but he said that the boys would think he was a coward. A shell came over and blew both his feet off, and when they were carrying him out, the shells were falling pretty thick around them, and he said to the boys, "Better leave me here boys, I am not much good now anyway, and you are only endangering yourselves." However, they got him down to the dressing station, but he died from loss of blood. All the time he was in the trenches he was always with his men, cheering them, and helping them to get cover for themselves. None of the boys can say

Wartime in Athabasca, September, 1915: a family awaits a soldier returning on leave. Athabasca Archives, 00329.

The Northern News

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA

VOLUME 6 — FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1914 — NUMBER 36

Who Will Get The Staggering Blow?

VICTORY or DEFEAT?

The Critical Hour Has Arrived

Allied Troops in Death Grip With Kaiser's Men

The critical point in the war pressing around Paris. Both sides have chosen the present battle line, said to vary in scope from 150 to 200 miles, or some a point 25 miles North-east of Paris. We need not outline the strategic points. The main facts governing the situation are—1, three million men are engaged, the superiority in numbers resting with the Germans, whose lines of communication are not seriously hampered. 2, The Germans, while horribly depleted by the murderous fire of the allied troops, have replenished their places men for man. 3, The proximity of the allied troops to a circular base, with officers in command who have had time to dovetail the several arms at their disposition in the manner best suited to the resistance and defeat of their great antagonist.

Athabasca's Share in the War

The Mayor Takes Action

That Athabasca has not been conspicuous in supplying recruits for the War is not the fault of the place or the people. From the first announcement of the war many citizens expressed their readiness to aid in whatever manner might be deemed advisable. A few have already gone to the front, but no organised effort has been set in motion owing to the fact that there has been no vital, workable plan with Edmonton.

The telegram that Mr J. H. B. Will sent to his brother was brought to the notice of the Mayor, and we understand that he has communicated with the authorities at Edmonton with a view to ascertaining their wishes in the matter of placing Athabasca on a footing as an auxiliary supply ground.

In the meantime applicants are numerous, and we believe that we are not far out in calculating that at least 50 able-bodied, well-seasoned men can be relied upon, if required, to give a good account of themselves.

The movement has begun, and we shall probably hear more of it in due course.

The Women's Institute will take an active part, and the Dramatic Club and other societies will most probably organise entertainments, the proceeds of which will go to the Hospital or Patriotic Fund.

Our Men for the War!

The Brothers Will, Tradesmen and Farmers, And Frenchmen Ready

J. H. B. Will, barrister, Athabasca, well known to every inhabitant for his stanch, robust character, left. It will be remembered for the old country a fortnight ago with the object of personally tendering to his old regiment in Edinburgh. Two days after he landed he telegraphed his brother from London, England, that he had enlisted and that there was an urgent need for men. The act is characteristic of the man.

The brother, Will, who has for three months been acting as accountant and cashier for the Hudson's Bay Company, immediately accepted to adopt the suggestion, which is tantamount to saying, "Do as I have done, and come along and fight for the King and the Empire." Will leaves on Thursday. It should be stated in this

Five typical Grand Prairie boys landed in Athabasca on Monday night, having travelled by boat to Edson, and thence to Grouard, where they took the N. T. C. boat for the Landing. The first thing that they did was to call upon Major McDonald, who was immensely pleased with the manly bearing and broad imperial spirit of the men. Their names are:—

D. W. Pratt, G. W. T. Balmer, Jack McKenzie, Chester Miller—all home steaders.

They were accepted by Major McDonald and proceeded to Regina for training prior to entering upon the service of the R. N. W. M. P.

Intercession

The Northern News

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA

VOLUME 7 — FRIDAY, MAY 14, 1915 — NUMBER 39

Will Submarines & Zeppelin Fleets Subdue England?

A Grave Development---Shall we Become Barbarians?

Light on the War From the Loss of The Lusitania

Germany's Sea Strategy Now Made Plain

Zeppelin Ships Intend to Work Havoc on British Cities

A NEW CALL OF EMPIRE

Seclusion of Fleet Part of Big Scheme to Strike Final Blow at British Sea Supremacy

Germany's plan for defeating Great Britain as a naval and commercial power is at length unfolding itself with a pointed

residence from Great Britain, what will happen to London when Germany sends Zeppelins and aeroplanes across the channel by the hundred? Germany is ranking them right and left at Cuxhaven, Frederickshaven, and other cities. Her airships now visit the east coasts of England with more frequency. This very week fifty bombs were dropped at Southend and Lee, which are really suburbs of London. Three thousand business men leave their residences at these places on the Thames. Fast trains depart each morning and return in the evening.

* * *

It is obvious, therefore, that if a score of homes can be destroyed in a few minutes as was the case at Southend, what is to occur when Germany gets more accustomed to the general position and twenty airships with an average of thirty explosives each, reach London?

* * *

In the light of what has happened, and in the absence of any indication of what Great Britain is doing, or intends to do, to meet this contingency, the imaginative regret, which we convey to our readers on this page (C) will not appear to be an exaggerated detestation.

* * *

Tuesday, in answer to a question by Lord Charles Beresford, that the Lusitania had no convoy before passage through a submarine zone of the enemy. The ships at the disposal of the Motherland for this purpose are be stated, insufficient? There is some talk of arming merchant vessels with guns of sufficiently large calibre so as to fight the unseen enemy, although unless these vessels can steam at the rate of 18 to 20 knots an hour the arming urged will be of little avail—especially if Germany can add considerably to her submarine area.

* * *

We are also told the following by an unquestioned authority on submarines:—

"If half the rumors one hears be correct, the blockade (of some of our ports at any rate) is sufficiently in being to have acquired the appearance of legal status."

It should be carefully noted that this was written long BEFORE the loss of the Lusitania.

* * *

What then, is to happen to

the Transylvania and the hundred ships now on the water the Homeland from this very Continent? Where did the submarine fly to after she accomplished her murderous deed of last Friday? How many companions of her are prowling about the Irish coast at this moment? What will transpire when, instead of half a dozen, Germany can put to sea, 200 such ships as sank the Lusitania? Do we put our imagination to an absurd when we infer that in 1916 Dover will be bottled up and the River Thames closed to traffic? Germany is building submarines at great speed.

* * *

The dilemma suggested by these questions brings us to the paramount question of the war. What is Germany's plan of subduing Great Britain?

* * *

So far she has been checkmated in her attempt to reach Calais. On land the Allies have already won half the battle, and, if the enemy can be held in further check till France and Great Britain are able to

hurl their great human engine the into her heart we will see her end of Belgium and shelter be behind her great fortresses on the Rhine and elsewhere.

* * *

But what is her policy toward us?

* * *

Is is now clear, we think, that her fleet is lying in the Kiel Canal are not there because of any fear Tirpitz has for the British Navy. They are in part because Germany is making a bold and continuous effort to smash British commerce on the high seas. She is sinking British ships at the rate of 1[illegible] ships per day. The number is, we admit, not so serious as it looks. But the average is greater to-day than it was three months ago, and with the menace of submarines that average will go up and up till she hopes to frighten Great Britain into keeping her merchant crawlers in port, when she will then venture to take their place.

* * *

That's part of her game.

* * *

The other part is to strike a blow by her submarines at the British Navy, and no better days work was done to Germany than when the Queen Elizabeth was sent to the Mediterranean. Germany did not send her cruisers round the world to distract British commerce. Her plan was to divert from the North Sea a large number of battleships, until her submarines were ready. And now we see when she thinks she has really crippled the sea power of The British Empire she will make the plunge into the deep waters of the ocean and take in hand the remnant of the British Navy.

* * *

Will Germany succeed? Will her submarines and Zeppelin fleets subdue England? For an answer to that question we look—not to Italy or the United States, not even to the allies of the West, or to that marvellous machine, the Russian steam roller but to the man of the street. He does not quite satisfy us. We are far from pleased with his attitude in Canada or in Edmonton or in Athabasca. He does not realize what is at stake. It is not a question of winning. The real matter is human. Germany must be ruined, broken, and debauched with the blood that she is responsible for shedding if the world is to gain its equilibrium. It is out of focus. We are going back. Civilization

Grosmont, The Garden of W. Athabasca

A Curious Fish Story—Rich Farmers in the Making

RICH SOIL AND GOOD CLIMATE

Seen from the north side of the bridge that spans the creek that runs in a westerly direction to the Baptiste Lake, the sheet of water presents a very inviting combination of colour. The lake is deep, dark blue. Suggestively like the figure 8, the land to the north and north-west slopes toward the banks in an easy gradient. The early settlers of Grosmont naturally gravitated toward the beaches, and some of the best-situated and most promising farms are to be found here, for the writer sees in the small farm of to-day the extensively - cropped and

A.--The War Reviewed As It Is To-Day

The war of movement turns into the war of attrition: the *Northern News* report of the battle that saved Paris from German occupation and led to the beginning of trench warfare on the Western Front. Neither side would inflict a decisive military blow for three more years. *Northern News*, September 11, 1914. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

The enemy as barbarian horde: Submarine warfare in the Atlantic shocked Canadians more than the trench warfare on the Western Front about which they knew relatively little. *Northern News*, May 14, 1915. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

enough about his bravery.

I wish you would send me a pair of moccasins as soon as you can, as I have awfully sore feet (but not cold feet), also Service's "Rhymes of a Rolling Stone."

I got a letter from Julian when we were in the trenches, and he says he expected to be out here soon. I do wish he would stay in England, where he is safe; I don't mind it myself, but I wish he didn't have to come back. He had ten days sick-leave and had been seeing the sights of London.

You speak of the long casualty list in the papers—there sure were some casualties while we were at the Somme, but thank the Lord I am still as well as ever I was, may be a little better. I must close now, hoping this will find you all well, I remain

Your loving son,
Seton.[13]

Private Arthur Milne, an electrician from Torquay, England, who had homesteaded near Colinton, was not as fortunate as Seton Mills. He suffered a fate similar to that of Major Holland, also in the Somme campaign. The officer in charge of his unit, Sergeant J. L. MacPherson, himself a resident of Athabasca Landing, wrote Milne's mother the following account of her son's death:

> He was hit in the right shoulder and side by a shell which dropped where he was standing in the trench. A stretcher bearer dressed his wounds and we made him as comfortable as we could in the dug-out. I stayed with him from the time he was hit until he died, a matter of about four hours. He was conscious up to within fifteen minutes of his death and every little while he would ask for a drink of water. About an hour before he passed away he said, 'Mac, it's a Belgian homestead for me, I'm going.' A little while after he murmured 'Mother' and 'Dad' several times, then he seemed to go off into a gentle sleep and passed away without a movement.[14]

Not all the news received in Athabasca after the Somme campaign was this grim. The soldiers realized that their families at home were anxiously awaiting news of them and that the mails were chaotic, so they sometimes reported the names of all the local men they knew had survived the latest bloodletting. Ralph Fox, for example, wrote this letter to his mother towards the end of the Somme offensive:

> I suppose you have been worrying and wondering why I have not written for so long. We have been very busy this last couple of weeks, and time goes so fast I did not think it was so long since I wrote last.
>
> I was away to school for ten days taking a bombing course and just got back last night, and all that time I did not get any mail; it is chasing around the country after me and hasn't yet caught up. So I will write again as soon as the mail comes, as there ought to be a couple from you.
>
> You will likely have had news and by the papers know how we are getting along. This last time in our casualties were very heavy, but the boys from Athabasca seem very lucky. Ralph Crawford was wounded, but nothing serious. I was telling you about Arthur Fisher before. He has gotten over to England now, so he will be safe for most of the winter at least. Dave is with us yet and is all right. Walton Lewis was taken to the hospital about two weeks ago. He was run down but has not come back to us yet. Seymour, Seton and Alphonse are all well and fine yet.
>
> We saw the 31st. a little while ago and saw Petty, Wilson and Reg. Turner. They are the only ones left of the Athabasca boys. They look just the same as they used to and all wished to be remembered to everyone at home. Frank Greer is also with the 31st now but is in the hospital at present, I think with his feet. Coy is with the 49th, but I have not seen him since they were in last.
>
> Well, I have to go on parade now but will write again in a few days. So bye-bye. With love to all.
>
> Ralph[15]

Soldiers' letters from the front were censored, and most in any case could find no words to convey the everyday reality of life in the trenches. Nor could they report facts about the military situation: that was strictly forbidden, and, moreover, the men in the muddy dugouts usually had only the haziest idea of the broader military picture. Fairly early in the war however, one of the Athabasca volunteers, Private W. H. A. "Billy" Will, previously HBC accountant at the Landing, sent the following letter to his friend and erstwhile boss, HBC manager A. C. McKay. It is the most graphic and informative document we possess on how the Athabasca soldiers perceived the realities of war on the Western Front.

> Somewhere in France,
> July 17, 1915
>
> I came over here in the middle of March, and we have been in and out of the firing line ever since. So far I have come through without a scratch, and I sincerely hope my good fortune will hold good. I have had a few narrow shaves, of course, as has almost everybody else. War now-a-days is absolute hell on earth, and the most deadly things in the whole war are machine guns. The damage done by them is simply awful. Whole battalions have been practically wiped out by them.
>
> We have been in various parts of the line, some easy places and some the reverse. One curious feature is how

The Northern News

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA

VOLUME 7 — FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1915 — NUMBER 41

500,000 BRITISH SOLDIERS WILL be PUT OUT of ACTION

THE SACRIFICE FOR THE WESTERN FRONT

The stubborn resistance which the allies are meeting with from the well-organised forces of their enemy along the Western front in Europe enables us to form some idea of the sacrifice in men that will be required to expel them from Flanders. We now know what the British are up against:

A DEFENCE COVERED WITH GUNS AND MINES, 300 MILES LONG AND 25 MILES DEEP
GROUNDS TRENCHED, WIRE-BARBED, AND MINED, AND HELD BY 1,800,000 MEN, AND 10,000 GUNS
AN INCREASINGLY EFFICIENT AIR FLEET, AND SHELL FIRE FILLED WITH POISONOUS LIQUID

How long will it take for the allies to break down this gigantic phalanx of human and mechanical machines, with their power and heroism strained in the Gallipoli Peninsula, and now to be further tried by a big war in itself in the Balkans?

If these colossal facts are borne in mind there will be less disposition to carp at the slow pace on our side of the line. Russia made a great sweep. Perhaps it would have been better had she followed the example of Generals Joffre and French, and organised five million men and kept to the Berlin road.

Judging by the losses since the Marne was re-crossed, and the list of casualties at St. Julien, Dixmuude, and Ypres, an average of 20,000 per mile will not be considered an extravagant loss of men for the task that lies before the allies.

LOCAL PATRIOTS

Robert Winter, Colinton

With One Son Killed in Action And Another in the Trenches He Goes to England, at his own Expense, to offer his Expert Services to the Empire.

Robert Winter, chief partner of the North Alberta Machinery and Hardware Company, Colinton, has the fire of the British patriot in his make-up.

When the war broke out he used some caustic language about the "flat rate" in military men. He was restive to smell the essence of powder. He was of a loyal, brave British stock. He resigned himself to a state of discontent and wished he were young like his two sons. He was, however, becoming reconciled with the same spirit and enlisted. One of these was killed in action. The other, Jack, remains a private in the trenches somewhere in France, under the colors of the 31st Alberta battalion.

Winter might have remained [illegible]

PROGRESSIVE LIBERALS

Should Women Vote?

Local Liberals Will Celebrate Thanksgiving by a Social Reunion in Keir's Hall on Monday Night, when there will be a debate on Equal Suffrage

Should the franchise be extended to women?

That both sides may be well discussed the Athabasca Liberal Association have arranged a full-dress debate on Monday for the benefit of Liberals in the town and district.

Quite a number of the members will, no doubt, take part, and it is an open secret that one or two members, who are opponents of the dissolutionist single life, entertain some very rational or irrational views on the subject, but, in order to set the usual ball rolling, the following gentlemen have agreed to lend their eloquence on both sides, namely:

FOR THE VOTE
J. F. Evans.
A. M. Nicol.

Fond du Lac Indiscretion

THE BULLETIN'S BIG "SCOOP!"

The Edmonton Bulletin announced this week that the party, headed by Mr. Dardier, which left Athabasca three weeks ago for Fond du Lac, was highly important. It specified the particulars of the outfit, namely, a large number of canoes and supplies, and machinery to the value of $50,000. All this, with a few references to the personal composition of the party was given out as if it were first hand information. Our readers have for weeks been in possession of the information. But there is no harm done in the repetition of a good story. As with its sublimated editorials, its news intelligence is not marked by up-to-dateness.

But it has, in this connection, been guilty of a journalistic indiscretion. It announces the name of the firm that was principally responsible for the Dardier expedition, and intimates that it is somewhat strange that Edmonton, and even Athabasca was not familiar with the name of the world-wide firm at the back of the enterprise.

We are not responsible for the collection of Edmonton news. We do know about Athabasca, and have known for weeks and months all about the business relationship that exists between a great English firm and the Dardier search for nickel on Lake Athabasca. Others, a select few, also know. But for reasons ought to be well known to the Bulletin, but which it is obvious it did not respect, we have not marketed the information, and had even the Bulletin stopped to consider the effect of the publication of the name, we believe that it would have refrained from identifying Mr. Dardier with the firm in question, at any rate until some responsible authority had given it permission. It is certain that neither Mr. Dardier, nor any representative of the Company did so. It shocks well for the good faith of the Athabasca that they have observed the confidence reposed in them, and which was extended to them with the object of preventing an exploitation of Fond du Lac for purely speculative purposes. No one knows better than the English interest concerned that the presence of nickel in that country, NORTH EAST OF FORT McMURRAY, is not yet demonstrated to an extent to justify any definite statement, and especially to place its name in juxtaposition with the luxurious boost which the Edmonton paper gave to it the other day.

Two of the biggest companies in the United Kingdom are

The dawning realization of the cost, in human life, of infantry offensives after the stabilization of the Western Front. *Northern News*, October 8, 1915. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Collection.

the distance between the German lines and ours varies. Where we have been it varies from 20 to a thousand yards. It is no joke when the lines are only about 20 yards apart. In addition to the ordinary shells and bullets a little variety is introduced in the way of hand bombs and trench mortars. Then, again, both sides are very industrious undermining the enemy's trenches, so that poor Tommy does not know the moment when he may go sky high.

I had a note from Hector Turner the other day. He and the other Athabasca boys are in training near Folkestone. Hampton (my brother) is at the Dardanelles, and I see by the papers that his regiment has had a severe cutting up. The Colonel, the Major, and 7 other officers have been killed, four are missing, and four are wounded. The rank and file casualty list has not yet been issued, so I can only be patient, and hope he has pulled through all right.[16]

Later in the war, aeroplanes began to play a more important, if still relatively minor, role in the fighting, and Athabascans read in their newspaper about the well-publicized heroics of such flyers as "Wop" May and Billy Bishop. Yet most of the Landing's inhabitants had never seen an aeroplane, let alone an aerial dog fight, so they must have had some difficulty imagining what this new form of warfare was really like. A report written by Harry Thorn, previously one of the *Athabasca Herald's* staff, may have helped convey something of this aspect of the war to the folks at home:

> I must tell you of today's exciting events. Or rather, as much as I may. I had my first sight of battle; a battle in the air. It was the greatest yet fought over England.
>
> We were at work in a park when the air-raid syren (sic) shrieked its warning. We immediately took cover under the great beech and chestnut trees. Two minutes after the warning we saw in the direction of London a large number of aeroplanes slowly descending from the clouds. At the same time explosions began, sounding quite close. Then our anti-aircraft guns made little white balls of smoke all around the arrow-shaped squadron, and the racket told us how fierce was the fight. Soon our own planes advanced from all directions and mingled with the Huns. The guns below ceased fire and the machine guns above began their nerve-racking fusilades. The sight was appalling and quite indescribable. The battle was gradually coming towards us, the machines at the same time circling and gliding and falling and rising. The bursting of many bombs told us of the pain and misery and death those murderous beasts were creating amongst our people in and near London; you will never, I hope, understand the rage and hatred which overcame us all. Many of the men around me had wives and lovers and children and dear ones just over there, yet had to lie in helpless, bitter rage, doing nothing. Low, hardly heard, yet fervent curses now and then broke the comparative silence around us. Men gripped their rifles and shook their fists in the air. I believe it is every man's undoubted duty to wipe every one of those heartless beasts off the earth; and surely it is God's will. But it is impossible to express my thoughts.[17]

In addition to giving that vivid picture of one of the first air-raids, Corporal Thorn's letter reveals some of the emotions and convictions that motivated the Athabasca volunteer soldiers. The Germans were "Huns," "murderous beasts" who deserved to be wiped off the face of the earth and whose destruction God had sanctioned. For young men like Harry Thorn, and for the editor of the *Athabasca Herald*, the war was a moral crusade, and they were proud to be doing their share to save decency and democracy from the barbarian hordes.[18]

Harry Thorn was one of the last Athabascans to go to war willingly. The last contingents of soldiers from the Athabasca region were conscripts, mainly farm boys who knew and cared little about European politics and who would have much preferred to remain in Alberta with their families and livestock. Some cheerfully accepted the adventure when it was forced upon them, others went reluctantly with an air of weary resignation. Since they lacked patriotic zeal, they were not likely to make good soldiers unless they were given intensive training and indoctrination, a fact that the British High Command recognized. Rather than sending them straight to the front, it placed them initially in training camps at Bramshott in Hampshire or at Ripon in Yorkshire. And indeed all that some members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force saw of the war were the dangerous Atlantic crossing, the spectacular but relatively unimportant air battles in the skies of southern England, and the spit and polish of the training camps.

One such conscript with relatives on a homestead north of the Athabasca River was Allen Knight. His letters to his niece Florence in Regina tell us little about the war but provide an interesting picture of how a typical Athabasca farm boy reacted to the sights and customs of wartime England. This is an extract from the first letter Private Knight wrote after his troopship landed in Liverpool:

> Well I am in old England now, arrived here Aug. the 16th. This sure is a pretty camp, nice long green grass and woods all around. We are in corteen [quarantine] for one month here, then we go to another camp to train. This camp here covers over twenty mile square and they say there are two million men here in this one camp that haven't seen any service yet. I heard today that we were all going to be put into the engineers and if we aren't transferred and still stay in the infantry we won't go to France before next Spring. Most everybody here thinks the war will be over by Christmas. I hope so any way. This sure is a pretty country, wish you could see it. … They have some of the funniest things here in England you ever saw. All of the houses are built of brick and have a chimney every two feet. And say, I wish you could see the trains. I told them I was going to get one and a mile of track and send to the kids to play with. You could put the engine inside of our engines back there. The coaches only hold sixteen, eight in a compartment. The seats run crossways of the coach, and four sit on each seat facing each other. But, say, they sure can run some—about sixty miles an hour. … They don't drive horses here the way we do: they use two-wheeled carts and only use one horse, or when they use two they put one horse ahead of the other tandem. We have four meals a day here. We have to get up at six, have breakfast at seven thirty, dinner at noon, and supper at five, then we have a *bluddy* lunch at eight. Ha Charley, Ha, Ha.[19]

Thus, in the late summer of 1918, England seemed odd but interesting and amusing to Allen Knight. But if in body he was at Bramshott, in spirit he was still back on his homestead, worrying if the crops had been ruined by an early frost and whether the womenfolk could get the harvest cut and threshed. During the winter he dreamed of duck shooting, and sent advice on how to look after the cow. As the next spring approached and the Armistice seemed to have brought his demobilization no nearer, he pondered how the folks back on the farm could get the ploughing and sowing done.

By now he was fed up with England, and quite homesick; the worst thing about England, he complained, was that it rained all the time, and he was forever wading through mud and water and getting soaked to the skin. Not that army life was too bad: his job in the Engineers was quite cushy, he was saving much of his pay, and he spent his spare time playing billiards and going to movies in Ripon. But he didn't feel at ease in Yorkshire: the countryside, though pretty, didn't look like "good old Canada," he couldn't understand the local dialect, and the local mores mildly shocked him. On hearing that his friend Pearl was looking for a wife, he commented, a trifle sardonically:

> If Pearl wants to get married so bad he had ought to be over here for he could sure get one here and could try on the boot before he bought it. Ha. Ha. I never saw anything like it is here in this country, you can walk out along the river at night and see them laying all over, just like cattle on a hot day.[20]

Private Knight, a lonely and frustrated outsider in

England, was thus very glad to get back to Western Canada in the summer of 1919, and his working holiday in the Old Country had done nothing to increase his love or respect for the British.

We are not sure whether Allen Knight returned to the Athabasca area after the War or went to work his niece's farm in Saskatchewan, but if he did visit the town of Athabasca in 1919 or 1920, he might have been surprised at its appearance of decay. Certainly any soldier who had left in 1914 would have noticed a marked decline when he returned. Post-war Athabasca was not exactlv a ghost town, but compared with the bustling metropolis of Athabasca Landing in 1913, it came close.

When feminist and reformer Nellie McClung visited Athabasca in 1917 on a fund-raising drive for the Red Cross, she immediately sensed its decline as a trading centre, and urged its inhabitants to look to agriculture for their economic future. During her address at a public meeting held in the Methodist Church, she remarked that "Athabasca has had a hard deal from railways: on one side the Peace River railway and on the other the A&GW both of which have passed it by. It will never be a city."[21] On the other hand, she continued, there was no reason why Athabasca should not settle down to be a medium sized market town with a good local cattle and grain industry. Three years later, another visitor, Pastor J. Lorne McTavish of the Edmonton Methodist Church, prented a fairly similar diagnosis of the depressed state of post-war Athabasca:

> Athabasca, like some other western communities, has had a somewhat checkered career. To have seen the town grow to be a bustling burg of nearly 2000, the centre of a large trade with the Peace River country, and having not only railway connection with Edmonton but a large steamboat service on the Athabasca River, has been the experience of some of the oldtimers still doing business here. These same oldtimers have seen the tide of population ebb until at present it does not exceed 400. Several causes have contributed to this slump in population. The building of the ED&BC and A&GW railways has diverted much of the traffic formerly passing through Athabasca to the north. It also destroyed the steamboat traffic. … The financial disaster, due to the general depression during the war period and the changed railway policy adopted by the government, could not have been foreseen, and for it the people are in no way responsible.[22]

Responsible for its fate or not, Athabasca was facing a major crisis by the end of the War. As Pastor McTavish recognized, the population figures told the dismal story. From a population of 1,900 in 1913, the town had slipped to 497 in 1916, and the 1921 census would show a further decline, to 425.[23] The town of Athabasca had become a village again. McClung and McTavish had been correct, too, in identifying the fundamental

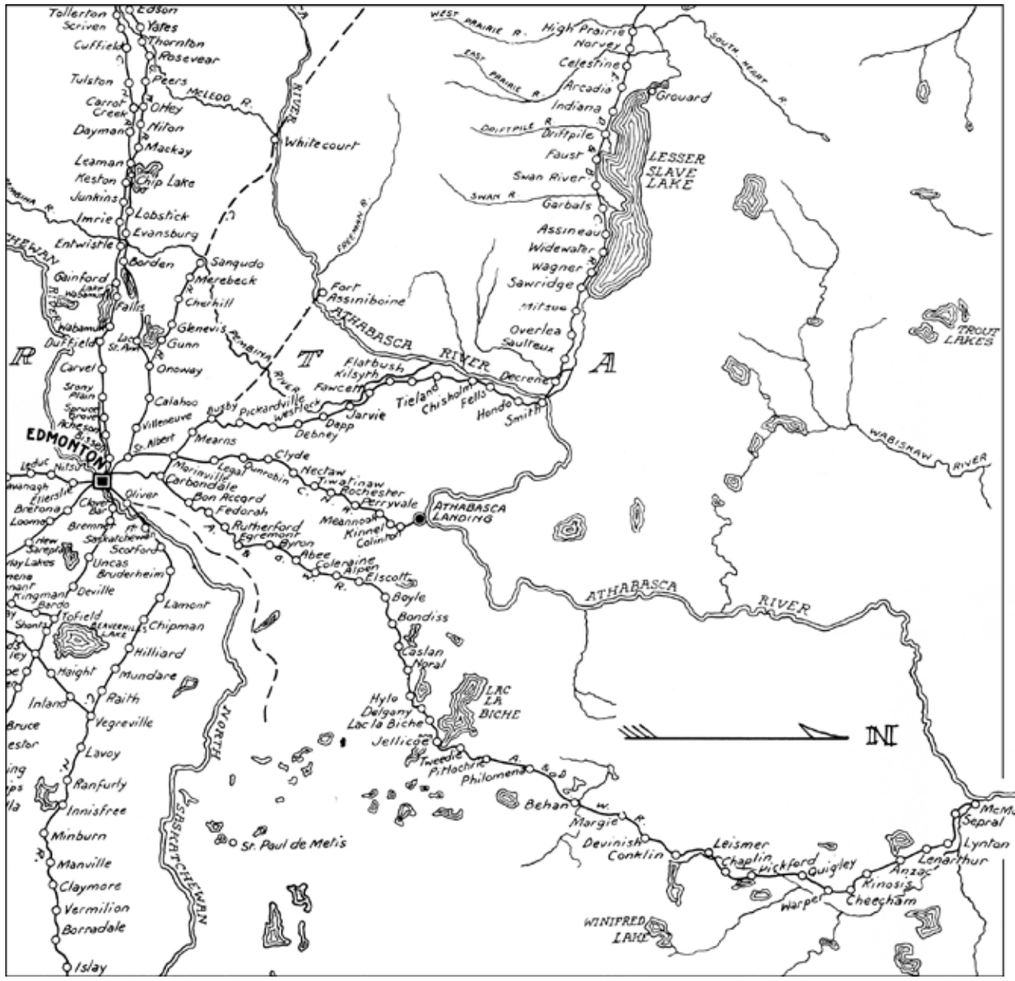
A Red Cross fund-raising meeting at Athabasca during World War I. Athabasca Archives Gorman Collection, 00777.

One of Nellie McClung's other campaigns during the war years was for prohibition. Alberta went "dry" in 1916, and some Athabascans celebrated soberly at a Sunday school picnic on Dominion Day. Athabasca Archives, 00497.

Suddenly a road to nowhere in particular: the Athabasca Landing Trail after 1914. Glenbow Archives, NA 2991-8.

cause of this drastic decline: the death of the Landing. In 1915 Athabasca suddenly ceased to be a significant inland port. That year, for the first time in over three decades, there had been no pounding of hammers and shrieking of saws as dozens of scows were readied for their voyage down river. The Athabasca Brigade was no more. Nor, after 1914, were there any steamboats at the Landing: both the NTC and the HBC closed down their services that fall. Furthermore, the Canadian Northern Railway, on the verge of bankruptcy, scrapped its plans for a railway bridge over the Athabasca River and an extension of its Athabasca spur to Fort McMurray. From being the "gateway to the North," Athabasca had become, almost overnight, the last stop on a road to nowhere.

The loss of its economic raison d'eire hit Athabasca hard. No more northern trade meant massive unemployment among the rivermen, freighters, labourers, carpenters, clerks and others whose wages had been paid by the HBC and the NTC. Most of the Métis rivermen and their families simply left town, usually heading for Lac La Biche or Lesser Slave Lake, or down river to booming Fort McMurray. Workers of European extraction, especially those with British roots, often found that joining the army was the easiest way out of their dilemma. Other jobless Athabascans tried to drink their problems off their minds, and police reports for the war years



Railway Map of Alberta, 1916, showing how Athabasca was by-passed by both the A&GWR line to Fort McMurray and the ED & BCR line to Lesser Slave Lake and Spirit River. Facsimile of the original map by Sam Gorman, courtesy of Iain Taylor.

reveal a significant increase in alcoholism, theft, and violent crime.[24]

Not only townsfolk were hurt by the collapse of the Landing's economy. Homesteading, for those with little or no capital, was not a paying proposition during the start-up years when land had to be cleared and farm buildings erected, so many farmers in the Athabasca region were dependent on seasonal jobs to help make ends meet. The opportunity for such seasonal work largely disappeared and the result, for many, was destitution. From February, 1915, onwards, the RNWMP began recording cases of distressed homesteaders, and during the winter of 1914/15 gave out $1,712 in emergency relief provided by the federal government.[25] The local Board of Trade, too, formed an ad hoc committee to investigate the condition of local homesteaders, and this committee subsequently acted as an agency collecting charitable donations of money, food and clothing for those in need. Unfortunately, however, there were few people in Athabasca with much money to give, and local relief efforts were competing for donations with the Patriotic Fund and with the equally pressing needs of the Athabasca hospital.[26]

THE ATHABASCA HERALD.

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA

VOLUME 1 — THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12th, 1916 — NUMBER 4

Money In Sheep.

Exploit This Industry.

There was one farmer, Mr. Frank Stafford, living west of Athabasca, who wore a big smile when in town last Saturday, and the cause thereof was found in the number of cheques he had just received from the sale of lambs. One of those totalled $39.00 for three lambs. This is not a single instance in the affairs of Mr. Stafford. He has grown to look upon his sheep as an ever present bank account and thinks that every homesteader could enjoy the same good fortune.

Those who keep sheep know they give the biggest money for the investment of any class of live stock; they consume rough cheap feed, keep the farms clean, furnish a cheap, handy class of fresh meat, pack and fertilize the summer fallow and can be taken care of without any tax on the labor of the farms. The bulletin of sheep keeping issued by the department of agriculture puts it this way:

The special advantages of sheep keeping are as follows: Sheep do not require the outlay of much capital for foundation stock or for buildings, and they make small demands on labor for their care in either winter or summer. They mature rapidly, increase rapidly, and furnish returns twice a year. It is commonly estimated that the wool will pay the keep of the ewe, measured by the value of the marketable food feed consumed and not including labor. Sheep convert certain classes of both green and dry feeds, otherwise of no value or even injurious, into valuable meat. Such feeds are rough and weedy natural hay, pea straw, tailings, weed seeds, and weeds growing in the pastures, fields, stubble fields, summerfallows, lanes and yards.

Ninety Per Cent of Weeds.

Sheep will eat ninety per cent of the total number of kinds of weeds that grow in Alberta, many pests of the province have become readily infested with weeds owing to the practice of growing grain year after year on the same land and to the difficulty of killing weeds in our dry autumns. Sheep are the only animals to which it is safe to feed wood seeds. Other animals do not grind them well enough to destroy the germ. They pack the summerfallows and also fertilize them by distributing droppings and tramping them into the soil. Their droppings are usually left in the highest and lightest part of the pasture which are the parts on which they lie. It is this quality of fertilizing land that has given rise in England to the saying that the sheep's hoof is golden. Sheep furnish to the household of the farm a cheaply produced, wholesome kind of fresh meat in conveniently small carcases.

Colemans, Alta., Oct 5, 16.

Mayor McKernan
Athabasca.

Have heard of Athabasca's irreparable loss in burning of hospital. Please accept our heartfelt sympathy. We, as old residents of Athabasca, fully realize the great loss to the community. We regret exceedingly the loss of life. Kindly convey to the Sisters our sentiments of deep personal feelings.

Dr. J. E. OLIVIER
J. C. HENDRY
E. E. OLIVIER

Hospital Destroyed.

THREE PATIENTS MEET A TERRIBLE DEATH IN RAGING FLAMES--
$20,000 LOSS.

Immediate Action Necessary To Secure Hospital Facilities.

The fire fiend has again visited Athabasca, exacting appalling toll in material losses and human lives, depriving it of its public institution of greatest utility, and rendering the question of the immediate establishment of an hospital here acutely important.

The Sacred Heart Hospital is no more, and its destruction by fire involved the loss of three human lives.

This deplorable event occurred early on Sunday morning, starting about 5 o'clock. Within one hour nothing but a smoking heap of charred timbers remained this time it was impossible to be of any assistance. Dense volumes of smoke rolled through the corridors and flames were greedily devouring the dry woodwork. No life could exist under such conditions and the work of rescue perforce ceased. The cries of the unfortunate woman had ceased. Death, coming quickly, ended her agony. The younger girls, mental defectives, who occupied a room next to Mrs. Olson's made no outcry whatever. Asphyxiation must have saved them from the intensity of the flames. There their physical abilities, but the fire had gained too great a headway for their efforts to be of avail. The fire occurred, too, at an hour when the populace was wrapped in deepest slumber, and there were many who were utterly ignorant of the event until well along in the morning.

The patients of the Hospital, with one exception, of the three reported above were all safely gotten out, and together with Sister Superior Eloise, Sister Amy, Sister Rolande, and Sister Rustee, who directed the affairs of the hospital, were taken

Red Cross Society Appeals For Assistance.

It is particularly requested that the women of Athabasca and district read the letter of the Provincial Secretary, printed elsewhere in this issue, to the local branch of the society. As so many of the men from our own district are needing medical supplies it is hoped that the women will come forward and help to supply the need. It is almost impossible for the local branch to continue its work unless the women of the town and district who have not helped come forward and do a small share. Many of the best workers have moved away and others are needed to fill the vacancy. Material will be supplied at the Red Cross rooms upstairs Hudson's Bay store Tuesday and Friday afternoons from 3 to 5 p. m., or on application to Miss Vesta Lewis. At any time during

Will Investigate Possibilities of Sugar Beets.

Mr. A. A. Greer is back in town after spending two weeks superintending the erection of a bridge over Flat Creek near Donatville. Mr. Greer states that the crops in that section of Athabasca are pretty good. There is a splendid yield and although from did some damage, still the enhanced price will make up for the deterioration in quality. This district is largely populated by colored settlers and Mr. Greer speaks highly of their industry and genius for organization looking towards better prices and larger markets. Many of them have as high as sixty, forty, sixty and some a hundred acres under cultivation and plenty of farm power in the form of horses and mules. Hogs and cattle are also much in evidence, but the newest idea of these people is that of sugar beet growing with a view of

Effective Work By

Local Branch of Red Cross.

The annual meeting of the Athabasca branch of the Canadian Red Cross Society was held in a room kindly lent by the Hudson's Bay Company at their store on Friday, the 6th. inst.

The President, Mrs. George Mills, occupied the chair.

The honorary secretary, Mrs. Laval, produced a balance sheet and statement of what had been done during the year which was of a most satisfactory character, the total receipts amounting to $740.60, with an expenditure of $502.70.

Out of the balance in hand it was decided to make a donation of $30 for the upkeep for one year of the Athabasca and Calling ton cots which were presented to the Clivelen Hospital by this branch, $100 in cash to the head branch of the Canadian Red Cross Society, and $80 to be sent to the fund in aid of the prisoners of war.

The amount of work done by this branch was most gratifying, 3,218 articles having been made and forwarded during the year.

Mrs. George Mills was again elected President and Mrs. J. W. Mills, Vice-President, while Mrs Laval has again kindly consented to act as Honorary Secretary for the ensuing year, with the following as committee: Mrs. Howard, Mrs. Currie, Mrs. Fox, Mrs. Vermeeren, Miss Edith Haight and Mr. A. C. McKay.

$11,000, involving a total loss of $20,000. In conversation with Rev. Father Desmarais, The HERALD learned, that the Sisters of Providence, whose headquarters are at Montreal and who control the hospital, are unlikely to rebuild. Athabasca and district are thus confronted in an urgent manner with a grave problem, whose solution demands immediate action. In this connection we refer the reader to our editorial columns, where THE HERALD, humbly discusses the matter. Let us take action quickly. In view of all the circumstances we believe this to be the psychological moment.

Geologists Back From Labors Down North.

Mr. A. E. Cameron, of the staff of the University of Alberta, Edmonton, who has had charge of a survey party for the Geological Survey of Canada, reached Athabasca on Monday night from Great Slave Lake. The party left Edmonton on May 29 and travelled down by the Peace and Slave rivers to Ft. Resolution.

The object of the expedition was to study the general geologic and economic possibilities of the country lying about the west arm of the lake and especially the vicinity of Slave Point, where, in recent years, many oil claims have been staked.

A necessary and important part of the work was the surveying of the north shore of this arm, which hitherto has never been

vegetables do well. Timothy has been grown for years. Mr. Cameron related an instance of remarkable growth of wheat, barley and oats. On the land of A. J. Vale, Anglican missionary, these grains were sown on June 9, were up on June 15 and fully headed out by July 19. However, with the exception of the deltas of the Hay and Slave rivers the land is not particularly adapted for agricultural purposes, being muskeggy, timbered and containing many gravelly ridges.

Mr. Cameron made delighted reference to one particular scenic feature of the North, the Alexandra Falls, on Hay river, forty miles south of Hay River post. These falls are 150 feet wide and have a sheer drop of 105 feet. They rival Niagara in their majesty and beauty and are well worth a trip to view them.

F. H. McLearn.

Mr. F. H. McLearn, of the Geological Survey of Canada, who has been making a structural and stratigraphic survey of the Athabasca section, arrived in town on Monday night on Mr. Smalley's boat. He left Athabasca on July 3 and worked down the Athabasca river to a point about 30 miles below Ft. McKay.

The work accomplished by Mr. McLearn has an important economic bearing on this district and the country on account of the interest taken in oil. The information gleaned will appear in the Annual Report of the Survey, which will be awaited with deep interest. A considerable

The tragedy of the Sisters of Providence's Sacred Heart Hospital. *Athabasca Herald*, October 12, 1916. Athabasca Archives Newspaper Colletion.

The story of the hospital was one of the tragedies of wartime Athabasca. The large, clean, well-equipped facility that the Sisters of Providence and their local supporters had struggled so long to bring into existence was the pride of Athabasca. But in 1916 the Sacred Heart Hospital was razed to the ground by a fire. It was uninsured, so in a few hours $12,000 worth of buildings and equipment, the fruits of a decade's labour and fund raising, were lost.[27] That year, too, the fur-trading firm of Revillon Frères, which had already been a victim of the great fire of August, 1913, again lost its Athabasca store in a fire.[28] This time the company did not rebuild, and the loss of Revillon was another nail in the coffin of the local fur trade.

By the end of the war, the local HBC store, although still in operation, had become little more than a retail shop, one general store among others. Not that there were so many others, since many of Athabasca's retail outlets went out of business in these tough times. A few remained, such as the Farrell & Daigneau General Store, Rennison Bros., McLeod Bros., Cull's

The Farrell & Daigneau store's delivery car, with Mr. Daigneau, c. 1920. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00725.

Pharmacy, and Falconer's Hardware, but even these well-established and popular local merchants had a struggle to survive, and often kept their rural customers only by giving them credit throughout the summer until post-harvest crop sales allowed the homesteaders to pay their bills (or some of them).[29]

The town administration was, if anything, in an even less enviable state. Hardly anybody could afford to pay their property taxes in 1915, and the town was forced to cut the salaries of its employees: the secretary-treasurer, the assessor, the stenographer, the police constable, and the fireman.[30] It published a list of over 3,000 town lots on which property taxes were owing, and threatened to auction them off if their owners continued to be recalcitrant about paying, but the threat was largely bluff, since most of the properties were unsaleable.[31] With drastically reduced revenues from taxes, the town could not service its debts, and from 1915 the threat of bankruptcy loomed large, and a succession of mayors struggled, without much help or hope, to appease the creditors and stave off disaster.

Warned by his astute business partner, Jim Cornwall, Mayor J.H. Wood had seen the writing on the wall as early as January, 1914, and had handed over his office to bank manager A.L. Sawle. Sawle himself resigned eight months later and postmaster James McKernan took over.[32] He lasted just over a year, and the new mayor, George Mills, was a farmer, an indication that Athabasca had become primarily an agricultural community.[33] Mills had little room to manoeuvre, but by cutting costs to the bone and judiciously selling off some of the town's assets, he kept the creditors at bay for a few more years. His devotion to this thankless task, and his keen interest in seeing a restoration of hospital services for the Athabasca area, earned him a great deal of respect among town residents, and helped soothe some of the town/country antagonisms that had built up in the hectic pre-war years.

Mills eventually cashed in on this hard-won popularity when Athabasca's MLA, A.G. Mackay, died suddenly in 1920. He gained the liberal nomination by acclamation, and then handsomely defeated James Cornwall in the by-election by a margin of 640 votes to 286.[34] Cornwall, who was running as an Independent, polled well in the north of the constituency and swept Fort McMurray, but did surprisingly poorly in Athabasca for a man who had been one of the Landing's most popular and respected businessmen before the War. The vote against him was a measure of Athabasca's resentment at his decision to pull the NTC out of the Landing in 1914.

Athabasca suffered other losses and faced other problems during World War I. The RNWMP headquarters was transferred to Peace River in 1916, and Athabasca was left without even a local detachment.[35] Similarly, Bishop Robins moved the Anglican diocesan see to Peace River, so the status of All Saints Church declined from that of a cathedral to that of a mere parish church.[36] The imposing Methodist Church also served a shrinking congregation, and was in financial trouble, partly because its operating costs were high and partly because it, too, had a formidable debt load to service.[37]

Membership in the Athabasca Board of Trade plummeted, and the organization became so short of funds that it had to curtail drastically its publicity campaign about the glowing future in store for Athabasca as a commercial and market centre. These claims were coming to have such a hollow ring that the Board underwent a crisis of conscience as well as a financial crisis, and in 1915 even considered closing down entirely. In the event it eschewed this drastic step, but was effectively dormant through 1916, and in 1917 underwent a major reorganization that turned it into an agricultural lobby group.[38] From 1917 onwards its primary concerns were grain prices, elevator facilities, railway service to local farmers, and road building. The last activity, in fact, seemed to be the one bright spark on Athabasca's economic horizon during the later years of the War. The town already had road links with Edmonton, Lac La Biche, and the Peace Country, roads that MLA A.G. MacKay had worked to improve, and now a fourth main highway was being built to Calling Lake and Wabasca, with the possibility of a future extension to Fort McMurray. But in 1920 even these hopes were dashed: the provincial government abandoned work on the Wabasca road and cancelled the entire project. [39]

The litany of Athabasca's woes seemed never ending. The collapse of the Moose Lake and Athabasca Oil Company put an end to ideas of a local oil and gas industry. The town's somewhat unreliable natural gas supply was again cut off, rendering the gas heaters in the hotel and various businesses useless, and plunging the streets once again in darkness at night.[40] Forest fires raged along both sides of the river in 1916, destroying square mile upon square mile of valuable timber and delivering a severe (although not fatal) blow to the local lumber and sawmilling industry.[41] Fox farming, hailed in 1913/14 as an important new contribution to the region's economy, was hit by a series of scandals and bankruptcies, and disappeared as quickly as it had come.[42] From 1919 onwards war veterans, many of them crippled or victims of shell shock, poured back to the town and countryside, only to find that there were no jobs for them, and that the business of turning scrub, marsh or woodland into a prosperous farm had become even more difficult. In October, 1920, the *Athabasca Herald* reported that grain prices at the local elevator (run by Alberta Grain Growers) were lower than ever before, so low in fact that many Athabasca district farmers complained that they were operating at a loss.[43]

Athabasca's Great War veterans at a reunion in the 1930s. Athabasca Archives, 00731.

Athabasca's second hospital, formerly the residence of Bishop Holmes. Athabasca Archive Stephens Collection: 01011.

Symbolic of Athabasca's problems was the story of the hospital. When the Sacred Heart Hospital burned down in 1916, the Sisters of Providence reluctantly concluded that they could not raise the capital needed to rebuild. Athabasca's well-known and popular physician, Dr. Joseph Olivier, who had been one of the driving forces behind the hospital project, had become heavily involved in the war effort and had left town in 1915. His replacement, Dr. MacDonald, concluded that with the hospital in ruins and the town's population only one quarter of what it had been, there was no future for him in Athabasca. When he pulled out in 1916 Athabasca was left without hospital or doctor.[44] Mayor Mills set out to recruit a new physician but it was April, 1917, before Dr. Meyer, his prize catch, began to practise in Athabasca.

Dr. Meyer was an energetic, strong-willed man with decided opinions on matters medical, and he did not suffer fools gladly. He and Mills immediately began looking for a means of obtaining a new hospital for the town, and their eyes lighted upon the now-empty bishop's residence owned by the Anglican Church. This they persuaded Bishop Robins to sell to the town at a fairly low price, and they themselves apparently loaned the town the cash to make the purchase.[45] Then they formed a local hospital board, and appealed for government aid in equipping and staffing the new facility. When this was not forthcoming, they approached instead a private charitable organization, the Victorian Order of Nurses, which agreed to purchase the hospital and assume responsibility for running it. By the end of the war, Athabasca once again had a functioning hospital, but, like its predecessor, it was partly dependent on charitable donations to cover its operating expenses.[46]

Dr. Meyer now had his hospital, but he was dissatisfied with the amount and quality of medical equipment in the building, and, increasingly, he was dissatisfied with the quality of medical care provided by the Victorian Order's nurses. The Matron of the hospital, on her side, vigorously defended her nurses against Dr. Meyer's criticisms and objected to some of his methods of treatment. By 1920 Matron and Doctor were at daggers drawn, and in October the storm that had been brewing for a couple of years finally broke. Dr. Meyer went public with his criticisms of the poor management and low quality of service offered by the hospital.[47] The Matron then banned Dr. Meyer and his patients from using the hospital. As a result, an unfortunate victim of a farm accident who needed to have a limb amputated had to be driven to Edmonton for his operation; he subsequently died.

Athabasca was in an uproar. A public meeting was held to inquire into the crisis, and Dr. Meyer eloquently pleaded his case, receiving the support of MLA George Mills and the new mayor, Frank Falconer. The existing hospital board, which supported the Matron, then resigned and a new board, headed by Mayor Falconer, was elected. This group asked the Victorian Order of Nurses to relinquish day-to-day management of the facility, and appealed for help from the provincial government. Despite the lobbying efforts of MLA Mills, no aid was forthcoming from the government, and the VON pulled out completely, leaving the hospital with no nurses.[48] Dr. Meyer then appealed to the Red Cross, which agreed to run the hospital on a temporary basis while a more permanent arrangement was worked out. It took until 1922 for a solution to be found: the creation of a municipal hospital board that would run a regional hospital designed to serve, and be funded by, not only the town of Athabasca but also the surrounding rural and municipal districts of Nelson, Cartier and Grosmont. This arrangement kept the hospital running during the 1920s, but the facility continued to be plagued by inadequate funding, which meant a lack of modern equipment and insufficient nursing staff.[49]

The hospital thus endured a series of crises but survived. That was also true of Athabasca town and region as a whole, but it was not true of the town's administration. Until 1921 the Town Council limped along, hamstrung by unpaid taxes, unmanageable debts, and an unsympathetic provincial government. George Mills simply did not have the influence in cabinet that J.R. Boyle and A.G. MacKay had wielded, and in tough economic times the government had more important things to do with its limited resources than to bailout a small town that had overspent in the pre-war boom and now had to live with the consequences. In vain Mayor Falconer and MLA Mills pointed out how government railway policies had contributed to the demise of the Landing. In vain they reminded the Liberal cabinet of how Justice Boyle in particular had championed and encouraged the town's expansion of its services and the building of the Brick School. In vain they argued that, if Athabasca's debts were written off, the town could start from scratch and rebuild its finances in line with its new role as an agricultural market centre.

Premier Charles Stewart's Liberal government may have acknowledged the force of these arguments in the abstract, but in practice in the winter of 1920/21 it could spare neither time nor money to deal wth Athabasca's woes. It had its own severe financial difficulties, and it was fighting for its political life.

The axe would in fact fall in the provincial election of July, 1921. The recently formed United Farmers of Alberta party, although it obtained only twenty-nine per cent of the popular vote and considerably less votes overall than the Liberals, gained thirty-eight of the sixty-one seats in the Alberta Legislative Assembly, and formed the new government.

Athabasca would buck the trend and stick by local Liberal MLA, George Mills.[50] Given the fact that the town of Athabasca was already in head-on conflict with the Liberal government, this was a rather remarkable exhibition of political loyalty. The Liberal government was frightened by the widespread discontent among prairie farmers, and was anxious to put the province's finances on a more secure footing so that it would have more money available to help distressed homesteaders. That meant, among other things, making sure that delinquent municipalities such as Athabasca paid the interest due on their outstanding government loans. Mayor Falconer and his council demurred, pleading incapacity, and held a public meeting to see if they had local support for their position. They had, overwhelmingly, and the stand-off continued.[51] The government's Municipal Finances Commission then investigated Athabasca's situation and drew up a financial plan of action for the town to implement which involved raising taxes and selling assets at firesale prices. Backed by the threat of legal action, this was an ultimatum designed to cow the town into submission.

The game was up, but Mayor Falconer and his supporters refused to be intimidated. The Town Council met for one last time, passed a resolution refusing to carry out "the directions of the Municipal Finances Commission, Bond Holders & Department of Municipal Affairs regarding the bonded indebtness of the Town," and resigned en masse.[52] No candidates could be found to fill their shoes, so in the summer of 1921 Athabasca found itself without a mayor or a town council. Effectively, the town had declared bankruptcy, and the Department of Municipal Affairs was forced to take over its day-to-day administration. Athabasca Landing had died in the winter of 1914/15, but it was buried in the summer of 1921.

A deserted town in crisis: Athabasca in the early '20s, the view looking east. Glenbow Archives, NA-1072-29.

Chapter 10

Postscript—The Rise of Modern Athabasca

In the sixty-five years since 1921, Athabasca's population has gradually grown until it is now approximately the same as that of Athabasca Landing in 1913 (about 1,900). Yet although Athabasca is now as big as it was on the eve of World War 1, the process of recovery has been slow and uneven. Indeed, during the years between the wars, Athabasca, notwithstanding its official status as a town, was little more than a village that served the local farming community. To be sure, the population did grow by a couple of hundred in the good years before the Great Depression reached rural Alberta, but as late as 1943 it stood at only 600.

The late 40s, when Canadians made babies instead

Aerial view of Athabasca, August 1950. Bill Preece, Athabasca Archives, 01150.

of guns, were the time when prosperity (and fertility) returned to Athabasca, as to so many other Canadian villages, towns and cities. By 1949 Athabasca's population had topped the 1,000 mark, and the '50s saw another forty per cent increase, to 1,406 in 1960. Since then, the trend, while not consistent, has continued upwards overall. The mid-'60s witnessed a brief downturn in the demographic curve, and much of the '70s was a time of stagnation. However, Athabasca's slow growth resumed in the late 1970s and appears to be continuing in the mid-'80s, despite the province's recent economic troubles.[1]

In the steamboating days, from 1888 to 1914, Athabasca Landing was a unique community. After World War I, Athabasca had less to distinguish it from other small towns in Western Canada until the arrival of Athabasca University in 1984. The village struggled through the '20s and the Depression years, and contributed its share of fighting men to the Second World War. It shared in the post-war economic boom, fuelled by oil revenues, that Alberta enjoyed for nearly forty years, and quickly resumed its earlier role as a market town serving a rural population of over 5,000. At the beginning of the 1950s, the engine of the local economy was still farming, but in the last few decades the Athabasca area has experienced the effects, both positive and negative, of the modernization of agriculture. Farming is still important to the town, of course, but the decline in the family farm and the rise of agribusinesses have caused a relative reduction in the role played by agriculture-related activities. Since World War II, Athabasca has also experienced the revolution in transportation and communications, and the major improvements in education and government services, that together have transformed the lives of all Albertans. These changes have helped Athabasca to grow: with the location of government offices in the town, the centralization of the school system, the expansion of service industries, and the creation of the County of Athabasca as a larger administrative unit, the town has become a full-fledged regional centre.

That, in a nutshell, is the story of the phoenix-like rebirth of Athabasca from the ashes of Athabasca Landing. But each of the decades since 1921 has had its own flavour, its own contribution to make to this ongoing saga. This brief postscript can do no more than recall some of the main highlights of life in Athabasca from the '20s, to the '80s, but doing so will help us to build a bridge in time between the old Athabasca Landing with its scows, steamboats, box socials and railway, and the Athabasca of today with its pick-up trucks, VCRs, Performing Arts Centre and University.

Throughout most of the 1920s Athabasca was too small and poor to support a local newspaper. The local Hudson's Bay Company store, the town's symbolic link with the days when it was "headquarters of northern transportation," closed in 1924, and many other local merchants pulled out or went bankrupt in the decade of crisis that followed the closing down of most of Athabasca's river transportation. However, a few well-known names (including druggist Harvey Cull and hardware store owner Frank Falconer) stuck it out, and general store owner J.L. Lessard even rebuilt his business premises in 1929. There were even a few new faces: Anton Schinkinger started a harness shop that later evolved into a menswear and footwear store; Charles Parker bought the HBC premises, moving his Empire Store there in 1925; and the Athabasca Creamery opened in 1926. Two years later, the Creamery's new owners, Angus McLeod and John Van Dyke, also set up the town's first electric-power supply company, and in 1929 the old gas lamps on the streets were replaced with electric lights. Before that time, the Imperial Bank and the veteran's hall had been the only "electrified" buildings in Athabasca. Between 1925 and 1929 they received their power from a Delco plant housed in the basement of Parker's store.

Four of the survivors. From left to right. Mr. McDermid, Dr. Turnbull, Frank Falconer and Harvey Cull, after a successful hunting expedition c. 1920. Athabasca Archives Cull Collection, 00719.

The revamped municipal lighting system was a manifestation of the town's recovery from the bankruptcy into which it had plunged in 1921. By the late '20s it again had an active Town Council and Board of Trade, and most inhabitants were once more paying their taxes. This relative prosperity reflected the better times experienced by farmers in the mid to late '20s. Bumper crops and higher grain prices, combined with the creation of Wheat

Dog team in front of Charles Parker's store, 1936. Athabasca Archives Evans Collection, 00920.

Pools and Farmers' Associations to look after their interests, meant that many local homesteaders were now well established as successful farmers able to afford the new gasoline-powered tractors, trucks for grain handling, and automobiles for personal transportation. Moreover, agriculture was not the only industry that experienced a real, if short-lived, boom in the late '20s: lumbering and sawmilling also expanded during these years, as did the new commercial fishery at Calling Lake.

The Athabasca Creamery and the Power House in the late '20s. Athabasca Archives, 05103.

A reflection of the good years for farming in the late ‘20s: the Athabasca booth at the Edmonton Agricultural Exhibition, July, 1929. M.R. Percival, Harvey Cull, Percy Taylor, Charles Shoubridge, A. Schinkinger. Athabasca Archives, 00722.

Hauling lumber in the late ‘20s: a load of 125 railway ties hauled by Frank Senz from Thirty Mile Island to Athabasca. Athabasca Archives Allen Collection, 00307.

The unveiling of the Memorial Cairn commemorating soldiers from the Athabasca area who died in World War I. Athabasca Archives Waddle Collection, 00911.

Life in Athabasca in the 1920s probably did not differ greatly from life in the 1900s, except for the growing numbers of automobiles, telephones, phonographs and radios. Some of the older social clubs, such as the Canadian Club, had become moribund, but the Athabasca branch of the Great War Veterans Association flourished, purchasing an existing office building for a clubroom in 1921, expanding into a purpose-built memorial hall in 1928, and erecting a war memorial cairn in 1932. The most memorable social events in Athabasca during the ‘20s appear to have been the chautauquas, travelling tent shows that appeared for a week each summer and offered a wide range of entertainment and instruction including public lectures, musical performances, comedy and drama. They made a change from box socials, silent movies and “Hockey Night in Canada” on the radio from Edmonton.

Eventually, in July, 1928, the town got back its local newspaper, now called (for the first time) the *Athabasca Echo*. The paper was edited by William Conquest, whose wife, Mary, would come to be known across Canada as the “Red Cross Lady,” and would be named a member of the Order of the British Empire for her fund-raising work for that organization. The paper was soon campaigning for a bridge across the river, and remarking on the increased traffic on the ferry, a reflection of a new wave of immigration into the area and, in particular, an expansion of homesteading north of the river, from Greyville to Richmond Park.

The total number of homesteaders in the wider Athabasca region increased only slightly during this period, however. Overall, although many homesteaders prospered, about one-half of the original pioneers either sold their farms to newcomers or neighbours, or simply gave up the unequal struggle to turn marginal land into cultivated fields. That meant there were many new faces in the one-room log schools now dotted throughout the Athabasca area from Vincent in the south to Richmond Park in the north and from Baptiste Lake in the west to Silver Fox in the east.

Other changes of note experienced by Athabasca in the 1920s occurred in the realms of health care, religion, and politics. The hospital crisis of 1916–22 had been resolved by the creation of a municipal hospital using the building that had once housed the Bishop of the Anglican diocese of Athabasca. This hospital was funded by the Town of Athabasca, by the municipal districts of Cartier, Grosmont and Nelson, and by annual subscription fees paid voluntarily by potential users (a sort of local hospital insurance scheme). On this rather shaky financial basis it staggered along until 1929, when the first local Board of Health was created in an attempt to put the region’s rather limited medical services on a more systematic footing.

Rev. Robert Little and Rev. Frank Abbott at the Athabasca Municipal Hospital. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Aca 129.

The late '20s was a time of renewal also for the Anglican church in Athabasca: in 1928 the dedicated and energetic Rev. Robert Little became the rector of All Saints and also Archdeacon of the Athabasca diocese, and for the next seventeen years he and his equally hard-working and popular wife, Marian, would run a much-needed social program intended to keep the poor and unemployed of the parish from utter destitution. The congregations of St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic church, still led by Father Desmarais, and of the Athabasca Methodist church, which became the United Church in 1925, contributed to similar relief efforts, especially after hard times returned in the wake of Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929.

As for politics, Athabasca remained Liberal throughout the 1920s, although from 1921 onwards the government in Edmonton was United Farmer. MLA George Mills lost the Liberal nomination to farmer John Frame in 1926, but in the late '20s Frame had a change of political heart, and attempted to keep his seat as the UFA candidate in 1930. This piece of

political opportunism misfired, and a popular local merchant, Frank R. Falconer, took the Athabasca constituency for the Liberals in 1930, thereby confirming the region's loyalty to the memory of Justice Boyle and A.G. MacKay.[2]

The 1930s told a different story. Economically these were the years of the Great Depression, and politically they witnessed the rapid rise of Social Credit in Alberta. Essentially it was a decade of stagnation for the village. The population stood at 573 in 1931 and at 578 in 1941, although this apparent stasis in the number of Athabasca's inhabitants over the decade does disguise a small rise to 623 in 1939, before the call of war took away some of the village's men to train as soldiers, sailors or airmen.

Since Athabasca was at this time primarily an agricultural community, its economic health was closely tied to the fate of local farmers. And that, in the first half of the 1930s at least, was almost as bad as it could be. Athabasca did escape the worst of the dust storms and grasshopper plagues that devastated the southern prairies, but the weather was harsh (dry in the summer and very cold in the winter) and infestations of Russian thistle spoiled the crops. And even worse than the natural disasters were the man-made ones: the financial and industrial crises of the Depression years resulted in the virtual disappearance of Western Canada's overseas grain market, and that, despite the decreased yields caused by bad weather, meant huge surpluses and low prices. With wheat at less than forty cents a bushel, most farmers were struggling to avoid crippling debt or bankruptcy, so there was little money left over to purchase goods and services from the merchants of Athabasca.

As might be expected, the *Athabasca Echo* in the early '30s carried its full share of reports of destitution, suicide, alcohol abuse, violent crime; child battery and juvenile crime. There were simply too many unemployed, hungry and desperate people for the local authorities and charitable organizations to cope with. By 1931 the Town of Athabasca was in financial trouble again: taxes were not being paid, but the costs of poor relief, widows' allowances and hospital bills for the indigent were sky-rocketing. Teachers and local government employees saw their already meagre wages cut further, and local merchants were once again forced to extend credit to customers who had no cash to buy even basic necessities. On the other hand, those who did have some income found the Depression years a time of welcome low prices: one could buy eggs for sixteen cents a dozen and two cans of pink salmon for twenty-five cents, while wage labour could be purchased for $1.50 a day, even when the day entailed a twelve-hour shift on a threshing crew.

So not everybody found the early '30s the worst of all times, and, moreover, the Athabasca area seems to have experienced a mild economic turn around in the mid-1930s. By 1935 the number of people on poor relief recorded by the local RCMP had declined to twenty from the high of 200, the worst of the emergency was over, and the town's politicians and administrators could breathe a sigh of relief. The hospital, which had nearly gone bankrupt, was saved by local fund-raising efforts and by the fact that a higher proportion of patients were able to pay their bills, while the quality of health care in Athabasca was improved by the arrival of Dr. Edwin Kinney Wright, who came in 1933 and stayed, with one brief hiatus, until his death, thirty-three years later. His colleague, Dr. Meyer, remained in town until 1938, when he left to set up a practice in the remote B.C. village of Telegraph Creek.

Other indications that the economic crisis was slowly ameliorating were the resumption of oil drilling

Dr. E.K. Wright a well-known figure in Athabasca for more than thirty years. Athabasca Archives, 01149.

(some small gas wells, but no major discoveries, were found in 1935), the use of air transportation by the Calling Lake commercial fishery, the sight of scows and fur traders back on the Athabasca River, and the modernization of the local flour mill in 1936. The same year saw the opening of Mike's clothing store. Two notable local personalities made their debut in Athabasca in 1938: historian and author W.B. Cameron opened a drug store to supplement his income from writing, while young lawyer P.G. Davies took over the practice of P.W.L. Clark, who was retiring after working in the village since 1916.

This moderate revival in Athabasca's fortunes was reflected in an increase in the number of students in the local schools, and a modest expansion of the school system. The Brick School had to be expanded by the addition of two extra classrooms, sometimes known, collectively, as the "Stucco School," while rural log schools were constructed in such districts as Big Coulee, Hallcroft, Ferguson, Larvert, Winding Trail and Narrow Lake. In 1939 the eighty-six local school districts in the region were amalgamated into the Athabasca School Division which, on the eve of World War II, operated the Brick and Stucco schools, and forty-seven rural log schools, and employed 143 teachers.

Despite the Depression, there were some improvements in the quality of life of Athabasca area inhabitants in the 1930s. In 1937 the Collins brothers started a motor-coach service to Edmonton, to complement the three-times-weekly train service. Initially they owned only a single, seven-passenger touring car, but their business developed into the Canadian Coachways bus line. For those living north of the river, the ferry service was improved and made free, while in 1934 a cable cage system was installed to allow people to cross the river in spring and early winter when floating ice precluded operation of the ferry. By 1937 the *Athabasca Echo*, indefatigably pursuing its campaign for a road bridge, claimed that a total of 2,000 settlers lived north of the river. This figure was probably an exaggeration, but it is true that a new wave of immigrant homesteaders, mainly from Poland and the Ukraine, arrived in the '30s and many of them settled north-west or north-east of Athabasca. Other newcomers to the region were farmers escaping from the dustbowl areas of southern Saskatchewan and southern Alberta—families who had salvaged just enough from their once-prosperous grain farms to purchase quarter sections further north and try their hand at the less profitable, but also less risky, business of mixed farming. If these different kinds of refugee did not greatly boost the population of the Athabasca region, they at least prevented it from declining, and

The cable cage that carried passengers across the Athabasca River in the spring and fall from 1934 to 1952. Athabasca Archives, 00870.

they brought with them their own special talents and culture.

Indeed the cultural life of Athabasca and area seems to have flourished in the '30s. The box socials, barn dances and chautauquas continued as before, and there was a noticeable increase in the amount of drama and music performed by local people. For example, the Athabasca Amateur Dramatic Society was formed in 1930, the same year that the town band was reorganized, and both groups put on performances that were well received by local residents. Another entertainment option, the talking movie, first became available in Athabasca in 1930, but the response to "talkies" was less than overwhelming, and two years later the movie theatre went back to silent films.

The onset of the Great Depression had proved devastating for the phonograph industry, so there was a marked drop in the number and variety of gramophone records available to phonograph owners. In compensation, however, radio developed considerably during the '30s, and the number

Another form of recreation: the old swimming hole, Tawatinaw Creek, nicknamed "The Pier." Athabasca Archives Schinkinger Collection, 00313.

of Athabascans possessing "wireless" receivers increased markedly. Opinions differ on what stations could be picked up locally, but it would seem that CBC, CJCA, CFRN, and possibly CKUA, were (depending on the weather and the quality of the receiver) available from Edmonton, and that certain powerful American stations (including Denver and Chicago) and even Mexican border stations would cut in after dark. Athabasca itself lacked a local radio station, but a short-wave transmitter was set up at Calling Lake in 1939. Radio CFRN even put on a special program called "Salute to Athabasca" in 1936, and this provided a good opportunity for self promotion by a local dance band, the Tempo Testers, formed that same year.

In general, radio—together with improved road transportation, and a better mail system, one that used the bus service and airplanes landing on the river—decreased Athabasca's isolation from the rest of Alberta.

That fact and, of course, the widespread hardship and discontent resulting from the Depression, helps explain why in 1935 Athabasca forsook its traditional road of political independence and voted with the majority of Albertans to elect a Social Credit government led by William Aberhart. The local Liberal MLA, Frank Falconer, was swept away in the Social Credit landslide by Clarence Tade, who then resigned to allow a cabinet minister, C.C. Ross, to obtain a seat. Ross, however, died in 1938, and Tade narrowly regained his seat in a close by-election victory. Athabasca was to remain a Social Credit stronghold until 1972, except for a brief period in the mid-1950s, when voters elected a Liberal representative.[3]

Athabascans, like people throughout Canada, responded to World War II with courage and generosity. By 1942 there were 153 local men serving in the armed forces, a number large enough to cause an acute farm labour shortage. We do not know how many of these men did not return, but, overall, the casualty rate among Canadian servicemen in the World War II was much less than the one-in-ten death rate suffered by Canadian soldiers in the First World War.

On the home front, the women of Athabasca responded, as their mothers had done, by preparing garments, food and supplies for the servicemen. They also gave whole-hearted support to the Red Cross in

Remembering World War II: a group of veterans in front of the Athabasca Legion Hall, c. 1947. Athabasca Archives, 00321.

The first air mail delivery to Athabasca, February, 1931. Athabasca Archives Hay Collection, 00966-b.

its efforts to ensure the availability of field hospitals, and the safety of prisoners of war. Athabascans responded to the likelihood of a drawn-out war by applying for an Air Cadet Squadron to train young people for future induction into the Royal Canadian Air Force. The squadron (RCACS 230) received its charter in 1942, and has continued active in the community until the present time.

Anxiety, grief and a lack of labour were among the most serious effects of the war experienced in Athabasca. In addition, the school system suffered a severe shortage of teachers during the war years, partly because many of the teachers had volunteered for service. Then, too, the additional stresses of this period resulted in a noticeable increase in drunkenness and crime. However, in an economic sense, not all of the effects of the war were bad. Rather than undercutting Athabasca economically, as had the Great War, World War II stimulated the local economy. Grain prices rose rapidly as Western Canada began supplying beleaguered Britain, the demand for lumber and wood products increased, and drilling for oil was resumed. Once again, no major oil wells were discovered in the Athabasca region, but earlier natural gas finds were confirmed, and a new natural gas pipeline was laid to the town in 1946. The highway to Edmonton was improved, and the municipal districts of Grosmont, Nelson and Cartier jointly purchased a caterpillar tractor and scraper for the purpose of levelling and gravelling secondary roads.

This practical co-operation led to an administrative reorganization after the War: in 1947 the Municipal District of Athabasca was formed from the districts of Grosmont, Cartier, Nelson, and parts of Westlock and Tawatinaw. As the headquarters of the new Municipal District was at Meanook, this change did not immediately benefit the town of Athabasca, but it was obvious that it would only be a matter of time before the administrative office would, for convenience, be moved to Athabasca.

A similar centralization was beginning to occur within the school system. Since the formation of the Athabasca School Division in 1938, the shortage of certified teachers had forced the closing of a handful of one-room log schools (beginning with that at West Athabasca), and the bussing of pupils to other local schools or to the Brick School in Athabasca. This trend continued during and after the War, and among the rural schools to close were Keyes, Golden Sunset, Dover, Atlanta, Vincent and Halkroft. By 1946 the Brick School had 378 students, but the number of teachers employed in the rural schools had dropped by more than one-half, to sixty-eight.

Most of the over 2,000 rural school children still received only a rudimentary education, but the

Grade 9, 10 and 11 classes outside the Brick School with teacher Hedley Graham (Tiny) Shaw, 1931. Athabasca Archives, 00661.

The beginnings of bussing: Mr. Thompson's school van, 1943. Athabasca Archives Donahue Collection, 01087.

decline of the one-room school and the expansion of the Brick School as a high school meant that a minority of more gifted students might, if their parents agreed, continue into the higher grades and obtain their matriculation diplomas. To do so, they needed a place to stay in Athabasca during the week. The local organization that met this need was the Anglican church: in 1938 it inaugurated the Bishop Young Boys Hostel situated near the Brick School, and in 1941 opened the St. Mary's Girls Hostel.

These new buildings were only a few of those erected in Athabasca at this time. The Stucco School was expanded in 1941, and the hospital in the next year. Construction of the Alaska Highway brought convoys of U.S. soldiers and labourers to the town, and soon temporary accommodation, in the form of quonset huts, was erected to house them. Local merchants benefited substantially from the increased quantity of money in circulation, and the Alaska Highway thus gave the town a short-lived but welcome economic boost.

Another improvement that helped the local economy was in the more reliable supply of electric power. The power house was taken over by Dominion Electric Ltd. in 1940 and was purchased from that company by Northland Utilities at the end of the War. These changes made possible a modernization of the generating system and the integration of Athabasca into a regional grid more capable of compensating for local breakdowns and for fluctuations in demand for

Athabasca Junior Hockey Team, 1937-38. Athabasca Archives Evans Collection, 00916.

power. The local lumber industry, too, experienced boom times during and after the War. G.G. Fowler opened a new planing mill in 1943, then in 1945 Imperial Lumber opened a large lumber yard and sawmill to exploit the region's timber resources, and yet another new sawmill was constructed in 1946.

The soldiers returning at the end of World War I had received their country's thanks, but very little in the way of practical assistance in making the difficult transition back to a peacetime economy. Canada

A time of recovery in the late 1940s: Evans Street, Athabasca. Bill Preece, Athabasca Archives, 01019.

The new Athabasca Creamery, c. 1956. Athabasca Archives, 01068.

expressed its gratitude in a more concrete way after World II. The Department of Veterans Affairs ensured that arable land was made available to returning soldiers, and that those who wished to pursue their education or to establish a business would receive assistance. We do not know how many local boys took advantage of these programs, but it seems clear that the Veterans Land Act provision for farmlands appealed the most to Athabasca's returned soldiers.

Like their counterparts elsewhere in Western Canada, Athabasca's farmers were doing exceptionally well in the' 40s, making up for the hard times they had endured in the previous decade. Good harvests and high grain prices meant plenty of money in their pockets, and they responded by buying modern farm machinery, automobiles and other consumer goods. This in turn benefited the town's merchants. Falconer Hardware branched out as a supplier of tractors, and each consignment brought in was snapped up before the vehicles had even been unloaded from the train. The Philipzyk farm equipment dealership was started in 1947, and prospered mightily. Landing Motors, a Ford dealership, opened in 1946, and Hunter Truck and Implements (now Hunter Motors), two years later. A Canadian Coachways bus depot was built in 1948, and a landing strip was planned to handle the increased airplane traffic.

The post-war years saw the arrival of quite a galaxy of new businesses, and the expansion of professional services in the town. For example, in 1945 the Creamery was rebuilt, a Credit Union opened, a T.B. Clinic was started, and a new dentist, F.T. Emmett, set up shop. 1946 saw the opening of a liquor store, a Five to Five convenience store, Shaw's Meat Freezer business, and a bigger and better Mike's Store. In 1947 Dr. Josephine Brown arrived, and the Red Cross started a mobile blood-transfusion service in the Athabasca area. Nor was the health of the animal population of the district neglected, since veterinary surgeon Dr. Paul Gudjurgis opened his office in Athabasca in late June, 1949. The intervening year, 1948, witnessed the opening of a new restaurant, a Co-op store, a Marshall-Wells store (replacing the old McLeod Brothers general store), and the Aurora movie theatre.

The town's cultural and recreational facilities also improved after the War. Athabascans had long been avid spectators and participants in sporting

events, and in 1947 the townspeople had a special treat: Athabasca hosted the Dominion Amateur Wrestling Championship, the event that determined the wrestling berths on Canada's 1948 Olympic team. Perhaps the town's success in putting on these games had something to do with the fact that in 1948 Athabasca hosted the Provincial Amateur Boxing Championships, sponsored by the Athabasca branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, and other local organizations. Athabascans also took a healthy interest in skiing, track and field and other sports, while curling had been established as a favourite winter sport since at least as early as 1909, and in 1946 the Athabasca Curling Club was finally incorporated under the Societies Act, an early move in the campaign to build a new rink.

Gains were also made on the more intellectual side. A Library Board was created, and in 1946 the first municipal public library was opened. The first Athabasca Music Festival was put on at the Brick School in 1945, and the second and third festivals were held in 1947 and 1948. And, after several years of deliberation, planning, and fund raising, the Community Centre was built and opened in 1949. So if Athabasca at the end of the 1940s still had some way to go before it would again equal the splendours of 1910-14, it was at least well on the road to recovery.[4]

The decade of the 1950s was, by and large, a time of continued prosperity and expansion for Athabasca. The population rose to a figure of 1,406 at the end of the decade, and professional services also developed quite dramatically. A new hospital was built in 1952, and three years later Drs. Brown and Brand opened their new Medical Centre. In 1952 Lloyd Chamberlain began practising law in town; and Dr. Steblyk opened his dentistry practice in 1955.

In matters political, Social Credit candidate Antonio Aloisio (previously Reeve of the Athabasca Municipal District) took over as MLA in 1952 from Gordon W. Lee who had served conscientiously but unspectacularly through the '40s. Athabasca's tradition of independent political judgement reasserted itself briefly in the 1955 election, when Liberal Richard Hall unexpectedly defeated Aloisio, but the Social Credit stalwart was back as MLA in 1959. On the level of local government the major change was the creation of the County of Athabasca (#12) in 1959, through the administrative merger of the Municipal District of Athabasca, the Athabasca School Division, and the local hospital board. The first County Council, elected in March, 1959, decided to move the administrative office from Meanook to Athabasca, thereby completing the process of centralization that had begun in 1946/47.

Further centralization was also occurring in the region's school system. By 1951 the School Division had 1,940 students (450 of whom attended schools in Athabasca town), seventy-six teachers and thirty-eight buses. Gradually, despite vociferous resistance from many parents, more and more rural schools were shut down and more and more children bussed to Athabasca, Richmond Park, Grassland, Colinton, Rochester or Boyle. A violent controversy broke out over this bussing policy, and the fire raged for much of the early '50s before dying down to smouldering resentment.

From 1959 onwards the Board of Education was a subcommittee of the County Council and rural interests therefore had overwhelming representation on it. But it, too, found that the reasons for centralization were educationally and academically sound, and that there was no real alternative but to continue the School Division's policy. Rural depopulation and teacher shortages were facts of life, and a large highschool in Athabasca could offer students a much better range of courses and a higher quality of secondary education than could the old one-room log schools. In line with the new approach, Edwin Parr High School was constructed to ease the pressure on the old Brick and Stucco schools. The first building at Edwin Parr was quite small, but the school was immediately expanded in 1950. Further extensive additions in 1955 allowed it to accommodate Junior High as well as Senior High students, leaving the Brick School as Athabasca's elementary school, but even this was not enough, and another portion of Edwin Parr (completing what later came to be known as the North Wing) was built in 1958. As a corollary to the expansion of Athabasca's educational facilities, new rural central schools were constructed at Grassland, Richmond Park, Rochester, and Colinton.

Schools were by no means the only buildings being constructed or renovated in the '50s. Indeed the decade might be characterized as Athabasca's era of reconstruction. Apart from the new Community Centre, the Town built a new waterworks in 1950, and a new town office in 1952. That same year saw the completion of the bridge across the Athabasca river, a project that had been underway since 1950. The Sisters of Providence opened the St. Vincent de Paul Home for the Aged, and the completion of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the East Hill brought the number of churches in the town to four. The federal government provided a new post office in 1955, and the Town invested in a new fire hall the next year. St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic Church had been destroyed by fire in 1953, and the congregation

The result of forty years of lobbying: the Athabasca bridge, 1952. Bill Preece, Athabasca Archives, 01025.

had been forced to hold services in the assembly hall. However, the new church was completed in 1956, and the dedication ceremony was held in November. The Athabasca Flying Club built a new airstrip north of the river and began using it in 1957, the year that a major new subdivision was opened west of the Catholic Church to accommodate some of the town's rising population. Recreational facilities were improved by the creation of Jubilee Park, named to commemorate both the Province's and the village's fiftieth anniversary in 1955. At the end of the decade Athabasca saw the construction of its second senior citizens' home, Pleasant Valley Lodge, and its fifth church, the United Missionary Church, opened in 1959.

Sadly, there were some casualties of all this construction fever. More of the old Athabasca Landing disappeared through fire or the wrecker's ball, including St. Matthew's log church which had survived as a parish hall alongside All Saints church while Archdeacon Little remained rector of the Anglican parish (he retired in 1950 and died six years later). Fortunately in 1950, when the owners of the Union Hotel decided the time had come to upgrade their facilities, they decided on renovation rather than reconstruction, so the brick building erected in the wake of the Great Fire of 1913 still stands today.

Technological advances in the 1950s also brought significant changes to the lives of Athabascans. The Rural Electrification Plan brought to farm families some of the luxuries (soon to be reckoned as necessities) already enjoyed by many urban dwellers, such as washing machines, electric stoves, refrigerators, and electric heating and lighting. Long-playing records replaced the old 78s, and radio faced a powerful new competitor: television. TV was first introduced into Canada by the CBC in 1952, and reached Athabasca two years later, when Tommy McLean erected the first TV aerial to pick up signals from Edmonton. Ed Polanski made the first effort to bring cable TV to Athabasca in 1957, however, the application was not successful until some years later.

Meanwhile, Athabasca listeners to CFRN Radio had the opportunity in 1952 to hear locally raised playwright and novelist George Ryga broadcast a humorous poem that he had written about the dusty farming village that he had known in the Depression years. Ryga had a love/hate relationship with Athabasca and, for all his joking, took the town and its multicultural history very seriously. Most Athabascans, however, simply took advantage of the Landing's colourful past as an excuse for

Athabasca's third hospital, built in 1952, gutted by fire in 1980. P. Krawec, Athabasca Archives Stephenson Collection, 01012.

Recreation In the 1950s at Baptiste Lake public beach. Bill Preece, Athabasca Archives, 00992.

The new transport technology: motor trucks on the highway south of Athabasca in the spring of 1955. Athabasca Archives, 01209.

celebrating and partying. In this vein must be reckoned Athabasca's "Klondike Night," first celebrated in 1953 and two years thereafter expanded into a weekend-long extravaganza. In the course of the fun, the town finally contrived to pay for the community centre. But if in the 1950s the town's inhabitants were not averse to making use of their history, on the whole they did a remarkably poor job of preserving it, notwithstanding the formation of the first Athabasca Historical Society in 1956 and all the hoopla surrounding Alberta's Golden Jubilee the year before.[5]

The 1960s opened with some Athabascans in a more historical frame of mind. In 1960 a cairn was erected in the town campsite to commemorate the Landing's role in early transportation, and the Town's 50th Anniversary Celebrations the next year included a historical pageant, written by John Havard, called "The Athabasca Story." In 1964, the HBC log house that had housed Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Wood burned down, thus being saved the indignity of being demolished for firewood, its probable fate despite a campaign by the *Athabasca Echo* to preserve it. While no one could be blamed for that loss of part of Athabasca's history, the same cannot be said for the next series of demolitions. That same year the old McLeod Brothers store on Strathcona Street (which had been erected in 1913) was torn down to make way for the Robinson store, and two years later three more pieces of Old Athabasca were lost to "progress": the Telegraph Office, the Philipzyk building, and the brick HBC store that had been built in 1912 and had more recently served as Parker's Store. The local historical spirit was not totally dead, however, since 1966 saw the first commemorative Trail Ride on the old Landing Trail, and 1967 the publication of George Opryshko's loving tribute to the one-room log schools of the Athabasca region, *Clover and Wild Strawberries*.

Other important events in the field of education were the construction of a new Athabasca Elementary School in 1966, and the opening of a large additional South Wing on the Edwin Parr Composite High School in 1968. As in the previous decade, the town experienced quite a lot of construction in the '60s, and also the arrival of several new professionals. Among the new buildings were a Wheat Pool elevator (1961),

Celebrating Athabasca's Town's 50th Anniversary: the Jubilee Parade, 1961. Athabasca Archives, 00061 and 01173.

the Stychin Gulf station (1963), the Hillside Motel (1964), a Rexall drug store on Strathcona St. (1964), a new Marshall-Wells store (1964), Northland Autobody (1964), a new Athabasca Health Unit building (1964), the first Super A grocery store (1965), the Leeds Ladies Wear store (1965), the Tom Boy supermarket, a nursing home (initially Blunt's Nursing Home, later Extendicare), the Grandview Court housing project (1966), Ken's Confectionery, and the Provincial Government building (1967-68).

Other important additions to Athabasca's facilities in the 1960s were the construction of a new ice-skating rink and curling rink, the installation of cable TV, and the building of the Ukrainian Catholic church in 1967. A unique industry began in 1964, when Ed Polanski opened the short-lived Athabasca Clayworks, which produced beautiful ceramics made of local clay and embellished with patterns developed by a local artist. These were the years, too, when the town at long last received asphalt streets and new sidewalks, and when the Athabasca Golf Course was constructed. With these new amenities Athabasca was well-prepared in 1967 for Canada's Centennial Celebrations, and the local events included a rodeo, the Don Messer Show, and a spectacular performance of "The Athabasca Story" against the backdrop of the Athabasca River.[6]

Despite a significant dip in the demographic curve in mid decade, the '60s were on the whole a time of growth and prosperity for Athabasca. The '70s were a period of stagnation. The population of the town in 1970 was 1,829. In 1979 it was much the same, 1,878. However, although Athabasca was not growing much, it was still changing, and usually for the better because many of its inhabitants showed unusual energy and initiative. For example, at the beginning of the decade a Senior Citizens' Society was formed, and by 1973 it had obtained the old CNoR station and renovated it as a Drop-In Centre. The next year another group of local residents formed a Swimming Pool steering committee and launched the project of building a heated pool. This committee evolved into the Landing Pool Association and, with help from the Kinsmen and Lions, had raised sufficient funds by 1979 to begin construction of the Landing Pool, which was opened in 1980. The Trail North Foundation was created in 1976, and undertook much valuable work mapping and sign-posting the Landing Trail and restoring an old church at Waugh before financial difficulties forced it to call a temporary halt to its conservation work in the early '80s.

Meanwhile, the Town Council had begun its ultimately successful campaign to make Athabasca the site of Athabasca University. An initial lobbying effort in 1976–77 proved unsuccessful, but did lead to the formation of a "Friends of Athabasca University" committee in 1978. This group received the active support of MLA Frank Appleby who in May, 1979, took a delegation of five to lobby Minister of Advanced Education Jim Horseman, and in July of that year obtained the endorsement of the Northern Alberta Development Council for the scheme of relocating the University from Edmonton. By 1980 the lobby had done its work. Without consulting the University, the government suddenly announced, on March 5, 1980, that Athabasca would indeed be the future site of Athabasca University. Land on the escarpment west of town was purchased, and the die was cast. By June, 1982, Premier Lougheed was in Athabasca for an official sod-turning ceremony, and construction of the new university facility was soon underway. Most university staff had their jobs relocated to Athabasca during the summer and fall of 1984, and in June, 1985, the University held the official opening ceremony of its new and permanent home.

The tale of the relocation of Athabasca University has taken us beyond the 1970s. But before we leave that decade we should notice a few other changes that modified the face of modern Athabasca. A fairly high proportion of the businesses currently operating in the town date from these years, including the Van Hout bakery (1971), Kwan's restaurant (1972), the Trades Building (1973), the Athabasca Centre (1975), Riverside Shell (1975), Kaspersky Lumber (1975), the AGT office and exchange (1975–76), Norwest Heating (1977), the Athabasca Inn (1977, expanded in 1980), the Macleod's store (1977), Riverside Sports (1977), Athabasca Music & Sports (1978), the Barrhead Savings and Credit Union branch (1978), Gilmin Flowers (1979) and the Red Rooster convenience store (1979), and this list is by no means comprehensive. Other significant developments during the 70s were the formation of a new Athabasca Flying Club in 1971 and the eventual opening of a new airport in 1977, the building of Little Manor (a seniors' home named after Archdeacon Little and run by the Anglican Church) in 1975, the creation of a large new sub-division on the south-west hill in 1976, the opening of West Wind Trailer Park in 1977, and the move of the public library to the Stucco School in 1979. Various friendly faces familiar to local residents were also first seen in the town in the 1970s, including Dr. Brian Oldale who arrived in 1972 and Dr. A. Mol who came in 1979. Politically, Athabasca in the 70s belonged to the Progressive Conservatives in the person of MLA Frank Appleby, who won the constituency by a fairly narrow margin from Social Credit in 1971, and more comfortably in 1975, 1979 and 1982.[7]

The 1980s began quite dramatically in Athabasca. The new swimming pool was successfully opened, the relocation of Athabasca University was announced, and the hospital burned down. The problem of the gutted hospital was solved temporarily by using trailers on the old site, and permanently by soliciting government funds for a new hospital building at the Cornwall Place subdivision on the east hill. The new hospital was completed and opened in the spring of 1984, making, with the new health unit that accompanied it, an impressive addition to the town's range of services. Equally impressive was the new Performing Arts Centre opened in 1981, another striking example of what the town's residents could create when they set their minds to it.

Other examples of "progress" in the early 1980s were more controversial. The imposing but aged Imperial Bank building that had been built after the HBC fire of 1912 was torn down, to be replaced by a neat, modern and functional, but characterless, ediface. Similarly the old Royal Canadian Legion Hall, one of the most beautiful wooden buildings in Athabasca, was demolished to make way for a modern clothing store, and, architecturally speaking, the new Legion was much inferior to the old. Other new building projects were accomplished with less damage to Athabasca's historical heritage: the Lions Club seniors' residence (Pioneer Place), the new Treasury Branch and Bank of Nova Scotia buildings, the rebuilding of the Macleods store, the Aspen Ridge Christian Fellowship church, the new Super A supermarket, and the extensive renovation of the north wing of Edwin Parr Composite School, to name a few of the most visible.

Buildings, however, were not the only things new in Athabasca in the 1980s. From 1980 the town had an official Archives, presided over for its first five years by Frank Falconer, Jr.; and a second local newspaper, the Athabasca Advocate, has been in operation since 1982. Since 1984 the highschool has been not just a place to send the kids but a community school, and the University not just a building on the west hill but a body of people, some of whom have begun to play active roles in the life of the community. At time of writing, the latest change in Athabasca is a political one: the new constituency of Athabasca–Lac La Biche, following a tradition established by the old Athabasca riding in the 1920s, elected an opposition MLA, the New Democrat candidate Leo Piquette.[8]

In Athabasca in the 1980s, relatively few visible remnants of the old Athabasca Landing remain. The river is still here, of course, but no steamboats or scows. The railway is still here, but no passenger trains, and the old station has found a new purpose. It is still one of the most interesting wooden buildings in the town, and outside it stands another reminder of the Athabasca area's past, a steam tractor. The Brick School stands, a Regional Historic Site, and recent internal renovations should prolong its usefulness to local clubs and organizations even if it can no longer serve as a school. The United Church has benefited greatly from an expensive but very necessary and valuable program of renovation, and is now protected as a Provincial Historic Site. But only the future can tell what fate is in store for its equally beautiful but smaller neighbour, All Saints Anglican Church. Will it be one of the relatively few gems to be preserved for posterity from Athabasca Landing, or will it go the way of St. Matthew's church, the HBC store, the old Legion hall, the Imperial Bank building, and so many other parts of Athabasca's past? If this book goes some way to rekindling in Athabascans a desire to preserve what they still can of their historical heritage, it will have served its purpose.

A Final Note From the Editors

As far as we know, this book is the first attempt to publish a history of Athabasca Landing; as such, it is bound to be imperfect, nothing more than a first draft of a more definitive work that may one day be written. The Athabasca Historical Society would like eventually to produce a second edition of this book, one that will draw upon more extensive archival research and will provide an opportunity to correct any errors and omissions that readers find in this edition and communicate to us.

The Society also hopes to work on "Volume 2," a book that will cover the rise of modern Athabasca in a more detailed, systematic and evocative manner than has been possible in the postscript chapter of this work. At present, however, the Athabasca Archives does not possess a sufficiently large and varied collection of old photographs, artifacts, and other source material to make such a project feasible. If you have any photographs or other historical material, such as letters or diaries, that might help us reconstruct Athabasca's past, please contact the Archives through the Alice B. Donahue Library and Archives or write to the Athabasca Heritage Society at the address given below. The Archives also appreciates the temporary loan of materials that you may not wish to donate permanently.

The Athabasca Historical Society intends to begin work in 1987 on two projects that should, when completed, make the task of writing Athabasca's history easier. One is a comprehensive guide to all archival collections possessing source materials relating to the history of Athabasca Landing, the town of Athabasca, and the Athabasca region. The second is an oral history project. We should like to record the reminiscences of as many as possible of the more senior citizens of Athabasca and area, since the minds and memories of local pioneers and their families are one of the best sources of knowledge about Old Athabasca. If you would be willing to share your recollections with us, or if you know of somebody else whom we should contact, please write a short note to the following address:

Athabasca Heritage Society
4704 48 Street
Athabasca AB T9S 1R2

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18. Statistic calculated from data assembled by MacGregor in *The Klondike Rush Through Edmonton*, p.235. MacGregor's own summary of the Canadian dimension of the Klondike episode, given on p. 155 of *A History of Alberta*, was less sanguine: "The Edmonton routes to the Klondike were perhaps the most difficult of any they could have chosen. Of the 1,500 who went that way, half chose the water route down the Mackenzie River, and some 565 of them reached the Yukon. The other half, using pack horses, set out to traverse fifteen hundred miles of muskeg and forest and of those about 160 got through. … The Edmonton routes to the Klondike were dismal failures."
    The figure of 565 stated here by MacGregor appears to be about seventy-five too high, judging by the detailed information provided in *The Klondike Rush Through Edmonton*, p. 235 and *passim*.
19. MacGregor, *The Klondike Rush Through Edmonton*, pp. 24, 25.
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21. MacGregor, *The Klondike Rush Through Edmonton*, pp. 68-72, 123-124, 245.
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    Athabasca Echo, 5 May, 1952.
26. MacGregor, *The Klondike Rush Through Edmonton*, pp. 36, 99-100, 102.
27. *Edmonton Bulletin*, 18 April, 1898.
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28. Mitchell, *The Golden Grindstone*, p. 39.
29. Mitchell, *The Golden Grindstone*, p. 40.
30. Mitchell, *The Golden Grindstone*, pp. 36, 40.
31. MacGregor, *The Klondike Rush Through Edmonton*, p. 125.
32. *Edmonton Bulletin*, 7 July, 1898.
33. Department of the Interior, Dominion Lands Branch, File #90051-8.
34. Hudson's Bay Company Archives, A.12/L103/1 fo. 8.
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7. *Edmonton Bulletin*, 1 June, 1899.
   Mair, Charles. *Through the Mackenzie Basin*, p. 32.
   Chalmers, J. W. "Inland Journey." The Beaver (Autumn 1972): pp. 52-59.
8. Sawchuk, *Métis Land Rights in Alberta*, pp. 87-110.
9. Sawchuk, *Métis Land Rights in Alberta*, pp. 112-115.
   Anglican Diocese of Athabasca Records. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Ace. #70-387. A 281/148, 149.
10. Interview with Big Joe Cardinal by Pat Sawchuk and Joe Sawchuk, High Prairie, Alberta, 9 February, 1981, quoted in Sawchuk, *Métis Land Rights in Alberta* p. 140.
11. Sawchuk, *Métis Land Rights in Alberta*, p. 109.
12. Sawchuk, *Métis Land Rights in Alberta*, p. 148.
13. Government of Canada, Department of Indian Affairs. "Report of Comissioners for Treaty No.8 (Winnipeg, Manitoba, 22 September, 1899), Text of Treaty No.8, signatures, and Order in Council," *Sessional Paper* No. 14 (1900), pp. xxxv-xlix,
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15. Cornwall, Jim. Affidavit sworn in the presence of S. A. Dickson, Commissioner for Oaths, Edmonton, 1 November,1937. Reproduced in Fumoleau, *As Long As This Land Shall Last*, pp. 74-75, and in Daniel, "The Spirit and Terms ofTreaty Eight," pp. 83-84.
16. "Report of Commissioners for Treaty No.8," pp. xxxix - xlix.
    Fumoleau, *As Long As This Land Shall Last*, pp. 77-88.
17. Fumoleau. *As Long As This Land Shall Last*, p. 88.
18. Sawchuk, *Métis Land Rights in Alberta*, p. 105.
19. "Report of Commissioners for Treaty No.8," p. xlii.
20. "Report of Commissioners for Treaty No.8," p. xliii.
    Daniel, "The Spirit and Terms of Treaty Eight," pp. 92-100.
21. "Report of Commissioners for Treaty No.8," p. xliv. The Indian Act, however, was not specifically mentioned in the Treaty, nor was any attempt made to explain its provisions in detail to the Indian bands that signed the Treaty. Had this been done, it is doubtful whether many would have signed.
    For an account of the amendments that had been made to the 1880 Indian Act up to 1975, see Miller, *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*, pp. 76-100. These changes had rendered the Federal government's policy towards Treaty Peoples less generous and more restrictive, without altering the underlying attitude of paternalism embodied in the legislation. The categorical refusal by the Indigenous peoples of Lesser Slave Lake and elsewhere to accept reservations is an indication of their fundamental lack of accord with the premises of the policy followed by the Department of Indian Affairs.
22. A brief account of Richard Secord's scrip dealings is given in Secord, *A Builder of the Northwest*, pp. 78-79. Secord was, from the early 1900s onwards, a prominent Edmonton capitalist, with investments in mining, lumbering, transportation, brewing, hotels, and other profitable business activities. Cornwall invested the income he derived from the Klondike rush and scrip speculations in the Northern Transportation Company, and in efforts to speed the settlement of the Peace River area. For an account of one such promotional effort, see Kelly, L. V., *North With Peace River Jim*. Calgary: Glenbow Institute, 1972.
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27. "Memoirs of Rayner Whiteley." Audiotape, recorded April, 1981, Colinton History Book Club. Extracts in *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, pp. 463-465.
28. *Athabasca Echo*, 19 April, 1929.
    Athabasca Echo, 2 December, 1932.
    Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today, p. 393.
29. *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, pp. 55-56, 343.
30. *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, pp. 7, 187-189.
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31. *Athabasca Echo*, 31 January 1947. Information provided by Kathleen Stafford of the Eight Horizons Historical Society, telephone conversation, January 1986.
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38. Willey, "Reminiscing."
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41. McMcCrum, A Register of Service, p. 41.
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43. McMcCrum, *A Register of Service*, p. 43.
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45. McMcCrum, *A Register of Service*, p. 46.
46. Willey, "Reminiscing."
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62. Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement," p. 81.
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64. *Edmonton Bulletin*, 3 June, 1904.
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66. Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement," p. 166.
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This figure may be somewhat inflated.

Chapter 6

1. This list of the earliest pioneers in the Athabasca region has been compiled from obituaries in such local newspapers as the *Northern News*, the *Athabasca Herald*, and the *Athabasca Echo*, and also from the family history, *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, *passim*.
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6. Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement," p. 117.
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17. *Athabasca Times*, 9 April, 1914.
18. Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement," p. 130.
19. Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement," pp. 122, 128.
20. Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement," p. 126.
21. Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement," p. 147-
22. *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, p. 460.
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The account of C. B. Major's methods of hand threshing and horse-powered threshing is also based on information supplied by Frank Falconer, and on Scottie Willey's "Reminiscing."
26. *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, p. 464. [This is an edited transcript of a tape recording made by Mr. Whiteley in April. 1961.]
27. *Colinton & Districts: Yesterday & Today*, pp. 100, 464.
Information about Philip Shank provided by Vi Kowalchuk.
28. *Northern News*, 9 July, 1910.
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29. *Northern News*, 14 January, 1911.
30. *Northern News*, 6 August, 1910.
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Chapter 7

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6. Routledge, W. H. "Annual Report of Superintendent W.H. Routledge, Commanding 'N' Division, Athabasca Landing, 1908," Government of Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1909, n.p.
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23. *Northern News*, 27 January, 1909.
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Athabasca Times, 29 January, 1914.
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43. *Athabasca Times*, 5 June, 1914.
44. Report of Board of Trade meeting, January, 1913, Athabasca Archives.
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6. Cameron, *The New North*, pp. 40-41.
7. Cameron, *The New North*, pp. 35-36.
8. Canuck, *Seeds of Pine*, pp. 95-96.
9. *Northern Light*, 12 December, 1908.
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12. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entries for 11 September, 1910; 14 September, 1910
13. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 24 November, 1910.
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15. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 22 September, 1910.
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17. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 14 October, 1910.
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19. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 1 September, 1910.
20. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 25 September, 1910.
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22. McMcCrum, *A Register of Service*, pp. 45, 48.
23. Cameron, *The New North*, pp. 38-40.
24. McMcCrum, *A Register of Service*, pp. 50-51.
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30. *Athabasca Times*, 21 May, 1913.
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32. *Northern News*, 23 May, 1913.
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36. *Northern News*, 6 April, 1912.
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38. *Northern Light*, 12 December, 1908.
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40. *Northern News*, 16 November, 1912.
41. *Northern News*, 3 October, 1913.
42. Opryshko, *Clover and Wild Strawberries*, p. 16
43. Opryshko, *Clover and Wild Strawberries*, pp. 17-33.
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57. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 6 November, 1910.
58. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 26 November, 1910.
59. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 16 November, 1910.
60. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entry for 12 November, 1910.
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63. Sanders, C.J. "Private Diary," entries for 30 August, 1910; 6 September, 1910; 9 October, 1910.
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Chapter 9

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7. Granatstein, J. L., et al, *Twentieth Century Canada*,

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8. Craig, *But This Is Our War*, p. ix,
Granatstein, *Twentieth Century Canada*, p. 144.
9. Granatstein, *Twentieth Century Canada*, pp. 99-100, 117-126.
10. *Northern News*, 9 April, 1915.
11. Frank Falconer, "The First Great War," pp. 2-4. Manuscript, 1985, Athabasca Archives.
12. *Northern News*, 27 November, 1915; 3 December, 1915.
13. *Athabasca Herald*, 16 November, 1916.
14. *Athabasca Herald*, 2 November, 1916.
15. *Athabasca Herald*, 2 November, 1916.
16. *Northern News*, 13 August, 1915.
17. *Athabasca Herald*, 23 August, 1917.
18. *Athabasca Herald*, 30 November, 1916; 23 August, 1917.
19. Letter from Allen Knight to Florence Drake, 18 August, 1918. Athabasca Archives.
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21. *Athabasca Herald*, 30 August, 1917.
22. *Athabasca Herald*, 24 July, 1920.
23. Government of Canada Census figures, as reported in the *Athabasca Echo,* 18 August, 1950.
24. *Northern News*, 5 June, 1914; 25 June, 1915.
25. *Northern News*, 12 February, 1915.
26. *Northern News*, 12 February, 1915; 26 November, 1915.
27. *Athabasca Herald*, 12 October, 1916.
28. *Athabasca Times*, 28 December, 1916.
29. *Athabasca Herald*, 30 April, 1920.
30. *Northern News*, 8 January, 1915.
31. *Northern News*, 8 January, 1915.
Athabasca Herald, 31 July, 1920.
32. *Northern News*, 14 January, 1914; 23 September, 1914; 10 December, 1915.
33. *Athabasca Herald*, 13 September, 1917; 29 May, 1920.
34. *Athabasca Herald*, 3 July, 1920.
35. "The History of the Force," entry for 1916. Typescript, RCMP Archives. (Photocopy held in Historic Sites Library, Alberta Culture.)
36. McMcCrum, Elizabeth. *A Register of Service*, p. 66.
37. *Athabasca Herald*, 24 July, 1920.
38. *Northern News*, 29 January, 1915.
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39. *Athabasca Herald*, 25 September, 1915.
40. *Athabasca Herald*, 15 May, 1920.
41. *Athabasca Herald*, 9 October, 1916.
42. *Northern News*, 3 July, 1914; 31 July, 1914; 31 October, 1914.
43. *Athabasca Herald* 16 October, 1920.
44. *Northern News*, 31 December, 1915.
Athabasca Herald, 26 October, 1916.
45. *Athabasca Herald*, 26 April, 1917; 7 June, 1917; 13 September, 1917.
46. *Athabasca Herald*, 5 March, 1921.
Athabasca Echo, 8 February, 1929.
47. *Athabasca Herald*, 30 October, 1920.
48. *Athabasca Herald*, 20 November, 1920; 5 March, 1921.
49. *Athabasca Echo*, 8 February, 1929.
50. Wark, A Report on Alberta Elections, 1905–1982, pp. 11, 33.
51. *Athabasca Herald*, 2 February, 1921; 12 March, 1921.
52. *Athabasca Herald*, 12 March, 1921.

Chapter 10

1. Population figures for the Town of Athabasca cited in this chapter are taken from a file in the Athabasca Archives, compiled from Government of Canada Census reports and from local surveys reported in the *Athabasca Echo,* 18 August, 1950; 15 June, 1951; 11 January, 1967.
2. Most of the information about Athabasca in the 1920s is taken from the Athabasca Archives' chronological files for the decade, which have been compiled from local newspapers and other source materials owned by the Archives.
Specific data has also been drawn from the following issues of the *Athabasca Echo*: 12 July, 1928; 25 July, 1928; 16 August, 1928; 8 February, 1929; 8 March, 1929; 12 April, 1929; 14 June, 1929; 20 September, 1929; 6 December, 1929.
Electoral information is from Wark, *A Report on Alberta Elections*, 1905-1982, pp. 33-34.
3. Athabasca Archives, chronological files for the 1930s.
Athabasca Echo, January 10, 1930; 11 April, 1930; 9 January, 1931; 6 February, 1931; 25 September, 1931; 27 January, 1933; 5 January, 1934; 19 January, 1934; 2 February, 1934; 16 February, 1934; 20 April, 1934; 22 June, 1934; 23 November, 1934; 15 February, 1935; 23 August, 1935.
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Opryshko *Clover and Wild Strawberries, passim*.
4. Athabasca Archives, chronological files for the 1940s.
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5. Athabasca Archives, chronological files for the 1950s.

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6. Athabasca Archives, chronological files for the 1960s.
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7. Athabasca Archives, chronological files for the 1970s.
Wark, *A Report on Alberta Elections*, 1905-82, pp. 101-132.
8. Athabasca Archives, chronological files for the 1980s.
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