Foundations of North Battleford

City of North Battleford 2013 Centennial Historical Committee

As our fair City prepares to celebrate its centennial in 2013, one is compelled to reflect on the extraordinary journey our forebears embarked on at the turn of the twentieth century.

Although the first permanent settlers arrived in the area in the early 1870s, it was the opening of the North Saskatchewan River Valley in 1902 that provided the impetus for large scale settlement. The fledgling community of North Battleford quickly became a melting pot for newcomers from distant lands, with rich and distinctive cultures. Assyrians came from the Middle East and Barr Colonists halted their westward trek to sign for homesteads near North Battleford. Anglo-Saxons from the United Kingdom, the Maritimes, Ontario and the United States made the long and perilous journey by steamer, rail and ox cart. Finally, farmers of Germanic and Slavic origins joined the community's first citizens, intent on pursuing their dream in a great and free land, and ready to help lay the foundations for a new and dynamic city – North Battleford.

North Battleford's most important industry during its formative years was agriculture - growing the principle grains or raising cattle. The North Battleford Agricultural Society, which represented the farmers and cattlemen and showcased their successes, was formed in 1906. Local improvement districts were established in 1907 and the first elevator and flour mill were constructed in 1908. As historian Allan Schille pointed out, "…these stalwart men of the soil have put North Battleford and the surrounding districts on the map as one of the most noted farming districts in Saskatchewan."

Though the community's early settlers were primarily farmers, the direction and future of North Battleford was determined by the building of the Canadian Northern Railway in 1904. The railway provided employment and opened the doors to other industrial development in our city.

North Battleford's first decade was characterized by phenomenal development – explosive growth and rapid progress on every front. Village status was conferred on the community in 1906. Four months later, North Battleford became a town, and in 1913, a city.

The first municipal government was formed in 1906 which allowed for a framework and organized approach to the community's development. A local police force and fire department were created, work began on a water and sewer system in 1909, and electrical power came in 1910. The government provided standards and guidelines for infrastructure which were essential with the construction of schools, hospitals, churches and expansive homes in North Battleford's early years. The Saskatchewan Hospital, North Battleford Collegiate, Third Avenue Presbyterian-Methodist Church, Auditorium Hotel, Sallows and Boyd Building and many large homes in the city were being constructed in 1912.

The citizens of North Battleford have confronted every obstacle and responded to every situation with courage and vision, pride and resoluteness, skill and energy. The unyielding wilderness, unprecedented growth, the Great War, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression of the Thirties, World War II, the prosperous decades of the fifties and sixties as well as the unique challenges of the last number of decades have never discouraged the community from progress and development.

Life in those early years was hard. As Cecelia Whetton put it, "….undaunted by the odds that would have broken men and women of lesser spirit, they struggled on to final victory….they carved the nucleus of a city from the wilderness of bare prairie and bush… what a mighty achievement."

During our centennial year, it is fitting that we, the citizens of North Battleford, consider the remarkable legacy of our great city. We honour those who came before us to lay the foundations for its prosperity.