



# Reflections Of Our History....



**125**  
BRANDON  
1882-2007

**Reflections  
Of Our  
History....**

**Produced in Recognition  
of Brandon's 125<sup>th</sup>  
Birthday**

## Acknowledgements ...

The City of Brandon celebrates its 125<sup>th</sup> Birthday on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007. This informational booklet about the people, places and events that helped shape Brandon over the last 125 years is meant as an educational guide to assist in providing historical information about Brandon.

Many community resources were used in researching the material presented.

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## Table of Contents...

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Birth of Manitoba - Louis Riel.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Gabriel Dumont.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>United Empire Loyalists.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1873 North West Mounted Police.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>General Rosser and the CP Rail .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Thomas Mayne Daly.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The First Settlers of Brandon.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Tragedy on the Tracks.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Disaster at Brandon Asylum.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The 1913 Dominion Fair.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Carrier Pigeons in World War I .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The Brandon Sun .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>CKX – Pioneer of the Airwaves .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Aboriginals and Prairie Settlement.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>The Early Days of Law Enforcement.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>The City Crest .....</b>	<b>18</b>

## Introduction...

**B**randon was never a village nor a town. It formed with such speed that it has always been a city. So, what were the events that shaped Brandon's formation and who were the people responsible?

In the early spring of 1881 the site where the City of Brandon now stands was empty prairie lying on either side of the Assiniboine River. Except for the wild life, the wandering bands of Indians and the passing boats carrying supplies and freight upstream from Winnipeg to the Hudson Bay Post at Fort Ellice, the prairie was empty and silent on the spot where the tiny Snye River joined the Assiniboine.

A little over a year later, unbelievable as it may seem, a City stood on the land that had been so empty and silent - BRANDON. As the first city of the prairies west of Winnipeg, it was destined to become the hub of Western Manitoba and the trading centre for a wide area. Soon it began to call itself the Wheat City in honor of the vast quantity of grain that poured through its elevators. But, in that first year of its existence, it was known as the Wonder City of the Northwest because of the suddenness of its birth.

The following accounts focus on particular moments in Brandon's history and the development of the North West that hopefully will give some insight into the character of this special city.

## The Birth of Manitoba ... Louis Riel

Louis Riel was a Canadian politician, founder of the Province of Manitoba, and leader of the Métis people of the Canadian prairies. He was born in 1844 in what is now Manitoba. Riel was sent to Montreal to train for the priesthood, but never graduated, and came back to the Red River area. Ambitious, well educated and bilingual, he quickly emerged as a leader among the Métis. He led two resistance movements against the Canadian government to preserve Métis rights and culture. In 1869-1870 he headed the Red River Rebellion. Riel established a provisional government which would eventually negotiate the Manitoba Act with the Canadian government, establishing Manitoba as a province. Riel was banished to the United States for his part in the creation of the provisional government and the execution of Thomas Scott during the rebellion.

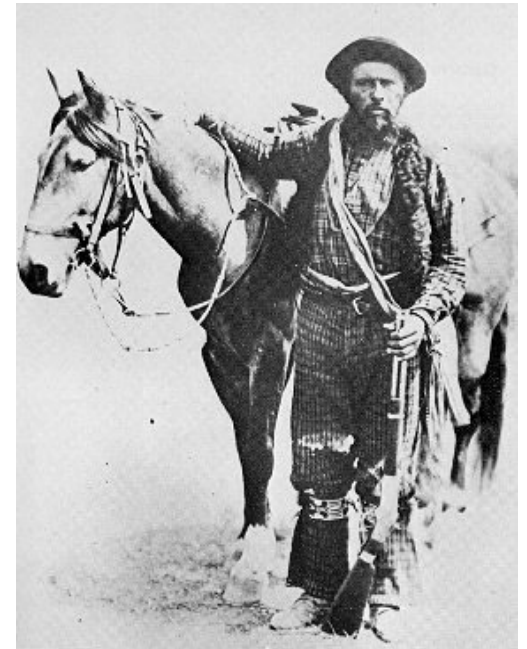


Riel returned to Canada in 1884 to what is now the province of Saskatchewan to once again represent Métis concerns to the Canadian government. He was the spiritual and political leader of the short-lived North-West Rebellion. Riel surrendered to Canadian forces and was taken to Regina to stand trial for treason where he was found guilty and hanged as a traitor on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1885.

## Gabriel Dumont...

Gabriel Dumont is best known as Louis Riel's general and commander of the Métis military forces during the Northwest Resistance of 1885. He was born in St. Boniface in 1837. Although he was unable to read or write, Dumont could speak six languages and was very skilled at horseback riding and marksmanship. Dumont was a member of the delegation which convinced Louis Riel to return to Canada to act as a spokesman for the rights of the Métis. When no response was received from Ottawa, a temporary, emergency government was set up. The Métis, under Dumont's leadership, fought with government troops. Finally at Batoche, most leaders of the Métis were either captured or surrendered. Dumont avoided capture by escaping to the United States where he showed off his sharp shooter skills by performing in the Buffalo Bill Cody Wild West show.

He returned to Canada in 1893 and lived near Batoche until he died in 1906.



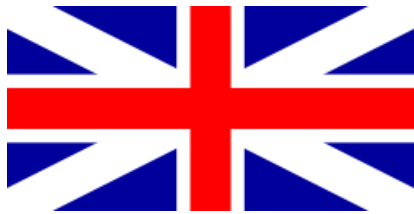
He is remembered as a skillful leader of the Métis people in their struggles for responsible government and recognition of land claims.

## United Empire Loyalists...

The United Empire Loyalists were residents of the Thirteen American Colonies, who took the British side during the American Revolution.

They came from every class and walk of life. Many were farmers and craftsmen. There were clerks and clergymen, lawyers and labourers, soldiers and slaves, Native Americans, college graduates, and people who could not write their own names. Their reasons for becoming Loyalists were as varied as their backgrounds. Some had strong ties with Britain; others had simply supported what turned out to be the losing side. The common thread that linked these diverse groups was a distrust of too much democracy which they believed resulted in a breakdown of law and order.

Approximately 70,000 Loyalists fled the Thirteen Colonies during the War of Independence. Of those, roughly 50,000 went to the British North American Colonies of Quebec and Nova Scotia.



Fleeing in panic and confusion, forced to leave behind most of their possessions and burdened with the prospect of building a new life in a new land, the Loyalists faced unpromising

beginnings. The lands they were to settle were isolated, forbidding and wild. But the Loyalists determination and resourcefulness assured the success of many new settlements.

The influence of the Loyalists on the evolution of Canada remains. Their ties to the British and their opposition to the United States provided the strength needed to keep Canada independent and distinct in North America.

## 1873 North West Mounted Police...

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1873, Sir John A. MacDonald introduced a bill into Parliament which aimed to bring order to the frontier, encourage settlement and establish Canadian authority in the North West. The Bill was passed 17 days later, creating the North West Mounted Police. Close to 400 men were recruited and trained, meeting at Fort Dufferin, Manitoba in June of 1874. Following the Boundary Trail, the Force traveled into the territory now known as Saskatchewan, and headed west.



In addition to fighting the whiskey trade, the North West Mounted Police came to secure peaceful relations with the First Nations people of the Plains.

The general duties of the Force were to:

- establish law and order;
- collect customs dues;
- enforce prohibition;
- supervise the treaties between First Nations and the federal government;
- assist in the settlement process;
- ensure the welfare of immigrants; and
- fight prairie fires, disease and destitution

In 1904, the name changed to the Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP). In 1920, the RNWMP absorbed the Dominion Police and became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and was responsible for federal law enforcement in all provinces and territories.

## General Rosser and the CP Rail...

In the late 1870's everyone believed that the railway would run from Portage La Prairie northward to Edmonton. However, railway officials abandoned plans for a northerly route in 1881 and decided to build the main line straight west from Winnipeg.

General Thomas Lafayette Rosser was a Confederate General during the American Civil War. Following the war, he became a railroad construction engineer for the Canadian Pacific Railway. He was commissioned by the CPR to select a site in the northwest as the next divisional point on the railway. That site, located on the south side of the Assiniboine River, about 2 miles west of the Grand Valley settlement, would become the City of Brandon.



Rosser returned to the United States, and in 1886, he bought a plantation near Charlottesville, Virginia, and became a gentleman farmer until his death.

In the summer of 1881, several months after Rosser had made his choice, Brandon was chosen as a town site. Imagine standing on the bank of the Assiniboine River looking out into the open prairie as far as the eye can see... the tall grasses swaying in the gentle breeze. That's what the original surveyor's saw when they came to survey the site selected by Rosser. William Van Horne was in charge of the survey party sent out by the CPR. The original survey stick marking the beginning of Brandon was staked near the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Pacific Avenue.

Almost exactly one year later so many people had made their home within its boundaries that Brandon was incorporated as a City.

## Thomas Mayne Daly...

Thomas M. Daly was Brandon's first mayor and guided the early development of the city.



Daly was born in Stratford, Ontario on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1852. He grew up in a household where politics were the main topic of conversation. Educated in Toronto, he began his law career in Stratford where he gained his first political experience as a town councillor and chairman of the public school board.

Attracted to the prairie lands of the North West, Daly left for western Canada in July of 1881 and was among the first to settle in Brandon. He became Brandon's first lawyer. With the arrival of the railway in 1882 and the flood of people to the area, Thomas Daly was elected as Brandon's first mayor and sworn in on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1882. He resigned in December of 1882.

Mr. Daly then resumed his legal practice and was appointed to the Queens Counsel. He entered federal politics in 1887, serving as a member of the House of Commons for the next 10 years. In 1892, he became Canada's first Minister for the Interior, Immigration and Indian Affairs, and thus the first Manitoba MP to sit on the federal cabinet. He was also named Canada's first Juvenile Court Judge.

Thomas Daly devoted many years to the building of Brandon in the early days, and the public affairs of Western Canada. He died suddenly on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1911 at his Winnipeg home. Flags were flown at half mast both in Brandon and Winnipeg. Daly was buried in Stratford.

## The First Settlers of Brandon...

**B**randon was chosen as a town site early in May of 1881. Almost exactly one year later, so many people had moved here that it became incorporated as a city. It was a rough, frontier town of tents and shacks that had been erected very quickly in the prairie wilderness. Settlers arrived in waves – approximately 1500 a week – by foot, horse, steamboat and rail.

Early in October of 1881, the first passenger train reached Brandon over the newly laid rails. With the arrival of the railroad, the new town was easily accessible from Winnipeg and the East.

### Who were the pioneers of our City? ...

The first medical doctor in Brandon was **Dr. Alexander Fleming**, who set up his practice as a druggist and physician in a tent at the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street & Rosser Avenue. Fleming was the organizer of the first School Board and was on the first Board of Governors of the Brandon General Hospital.

Brandon's first photographer was **J.A. Brock**, who was concerned with making Brandon beautiful. He paid several boys \$1.50 a day to gather maple seeds along the riverbank from which he grew the first maple trees to line the streets of Brandon.

**J.E. Hughes** designed, constructed and owned many of the buildings on 10<sup>th</sup> Street, one of which was the Hughes Block. This was the location of "The Arcade", which opened in November of 1905, and showed the first moving film in the history of Brandon.

**James Freer** emigrated from England to the "Brandon Area" in 1888 to farm. He began taking films of rail and farm life and eventually the CP Railway Company sponsored his filmmaking and toured them through Britain as recruitment films. He produced many of these silent films, and is credited as the first Canadian filmmaker.

The owner of the first hotel in Brandon was **Charles Pilling**. He built the first hotel – called "The Royal" – in order to provide temporary housing for the rapidly arriving pioneers. It was located on the south side of Rosser Avenue between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets.

The first grocery store in Brandon was that of **Coombs and Stewart**, which was built on the NE corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Pacific Avenue. Managed by Mr. Stewart, the store sold clothing as well as general merchandise such as groceries, hardware, crockery, boots, shoes, etc.

The first marriage ceremony in Brandon was performed by the **Rev. Mr. Thomas Lawson**, a Methodist minister, on February 15th, 1882. Lawson's son **Brandon**, was the first boy to be born in Brandon. The first female child born in Brandon was **Ethel Mary Boydell**, daughter of Rev. J. Boydell, a Church of England missionary appointed to the Brandon district.

The first school principal was **T.G. Lamont** who came from Ontario, and originally went to Rapid City seeking a job. He was told to try the Brandon School. At age 23, he became the first teacher in Brandon with a class of 15 students.

## Tragedy on the Tracks...

Wednesday, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1916 was a bitterly cold day in Brandon as men hired by the CP Railway were clearing the snow dumped in the rail yard. The conductor of the snow train checked at the depot to make sure no passenger trains were scheduled in the area. As an extra precaution, he sent his brakeman to the train's caboose to watch for oncoming cars. While the snow train waited to pick up the next load, 30 workers climbed in the caboose to keep warm. At the same time an 8-car train loaded with hogs from Calgary was cleared to depart for Winnipeg. Due to a stalled freight train, it was forced off its regular track and onto the main passenger line. As the stock train inched forward, its engineer was blinded by a dense cloud of smoke, steam and fog.

The engineer of the freight train had been warned about the snow crews in the area and was traveling less than 8 km/hour as it inched towards the 8<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. The snow train, traveling in the opposite direction, but on the same track, was pushing 10 flat cars, its caboose in the lead. Conditions of the day made visibility very bad.

The engineer of the freight train was the first to recognize that is was on the same track as the snow train. As he saw the caboose emerge out of the gloom ahead, he threw his emergency break, but the brakeman in the caboose reacted more slowly.

The impact went almost unnoticed by those riding in the rear of the trains, but was strong enough to force the caboose back onto the attached flatbed, bending it upward. It immediately broke free of the track and sliced through the caboose like a knife. Fourteen men were killed instantly and another 5 died in the hospital. Some of the victims actually survived the accident, but froze to death waiting to be rescued. It was a tragic day for Brandon.

## Disaster at Brandon Asylum...

The Brandon Asylum for the Insane opened on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1891. It had originally been built in 1890 as a detention centre for boys, however it was transformed into an Asylum for the Insane.

Disaster struck the Brandon Asylum on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1910. In the early morning hours, more than 700 staff and patients of the Asylum were forced to flee the buildings when a fire broke out. The fire started in the attic of the central building and quickly spread to the rooftop. Strong winds fanned the fire and within 1½ hours, the entire structure was engulfed in flames. The main buildings, except the powerhouse, were completely destroyed.

Needing a place to house all of the residents of the Asylum on a temporary basis, the Winter Fair Board in Brandon offered its new building on 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Brandon as a temporary shelter. With the ruins still smoking in



the background, the citizens of Brandon saw quite a scene as the 640 patients from the Asylum were marched from the institution's grounds, down First Street, over the bridge, and on to their "temporary" home in the Winter Fair building.

The Winter Fair building remained a temporary home for the patients for almost two years. There was no place in the province large enough to house and care for so many people in one location. The Brandon Asylum was rebuilt on the original site and in December of 1912, the new building was ready for the inmates and staff. The magnificent new structure, known as the Parkland Building, still stands today.

## The 1913 Dominion Fair...

The first Dominion Fair was held in 1879 in Ottawa, Ontario. The purpose of the fair was to display and promote agriculture products from other provinces to the farming community.

The site of the Fair changed each year and it became an important event that brought national attention to the community that hosted it. The first Dominion Fair outside of Ontario was held in Winnipeg in 1904. In 1912, the Brandon Agriculture Association made an official application to the Federal Department of Agriculture to host the 1913 Fair.

To make sure the event was a success the Brandon Agriculture Association carried out extensive improvements to the existing facilities.



The 1913 Dominion Fair was held from July 15 – 25 and offered the largest prize list of any exhibition ever held in Canada for livestock and agricultural products. Four major structures were built – the Grandstand, the Cattle Barn, the Poultry Building and Display Building II. Approximately \$150,000 was spent to put up the buildings, remodel the grounds and purchase extra land to expand the site.

The 1913 Fair was opened by Premier Roblin and was a huge success. It was attended by more than 20,000 people. Unfortunately, this was the last Dominion Fair ever held in Canada. With the outbreak of World War I, the fair was put on hold and by the time the war ended in 1918, the tradition of the annual Dominion Fair had ended.

Display Building II located on the Keystone Grounds is the only building left from the 1913 event.

## Carrier Pigeons in World War I ...

During World War I, messages were sometimes transmitted by wire (telegraph or field phone), but two-way radio communications had not yet become available. Sometimes a unit was ordered to attack over difficult terrain, making it impossible to string the wire necessary for communications. In these situations, a field commander often carried with him several carrier pigeons.

Nevertheless, there were certain limitations in using carrier pigeons. Pigeons could only be trained to fly to known positions such as base headquarters, and therefore could only be sent out from the front line to rear positions and not in the other direction.



Pigeons served many purposes during the war, racing through the skies with airplanes, or even being fitted with cameras to take pictures of enemy positions. But their most important role was as messengers. A message could be written on a piece of paper, then neatly folded and secured in a small canister attached to a pigeon's leg. Once the pigeon was released, it would try to fly to its home back behind the lines, where the message would be read and transmitted to the military leaders.

Carrier pigeons did an important job. It was also very dangerous. If the enemy soldiers were nearby when a pigeon was released, they knew that the bird would be carrying important messages, and tried their best to shoot the pigeon down so the message couldn't be delivered.

## The Brandon Sun...

The first edition of "The Brandon Sun Weekly" was printed on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1882. The newspaper has been an important part of Western Manitoba life as the City of Brandon progressed from a tent-town in the land rush days of the 1880s to the thriving prairie community it is today.



Will White traveled by rail, steamboat and foot to Brandon from Exeter, Ontario to establish The Sun. White was able to publish a four-page daily paper from a building on 12th Street. Running out of funds, the daily publication was halted, and for a few months, was published on a weekly basis by C. H. Beaton. White returned from a trip to Eastern Canada with sufficient

money to regain control of the paper, however, it remained a weekly publication until he left the scene in 1897. Like Brandon, The Sun had expanded during Will White's 14 years, and the paper outgrew its original home and moved to 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

In 1903 J. B. Whitehead purchased the majority of shares, and in 1911 obtained sole ownership of the paper. In 1905, Mr. Whitehead secured a building permit for the building at 24 – 10<sup>th</sup> Street which housed The Sun until it moved to its current location at 501 Rosser Avenue.

The Whitehead Family retained control of the paper for the next 90 some years. J. B. Whitehead turned over the paper to his son Ernest in 1937. Ernest's eldest son, Joseph, was responsible for much of the modernization of the plant and printing processes that took place in 1952. Lewis D. Whitehead then took over from his father as editor and publisher in 1961.

The paper is now owned by FP Canadian Newspapers.

## CKX – Pioneer of the Airwaves...

When the first sounds of music came over the radio waves from Brandon's first broadcast on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1928, the few people who had radio sets eagerly gathered to listen.



Brandon was one of the first Western Canadian cities to have a radio station, only seven years behind radio's introduction to Canada.

Until the late 1940's, the provincially-owned radio stations – CKX in Brandon and CKY in Winnipeg – were operated by the Manitoba Telephone System. Western Manitoba Broadcasters, lead by John B. Craig, a car dealership owner, purchased CKX from the provincial government in 1948. Initially, CKX was on the air from one hour at Noon and from 7:00 – 10:00 p.m. nightly. Eric Davies was the first full-time broadcaster and provided commentary on musical selections, the news, weather and sports. CKX was the lone radio station in the area until 1977.

Under J. B. Craig's direction, with this son Stuart running the camera, Brandon was introduced to television on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1955. As there were very few TV sets around, people often watched TV in store windows. CKX is credited with starting the high school quiz program "Reach for the Top", which became a CBC production.



For nearly half a century, the station remained under the ownership of the Craig Family and has always focused on local programming and its role in the community

## Aboriginals and Prairie Settlement ...

The Aboriginals of Canada faced three major problems in the years following Confederation: displacement from their land, the decline of the buffalo herds, and diseases for which they had no natural resistance.

Aboriginals were removed from their lands when settlers started moving onto the Canadian Prairies during the 1860s and 1870s. They had to move further west or north to stay one step ahead of the settlers. European settlers felt they had right to the land, believing that they were culturally more advanced than the Aboriginals. This caused considerable conflict in Western Canada. Aboriginals stopped railway and land surveyors from entering the region, as well as settlers.

By 1875, buffalo were on the verge of disappearing from the Canadian West. By 1889, only 635 buffalo remained in North America. Prairie buffalo nearly became extinct due to the widespread use of firearms, the shrinking of the natural grazing land, and the hunting of buffalo for sport rather than survival. This posed a significant problem for the Aboriginals as the buffalo were the only major source of food and warm clothing. Their only choice was to sign the treaties to obtain tools and cash. By the mid-1870s, most Aboriginals were facing starvation and poverty due to the near-extinction of the buffalo.

Disease had always been a problem since first contact with the Aboriginals. When the Europeans arrived in the Americas, they brought with them illnesses to which the Aboriginals had never been exposed. They had no natural immunities, unlike many Europeans, and would therefore quickly succumb to illnesses brought on by smallpox and tuberculosis.

## The Early Days of Law Enforcement...

On July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1882, the Brandon City Police Force came into being. The Force's first members were Chief Constable Archibald L. McMillan and two constables, Donald Campbell and John M. Keays.

In the early years, the Force was primarily concerned with breaking up fist fights, raiding houses of ill-repute, and fining people for reckless driving. Fist fights usually broke out as young men battled over girlfriends, liquor, or horses. Such conduct usually brought an officer of the law to the spot, and the brawlers were taken before a Police Magistrate.



Reckless driving of the day seemed more of a problem with horses. Residents of the City complained that life and limb were in constant danger from drivers trying to see whose horse could pace or gallop the fastest.

In the early years, the salaries of the members of the Force were raised through fines. In 1886, the City paid the Chief Constable \$800 per year, and the Constables received \$600 per year.

The first Police Chief of the Brandon Police Force (A. McMillan) accidentally shot himself in 1885 while placing a rifle in a case in Smart's Hardware Store. Shaking the rifle down, the butt hit the floor, the rifle discharged sending a bullet through the body below the stomach, and he died three hours later.



## The City Crest...

The **Golden Wheat** is a symbol of the agricultural industry of the community

The **Green Tree** is a symbol of the natural growth within the City of Brandon

The **Horse** is a reminder that Brandon was once known as the horse capital of Canada.

The **Shield** is symbolic of a good defence against aggressors.

The large square letters "**CITY OF BRANDON**" are indicative of a square deal to all.

The City **motto** – VIRE ACQUIRIT EUNDO means "She acquires strength through progress".

The name "Brandon" was derived from the Blue Hills of Brandon, a name, which was, received second hand from a Hudson's Bay trading post known as Brandon House. The trading post, in turn, had been named after a hill on an island in James Bay where Capt. James had moored his ship in the winter of 1631. (Source: *The Fort Brandon Story* by Roy Brown – 1974)

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