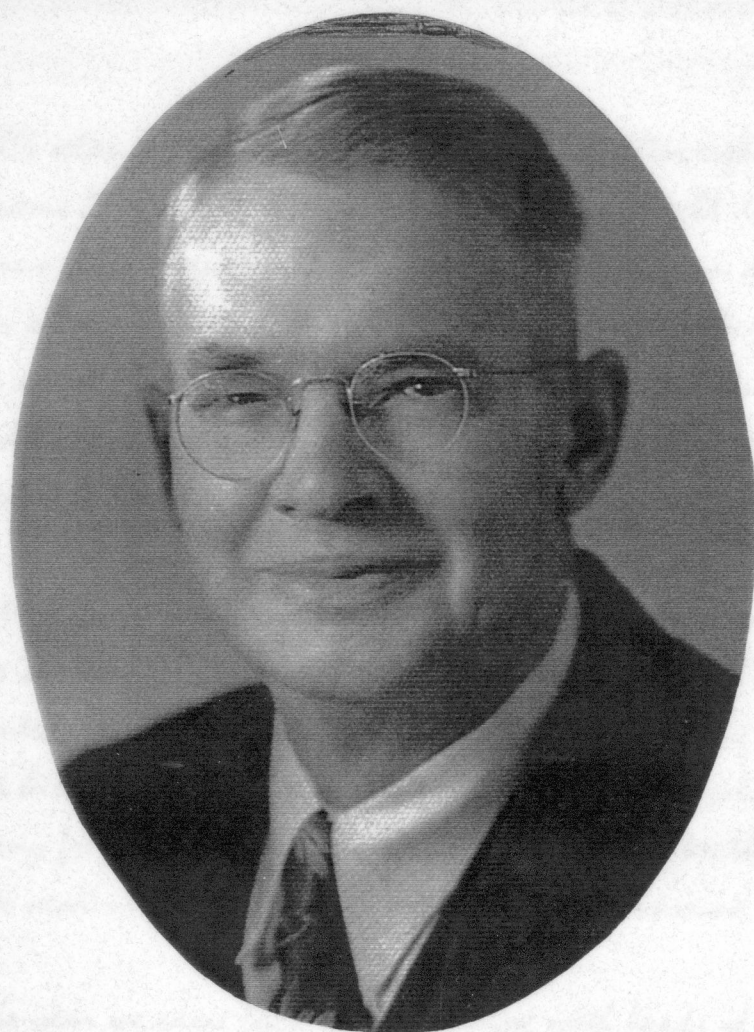


REMINISCING



LOT SCOTT WILLEY

February 20, 1885 - December 6, 1960

REMINISCING

by Scottie Willey

It was 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 I 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.

It was on this trip that I first saw Raynor Whitely. He was a boy of fourteen. It was custom for travellers, when meeting on the trail to stop and get acquainted. This we did and found Raynor was looking for lost horses and that his parents lived at Sandy Beach, now Perryvale. Raynor and I made many freighting trips together into the north after that and now that we are near neighbors we never get tired of reminiscing.

In the fall of the year we came back to the landing with loads of grain from McLeod and Perry, who started the first bus lines from Edmonton to Athabasca. 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, his wife and daughter, Miss Irine, to Edmonton on their way to England, where he went to retire. This trip took four days. 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 as well as the Boy's Anglican Hostel.

The Catholic Church which was burned a few years ago, was here when we first came.

The first Methodist Church was a Mission hall built by pastor Rev. Hopkins, situated on the site of the Royal Cafe.

After the stage line was established the mail was brought in on Saturdays and Wednesdays when on time. Wm Rennison was the first Post Master in the building where he managed a store for Ross Bros. of Edmonton. I distinctly remember of 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, Douglas Dean, came after the new year from Nova Scotia. He boarded with us. All but a few of his pupils were Metis 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 Parker's Store. There was six feet of water in the hotel on the corner. Boats were used for transportation in the street.

At this time Athabasca Landing was the distribution point for all freight going north. By boats in summer and teams in winter.

Many flat bottom boats or scows were built here. H.B. Co. had a port and two large warehouses were built on the river bank on the present site of McCabe's Seeds and Atlas Lumber. 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 port 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 boat, being high enough on the bank, just opposite plumber Craig's house. It was floated to this side of the river for installation of machinery. The boiler, being a marine one weighing twelve tons, had to be transported from Edmonton by twelve teams of horses. There were no wheels available to hold this heavy engine on these roads. The dome was cut off the boiler and built into a huge land roller by planks and rolled all the way. A picture of this was in the Edmonton Journal not so long ago.

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. The Government built wing dams on Little Slave river to make it more navigable for boats, but this did not prove successful.

Jas. Wood was the first Mayor. He was a carpenter and lumberman. He was responsible for moving the marine engine from Edmonton. He built, and he and his family resided in the house now known as the "Echo" office.

Jas. McKernan was the first official Postmaster and telegraph operator. He and his family lived at the back and upstairs in the old Government Telegraph building.

The first newspaper was published by McQuarrie and Watt and was called the "Northern Light".

The Imperial Bank was located on the present site and the first manager was Reid and his assistant was Davidson. Later there were three banks Imperial, Commerce and Royal.

Before this time the H.B. Co. reserved one square mile of town site and would not allow any competition. Consequently private stores such as McDugal and Secord built outside the mile. They were located in the west end across from the West Auto Court, Jack Russell was the manager. Afterwards Jack Lessard owned a store in the west end, just this side of the Muskeg bridge.

C.B. Major was probably the first real farmer. He located west of Baptiste Lake. He threshed the first wheat with a tread mill and three horses. Later his brother and family came from the east and located here. Some of the family still remain here.

Dr. Belanger was the first resident doctor. He did not speak English when he arrived here and he introduced himself with his Doctor's diploma which he carried. Later he located at Grouard and then Edmonton, where he became one of the city's leading physicians.

Being keenly interested in sports before coming here, I was happy to play in the first football game(soccer). Some young Catholic priests, going north on their way to missions, played with our team against Colin Frazer's boat gang from the north. He was a noted fur buyer of the north with headquarters at Chipewyan and was a descendent of Simon Frazer, explorer of Western Canada for whom the Frazer River is named. Raynor

Whiteley and Lewis Wood are the only other football players who still reside here.

I also played on the first baseball team at a sports day July 1st. The ball ground was where the skating rink is now located. It so happened an exploration party from California spent some time building boats and outfitting for the north for a stay of one year. (I believe in search of gold.) They were all young fellows many of them University boys and they had their own ballteam. This exploration was doomed to failure. They were over due many months and some of their families came here to have them located and the Mounties were sent in search and brought them out. Several of them died in the north. When they were brought out one member, Bud Dumphy, located and he with his mother and family from California homesteaded east of Colinton. Some of their land is now owned by the Sparr Bros.

About this time the Canadian Government and the Railways were encouraging immigration from the U.S. to western Canada by special rates of one cent per mile to land seekers. This caused a large influx of young people from the States who homesteaded in every direction from Athabasca. Many of these young fellows were ball players and these homesteaders comprised the first baseball country team. Many of them proved to be better ball players than homesteaders. By now the town had a team and baseball was the popular sport: Town against Country.

In 1918 our M.L.A., a cabinet minister, A.G. McKay, donated to the local baseball league, consisting of four teams, a trophy in the form of a cup, to be competed for each year. This cup last won by Athabasca, was in

possession of the manager, the late D.S. Jones. It has now been given to the officials of the Athabasca Aces to again be in competition. Hugo Carlson and myself are the remaining players, who played for this cup, who reside in Athabasca.

Foot racing was a popular sport among the natives. I recall a one mile race I entered. First prize was an Army Mauser rifle, second prize a suit of clothes from H.B. Co. imported from England many years before. There were only two of us finished: Phelix Powder of Lac La Biche and myself. I didn't get the suit of clothes. One native to show his prowess raced the stage to Edmonton, a two day trip, and they changed teams half way each day. He ran, trotted all the way and arrived first.

There were several booms in Athabasca. The two largest were the land boom and the fox boom. First were the fox pelts. Foxes were quite numerous and very valuable. Then they started raising foxes in eastern Canada and many buyers came west to buy live foxes. A company was formed here and undertook to raise foxes on an island a few miles down the river. This was a failure due to inexperience and falling prices. The most valuable load of freight I ever hauled was 20 thousand dollars worth of live black and silver foxes bought by a fur buyer, Fred Mathews, for a P.E.I. fox company. The foxes were carried in boxes or crates and guarded night and day. This boom didn't last long as the style changed to short furred animals and prices collapsed.

The land boom was a little bit later and on a larger scale. Homesteads surrounding the town and some farther out were bought by real estate companies, subdivided and sold in lots all over Canada, U.S., and

England at fabulous prices. They bought the farms by option and sold what they could and let the remainder go back to the owner. Years afterward I had occasion to have a hair cut and shave in a barber shop in Oakland, California. Seeing I was a stranger the barber inquired my nationality. When I told him I was from Alberta, he asked if I had heard of Athabasca. When I told him it was my home town, he said he had promised himself if he ever met anyone from Athabasca he would cut their throat. His reason: he and his brother had been sold two lots at a big price; after several years of paying taxes and not being able to sell them they pooled their resources and the brother came up to look over their investment. He secured a guide to locate them and found them several miles out and under a foot of water.

It was almost five years from the time the railroad started to build from Edmonton until it reached Athabasca in 1912.

At the Golden Jubilee celebration in 1955 I was awarded a prize for having lived the longest in the Athabasca district. This is with the exception of the native born. From the year 1912 there are many old timers in Athabasca who know its history better than I, and I will leave it to them to relate.

Reminiscences

By Scottie Willey
THE EAST HILL

1960

As I look out my window, and see the big machinery, and its lights at night, working around the clock, on the east hill, it brings to my mind events of some fifty odd years ago; when my father built the first road into the "Landing" from the east.

Up to then there was only a winding trail around and over the hill, with a log across Tawatinaw Creek, where foot passengers could walk, and more timid ones could crawl. When crossing with horses, when the water was high, the horses would swim.

We spent one summer cutting down the hill. This was all done by horses and hand work, using scrapers or slips. The hill was so steep we found it hard to hold the scrapers, from hitting the horses' heels.

We worked ten hours a day, and men received one dollar per day and two dollars a day for a team of horses. Included in our crew were two "Yanks" from Montana, a Frenchman, Joe Legasse (Bob Vance's uncle), the late Jas. Minns, afterwards our Post Master, and Jimmy Macrose, a native.

Rayner Whiteley, who has been to the scene of the new work, tells me this new road is following the first old trail used over sixty years ago. A part of it covers the old trail and a part follows along beside it.

Our M.L.A. at the time was the Hon. J. R. Boyle, minister of Highways and Education, and for whom the town of Boyle was named. The road supervisor, under whom we worked was Jack Fielders, a farmer living north of Edmonton.