

Information written by Wilfred R. Flack to Dr. E.K.Wright

#### Early recollections of Athabasca and district around 1911

In the spring of 1887 Samuel Flack and William Brown left Ontario for western Canada. They arrived at Revelstoke B.C. where they secured work as carpenters on a large freight shed for the railroad company. In the fall my father returned to Ontario. William Brown stayed in B.C. until the following summer when he came to Edmonton, and hearing that plenty of work was to be had at Athabasca Landing, decided to go north. On arriving at Athabasca he found conditions no better than elsewhere. Being broke he had to remain in the district and secured a job with the Hudson's Bay Co. building scows for carrying freight down the river. All freight for the north was transported from Athabasca on scows on the river.

In 1909 my father visited my uncle, William Brown, who had squatted on some land where Colinton now stands; as this land was not surveyed he could not homestead until the survey went through. My father, having tasted the Athabasca River water, decided to homestead in the district and filed on a quarter south of Colinton. In the spring of 1911 we left Ontario in March arriving in Edmonton about the 15<sup>th</sup>. We left Edmonton by team for Athabasca Landing on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March with my uncle, father remaining behind to look after our household effects and arrange to have them freighted up. Our first stop was at Mr. Milligans, a combination of stopping place and hog ranch. Mr. Milligan fed the hogs at noon and when he called pigs of every size, colour and shape came from all corners of the farm. The first nights stop was at Snow's Stopping Place. The following night we made Lewis' at Perryvale, the following noon W.F.Smith's. We arrived at Athabasca on 21<sup>st</sup> March. The only accommodation we could secure was in a rooming house next the Grand Union Hotel run by Louis Menard. Lewis Wood was chief cook and bottle-washer. Next morning we got some groceries and a stove from Falconer's Hardware and moved to a house owned by Jim Woods on the south hill about a mile from town. Father arrived a few days later on the stage which took 2 days to make the trip and was run by a Mr. Kennedy and his son, Albert.

Athabasca was booming; all freight and mail going north went by the Athabasca River. Athabasca was called the "Gateway to the North". The town had two hotels, 3 large feed barns and corrals. These were nearly always filled to capacity and a large number of teams tied on the river ice.

My uncle, William Brown, was known as Bill to distinguish him from W.F.Smith who was called Billy, they being the only settlers at that time in the valley. Billy had a saying that he lived in the valley when nobody's dog barked in the valley but his own. These two men were fast friends. They had a rule between them that if they did not see each other during the week they would make a point to contact each other on Sunday. They later owned and operated the first threshing machine in the district. Billy, being a steam engineer, owned a portable steam engine which was hauled by oxen. Bill was separator man and moved the machine with a fine big team of horses. Billy's engine was in demand in the winter for sawing lumber, wood and grinding.

An old timer of the district was David Hay who owned and operated the first post office and store in Colinton or Kinnoull as it was known then. Prior to opening his store Mr. Hay was also a freighter and well known on the trail. A story is told about Davey Hay. The two Bills and him were going to Edmonton for freight and stopped over night at the Sturgeon River. Next morning being very cold 30 degrees below

they went to water the horses. Davey took a couple of pails. Someone had been at the water hole early and cut a large hole in the ice. Davey cut a small hole for a pail, reached down for one pail and then for the other lifting both pails at once. Down he went through the ice to his shoulders. This meant a half-days stop to get him dried out. On another occasion Mr. Hay had seen some people on the trail drop one trace and tongue from the neck yoke and feed the horses on the trail. He thought this was a good idea and proceeded to do the same. He was cooking his dinner when the grease in the pan caught fire. He started to swing the pan to put out the fire and scared the team. He ran out to stop them and the tongue knocked him down and he was run over and had several ribs broken and was laid up for three weeks.

In the spring of 1911 Athabasca Landing was booming. Surveyors were surveying town lots for 5 or 6 miles south of town. Mother cooked for the survey crew at \$10.00 per day and they supplied the groceries. Carpenters \$10.00 per day. I drove a team hauling supplies and corner stakes for the lots from town at \$8.00 and all found.

James McKernan was land grant agent, post master and ran the telegraph office for the Dominion government. The town had two hotels, three banks, Hudson's Bay Co. store and warehouse opposite Imperial Bank, Revillon Freres Co. store and warehouse situated where the creamery now stands, three feed barns, a number of stores; H.Cull, druggist; J. Lessard store, fur trading stores, large warehouses on the river bank such as Mounted Police warehouse for supplies going north. The Athabasca River flooded in 1909 (1904 ?) and large amounts of supplies were destroyed by the water in the warehouses on the river bank. I understand the water rose to above the Grand Union Hotel (windows) caused by an ice jam at the bend of the river.