

DOORS OPEN 2021

September 12, 2021

'A History of Fraser's Grove Park, Bergen Cut-Off Bridge & Hidden Ghost Creeks'

RESEARCH COMPILED BY JIM SMITH – President and Historian/Archivist NEWHS Inc.

Speaker – JIM SMITH

Fraser's Grove Park

This section of Fraser's Grove Park, and the area surrounding it, has a history stretching back to the 1830s. Kildonan Drive, originally called East Kildonan Drive, was begun in 1912/1913 and it took until the early 1920s to be completed. Most of the land had to be expropriated as many of the landowners did not wish to sell the property needed to create the park.

In this area the original land was subdivided into narrow strips of property called parish lots, which stretched back from the Red River for a distance of 2 miles. This allowed every resident access to the Red River for transportation and fishing. While these subsistence farms were deep in length, they were very narrow in width. In some cases only 66 feet wide, but the average was probably more like 200 feet. Some farms were in the range of 1,000 feet in width but none of them were in this area. Prior to the 1870s most of the cultivated fields were fairly close to the Red River as the technology of the day and the subsistence nature of these farms due to the lack of market to support the sale of products meant there was no need to cultivate all of the property.

On the back portion of the property, roughly two miles away, a narrow trail ran behind all of the parish lots. In the 1850s and 1860s, this was originally called Two Mile Road, now known at Panet Road/ Molson Street/De Vries Street running north/south. Another trail began closer to the Red River and ran north and south. This was originally called the East Road to distinguish it from the West Road, which is now Main Street. By the 1890s East Road was renamed Birds Hill Road.

In 1909 the Elmwood portion of the roadway (Harbison Avenue and the area south) was renamed Kelvin Street by the City of Winnipeg. Elmwood had separated from the Municipality of Kildonan in 1906 to join the City of Winnipeg. The portion of Panet Road (formerly Two Mile Road) in the City of Winnipeg was renamed Birds Hill Road. This caused a lot of confusion with two roads bearing the same name, so in 1912 the Municipality of Kildonan renamed their portion of Birds Hill Road to East Kildonan Road. In 1929, East Kildonan Road was then renamed Henderson Highway. The Elmwood portion of the roadway remained Kelvin Street until 1963 when it also became Henderson Highway.

Fraser's Grove was named after William Fraser. He was the son of James Fraser and his wife Anne Bannerman, two of the original Selkirk Settlers. He was born on June 17, 1832, and died on September 9, 1909. He lived in Kildonan on the west side of the Red River with his parents.

Fraser was an avid reader, but he was largely self-taught, having little or no formal education in a school.

On November 29, 1855, he married Annie McBeth. They had no children of their own but adopted 3 children. Their son became Dr. W. R. D. Sutherland, daughter Christina later married Robert Tait and daughter Jemima married Mr. W. R. Ross.

William Fraser was the treasurer of the committee that formed the Presbyterian Church in Kildonan and remained in this position for 40 years. He later became a member of the second Provisional Government formed by Louis Riel in 1870 and also served in the Manitoba Legislature. He was the chairman and treasurer of the committee to establish Manitoba College, one of the founding colleges of the present University of Winnipeg. Fraser also served as the Reeve of the Municipality of Kildonan for 22 years.

In or around 1880, the Frasers moved to this side of the Red River, purchasing Kildonan Parish Lot 69, which included this park and the surrounding area, building a home here. In 1912 his son-in-law Robert Tait tore down this house and replaced it with a larger home. Located at 116 Fraser's Grove, this house still exists today.

The early 1900s was a boom time in Canada and this area was no exception. Land was being sold for building lots by speculators who had bought land from the Fraser family and other landowners in the area. This section of property became known as Rossmere Grove, which consisted of the land between the Red River and what is now Henderson Highway, south to Mossdale Avenue and to the north end of this park. This proposed subdivision was not a success as very few lots were sold and almost all of the property was turned over to the Municipality of Kildonan for unpaid taxes. The small number of lots that had been sold remained undeveloped and almost of these became the property of the Municipality of East Kildonan in the 1930s for the same reason.

In 1910, 50 acres of property was offered to the University of Manitoba, free of charge, and another 150 to 300 acres were offered for sale for \$600 to \$800 per acre if the University would choose this area as their permanent site. The University had no established location in 1910, and it wasn't until 1912 they finally chose the current site in Fort Garry. Fraser's Grove would have looked much different today if this offer had been accepted.

After the offer to the University of Manitoba was turned down in 1911, this area remained mostly in its natural state for another four decades. The municipality was finally able to sell off all the property for residential development, retaining this portion for the park. In these four decades the area was used as a picnic area for East Kildonan groups and families, including those who lived further away. It was also used as a camp site for various groups such as Scouts, Girl Guides and adult groups wanting to be in the great outdoors. The municipality required permission and a small fee for using the property, but no municipal services were created or provided. It was strictly a wilderness experience.

Nearby to the south were about ten summer cottages that had been built by private owners as a retreat to encourage residents to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Most of these became municipal property in the 1930s for failing to keep up the property taxes. A few of these

former summer cottages along the riverbank remained until the 1950s when they were torn down for residential development.

Beginning in the early 1950s and lasting into the 1960s saw the development of the area into the residential way it looks today. East Kildonan, which became a city in 1957, began the first steps to create Fraser's Grove Park as it is today in the late 1950s. In 1961, the park was removed from the authority of the City of East Kildonan and became a regional park under the second tier of municipal government, created in 1960, called Metro. In the mid 1960s Metro closed a portion of Kildonan Drive to unite the two sections of the park into one. In 1972 this second tier of government was abolished, along with all of the former municipalities and cities, and the City of Winnipeg was established.

Bergen Cut-Off Bridge (Black Bridge)

Many of the older people here may remember the constant discussion of the 1970s and 1980s that the C. P. R. railway yards in central Winnipeg be moved to a rural location outside the city. The railway company did in fact have a large railway yard outside central Winnipeg that could have replaced the central yards.

It was built in the years 1912 to 1914 and opened just before the beginning of World War One. Called the North Transcona Yard, the name is misleading because none of it was located in Transcona but north, mostly in the Municipality of Springfield, within the current Perimeter Highway. The residential area was expected to surround the rail yards in what is now the Grassie Boulevard and Kilcona Park neighbourhood. Projections made in 1912 predicted a residential population surrounding the yards upwards of 50,000 people. This of course never happened and only a small number of houses were ever built

These rail yards were built to allow railway traffic destined for outside Winnipeg to bypass the crowded central Winnipeg location entirely. The rail traffic projections for points east and west of Winnipeg never materialized, firstly because of World War One, then a depression in the early 1920s, followed by the Great Depression of the 1930s. This ended the prospects that the rail yards would be anything but a minor site, despite having track space within the North Transcona Yard larger than the track space in central Winnipeg. It was another "what if" in Winnipeg's history.

Instead of the projected 5,000 workers, the space never had more than 300 employees. When the yards closed in 1932, 200 C. P. R. employees were laid off and the former yards became a space to store train cars. It continued as a storage location for many decades after that. The tracks branched off from the C. P. R. mainline east of Winnipeg to the yards with a western outlet from the south side of Springfield Road. There was a railway bridge across the Red River and then tracks leading first north and then west going through what is now the airport region to join the C. P. R. mainline west of Winnipeg. This branch line was called the Bergen Cut-off, named for a region west of Winnipeg.

There were overhead railway bridges over both Henderson Highway at Springfield Road and Main Street by the Kildonan Golf Course. These were both removed in 1980, although there is still the railway bridge that exists over the Red River. It never had an official name, but it was usually called the Bergen Cut-off Bridge. Some people living on the east side of the Red River refer to it as the “black bridge”.

Access to the bridge on the east side of the Red River is made possible by walking on the elevated former roadbed of the track located opposite Springfield Road, starting behind the Cambrian Credit Union building on Henderson Highway. One can see by walking on this trail the amount of fill that was required to build up the roadbed and tracks above the surrounding land. The track and gravel were removed by the C. P. R in the late 1960s and the roadbed is now a public green space.

Work on the bridge began in 1913 and was completed in 1914. The bridge was built to be opened to allow boat traffic to travel down the river. The mechanism to open and close the bridge was removed in the late 1960s and the bridge was left in the open position. It was used on a regular basis from 1914 to 1932 and then on an occasional basis up to 1948, with a few occasions in the 1950s.

In 1948 the Municipality of North Kildonan proposed that it be used as bridge for vehicles but on the condition that they didn't have to pay anything for its reuse for that purpose. This was not a practical proposal as only one lane of traffic would have been possible due to the narrowness of the bridge.

One can view the bridge and actually walk underneath it on the west side of the Red River by following the crushed gravel pathway running along the river from Kildonan Park to the Kildonan Settlers Bridge. In the 1980s and early 1990s a restaurant was suggested for the bridge on the west side, but that idea was never carried out.

During World War Two, the bridge was used by the Canadian Army for demolition practice. In the 1960s and early 1970s there were many complaints from local residents that the former railway bed from Henderson Highway to the bridge was being used illegally by noisy snowmobiles at all hours of the day and night during the winter months and by teenagers to party.

The bridge continues to decay and rust and some time in the future the whole structure will likely collapse into the river.

Ghost Creeks

Formed 2010

Winnipeg is a city of rivers and streams as we all know, but before the land was settled in the early 1800s, there were many more waterways than what exists today.

In northeast Winnipeg we have Bunn's Creek, but the natural creek bed has been altered. In some places the creek was diverted to a new location and deepened from its natural state.

There is a portion of the original McLeod Creek that still carries water in it from what is now Whellams Lane, travelling under the Chief Peguis Trail and then emptying into the Red River. You can still see the outlet into the Red River when you travel west on the Chief Peguis Trail between Henderson Highway and the Kildonan Settlers Bridge.

The original length of McLeod Creek was much longer. It started east of what is now Molson Street from what was a swampy area before settlement. It then travelled west through the Morse Place area where it was big enough that a bridge was built to cross it at Munroe Avenue and Grey Street. It then went in a northwest direction crossing Gateway Road, Centennial Park behind Neil Campbell School and through the Rossmere Golf Course where the remains of it still exists as the water hazard. It then crossed through Pleasant Bay and between Maxwell Place and McLeod Avenue to Henderson Highway.

It was at this location somewhere between Brazier Street and Henderson Highway that a grist mill existed in the 1850s and 1860s to grind the nearby settler's grains. The grist mill stones were driven by the moving water of the creek. The grist mill would have looked similar to the reconstructed Grant's Mill in St James. Two of the four original grist mill stones are located in the small park at Edison Avenue and Henderson Highway, another one is located in a backyard of a private residence on Grandview Avenue, and the location of the fourth stone is lost to history.

The location of the creek is very evident as it crosses Henderson Highway and then Rowandale Avenue. It then travels mostly northward to Whellams Lane and there is a very definite pathway through this portion of the former creek bed.

The McLeod Creek had another branch that flowed into the main creek just south of the intersection of McLeod Avenue and Henderson Highway. This branch came from the south, roughly parallel to Henderson Highway. It can be seen today in the dip in the streets of the 200 blocks as far south as Bronx Avenue. This branch crossed Leighton Avenue in front of Lord Wolseley School and until the 1950s there was a footbridge across the front of the school grounds for the students who attended. It was never removed but is buried under the soil used to fill in the creek at this location. This branch then crossed the Northdale Shopping Centre property.

A general rule is where you see a dip in the land away from the Red River there was a creek or swampy area in that location at some time in the past.

People today are aware of the Seine River and where it now empties in the Red River in north St. Boniface, but sometime before 1800 it emptied into the Red River further north. Its waterway went north, east of Archibald and Watt Streets and then went west in the Chalmers/Johnson Avenues area. The dip in the land can still be seen when crossing Brazier Street in this location. It then crossed Henderson Highway and drained into the Red River in the Glenelm area near what is now Elmwood Cemetery.

Elmwood west of Roch Street is generally a low-lying area and was subject to much flooding in the past. Before the 1880s much of this area was swampy as a result of this. Elmwood was the last area in Northeast Winnipeg to be settled with farms prior to it becoming a residential district.

In the 1880s and 1890s what is now the Elmwood Cemetery and Glenelm district was a great location for duck hunting in the fall.

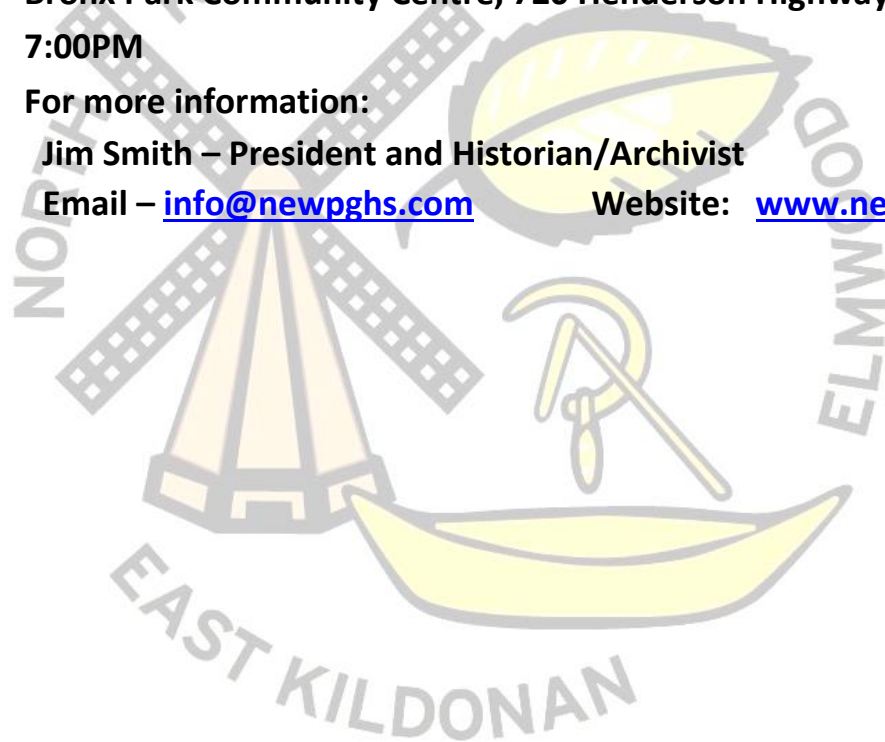
NORTH EAST WINNIPEG HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC. (2011)

- Meet the ***fourth Wednesday*** of each month (excluding July, August & December)
- Bronx Park Community Centre, 720 Henderson Highway
- 7:00PM
- For more information:

Jim Smith – President and Historian/Archivist

Email – info@newpghs.com

Website: www.newpghs.com



**NORTH EAST WINNIPEG
HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.**

Formed 2010