

CANOMA

Vol. 7 - No. 1

July 1981

Vol. 7 - No. 1

juillet 1981

CHIEF GEOGRAPHER'S PLACE NAME SURVEY

1905-1909

IV. MANITOBA

Alan Rayburn*

This survey of Manitoba's place names from 1905 to 1909 is the fourth in the series. Earlier papers were published on British Columbia's names in CANOMA, Volume 4, Number 1, July 1978, on Alberta's names in Volume 5, Number 1, July 1979, and on Saskatchewan's names in Volume 6, Number 2, December 1980.

In 1905 the province of Manitoba was served with 542 post offices. To each of these James White mailed a questionnaire requesting information on the origin and use of local names. He received and filed 338 replies, representing a response from almost two of every three postmasters or their designated respondents. No letters, however, are on file from some prominent places, among them being Winnipeg, Brandon, St. Boniface, Dauphin, Minnedosa and Selkirk.

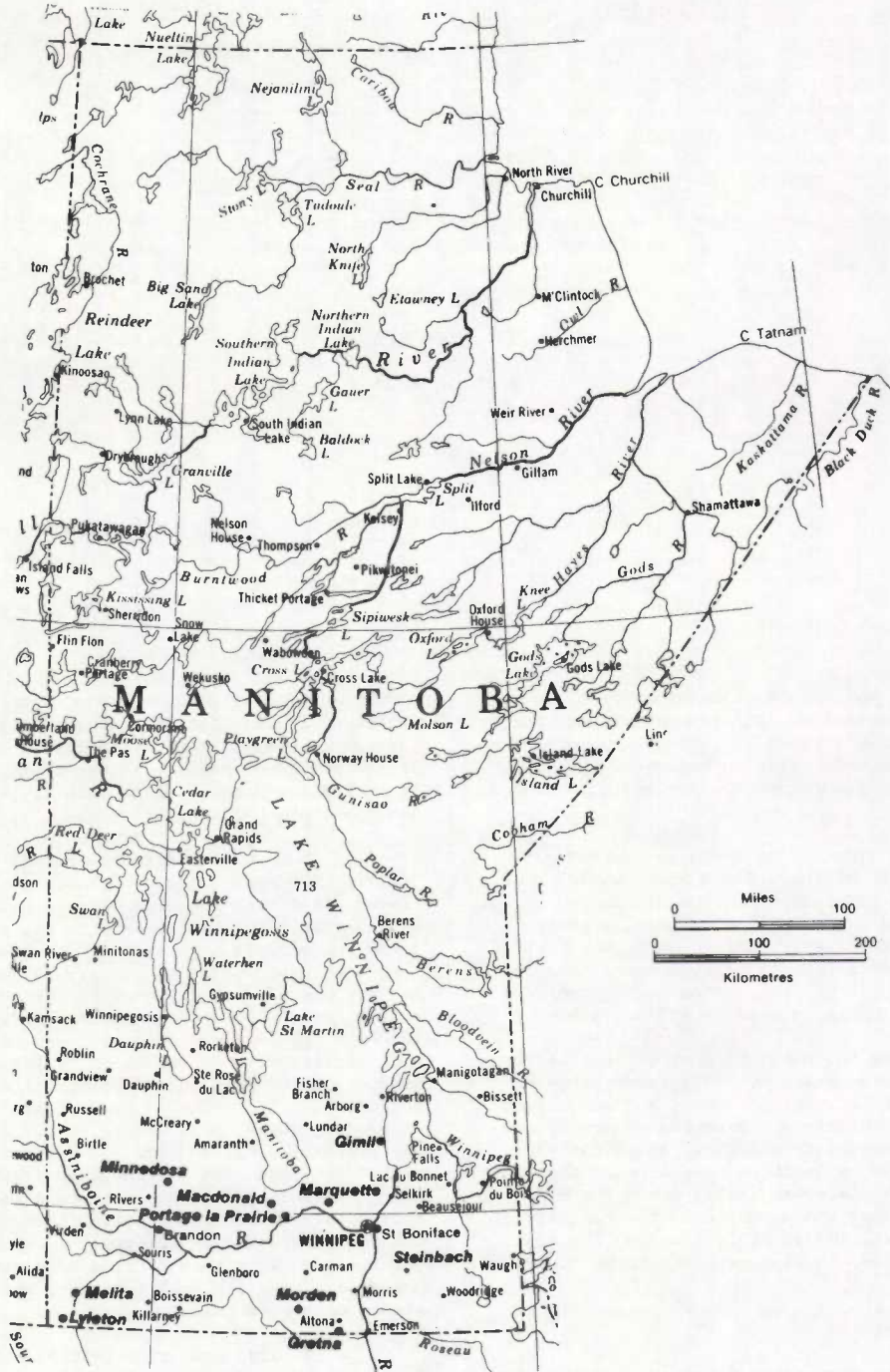
Although most of the Manitoba post offices had been in service for only 20 to 30 years by 1905, many postmasters had no idea why their offices were so named, and some even provided incorrect interpretations. Examples of errors submitted include the information from *Sidney*, which the postmaster claimed was for Sidney Smith, a companion of the Prince of Wales, when the place was really named for Sidney Austin, a newspaper reporter who accompanied the Marquess of Lorne party across the Prairies in 1881. *Austin*, the adjoining station and post office, is also reported to be named for

Sidney Austin, although the postmaster in 1905, Walter Clifford, stated that it was given for an engineer on the railway survey staff. The postmaster of *La Rivière* assumed his office was named because it was French for "the river", when it in reality honoured A.A.C. La Rivière (1842-1925), a prominent Manitoba political figure.

Some of the returns are not without their touches of humour. The postmaster of *Marquette*, H.O. Smith, said he believed his office honoured General Marquette and wryly suggested that if he had had "as sticky a nature as the alkali gumbo in Marquette, he should have been buried right here, & a tomb erected, so that people around here would know that he had got what he richly deserved for ever putting a depot in such a mire hole." CPCGN records indicate it was named about 1882 for the Jesuit missionary, Jacques Marquette (1637-1675). R.C. Bayliss, the postmaster of *Wakeham*, explained that he was discouraged by the lack of political awareness among the local Mennonites. "Speaking to them about local improvements such as school, roads, post office, etc., I frequently made use of the expression 'it is time for you people to wake up', and when we had the post office granted us [1898] I named it *Wakeham*, which was intended to be an abbreviation of wake them up." Unfortunately, the *Wakeham* post office remained awake for only ten years, closing in November, 1908. The name was also used for the school in this farming community 21 km southeast of Morden at the North Dakota border, but it has never been identified on topographical maps.

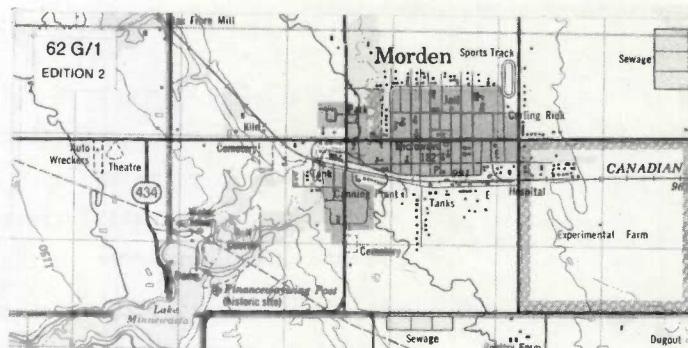
* Alan Rayburn, Executive Secretary, Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

A large number of letters received by Mr. White were from places named for persons who had distinguished themselves within Manitoba. Among these were letters from *Roblin* (for



Manitoba: showing communities for which details of replies to James White's circulars are discussed

Premier R.P. Roblin), *Morris* (for Lieutenant Governor A. Morris), and *Winkler* (for V. Winkler, prominent landowner and MLA). Two letters have been chosen to indicate the very valuable information provided in some letters on the history and early development of populated places named for settlers prominent in their particular areas. The MORDEN postmaster, James Stirton, may have had the reply written on his behalf, since the letter was submitted unsigned. The details of the migration by Alvey Morden and his ancestors from Wales, through the United States and Canada provide a useful insight into the historical geography of Manitoba. The notes provided by R.B. Lyle on the establishment of LYLETON also reveal specific dates of the arrival of the first settlers and the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railway through the village in the southwestern part of the province.



The town of Morden is named after Alvey Morden, who settled in Manitoba in 1874; homesteading the north-west quarter section nine, Township three, range five, west of the principal meridian of Manitoba. He lived here continuously till his death which occurred October 8th 1891. The Morden family are originally of Welsh extraction; first settling in York State in 1690, and remaining there until the close of the war in 1777, when the States gained their independence. Being much averse to the new order of things they migrated to New Brunswick, and from there they moved to Prince Edward County Ontario in 1849. The subject of this sketch then went to reside in Bruce County, living there until 1874, when he came to Manitoba as mentioned above.

Reply to circular: from Morden

LYLETON, MAN.

The town of Lyleton was named in honor of Andrew Lyle, who was the first settler in this district. He came from Smiths Falls, Ont., and settled here in the summer of 1881, on section 10, township I, range 28, where he still lives. He was the first post master of Lyleton, the post office which was established in 1890, was kept at his house until 1900. Owing to the growth of the settlement northward, the office was removed in that year to the residence of Robert Murray, the present post master, on section 22, township I, until July 1st 1903, range 28, when it was again moved to its present location in the village of Lyleton, on the C.P.R. which was extended to this point in September 1902.

Yours truly,

 Asst. P.M.

Reply to circular: from Lyleton

Many names in Manitoba are derived from persons who had distinguished careers beyond the borders of Manitoba. Such a name is *Macdonald*, a small community 19 km northwest of Portage la Prairie, named for Canada's first prime minister. In 1884 Elias Brown was appointed postmaster there and the place was given the name Drumconner. Presumably the residents disliked the name because, Mr. Brown relates, "some 10 years later the ratepayers petitioned the Depart. to change the name to *Macdonald* - it is known by that name and will be for all time to come." *Sifton*, another small community 26 km north of Dauphin, is generally believed to be named for Sir Clifford Sifton, who played a prominent role in bringing immigrants to Canada at the turn of the century. He himself opposed the use of this commemorative name, even though it was given in honour of his uncle, William Sifton, who was involved in the construction of the railway north from Dauphin and was the first resident of Minitonas. Canadian Northern officials proposed changing Sifton to Lemberg, for the capital of Galicia, but this name was given to a station and post office in Saskatchewan in 1905. *Carman* was named in 1879 for the Reverend Dr. Carman, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church in Canada.

Names specially constructed to designate new post offices have a particular fascination for toponymists. An example of such a name is *Hamiota*, created by the postal inspector (possibly W.W. McLeod¹ of Winnipeg), from the personal name Hamilton and an Indian word for "too many". A similar name, for which a letter from the postmaster of 1905 is also on file, is *Miniota*, meaning "much water". Another unusual toponymic formation is *Birtle*. When H.H. Wood applied about

1879 for a post office beside Birdtail Creek, to be called St. Clair City, the name was rejected because of duplication. In its place Mr. Wood devised "Birtle" from the name of the creek, a tributary of the Assiniboine River.

There are several names of Cree, Ojibway, Sioux and Chipewyan origin in Manitoba. Among names from Cree are *Winnipeg* ("murky water"), *Winnipegosis* ("little lake of murky water"), *The Pas* ("narrows between wooded banks") and *Wasagaming* ("clear water"). The postmaster of *Minitonas* noted that that name, derived from the Ojibway, was used by the *Saulteaux* to mean "home of the little god". In 1879 Joseph S. Armitage chose the name *Minnedosa* for his mill site, having been informed that "Minnedouza" was Sioux for "rapid water". His daughter, born the following year was also named *Minnedosa*. The post office was opened in 1881. Among other names conceived from elements of native languages are *Napinka* (Sioux for "double") and *Neepawa* (Ojibway for "abundance").

Many settlers had a fondness for the names of places in their homelands. Prominent, of course were names from England, Scotland and Ireland. In 1882 the Canadian Pacific Railway proposed honouring one of its directors, the Duke of Manchester, by replacing the postal name Gopher Creek with Manchester. Because the name had already been registered as a townsite on Whitewater Lake near present Deloraine, the railway authorities chose the name *Virden*, from one of the duke's seats in England.² A place named from a similar source was *Carberry*, derived from a seat of Lord Elpinstone, who accompanied the directors of the Great Northern Railway on the route

¹ Mr. McLeod also devised the name *Ninga*, from the Ojibway word for "mother", to replace the duplicated proposal, Stanley.

² P. Ham reports that Ida Clingan, a local historian, believed the name probably originated from the German town from which the Duke of Manchester's wife had come. (*Place Names of Manitoba*, 1980, p. 133).

Gretna April 17/08

James White Esq.
Respectfully - Ottawa.

Dear Sir

In the Spring of 1883, the Canadian Pacific Railway Co. connected their railway system in Manitoba with the Great Eastern Railroad of the United States, at Gretna, Manitoba, the point of intersection on the 49th parallel of Latitude which divides, here, Canada from the United States, and forms the International Boundary Line, between the two countries. Town sites were laid out. One a little to the south of the Boundary Line in United States territory was called Greche, an Indian word signifying "friend". The other right on the border in British possessions was named by the C.P.R. officials Gretna. Both towns are now prosperous business centres for their respective districts. Gretna was surveyed and laid out on a virgin section of rich, green prairie, broad lands, and from the similarity of its location, and surroundings to the historical "Gretna Green", on the Scottish border in Great Britain, famed in legend and song for its many marriages of run-away-couples, the name was suggested and accepted.

Reference to the name of Gretna Manitoba is to be found in one of Agnes Lamé's works viz "Lords of the North".

Yours truly
J. J. Tennant.
Gretna. Manitoba.

in 1882. Writing on behalf of the GRETNA postmaster J.F. Tennant explained that the name was chosen because its location on the Manitoba-North Dakota border was similar to its counterpart on the Scotland-England border.

Iceland was the source of a large number of names for populated places, especially in the area between Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba. Among such names are *Arborg*, *Baldur*, *Hnausa*, *Lundar*, *Reykjavik* and *Hecla*. The letter from GIMLI, reproduced here, describes the choice of the name for the home of Odin, the chief Norse god.

A number of Germanic names were transferred from Mennonite settlements in Russia. The postmaster of STEINBACH, A.S. Friesen, apologized for his ability in English, but still provided a good detailed account of the origin and meaning of the name and of the first settlement at Steinbach in 1874. Mennonite settlers also brought the Ukrainian name *Chortitz*. Ukrainian settlers provided several names for communities, among them being *Ukrainia* and *Komarno*. Unfortunately, no letters suitable for reproduction were received from any of the Ukrainian-named post offices.

The physical landscape of Manitoba is reflected in a large number of names of populated places. *Rapid City* recalls the name Rapid River, one of the variants of Little Saskatchewan River; *Pilot Mound* is named for a prominent landmark important to the first settlers travelling across the Prairies. *Plum Coulee* derives its name from a local coulee or valley where, according to the postmaster in 1905, there were a large number of wild plum trees growing. On behalf of the postmaster at *Portage la Prairie*, W. Scott Garrioch gave Mr. White some valuable information on the name of the city and of several local geographical features. Among these is *High Bluff*, the word "bluff" signifying a grove of

trees rising conspicuously from the surrounding countryside. Perhaps for the first settlers many groves of trees on the horizon reminded them of the abrupt change in elevation identified as a "bluff" in their previous experience of describing the landscape. This term occurs in many names in southern Manitoba. Similar bluffs are described in letters from *Oak Bluff* and *Woodlea*.

Several postmasters reported to Mr. White that they were given names by the Post Office Department, although other names had been requested. The residents of *Mekiwin* wanted *McGregor*, after the first settlers, but *MacGregor* had already been assigned to a station 35 km west of *Portage la Prairie* by the Marquis of Lorne, for the chaplain of St. Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh.

The postmaster of *Richland*, 37 km east of Winnipeg, could see no particular reason for that designation, and in 1923 it was changed to *Anola*, said to be an invented name. Six kilometres further east the early settlers wanted the name *Evergreen*, but the postal authorities provided *Queens Valley*, which the postmaster in 1905 claimed had no relationship to the district. The postmaster at MELITA, R.M. Graham, expressed a wish to change that name, presumably derived from the ancient name of Malta, to *Menota*, a former post office on the east bank of the *Souris River* near *Melita*.

Many places along with their names have completely disappeared. *Nelson* is one example. A.P. Stevenson explained in his letter that it was named for Adam Nelson, who settled there in 1877 and established grist and saw mills.

"A village soon began to grow up. A post office was opened and named *Nelsonville* after Adam Nelson the builder of the mill. In 1879-80 *Nelsonville* was incorporated as a town and

Re the name: Gimli

The first Icelandic settlers, coming to soil place in 1874, named the place Gimli, which is the name of the residence of Odin, the "Father of Gods and men" according to the Scandinavian Mythology.

According to some Mythology all "good and brave men" should come to Gimli after death and stay there with "Alfader" = Odin.

Reply to circular: from Gimli

The word Steinbach comes from a brook where
Stones was in the water it would be about Stone Brook,
in English. Steinbach should be in 2 words (Stein-Bach)
Stone-Brook. This name Steinbach here in Manitoba
come from the old Country: Russia while nearly all Settlers
in this Village who settled here at first in the fall ad. 1874.
Came from Russia out of a Village of Steinbach in there
for the give this Village the same name, and we also found
a smol Coulee here where some Stone, where in the Coulee
ore brook, so it made the name Steinhach or (Stone Brook)
here in Russia was 2 Village of the same name Steinbach
one was in the Government Taurien the other in the Government
(or as we call it here Province) of Cherson, and I think that old
people told me that she Came from Germanie out of a place
Called Steinbach (Stone-Brook) it is a German name for
Stone-Brook that is all i could write about, this name
but I do not know if this is what you like to know, or
what i should write i am not good educated in English

Yours truly

A. S. Friesen

P.M. of Steinbach

Melita was evidently named after the Island (now Malta) The first syllable mal - meaning honey - the last syllable I am not sure of ~~their~~ meaning - The Bible pronunciation is mēlita - accent on first syllable. This pron. is however seldom used here. Generally mēlita - all vowels short and accent on second syllable - Some pronounce the i as e thus meleeta. This pronunciation gives rise to bad spelling such as maleta - which is an objection. Personally I'd like to have the name changed to say menota - a P.O. just across de river in early times contemporary as a little before melita. Menota (Indians much as pure water) would be appropriate - Menota is now defunct

Yours truly
R. M. Graham

P.S. Is the creek here called Graham Creek on your official maps? or what?

R.M.G.

the name was shortened to Nelson. On the advent of railways these all missed the town by about 6 miles."

The buildings were moved, mostly to Morden on the Canadian Pacific Railway 10 kilometres to the south, and the post-office was closed in 1908.

This selection of details in the letters from the Chief Geographer's Place Name Survey of 1905 to 1909 represents a cross section of the variety of ways that places were named in Manitoba. The letters received from Ontario post-masters from 1905 to 1909 will be reviewed in CANOMA, Volume 8, Number 1.

