MILESTONES

Hartney’s Significant Historical Themes and Events
A Project of the Hartney-Cameron Heritage Group

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On the cover:

A special day in the history of Hartney, the 1916 production of the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera *The Mikado*, whose performances under the direction of Professor Racine would have involved many local musical talents.
Hartney Milestones

THE TOWN OF HARTNEY has a fascinating and important history. Beginning in the late 1870s, when the first settlers began trickling in, leading to our incorporation as a town in 1905, and up to the present, we have been an industrious, productive and vibrant community.

This booklet will help anyone, Hartney-ites and visitors alike, to appreciate the basic contours of our past. Sections on various themes, noting key events, dates and personalities, will enrich an exploration of our past, and bring to life our proud heritage – the rich and busy life that has defined us for more than a century. The following essential historical themes contain this story:

- Community Context
- Pioneers
- Community Development
- Government Development
- Public Services
- Transportation
- Retail Services
- Commercial Development
- Manufacturing and Industry
- Spiritual Life
- Education
- Health Care
- Clubs and Organizations
- Culture and Recreation

A Hartney Timeline is included at the end of this booklet, to help readers connect to specific key moments in our history.

We trust that this booklet will inform and inspire, suggesting the rich pageant that has been our community’s story. We leave readers with this thought, which has inspired us as we developed this project:

Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward.

- Søren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher
Community Context

The archival photograph of Hartney from the turn of the 20th century (opposite page) suggests the historic nature of our town.

The map of the community to the right will help situate the various buildings and sites that are noted in the text.
View of Hartney from around 1910.
Pioneers

Settlement of southwestern Manitoba happened only gradually before the railways began to arrive in the 1880s. The first settlers to arrive in what would become the Hartney area made their way here in 1880 – in June, when the weather might have been mild and inviting.

John Fee and Samuel Long were from Georgetown, Ontario, where Fee had been a miller (and also had a diploma from the Belleville business college) and Long had been a school teacher. Fee and Long’s experience was typical for homesteaders of the 1870s and early 1880s – they built a small log house, cut down trees, broke the land to plant a small crop, and kept working long days and even nights to ensure that they would be awarded Dominion Government patent for their land, which they both were able to do in March of 1882.

Fee and Long were quickly joined by other settlers, including William Roper and his two young sons, who were together to be the first settlers to spend a winter here. But times were still hard: the small log cabin that John Fee built, called “The Orphan’s Home” provided shelter for 17 people in April of 1882.

The land proved fertile, and Fee and Long and other pioneers gradually wrested a living in the place through the 1880s. These first pioneers were hardy souls, who persevered against the odds, a quality of character that still describes Hartney today.
Community Development

For several years after the first homesteads were occupied in 1881, the area in and around what would become Hartney was exclusively a farming area. In October of 1886, however, when S.H. Dickson built a small general store to serve the growing farming community, the first glint of a community was visible.

Between 1886 and 1889 a variety of other commercial establishments set up business in the area, including Joseph Young’s hotel, James Hartney’s store and post office, Butchart & Bridgett’s hardware store and Mr. Barter’s butcher shop. There were even two grain elevators, a Lake of the Woods operation and Leckie & Hammond’s elevator.

In 1889 a townsite was surveyed, and from then until the town’s incorporation in 1905, the Town of Hartney grew almost every day. The arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1896 ensured the community’s success. New business operations included blacksmiths, livery stables, hardware and dry goods stores, implement dealers and a few industrial developments.

A school and several churches were built. A doctor and a lawyer set up their practices. A few hotels were built. In 1893 the population of the town was pegged at 375. Sports and cultural activities ensured that community life was fully rounded and enjoyable. The Hartney Star newspaper provided readers with opinions and news from around the world. Hartney’s Town Hall and fire hall were built in 1906. And various volunteers and town employees made sure that the town was beautiful and sturdy, with major tree-planting projects and street upgrades and repairs.

The Town of Hartney continues its tradition of industriousness, with a productive character, self-contained and self assured.
Government Development

The public administration of Hartney from 1889 until its incorporation in 1905 was under the jurisdiction of Oakland R.M. Council, with the community of Hartney in Ward I, and our first member being W.T. Johnston. The first election in the new Village of Hartney elected as our first mayor C.D. Kerr. Council’s first meeting was on January 5, 1909 at the I.O.O.F. Hall.

Public functions that were connected in the public mind to government services included the post office and fire department. Dave Ricker was the first postmaster, in 1889, followed by William Foster in 1890. For many years the post office was in Ricker’s store, then in the local newspaper building, and finally in 1904 in a custom-built office built, which is still standing. Mail bags were delivered to Hartney by train and then sent out via horse and buggy. A new post office, still in use, was built in 1962.

Fire control was another important municipal function, but it took several years to get the necessary equipment. The first attempt in 1910 by village council via a referendum was defeated, with the expense for equipment deemed too high. But in 1925, after a fire that destroyed Mitchell’s Store and Yuen’s Café in 1924, the need for action was clear. A volunteer fire brigade was formed under fire chief Hamilton Bell.

The face of local politics was obviously the mayor, and through the years Hartney has flourished under the capable direction of such long-serving mayors as W.H.B. Hill (1907-09 and 1918-27), C.D. Batty (1928-34), J.L. Crowe (1940-51), P. Lougheed (1952-60) and R.W. McPherson (1967-74).
Public Services

Three notable services that were likely deemed essential functions in any small community were the provision of newspapers, lighting and telephone service. The first newspaper, in 1892, called the Hartney Enterprise was a weekly, with E.A. Bailey as editor and publisher. When the Enterprise closed in 1895 it was replaced by the Hartney World, which only survived to 1897, itself replaced by The Independent, from 1903 until 1939, with first editions from A. Schell and Oswald Davis, and later ones from Fred Batty beginning in 1908.

Major political issues that found voice in the local newspapers involved women’s suffrage (the vote) and the prohibition of alcohol. The speeches of local activist Nellie McClung were covered, and letters to the editor were a must-read feature of newspapers at the time.

In Hartney’s early days, lighting was provided by coal oil and every house and store had a lamp or lantern. During the 1920s many stores and some houses installed electric lighting systems, powered with a unit right in the building; one of the first to do this was the Manitoba Hotel, in 1925. These technologies were all swept aside when hydro-electric power was brought into town in 1929. It would take another 20 years, until 1949, for this service to reach rural areas.

The first telephone came to Hartney in 1905, with service in Vanstone’s Drug Store.

Annie Playfair, publisher and editor of the Hartney Star for many years.
Transportation

The various infrastructures of transportation (rail tracks, trails, earthen section roads) and the modes of transport (horse, wagon, stagecoach, railway coach) in the early years of any Manitoba community were significant aspects defining development and even physical shape. Like so many small urban centres, Hartney’s location, development and layout were initially dependent on the arrival of the railways. Thus the arrival in 1896 of a Canadian Pacific Railway line (and station), and then in 1900 with the construction of a Northern Pacific Railway line (taken over in 1901 by Canadian Northern), ensured that the community was set. Suddenly access to information, products and travel was available to all, and Hartney was linked to the world.

The broad swath of railway right-of-way running vaguely north-south that bisects the town was the hub of activity. The many grain elevators were located there, as was the flour mill. Commercial activity developed along the east side of the lines – on East Railway. And even the town hall faced onto the tracks, on the west.

The other late 19th and early 20th century transportation activity that defined Hartney’s development was the horse, whose care and service necessitated several typical commercial activities – harness makers, livery stables, blacksmiths, and carriage and wagon makers.

Hartney also boasted a stage service in its early years. A stage coach ran between Hartney and Meglund two days a week; and between Hartney and West Hall on Fridays. While the rail lines have long disappeared, and horse transport vanished long ago, the traces of those essential aspects of our history are still apparent in Hartney – especially via the wide railway right-of-way that now provides a lovely green space in the heart of town.
Retail Services

Besides the retail aspects of Hartney’s commercial core, the town’s purpose was also defined by the concentration of a variety of specialized services, developed for the surrounding farming areas, but also for the growing number of townsfolk.

Besides the services required for horses, noted earlier, there was also a need for machinists (to attend to repairs to the wide range of machines and equipment used on a farm), garage services (when automobiles came into wider use), and doctors, nurses, lawyers, butchers, milliners, dress-makers, bankers, builders, music teachers, and many others.

In Hartney some notable names have provided services during our early years: John Blair’s livery stable, the McDonald Brothers livery stable, Victor Duchesneau’s blacksmith shop, Eduoard Isabey’s machine shop, the hotels of William Hopkins and Mrs. O’Brien, G..S. Hallen as lawyer and his wife as a piano teacher, physicians Drs. Tolmie, Lyall, Bigelow and Irwin, bank manager J.F. Bradley and the editors of the Hartney Star – Walpole Murdoch and Annie Playfair.

The decline of horse power in the 1920s and the rise of department stores, catalogues and ready-made products had a profound impact on services in towns like Hartney. Former essential services like blacksmiths, livery and stables closed up. But many creative business people adjusted to automobile services and other contemporary needs. For example, William McDonald converted his livery stable in 1910 to an Imperial Oil station.