

We Made Wawanesa

Notable People from Wawanesa's Past



On the cover, left to right:
George Burgess, Mable Watson, Dr. Charles Vanstone and Letitia Mooney.



A Project of the Wawanesa Heritage Advisory Group

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THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE who have made Wawanesa their home over the years, since its inception in 1890, have been a fascinating group, full of strength and wisdom, wit and vigour, kindness and foresight.

Some of these people are also significant, key figures in our history. They have either come to define the region by their very being, or they have changed our communities through their actions and decisions.

This booklet recognizes and honours these people.

On the following pages you will encounter the collection of people who have made a real difference. The way we have chosen to explore and describe these people has been to focus on traditional occupations and avocations. With one key person typically defining each entry (a merchant, a school teacher, a brick-maker, etc.) we expect that the rich and deep experience of life and work in Wawanesa can be effectively and succinctly defined.

The people profiled in this booklet are special, but we have also endeavoured to feature others with slightly lesser claims to significance, who help define or enhance a certain entry. And where possible we have also added information and details on certain occupations and avocations so that readers can come to fully understand and appreciate who these people were, what they did, and how they did it.

This booklet was developed through a project called *Notable People*, an initiative of the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection. That project allowed us to develop a comprehensive inventory of potential candidates, and to carefully analyze and assess the relative significance of the 140 individuals profiled. We are grateful to the Province for this support and direction.

It is easy at the turn of the 21st century to forget the origins and qualities of Manitoba's smaller communities. But at their beginnings these were very industrious places, with young, ambitious people, full of life, and with great dreams for their new home. It is also important to recall that these places were also self-sustaining, with nearly everything one would need made at hand. Much of what was required for daily life was manufactured here, from bricks to dresses, harnesses to flour. Places like Wawanesa in 1900 were active, lively and fun.

It is important to set the stage for the following stories. They come from the excellent local history, *Sipiweske* produced by the Wawanesa History Committee in 1983, with additional material from *Oakland Echoes*, by J. B. Rome and *The Prairie W.A.S.P.*, by J.A.D. Stuart.



The Wawanesa Band

The list of Wawanesa's notable people has mostly been arranged alphabetically, according to last names, with four exceptions. The first four entries have been determined to more effectively set the stage for those who follow, describing pioneer experiences and early farm life.

Richard Cory, Sr.
James Elliott
J.J. Story
A.G. Scott

C.L. Atkinson
Thomas Banting
John Burgess
Jabez Elliott
Ernest Ellis
Families of Note
J. Ferris
Frank Fowler
Charles Gorrie
William Gorrie
Alfred "Professor" Grainger
John Gregory
Rev. Thomas Hall
Dr. H. A. Husband
Alonza Kempton
Charles Kerr
E.L. McDonald
Nellie McClung
Osborne Sisters
William "Gramp" Roney
Reverend Rounthwaite
Frank Schultz
A.W. Snider
Sports
Dr. Charles Vanstone

Historical Overview

Wawanesa is one of numerous Manitoba towns that had its original location abandoned when a nearby site was chosen by a railway company. In this case the village of Souris City, originally surveyed in 1881, had only a short way to travel. It is also one of dozens of towns that sprang up almost overnight when a railway station appeared in the middle of a well-populated farmland.

As the first settlers in the Wawanesa area established themselves in the years 1879-1884 two important communities developed within a few kilometres of the current site of Wawanesa. Millford, established in 1880 at the mouth of Oak Creek, close to the confluence of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers was the first village south of the Assiniboine in western Manitoba. It was soon joined by Souris City on 17-7-17 just south of Wawanesa.

During a time when dozens of speculative town sites were promoted during the Manitoba Boom of 1881-82, these two locations had the distinction of at least being inhabited and each indeed did have a selection of services for pioneers.

Many other such “Great Cities of the Future” existed on paper only. To the north, Rounthwaite also was well established by 1882 and boasted the first Anglican Church in southwestern Manitoba, an attractive building which is now located at the Sipiweske Museum in Wawanesa after many decades of service.

Settlers turned to these embryo villages for mail and supplies. Trips to Brandon, a day’s journey north, were necessary for selling grain and buying the more specialized items. A thriving grist mill operated along the river to the south by the John Gregory family and a brick yard near Souris City also were well used by the settlers.

With such services in place the settlers turned their attention to the business of establishing farms while the railway companies just kept making promises. By the time the current town of Wawanesa appeared in 1890, the region itself had a long and interesting history.

In the winter of 1889/1890 most of the residents of Souris City used the river ice to slide their dwellings and business structures a few kilometres northwards to the newly created railway crossing at Wawanesa. In a few short months the little village nestled attractively in a deep wide bend of the Souris River sprang fully-fledged into being.

It was predictable that Wawanesa would grow quickly and confidently in that the vital rail link placed it at the centre of an already well-established agricultural base. There was no speculation or uncertainty about its importance as a service centre, however its role as a home to a large international insurance company could not have been predicted. The formation of the Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Company initially impacted only locals but it grew into an international company that provided a very significant addition to the economic life of the village.

The much-anticipated arrival of the railway in 1890 led to an initial burst of commercial enterprises. The usual banks, general stores, drug and jewelry stores appeared quickly as buildings were moved from Souris City or built quickly from materials readily available via the new rail line. Many of these buildings were substantial, but few survive today. Within a few years they were supplanted and replaced by more ambitious structures such as of Story Block, followed quickly by the Wawanesa Mutual Building, both of which survive today. It was in that period that many fine homes appeared, of frame and brick construction, some near the core area but others on the perimeter. Owned by community leaders with names like Story, Jackson and Vanstone, several of these buildings have been well cared for and survive intact.

With services established and the comforts of home in place, residents continued the process of developing, initiating and supporting the social, cultural and recreational activities that bring a community to life. That process was well underway in the “first” communities of Millford and Souris City, and the creation of the new and more populous centre of Wawanesa promised new opportunities. The Wawanesa Enterprise, which first published in 1892, gave a voice to the various commercial and social initiatives and leaves us a valuable record of the times.

As Wawanesa looks forward to the century ahead it has taken steps to preserve important aspects of its past, including the preservation of the original Wawanesa Mutual Office as a Provincially Designated Heritage Site housing the Sipiweske Museum. Among the museum's exhibits are important collections relating to “The Mutual” and to Nellie McClung who grew up nearby and was married in the local church.



The humble beginnings of the “The Mutual.”

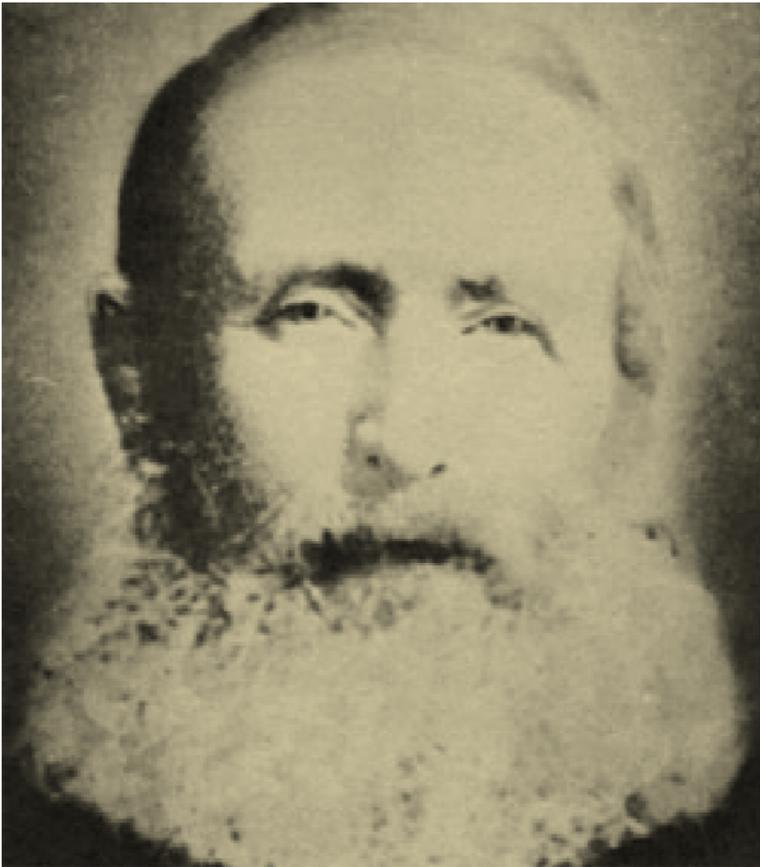


Wawanesa Baseball Team of 1919.

We Made Wawanesa

Pioneer

Farmer Richard Cory Sr.



Richard Cory was born in Devonshire, England, the second child in a family of six. In 1857, he married Mary Anne Frain. In 1870, Richard decided to move to Canada after seeing pictures of the new land and its many opportunities. They arrived at Port Hope, Ontario and settled among the "white" relations.

Free homesteads were offered in Manitoba so Richard and his son Gus left for Winnipeg in April 1879. The land at Winnipeg was so sticky and muddy they moved on to Portage la Prairie. They were able to earn enough money to buy a team of oxen, two Red River carts and a plough. Here they seeded a crop of oats.

In June they started west again and became friends of the Roddicks and Johnstons, but Richard could see the Souris hills and felt that water must be close by. Eight miles further south they took land and settled near a stream that Richard called the "Black Creek." They proceeded to stake their claims for homesteads or pre-emptions. When the official survey was made they were found to be only three rods out of correct line.

That fall they returned to High Bluff (near Portage) and harvested their oat crop, which yielded 95 bushels to the acre. Richard's second son Dick joined them in November and they built a log shanty near the Souris River and proceeded to take out logs for the new settlers to build homes

In June 1880, Richard planted their first wheat. The crop yielded 35 bushels per acre of fine quality wheat, which was drawn to Brandon where it sold for 35cents per bushel. Potatoes were also planted in June and there was ample for everyone. In the fall, Richard went east for his wife and the rest of the family. Once again they were united and pledged this would be home. The three oldest boys staked their claims along with their father, which meant they had a section of land to break. Much of their original land is still in the Cory name. Richard died in 1914 and Mary Anne in 1907. They are buried in Minnewawa Cemetery.



A tribute to the Cory legacy

Who Was First?

It appears impossible to know definitely who had the distinction of being Oakland's first settler. The year was almost certainly 1879, however, and one of the originals was young Augustus (Gus) Cory, the sixteen-year-old son of Richard (Dicky) Cory, an ex-Devonshire policeman who had crossed the Atlantic to Port Hope, Ontario, in 1870.

Gus and his father reached St. Boniface by train in April, 1879. They stayed at the Windsor House a couple of weeks and then took the Winnipeg and Western Transport Company steamboat "Alpha" to Portage. A fortnight later they travelled with a yoke of oxen, two Red River carts and a plow to High Bluff, where they sowed a crop of oats. In June, Thomas Elliott, one of four brothers who figured prominently in the laying of Oakland's foundations, and Orlin S. Elliott (reputedly no relation), arrived at High Bluff, as well as Francis (Frank) and Richard (Dick) Kinley, two Island. Together these six men started west "to get land for others".

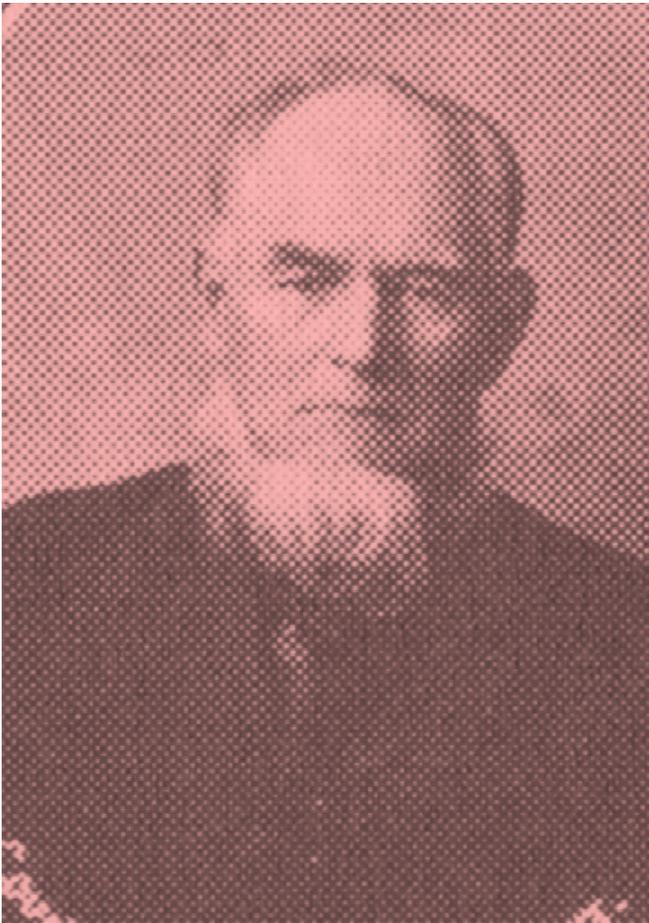
That fall, after staking out homesteads and pre-emptions, and cutting a winter's supply of hay, the group returned to High Bluff to harvest the oats, which yielded 95 bushels to the acre.

Adapted from *Sipiweske*, page 254 and "The Prairie W.A.S.P."

We Made Wawanesa

Pioneer

Farmer James Elliott



James Elliott, along with one sister and four brothers, was born in Hope Township, County Durham, Ontario, son of James Elliott who had emigrated there from Cornwall County, England around 1830. In 1868 he married Mary Hurley, daughter of a Bible Christian Missionary, Rev. Robert Hurley and his wife Mary Anne Clemence. In the spring of 1880 James went west with brothers Jabez and Joshua and, after spending the summer on his homestead, returned to Ontario in November. In the spring of 1881 he again set out for Manitoba with a carload of equipment and household effects. In May, his wife, with their sons, Almon (eleven) and Oliver (seven) followed. On arrival in Winnipeg, they boarded the paddlewheeler, "City of Winnipeg," and sailed up the Assiniboine River to Two Rivers (Souris Mouth), landing there on June 3, where they were met by father James. The "City of Winnipeg" has been described as a finely appointed, three-decked steamboat, gaily painted and upholstered and kept in the most spotless and shining order throughout. It was capable of carrying several hundred passengers and a large quantity of freight. From Two Rivers the family travelled some twelve to fifteen miles by team and wagon to their new home.

The summer of 1881 was a busy one for the family. They lived in a sod shanty erected the previous year by their father and before the arrival of winter, they had built a house 20' x 28' (the only one of the original buildings still remaining on the farm), an 18' x 16' granary and a stable large enough to hold 5 span (teams) of horses. In addition, 200 acres of land were under cultivation.