

DRAYTON, NORTH DAKOTA

Catfish Capital of the North

The Settlers

In March 1878 a group of individuals met in Drayton, Ontario, Canada, for the purpose of planning their migration to the newly opened lands of the province of Manitoba. Three single men left in late March, two more men followed April 1 and a family group of 6 left April 8. The later group was joined enroute by A. W. McCrea and traveled by rail to a point 12 miles east of Grand Forks, North Dakota. Their baggage was shipped to Fisher's Landing, near present-day Fisher, Minnesota (then the northernmost end of the railway), from which they traveled by wagon and steamboat through the Red River Valley to Emerson, Manitoba. Impressed with the area, they decided to stay. A. W. McCrea, as eldest man of the company, was given the right to choose the spot for a new settlement, which he did on April 26, 1878. The settlement was eventually named for the settlers' Canadian hometown, Drayton.

Within weeks at least three cabins had been erected and the prairie was broken to begin farming on each of the claims selected by members of the little colony. The population was augmented by the arrival of other individuals attracted by letters from their settler friends.

Drayton was incorporated as a village October 8, 1889 and as a city March 12, 1896. It was an important Red River boat landing located on the highest geographical point between Grand Forks, North Dakota and Winnipeg, Canada.

Transportation

Ox cart trails from Fort Garry and Pembina to Fort Snelling and St. Paul ran through the Drayton area and were used 1820-1870. Segments of the trails were used periodically after that. Routes were chosen to avoid marshy areas and the flood bottoms of the Red River. To avoid miring of the carts and oxen, grass or brush was thrown on the trail. Most of the three-part markings of wheels and hooves disappeared with the cultivation of the land later.

Navigation on the Red River began in 1859 with the steamer *Anson Northup*. Steamboats soon became an important means of transportation along the Red River. Other steamers were the *Minnesota*, *Dacotah*, *Manitoba*, *Alsop*, *Grand Forks*, *Grandin*, *Fram*, *Pluck*,



Selkirk and *Ogama*. The final steamboat cruise on the Red River was made in June 1909.



north of town in 1955.

The Northern Pacific Railroad reached Drayton in 1887. The first depot was built that year and used until 1959. Passenger trains were an important link to other communities until the late 1960s when I-29 was built just west of town.

Commerce

Since the town's organization in 1878 the major resources of the community have been the area's rich black farmland and its industrious people. Traditionally, Drayton's main economic activity has

been providing goods and services to its surrounding agricultural community. Where buffalo once stampeded across the prairies, the roar of man's modern machinery can be heard from early morning and on into the night. Besides grain farming, dairy and beef cattle, pigs and chickens were also raised. Eggs, milk, cream and home-churned butter brought extra income for families. Potatoes and sugar beets were introduced in the Drayton area in the early 20th century.

The hospital (below) built by Dr. H. M. Waldren, Sr. in 1902 was sold to the sisters of St. Frances, who ran the hospital until 1970, when ownership was transferred to the Drayton community. It closed in 1974 and the building fell victim to the 1997 flood.



Hospital [early 1900s]

Recreation and Education

Dr. H. M. Waldren, Sr. introduced the sport of curling to Drayton area residents when he came in 1899. North Dakota's first curling club Dacotah Curling Club (now Drayton Curling Club) was organized December 23, 1901, with 20 charter members. The first rink was built in 1903 and the present rink was constructed in 1955-56. Curling has enjoyed a robust and colorful history in Drayton.

The first school building was built in 1880 and another on 3rd Street in 1889. A brick building was constructed on 3rd Street in 1923 and the present building in 1968. DHS athletic, music and drama departments have been very successful throughout the years.

Places of Interest

- Drayton United Methodist Church, which appears in the National Register of Historic Places, is located on Main Street.



- Hastings Landing Recreation Area, located east of downtown at Grant Avenue, was named for an early area steamboat landing. The exact location of the original landing is unknown.
- Corner of Main Street and Almeron Avenue was where the first steel bridge was located. A gap in the trees across the river marks where the bridge led.
- Bison, elk and deer bones were left by Woodland people at a kill site along the Red River southeast of town circa 1500 AD. Locals now refer to this area as Ness's Point.
- A grove of mature cottonwoods just south of town marks the site of the old brickyard. Visitors can explore the site's walking trails, which are part of an Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site (OWLS).
- The old townsite of Bowsmont is 10 miles north of Drayton on Pembina County 44. Bowsmont Cemetery is straight west of the townsite.
- A monument dedicated to the Pioneer Spirit of Drayton's founders is located in Heritage Square on the river bank downtown.
- Nowesta Memorial Grove, located 4 miles north and 4 miles west of town, was established in memory of the pioneers who settled the Nowesta Community when the first families arrived from Ontario, Canada in 1881. The tree claim was planted by Wm. E. Gardiner in 1888, and donated by Elsie Elliott in 1988.
- Schumacher Park contains a veteran's memorial, two of the original pulleys from the 1911 steel

drawbridge, a Baseball Capital of ND monument dedicated to American Legion and high school baseball champions, and a plaque for Ervin and Anna Schumacher who donated the land for the park in 1950.

- An ox cart trail ran close to what became Main Street.



- Drayton and St. Edward's Catholic cemeteries are located west of town on Hwy 66 and I-29.
- Mayor's Row, a collection of specimen trees planted in memory of each of Drayton's mayors, runs from the corner of Almeron Ave. and 3rd St, north to Lincoln Ave, then east.

Ox Cart Trails Historical Society

Our museum (below) is located at 201 Almeron Avenue in Drayton, and can be seen by appointment.



The Society maintains a genealogy database of past and present area residents and their descendants. Visit our web site >www.oxcarttrails.net<

Sources: *A Century of Methodism*, Drayton United Methodist Church, 1978; *Heritage '76*, Pembina County, ND 1975; *Heritage '89* Pembina County, ND 1988; *Roy Johnson's Red River Valley*; The Red River Trails; Red River Valley Historical Society; Dr. Fred Schneider, UND; Kenneth C. Gardner, Jr.; *Drayton Echo*, North Dakota State Heritage Center. Photos from State Historical Society of North Dakota: Steamboat C0871, Bridge 0032-PB-08-24.

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Points
of
Historical
Interest

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