The South Saskatchewan River and the Development of Early Saskatoon 1881 – 1908

A Historical Narrative

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Introduction

The South Saskatchewan River … “with its grand rhythm of spring break up, high and low water and winter chill…” was a “…central force…” affecting the lives of early Saskatonians that dwelt on its banks.¹ The surface features of its wide, deeply incised valley directly affected the clustering of the homes and businesses located on both sides of its relatively shallow stream channel.

The following vignettes of people and events from Saskatoon’s past are presented to illustrate how this city’s early form and character were influenced by the South Saskatchewan River. This influence is particularly obvious in Part I: The Pioneer Years, which, for the purpose of this presentation, extends from the locating of the original townsite on the east bank to the coming of the railway. However, it is also evident in Part II: The Early Railway Years, that the river played a major role in the establishment of two more settlements on the west bank and, later, their amalgamation with the original settlement to form the City of Saskatoon.

The City of Saskatoon currently plans to incorporate “interpretative elements” into the River Landing Project that will instill local residents and visitors alike with a sense of the “place”, by demonstrating the connections between this central area of the city and its human history. The expectation is that these excerpts from Saskatoon’s history will aid in the selection of specific features, events, individuals and stories to be portrayed at River Landing for this purpose.

The sketch maps, block diagrams and illustrations, as well as the historical photographs included herein are integral to this presentation. They communicate relative location and descriptive detail more efficiently than the written word. Additional information and references, as well as sources, are cited in the end notes to assist in further research related to the incidents and individuals mentioned.

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Part I: The Pioneer Years (1881-1890)

On July 28, 1882, John Lake, and the small reconnaissance party he led, arrived at Clarks Crossing on the South Saskatchewan.² This, he knew was the north end of a tract of land on which the Temperance Colonization Society (TCS) of Toronto planned to found a
farming community in the northwest, that would be “ever free of the accursed liquor trade”. As TCS land commissioner, his primary goal on this initial trip west was to select a site for a service centre within the proposed Temperance Colony.

The TCS had been formed to take advantage of an 1881 amendment of the Dominion Lands Act (1872). This amendment allowed for private companies to obtain blocs of land in the northwest, on condition that they have them settled quickly. As an incorporated company, the TCS was primarily concerned with making a profit for its shareholders by selling the land obtained in such a bloc to those who would be attracted to a settlement where alcohol was prohibited.

Setting of the TCS grant (enlarged) in the central prairies 1882.  

WPD
Based on the best knowledge available, the TCS had requested, and received, a grant of some 200 thousand acres within 21 townships that straddled the South Saskatchewan. Its directors had insisted that this grant be located in what was described as the “fertile belt” (parkland) of the Canadian prairies.

This was done even though the route of the transcontinental CPR, which, originally, was to be constructed through the parkland region, had been diverted across the more arid grasslands to the south. The directors of the TCS accepted that, until a branch line could be built connecting their proposed colony to the CPR mainline, it might be supplied by boat from Medicine Hat where the railway would intersect the South Saskatchewan.

Lake and his party had come west by train as far as Moosimin. From there they had travelled by horse and wagon, following the existing telegraph line along the original railway survey, to Clarks Crossing.

From Clarks Crossing they now trekked south along the river looking for a suitable crossing place, hopefully near the centre of the tract, for the proposed service centre. As they journeyed along, Lake noted that, wherever there was a natural terrace on one side of the river’s wide, entrenched valley, there was a steep embankment opposite. This, he knew, would make it difficult to traverse by future colonists who would be settled on both sides of the river.

Near the south end of the tract, they came to an Indian reserve in the Moose Woods. There, John Lake met White Cap, chief of the resident Dakota-Sioux band. Through a Métis interpreter, White Cap told Lake that, if he returned along the trail that ran north from the reserve to the Métis settlement of Batoche, he would come to a point where it approached the crest of the high bank overlooking the river. Just to the west of that point is a place known as “Minnetonka”, where, because of the terrain, native peoples had been crossing the river for many years.

Lake and his companions returned along this trail and found the place of which Chief White Cap had spoken. There a ravine that ran down the steep bank allowed easy decent to the river below, while on the opposite side there was a broad terrace with a gentle slope to the natural prairie level beyond. This, Lake saw, was a suitable place for horse drawn wagons to approach the river from either side, and for the installation of a ferry to carry them across. He had found the site for the future service centre of the proposed Temperance Colony he had been seeking.

Frank Blake, the Dominion Land Surveyor (DLS) with the party, determined the location of this site within the tract. That day, Sunday August 20th, 1882, Lake’s entry in his diary read: “Camped at 2:00 p.m. Minnetonka is the name of our campsite. Sec.29, Twp.36, R 5”. The two of them spent the following few days studying the topography and soils of the surrounding area. After that, they returned to Clark’s Crossing to meet other members of the party who had been examining the remaining parts of the future Temperance Colony.
George Grant, the assistant land commissioner, then rode south to the railway depot at Moose Jaw, marking a trail along which he would lead the first settlers to the Colony the following spring. John Lake, with some of the party, returned east on the route they had come. There he reported to his fellow directors of the TCS regarding “Minnetonka”, his chosen site for a service centre, and the general quality of the land within the tract.

In the fall of 1882, the directors of the TCS had agreed that the townsite of the service centre for the Temperance Colony should be laid out on the portion of section 29 located on the west side of the river. However, that winter, officials of the Department of the Interior informed them that, according to the Dominion Lands Act, section 29 was a “school section”. Thus it was to be reserved for future endowment for schools in the northwest.9

On John Lake’s recommendation, it was then decided to locate the townsite on the adjacent section 28 instead. About a third of that section, low-lying and covered with brush, was on the west side of the river. But the remainder, on the high east side, was relatively level and clear. As well, this east side portion provided a good perspective from which to view the river and surrounding area.
However, further correspondence with the Department of the Interior revealed that this section, was a “homestead section” and remained subject to regulations governing the settlement of such land.\textsuperscript{10} It was only after Frank Blake (DLS) provided a sketch of the site, along with written testimony that the crossing on the adjacent section 29 was “…the easiest and most accessible crossing between Telegraph Crossing (Clarks Crossing) and Moose Woods…”, did officials of the Department of the Interior agree to sell section 28 to the TCS.\textsuperscript{11}

The agreement for sale also provided for an easement two chains wide (132 feet) encroaching onto section 29. This would allow for ferry landings and approaching roadways.\textsuperscript{12}

John Lake then proceeded to design a town plan for the eastern portion of section 28. It would be typical of those of many centers in western Canada at the time. But it would have some unique features as well.

Frank Blake (DLS) would lay the plan out on the site, under Lake’s supervision, during the summer of 1883.

The plan of this original Temperance Colony settlement on the east bank called for a grid of streets and avenues that fit the rectilinear boundaries of the sections enclosing it on the south and east sides. This was modified on the north east corner to fit the angle of the riverbank. It also provided for Broadway (part of which has since been renamed University Drive) to follow the Moose Woods – Batoche trail, the pre-existing native arterial that angled with the riverbank in this area of the site. Main Street was designed to be the intersecting east-west artery. It descended to the previously designated ferry crossing, located on the lower south east corner of section 29.

The provision of main arteries that were wider (99 feet) than the average street (66 feet) was common enough in urban centers of western Canada at the time. However all avenues being wide was unique. So was the reserving of the riverbank, the most desired and valuable setting for private residences, as public domain.

These unique features were due to the secondary motive of the TCS for founding this colony in the northwest, and John Lake’s personal background. The TCS had been formed not only to profit from the sale of the land to those that would settle in the proposed colony, but to provide a more wholesome environment (where temperance would prevail) for them.\textsuperscript{13} As a real estate developer, John Lake had advocated such “Garden City” principles being used in the design of areas in Toronto.\textsuperscript{14}
What would become known as the Garden City movement, like the Temperance Movement, was but one of the social utopian movements of the late 19th Century concerned with addressing the ills of a growing industrial society. It called for aspects of the real, natural world to be incorporated into the artificial, brick and concrete urban settings that an increasing proportion of the population were to occupy.

In the case of this plan for Saskatoon, John Lake’s intent was that boulevards of grass and trees would eventually line the wide avenues. The river banks would remain available to all residents as recreational space.

The Louise Grounds were designed as a venue for public gatherings, such as Victoria and Dominion (Canada) Day celebrations. It would, in fact, be the site of annual Temperance Colony agricultural exhibitions until 1895.
The origin of the name “Saskatoon” that was given to this original Temperance Colony settlement is known. But just who chose it, and when, is not.

The nomadic Cree bands of the region had referred to the bushes, with the tasty berries that grew on the high north facing bank just east of the Minnetonka crossing as “Mis-sask-qua-too-mina” and “Sask-a-too-mina”.15 Warriors would usually stop while at the crossing to cut some of the characteristically straight branches of these bushes to be used as arrow shafts. When in season, the berries on them would be picked by the women and children to either be eaten fresh or to be used in the making of pemmican.

In 1903 John Lake was asked how “Saskatoon” came to be the name of the original TCS settlement. He said he had chosen it while on the site in 1882, and is quoted as having rather dramatically added that:

> “While lying in my tent one Sunday afternoon, one of The chain bearers brought me a handful of berries. I asked him the name. He said they call them Saskatoons. In an instant, I remarked, Arise Saskatoon, Queen of the North.”16

However, this explanation is questionable in that John Lake was only at the site in August of 1882. By that time of the year the berry season is well passed.17

According to TCS minutes, Saskatoon had already been accepted as the name of the townsite to be located on section 28 when that section was purchased from the Dominion Lands Branch in December 1882.18 Possibly this variation on the native names for the bushes on the eastern portion of that section had been used to identify it in discussions as to its suitability as a townsite, and was adopted as its name by the TCS Board of Directors.

The failure of John Lake and his fellow directors of the TCS to comprehend the literal meaning of “Saskatchewan”, the Cree name for the river, contributed to early setbacks in the development of Saskatoon. “Swift flowing, turbulent muddy waters” implies shoals and sandbars that make navigation, especially of its shallower South branch, difficult.
Early in 1883, Lake had had building materials shipped by rail to Medicine Hat so that they might be moved down the South Saskatchewan to the site of the future Saskatoon. As soon as the ice was off, he had a crew load a couple of scows with “...shingles doors, sash, tin, nails, etc....” and had the lumber tied into rafts and then, started them off down the river.\(^{19}\)

In mid April, the first group of Temperance colonists, the majority of whom were from Ontario, detrained at Moose Jaw. From there they were led by George Grant on an arduous overland trek to the colony.\(^{20}\) They were told that building materials would be available when they got to Saskatoon, and to expect to see houses already being erected on the townsite.

However, when they arrived in late May, no building materials were yet there and wouldn’t be until August. When the lumber finally got there it was “sand filled” and had to be dried and cleaned before it could be used.\(^{21}\) Six small houses were constructed with this lumber on the site before the onset of winter. One of them is the “Trounce House”, which still stands in the backyard of 510 10\(^{th}\) Street East.\(^{22}\)

Most of the colonists were forced to make-do with dwellings crafted from sod, stone and poplar poles cut from bluffs in the area. A few managed to make overland trips by oxen and wagon back to Moose Jaw for additional building materials and extra provisions before the snow fell.\(^{23}\)

The following spring the TCS had the \textit{SS May Queen}, a 35 foot sharp–bottomed steam launch, shipped by rail to Medicine Hat, expecting that it would be used to make regular runs carrying passengers and cargo to and from Saskatoon. However, on its maiden run down the river it kept getting stuck in the shallows and on sandbars. When the \textit{SS May Queen} finally arrived at Saskatoon it was abandoned on the shore and Captain Andrews and his crew were left marooned in the little settlement.\(^{24}\)

Though some individual colonists did later bring more materials and supplies down the river by scow, this ended attempts by the TCS to use the South Saskatchewan as a transportation corridor.\(^{25}\) Instead, that summer, it had a small steam engine and cutting blades for a sawmill freighted to Saskatoon over the trail from Moose Jaw, so that lumber might be produced locally.

The mill was set up on the riverbank near the ferry crossing so that logs from stands of poplars at Beaver Creek could be floated down river to it. But it was soon obvious that the few boards that could be cut from each of the small trees that grew in the area weren’t worth the time and labour it took to saw them.\(^{26}\)

Thus the misjudgment of the navigational potential of the South Saskatchewan by the colony’s founders left the early residents of Saskatoon isolated and largely dependant on their ingenuity to provide food and shelter for themselves and their livestock. Those items they couldn’t produce locally had to be hauled in by oxen and wagon from Moose Jaw. Trade with members of the White Cap band at Moose Woods and the Métis of
Batoche saved many of the Temperance colonists from starving during their first winters on the prairies.27

There wouldn’t be more than about a dozen or so buildings scattered about its wide, rutted streets, or more than a hundred residents, in Saskatoon until the coming of the railway in 1890.

Sketch of early Saskatoon ca 1885 drawn from memory by Maude (Fletcher) MacIntosh, daughter of Joe and Grace Fletcher.

Headstones in the Pioneer Cemetery, set on the high east bank of the river, bear witness to the hardships endured by the early residents of Saskatoon and area. The first one placed on the site marks the grave of Robert Clark, who was buried May 25th, 1884.

Only 12 days earlier, Robert, with his oldest son, Wes, had arrived in Saskatoon. He had left his wife, Eleanor, and the rest of their children to wait in Moose Jaw while he erected a dwelling on his selected quarter of land in the Colony.

Shortly after their arrival, he and Wes had been called upon to help fight a prairie fire that was threatening the little settlement. While doing so, Robert had collapsed of exhaustion or smoke inhalation. This had led to his developing pneumonia.28
Realizing the seriousness of Robert’s condition, Dr. Willoughby, the TCS physician at Saskatoon, told Wes to quickly return to Moose Jaw for the rest of the family. Wes made the round trip by oxen and wagon in record time. Nine days later he was back in Saskatoon with his mother and his siblings.

Robert died the morning after their arrival, leaving Eleanor and the children to manage on their own. His internment took place later that day. The place of burial was a pleasant spot designated by the assistant land commissioner, George Grant, next to an aspen grove on the riverbank.

Other early colonists would be buried near Robert in the succeeding years. These included two young men who perished in blizzards and one who drowned when he fell off the ferry. Many were woman and children who died of illnesses, such as typhoid and influenza, or injuries, such as having been kicked by a horse or burned in a house fire.
In 1888, Thomas Copeland, as TCS Townsite Trustee, requested that the Department of the Interior grant Saskatoon title to this small graveyard. He was informed that it was actually on a small portion of the southwest quarter of section 20 that extended across the river.

Earlier, Andy LaPlante, the ferry operator, had filed for a homestead on that quarter. But as LaPlante hadn’t made the necessary improvements he hadn’t been granted title to it. So the Department agreed to hold title to this small plot of land and transfer it to Saskatoon when the settlement was legally incorporated.

Though this site is visually appealing for a cemetery, the river has been continually undercutting the bank at this point in the valley. This has caused slumping and landslides which have required some of the graves nearest the river to be moved. Earlier, these were moved within the Pioneer cemetery itself. In more recent years, those needing to be moved have been relocated to Woodlawn cemetery on the west side of the river.

The Temperance colonists who took up land on the west side of the South Saskatchewan soon found that they were to have difficulty reaching Saskatoon on the east bank for much of the year. The TCS did provide a toll free ferry service. But it was to prove unreliable during the months in which it could operate. This would become a major source of discontent in the colony.

As well, the ferry couldn’t be launched until the ice was off in the spring, nor could it operate during freeze-up in the fall. So, it was only during the dead of winter when the ice was thick enough that the colonists could expect to cross the river with certainty.

In the fall of 1883 the first colonists to arrive had begun to cross the river using one of the scows that had brought building materials from Medicine Hat. With a couple of large sweeps, and a lot of effort, they usually managed to make it across without being carried too far downstream by the current.

The following year the TCS supplied the cables and a windlass needed to adopt this scow as a swing ferry. They also hired Andy LaPlante, a Métis who had come to Saskatoon as a crewman on the SS May Queen, to operate it.

A long cable was strung across the river, with one end fixed at the designated landing near the bottom of Main Street and the other directly opposite on the west bank. The scow was then connected to running pulleys on this cable with a second cable, which in turn was run through the windlass on the scow. By cranking the windless the craft could be swung on the angle necessary for the current to push it across the river.
Andy LaPlante later built a small house on the east shore so as to be near the ferry for most of each day. When he was not available, Sandy Marr, who lived with his family in one of the small mansard-roofed houses on Main Street, would sometimes operate the ferry in his absence. On one occasion when LaPlante had cut his foot with an axe, Gabriel Dumont and his wife came from Batoche to help him out.

It is said that Dumont shot one of the last bison in the district while riding across the area where downtown Saskatoon presently stands. When he got off his horse and straddled the beast to cut its throat, the bison got up and ran for a distance with Dumont on its back before it finally expired.32

In 1886, John Stewart, who had come to Saskatoon as a blacksmith, replaced LaPlante as ferry operator. But, no matter who was in charge, the criticisms voiced locally and in correspondence to the TCS in Toronto were the same. It seemed to those dependant upon the ferry to get to and from the settlement that it was always on the other side, shut down for repairs or the operator wasn’t available.

The Saskatoon ferry leaving the west side landing ca mid 1880s. The trail leading from the east side landing to Main Street is visible in the right background. Photo LH899 LHR/SPL

Difficulties faced by the operators included avoiding shifting sandbars in the channel, mending torn cables and maintaining satisfactory landings as the water level of the river rose and fell. In fall the ferry had to be hauled far enough from the water so that it wouldn’t be crushed by the ice that swept down the river during spring breakup. Then it often required a community effort to get it back into the river for the summer season.

There were a number of times that the ferry was swamped or got stuck on a sandbar and those aboard, with their animals, had to swim to shore. The only fatality, though, occurred in the summer of 1887 when young Neville Pendegrassse fell off and drowned while trying to make it back to the landing.33

Given the usual long waits for their turn to cross, the ferry landings became informal meeting grounds for colonists from both sides of the river. No doubt the inadequacy of
the service was a starting point for many of their conversations. But these usually ended in more general exchanges of news and views. The landings are also known to have been where social contacts were made, such as the one that led to the first marriage in the colony.

The culmination of a courtship that resulted from a chance meeting at the ferry was the subject of an item in the August 9th, 1884 issue of the handwritten Saskatoon Sentinel. It stated that:

“Our numerous readers will be happy to congratulate our fellow colonist, Mr. Robert Caswell, in the auspicious occasion of his marriage to Miss Irvine. The Gordian Knot of Hymen was tied at Prince Albert on the 4th. Mr. and Mrs. C. were here on Sunday afternoon, and looked quite a youthful and happy couple.”

Robert Caswell had arrived with the first group of colonists in 1883. He, with his brother Joseph, had then proceeded to the homesteads on which they were to make entry near Clarks Crossing. Before winter set in, Robert had managed to build a house and harvest a small crop. The following spring, he had seeded his small plot and was busy ploughing more acres when Joseph persuaded him to take a break.

The two of them journeyed to Saskatoon that May 25th to take in a celebration being held there in honor of Queen Victoria. When they came to the west side landing they tied the oxen to the wagon and waited to cross. Shortly thereafter, Joe Fletcher, his wife Grace and their children arrived from their place, located a couple miles west of the settlement.

With the Fletchers were Will Irvine and his attractive sister Francine, who had been nicknamed “Frankie”. Will and Frankie were staying with the Fletchers until Will finished building a dwelling on his own place. Then Frankie was to join Will there as his housekeeper.

Following his introduction to Frankie at the landing, Robert took every opportunity to get to know her better during the crossing and the festivities at the Louise Grounds. In the next couple of months, he visited her at the Fletcher farm whenever possible. Finally, at the end of July he proposed and Frankie accepted, on the understanding that they would marry at a later date. As there wasn’t a Presbyterian minister at Saskatoon, they would have to arrange for the one from Prince Albert to officiate at the wedding.

However, when Robert rode his pony back to visit Frankie at the Fletcher farm a couple of days later, Will voiced objections to their marriage. Robert decided then and there to put the matter beyond question. With Frankie’s consent he made arrangements for them to elope to Prince Albert the next day.
George Grant, a family friend of the Caswells, agreed to be at the west landing with the ferry at sunrise to bring Frankie across to the Saskatoon side of the river. Robert then rode to his homestead to pick-up his suit. At Clark’s Crossing he crossed to the east side of the river in order to borrow his friend’s best driving team and buggy for the trip to Prince Albert.

Shortly, after sun-up, Robert was back at Saskatoon to find Frankie waiting with her luggage at the east side landing. From there they drove as far as McDowell, where they stayed overnight with the Angus Cameron family. The next day Lille Cameron, as Frankie’s chaperone and, later, as her Matron of Honor, accompanied them to Prince Albert where Frankie and Robert were duly married.

Robert, with Frankie as his wife, returned to Robert’s homestead at Clarks Crossing where they would remain for the following three years. But due to poor crops and the lack of an economic means of shipping out what surplus grain they did produce, Robert and Frankie left the Colony when Robert found employment as an itinerant CPR telegrapher. They did not return to Saskatoon until after the coming of the railway.

In the 1870s, the Hudson’s Bay Company had begun using flat-bottomed steamboats to supply its fur trade posts along the North Saskatchewan from Winnipeg, via the Red River and Lake Winnipeg. When the CPR reached Medicine Hat in 1883, these Hudson’s Bay Company vessels were being operated by the Winnipeg and Western Transportation Company (WWT Co). The WWT Co then tried to establish a shorter supply route, from Medicine Hat via the south branch of the Saskatchewan River, using steamboats that had sets of spar poles and winches attached so that they might better “leapfrog” through shallows and over sandbars in its channel.  

The first of these steam boats to make its way up the South Saskatchewan from the fork with the North branch was the SS Lily. It had reached the site of Saskatoon on July 21st, 1883, shortly after the first group of colonists arrived there. Captain Davis was later quoted as stating that: “the whole population of 75 inhabitants came to welcome the first steamboat as it passed by”. As a result, he believed “…the price of lots advanced immediately.” Further, the Captain noted that the steamboat had had to steer around the Saskatoon-bound rafts of lumber, which were caught on sandbars a considerable distance upstream.

The SS Lily made it to Medicine Hat. But it never made a return trip, as its bottom was torn out by a boulder in the river near that centre. Captain Davis and some of the crew would make their way back to Prince Albert by rowboat. The Captain later stated that he realized they were once again near Saskatoon when one member of the crew, scavenging
for rosehips and berries on the river bank, came across a potato patch belonging to a Temperance colonist.\textsuperscript{40}

The \textit{SS Northcote}, operated by the WWT Co, and three steamboats belonging to the Galt Coal Company at Medicine Hat, would make stops at Saskatoon during the Northwest Resistance in 1885. However, the steamboats that operated on the South Saskatchewan in the 1880s generally carried consigned cargo between Medicine Hat and larger centers such a Prince Albert, Battleford and Edmonton on the North Saskatchewan. Saskatoon and the couple of other settlements on the South branch at the time were too small to warrant regular service.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{A\ sketch\ of\ the\ SS\ Northcote\ tied\ up\ at\ the\ shore\ of\ the\ Saskatchewan\ River.}
\caption{A sketch of the \textit{SS Northcote} tied up at the shore of the Saskatchewan River. \textit{Artist unkown} \hspace{1cm} \textit{LHR/SPL}}
\end{figure}

So no dock was ever constructed for steamboats at Saskatoon. When the river level was high enough, those that did stop would sometimes tie up along the shore near the river landing. Most often they would anchor mid-stream and the small tenders they carried would be used to go to and from the shore.

The battles fought during the Northwest Resistance of 1885 took place to the north and west of Saskatoon. But, because of its location on the South Saskatchewan, the residents of this little settlement, set high on its east bank, would find themselves directly involved in the conflict.

Following the confrontation at Duck Lake in March of that year, between a NWMP patrol and a group of Métis led by Gabriel Dumont, a Canadian force, under the command of General Frederick Middleton, had been sent west to restore order. General
Middleton and the main body of his Division had detrained at Qu’Appelle and marched along the Telegraph Trail to Clarks Crossing. The remainder of his troops, with supplies and equipment, were off-loaded near Saskatchewan Landing on the South Saskatchewan.

The previous fall the *SS Northcote* had stopped briefly at Saskatoon to drop off rolls of wire and poles to be used in the construction of a telegraph line from there to Clarks Crossing. It was on its way to a winter berth at Medicine Hat. The following spring it was to be used, in place of the disabled *SS Lily*, to transport supplies from the CPR depot to the Hudson’s Bay Co posts on the North Saskatchewan.

Now the *SS Northcote*, along with the *SS Baroness* and *SS Minnow* belonging to the Galt Coal Company, were commandeered to transport the troops, with their cargo, from the Landing to meet up with the rest of Middleton’s Division at Clarks Crossing. After delays in loading, the *SS Northcote* finally left Saskatchewan Landing, with two barges in tow, on April 23rd, 1885.

The following day Middleton’s main troop, while advancing on the Métis headquarters at Batoche, was ambushed at Fish Creek. The wounded men were transported to Saskatoon where an emergency Field Hospital was set up in three houses close to the river bank. One of these was the present “Marr Residence” that stands at 326 11th Street East.

Sketch of Saskatoon in the summer of 1885. The three houses used as a Field Hospital are in the left centre ground. The Marr Residence is far left with the Trounce House up the trail behind it. Andy LaPlante’s little house is far right, near the ferry landing.  

*Photo RA7438a SAB*
Local citizens, including Dr. Willoughby and Thomas Copland, a former pharmacist, along with his wife and his sister, Mrs. Hunter, were recruited to care for the wounded soldiers. They would remain in charge until a military medical team arrived in the settlement.

Because of the sandbars in the river the SS Northcote didn’t reach Saskatoon until May 3rd. It stopped just long enough to unload the personnel and equipment of the No 1 Field Hospital Unit and for the Captain to pick up a fresh catch from a local settler who waded out to the boat to deliver them. Then it continued down river to deliver the rest of its cargo and the men it carried to General Middleton, who was waiting at Fish Creek.

During the following couple of weeks the SS Baroness, SS Minnow and SS Alberta steamed through Saskatoon with more government troops and supplies aboard.

After serving as the only “gunboat” ever on the South Saskatchewan during the siege of Batoche, the SS Northcote was used to transport more wounded troops back to Saskatoon. On one of these trips it also carried Louis Riel, under guard.

Riel was to be transported by steamboat to the Elbow. Then he was supposed to be taken overland by horse and wagon to Moose Jaw and from there to Regina by rail. However, the officer in charge decided instead to hold Riel on board the SS Northcote at Saskatoon overnight and then have him driven directly by horse and buckboard to Moose Jaw the next day.

That July the last wounded men and hospital personnel were evacuated from Saskatoon by the SS Alberta. It had four barges attached to it, one with a cow aboard to supply fresh milk for the convalescents. The other barges were to carry the remainder of the troops and equipment picked up at Clarks Crossing. From there, this last contingent of Middleton’s force was transported from the Saskatchewan district, via Lake Winnipeg to the CPR terminal at Winnipeg.

This ended Saskatoon’s moment in the national spotlight. The little settlement on the South Saskatchewan returned to a state of frontier isolation once more. This would last until the coming of the railway in 1890.

Part II: The Early Railroad Years

The residents of Saskatoon held an impromptu celebration on the evening of May 14, 1890 when they saw the lights of a work train approaching from the south. Many had begun to doubt that they would ever see their isolated little settlement, perched on the high east bank of the South Saskatchewan River, connected to the outside world.
Reports in 1884 that the TCS was facing legal suits by some of its own shareholders had dashed any hopes at the time that it was going to have a rail link built from the CPR mainline to Saskatoon. It wasn’t until 1887, that a real possibility emerged once more. This came about when the new Board, led by Charles Powell, arranged to furnish right-of-way across TCS holdings for an extension of the Qu’Appelle, Long Lake Regina (QuLLR) Railway to Prince Albert.

The natural contour of the valley at Saskatoon made it a suitable place for such a railway to cross the river. The right-of-way provided caught the western edge of section 28 as it curved down the ravine to the ferry landing. It then angled across the lower terraced portion of that section on the west side of the river, so as to maintain a gentle gradient to the natural prairie level to the north. During 1889, railway crews had laid tracks along the surveyed route on both sides of the river.

Now, with the arrival of this work train, carrying the wooden trusses for the erection of a bridge across the river, railway service appeared imminent. Speculation as to what this meant in terms of local business opportunities reached an all time high.

However, these expectations were dampened somewhat, when, first, the water tower for refilling the steam locomotives was placed across the river on the lower west bank. Then, to avoid unnecessary stops for trains, the depot was constructed in close proximity
to it. This meant that, for much of each year, the residents of the little east bank settlement would have to rely on the ferry service to get to and from the railway station.

To accommodate those that would wish to locate their businesses and homes near the station, Charles Powell, representing the TCS, and the Winnipeg firm of Osler, Nanton and Hammond, representing the QuLLR Railway, had an extension of the Saskatoon townsitelaid out on the west side portion of section 28. It was typical of railway towns in the northwest at the time in that it was a grid, with the avenues paralleling the railway tracks. However, Thomas Copland, as the local TCS Townsite Trustee, and an original Temperance colonist, used his influence to have wide streets and the riverbank reserved as public domain incorporated into the west side plan as well.\textsuperscript{51}

In 1891 the Dominion government cancelled the contract made with the TCS a decade earlier because much of the tract granted at that time had not been settled.\textsuperscript{52} Encumbered by lawsuits and facing bankruptcy, the TCS would be dissolved a few years later.

However, with the coming of the railway the settlement the TCS had founded on the South Saskatchewan had a life-line that would enable it to grow on its own. Before long a good number of the lots in what would be known as “west Saskatoon” had been bought up, though many of them on speculation.

The first buildings on the site were typical wooden structures serving as a railway station, a livery stable and a couple of dwellings. Notable additions to these over the next few years were two structures built with stones gathered along the river. These were the store, owned by James Leslie and James Wilson, and Don Garrison’s Queens Hotel. They had both been constructed directly across from the railway station at 1st Avenue and 20th Street.\textsuperscript{53}

These individuals, like most of the first residents and businessmen in this west side settlement, had come to the area as Temperance colonists. But, before long, there would
be others, drawn to Saskatoon by the opportunities availed with the coming of the railway.

One of these newcomers was James Clinkskill, who would become a prominent local businessman as well as an influential political leader representing Saskatoon and district.

Plan of “west” Saskatoon 1890  

The name “Clinkskill” for most current Saskatonians, brings to mind the seniors’ high-rise near the river at the south end of 1st Avenue. For those that have resided here for some time, it brings memories of the big white house that stood for sixty years about two blocks to the east. This house was one of the first grand residences that would come to line Spadina and Saskatchewan Crescents as Saskatoon grew.
In 1898, James Clinkskill had relocated his retail business from Battleford to the former Leslie and Wilson store in west Saskatoon. Here he was able to receive merchandise by train from wholesale firms in Winnipeg more economically than he had been able to obtain it by steamboat at Battleford.

Being a shrewd business man, he also had a large warehouse built on 2nd Avenue from which he began wholesaling to stores in Battleford. Even after the cost of freighting the goods by horse and wagon over the Battleford trail, he was able to make a fair profit.

As this west side settlement grew, he was able to build a bigger store on 21st Street, between 1st and 2nd Avenue. ‘CLINKSKILL’ remains embossed in the concrete sidewalk in front of where it once stood.

By 1903, his businesses established, Clinkskill undertook the construction of a comfortable home for himself, his wife Dora, their son and seven daughters. The site he and Dora had selected was on three lots facing the river, at 3rd Avenue and Spadina Crescent.

Panorama of “west” Saskatoon from the east side ca 1904. Knox Presbyterian Church (steeple) is at left centre. The Clinkskill house, standing by itself, is at right centre. Photo LH1356 LHR/SPL

There were only a few buildings in the vicinity at the time. Two were small one storey houses. Another was the original, frame, Knox Presbyterian church. As a member of the congregation, James Clinkskill had been involved in the design and construction of this structure, with its landmark steeple, three years earlier.

Using an architect’s handbook as a guide, Clinkskill drew up the plans for the house he would have erected on the site selected. He personally supervised the local carpenters who constructed it, using materials he had had shipped to Saskatoon.

When finished it was a large two-storey frame structure with a tiered verandah across the front. There was a kitchen, living room, dining room and bedroom on the main floor. On
the second floor were another five bedrooms, a bath and Clinkskill’s study. This study had a bay window from which he could look up and down the river. Some fast growing maples, possibly the first trees added to the Saskatoon landscape, were planted in the front yard and a plot cultivated for a garden in the back.

This would be the home of the James Clinkskill family until 1911. There they would host many gatherings of friends and business associates. Dora, the oldest daughter, recalls the dining and living rooms once being cleared for a dance that was attended by sixty people. The front verandah, with its perspective on the river, was a popular gathering place for young people in the community.

The river had played a role in Robert Caswell meeting and marrying the love of his life in 1884. It would also play a part in his becoming a construction contractor when he returned to Saskatoon with his young family in 1893.

Shortly after their return, Robert and Frankie had opened a general store out of the former Trounce house, which was located on the east side of the river. Their plan was to follow the example of Grace Fletcher, whose east side business had thrived, even though the railway station was on the west side.

In exchange for merchandise, Grace had accepted bison bones, gathered by cash poor settlers and Métis on the grasslands to the southwest and brought to the station over the “old bone” trail. She had then shipped the bones to eastern manufactures in return for cash. With the cash received, she had restocked her store, with a good profit left over in most cases.
Robert had begun by accepting butter produced by local settlers in exchange for groceries and dry goods. However, he soon incurred problems in storing and delays in shipping of the butter. As a result, his suppliers had cut him off and sued him for payments due. Out of business and in debt, Robert was forced to seek income by other means.

Having some previous experience as a carpenter, Robert, in 1894, submitted a bid and received a government contract to build a NWMP barrack on the west side of the river. Lacking funds to purchase the lumber needed, he hired three young men, including his brother-in-law, Will, to help him cut poplar trees at Beaver Creek to be used in the construction of this building.

After cutting and trimming about three hundred of these into poles, they tied them together with barbed wire to form a large raft. The four of them then stepped aboard and pushed off down the river for what would be a harrowing ride into Saskatoon.

The water level was high and the current noticeably strong as they passed under the railway bridge. The fast moving water carried them past their intended landing at the bottom of 1st Avenue and on toward the east side of the next bend. Only after vigorous flailing with the crude sweep they had attached, were they able to direct the raft back toward the west bank. Their crude craft broke up as they ran it up on the shore, near where the Bessborough Hotel stands today.
Though a few of the poles did float away, Robert and his crew were able to haul the rest back, overland, to the building site on 1st Avenue. There they constructed the walls of the building by securing the logs vertically like a palisade. The roof and floor boards were then made with the lumber from an old east side building Robert had torn down and hauled across the river earlier.

Next Robert had his crew crush limestone rocks gathered along the river. He then fired the crushed rock in a makeshift kiln he had fashioned in the riverbank. The lime recovered from this process was mixed with mud to form a stucco compound. This they used to plaster the walls inside and out.

After subtracting the cost of doors, windows and shingles needed to finish the barrack, plus the wages of his crew, Robert found that he had made a good profit on the project.

Photo of the NWMP barracks at 108 1st Avenue South ca 1903. It was constructed by R.W. Caswell in 1895. Constable Clisby stands to the right. Photo LH437 LHR/SPL

So, the following spring he submitted the low bid on a contract to build a new scow for the ferry. Competitors argued that he couldn’t do it for the price he quoted. But Robert and his crew managed to construct it in record time. They did this by building the craft upside down and then, using teams of horses flipped it over onto a bed of willow branches. From there they slid it into the river, where the windlass and cables were attached to make the ferry operable again.

Five years later, under a Territorial government contract, Robert and his crew would build a larger scow to replace this one. Again he managed to make a profit, even though he significantly underbid his closest competitor.65
One of the first buildings Robert and his crew constructed in Saskatoon was the original Knox Presbyterian Church on Spadina Crescent in 1900. The last building he constructed was the original brick King Edward School at 23rd Street and 3rd Avenue in 1904. This school would later be used as City Hall.

After that Robert returned to farming. This time he and his family settled on the quarter section that is now known as the Caswell Hill subdivision.

Following completion of the railway bridge at the Minnetonka crossing point in 1890, The TCS had the ferry moved downstream. It was placed where it would provide a more direct link between the east bank settlement and the railway station on the west side. The cable was now fixed to towers so it stretched above the water. The east side landing was located at the bottom of Victoria Avenue, which was accessible from Broadway via the “long hill” roadway. The west side landing was at the south end of 3rd Avenue.

In 1893 the TCS sold the ferry, one of its last assets, to John Stewart, their former operator, for a hundred dollars. He charged a fee of 25¢ to transport a team and wagon across the river. Despite complaints that this toll was excessive, Stewart found it necessary to take on other jobs, such as draying and blacksmithing, in order to support himself and his wife.

In the spring of 1898 Steward sold the ferry to John Art, the driver of the stage coach that ran intermittently from the Saskatoon station to Battleford. When the cable broke that August, Art left the ferry on the shore and began negotiating its sale to the Territorial government. In the meantime local citizens were forced to make temporary repairs to the cable themselves in order to use the ferry to bring east side exhibits across to the annual exhibition, now being held on the west side.

The following spring the Department of Public Works installed a new wire cable and assumed responsibility for the ferry. John Stewart was once again hired to operate it at a reduced toll of 15¢ per team and wagon, plus a ten dollar bonus for each month it was in operation each year.

Stewart built a small house on the west side river bank so that he would be close to his work. He would operate the ferry each year after that, except for 1903, until it was replaced by the Traffic bridge in 1907.

Damage to the scow by ice in 1900, which required its replacement by a new one in 1901, caused breaks in service during both of those seasons. In 1902 a broken cable caused the ferry to be out of service at mid-season. When back in service, the ferry
somehow slipped off its cable and drifted, with passengers aboard, down river almost to Clarks Crossing before it was beached. From there it had to be dragged along the shore, back to Saskatoon.\textsuperscript{72}

![The Saskatoon ferry approaches the east side landing at the bottom of Victoria Avenue ca 1905. The QuLLR railway bridge is at centre background and Knox Presbyterian Church is far right. Photo LH3081 LHR/SPL](image)

After that, a committee of local businessmen took it upon themselves to operate the ferry for the rest of the season. However, they left it on the edge of the river during fall freeze up. As a result, it was damaged when they finally hauled it out of the ice that winter.\textsuperscript{73}

In 1903, on the recommendation of the local committee, The Department of Public Works replaced Stewart with a different operator.\textsuperscript{74} Lacking experience, this individual swamped the ferry midstream on his second run across the river. This caused a significant break in service as the Department had to send a crew from Regina to salvage and repair the craft before it could be put back in operation.

John Stewart was hired to operate the ferry once again in 1904. But there would be a lengthy delay before it was put in the river, due to higher than normal water levels and flooding that spring.

In 1905, editorials in the \textit{Phenix} blamed poor ferry service for potential business being lost to other centers, such as Dundurn and Rosthern.\textsuperscript{75} The need to replace the ferry with a road bridge became a major issue local representatives would pursue with the new provincial government, which was established that year.
Because the Saskatoon ferry was out of service so much of the time, local residents were often forced to find other means of crossing the river. This usually meant scrambling along the tracks, over the open ties, of the railway bridge.

Farmers from the east side of the river would sometimes tie up their horses in the trees near the end of the railway bridge and walk across it to the west side. They found that this was usually a faster and more reliable means of traversing the river than depending on the ferry to carry themselves, as well as their teams and wagons, across and back. Eventually these farmers would be seen walking back across the trestle, carrying the purchases they had made at west side stores or parcels they had picked up at the railway station. They would then, once again, hook their teams to the wagons that had been left further up the ravine and drive back to their homes.

On one occasion two young men were carrying a coffin from a west side furniture store across the bridge when a yard engine came backing down the grade toward them.\textsuperscript{76} They were forced to dash to the south end and jump over the side. One of them broke four ribs, and was lacerated by splinters from the falling coffin as they tumbled down the rocks that covered the embankment.

Before a school was built at west Saskatoon in 1901, students living on the west side frequently had to walk across the bridge to attend the little stone school on the east side. One afternoon, Helen Clisby, the daughter of NWMP constable John Clisby who was stationed at the barracks on the west side, was crossing the bridge on her way home from school when she was caught part way by an oncoming train.\textsuperscript{77}
There was a barrel on a small platform extending out from the bridge surface. It held water for putting out fires that were sometimes started in the bridge’s wooden structure by hot coals falling from passing locomotives. Rather than jump into the river below, Helen took refuge in this barrel until the train had rumbled past.

While the ferry was out of service during the summer of 1898, Constable Clisby himself, was forced to use the railway bridge to get to the east side. He had received a telegram notifying him that a shackled prisoner, being transported from Prince Albert to the penitentiary in Manitoba, had managed to escape by jumping off the train south of Saskatoon. As this was in Clisby’s district, it was his job to recapture the escapee.

He first considered leading his horse across the trestle. But he realized that the animal might step into the open spaces between the ties or it might be frightened by the water swirling around the piers below. So instead he commandeered the railway car at the station to transport the horse across.

After blindfolding the steed, Constable Clisby led it onto the small platform of the handcar. He then hand pumped the horse and himself across the bridge to the south side of the river. There he mounted up and set off in pursuit of the fugitive.

It is said that Constable Clisby soon caught the escaped prisoner and that he brought the man back to Saskatoon and held him there until he could be picked up by prison authorities. However, it is not stated as to how he and his prisoner got back across the river.

In 1902, an east side resident had all the materials required to build a house shipped to the Saskatoon railway depot. Because the ferry was out of order for so long, he inquired as to the cost of having these materials shunted back to the east side on a railway car. Finding that this would cost almost as much as the freight cost from Winnipeg, he hauled the materials back across the bridge himself, using a handcar he borrowed from the section foreman.

On April 17th, 1903, the first of three special trains carrying a large group of immigrants from Britain arrived at the Saskatoon railway station. By the following day almost 15 hundred men, women and children were gathered there. They were expecting to begin a mass overland trek, under the leadership of Reverend Isaac Barr, to the proposed Britannica colony he planned to establish west of Battleford.

However, it was soon apparent that, due to incompetence or greed, Barr had not made adequate preparations for their stop over at Saskatoon. Nor had he made satisfactory
arrangements for their transport to the colony, or for the supply of the farming equipment they would need when they got there.

Fortunately, in preparation for the anticipated arrival of settlers in the area, the Dominion Government had had an Immigration Hall built at Saskatoon a couple of years earlier. It was located just west of the railway round house, on section 29. This two storey structure had room for about 150 of the women and youngest children. Immigration Superintendent Speers had also arranged for large bell tents to be erected around the Hall to accommodate the rest of these colonists.

As well, James Clinkskill and the other local merchants, having been alerted as to the arrival of these Barr colonists, had had extra wagons, farm implements, and livestock as well as groceries and general merchandise shipped in earlier. These would soon be bought up by those colonists that had the means to purchase them.

By the middle of May, the tent city that had occupied the river bank to the west of the railway station had disappeared as most of these colonists had moved on. A large number, accompanied by Reverend J. E. Lloyd, continued on to their original destination (now Lloydminster). Some took up homesteads along the way, while others remained to take up residence in Saskatoon.

That summer the Department of the Interior sold section 29 by auction. Dr. Willoughby, since retired from medical practice, purchased the northeast quarter that backed on the
railway station. Shortly thereafter he had this quarter subdivided as a townsite, which, because of its location and slope toward the river, would be called “Riversdale.” By the following summer, thirty some lots were occupied, many by small businesses wishing to be near the station.

Town plan of Riversdale 1903. 20th Street is 80 feet wide, the rest of the roadways are 66 feet wide. There was no other public reserve. Kerr and Hanson p. 59

It is obvious that the influence of the TCS was absent in the design of this townsite, as the streets are narrower and there was no provision made for parks. The small portion of river front included in this 1903 Riversdale plan would later be sold to private interests.

Dr. Willoughby would also obtain portions of the southeast quarter of section 29 that abutted on the river. These he would make available for private uses as well.
Attempts to incorporate the original east bank settlement and “west” Saskatoon together as a village in the late 1890s had failed because the river dividing them was too great a barrier. At the time neither of them had the 15 houses required by the Territorial statute to be incorporated separately.

Finally, in 1901, the recorded 113 residents occupying 26 dwellings, in the growing west side settlement, had been legally established as the village of Saskatoon. This allowed for an officially constituted council to levy taxes to finance the improvement of road ways, as well as impose fire controls and regulate the disposal of refuse within its limits.

Though the riverbank had been reserved for envisioned recreational uses, local residents had often used it as a place to dump garbage. The railway crews had also been hauling the cinders from the locomotives to the area where the Bessborough Hotel now stands and dumping them over the bank.

Following incorporation, the village council had had a nuisance ground designated northeast of the settlement (at about what is now 4th Avenue and 23rd Street). It had also had the streets in the vicinity of the station graded and ditches left along the edge of them for drainage. Wooden sidewalks had been built in that area as well so pedestrians wouldn’t have to trudge through the puddles that often formed along the roadways.

However, the greater potential of this west side settlement as a regional “jumping off” point of arriving settlers had been made particularly evident during the stop over of the Barr colonists. Bank receipts indicated that they had spent about a quarter million dollars in Saskatoon during their brief stay. James Clinkskill, Don Garrison, James R. Wilson and J.F. Cairns, among the growing list of local merchants, stepped up their campaign for Saskatoon to be incorporated as a town. As such, Council would, for example, have the resources to drain the large slough in the vicinity of 22nd Street, (between 1st and 2nd Avenues), which was the logical area for further development.

With the support of a majority of its recorded 544 residents, it officially became the Town of Saskatoon in July 1903.

One of the first decisions of the town council was to purchase a fifty acre plot of land (now Kinsmen Park) to the northeast, as it sloped toward the river, and would provide a natural drain for the designated area of development beyond 1st Avenue and 22nd Street. Another was to purchase a piece of the southeast quarter of section 29 on the west riverbank (now Victoria Park) from Dr Willoughby, to which the nuisance ground would be relocated.

An attempt was also made to annex the so-called “squatters village” of Riversdale west of the tracks in order to include it within the Town’s health and fire regulations. However, the Territorial town statute did not make provision for such an action.
Not wishing to come under the jurisdiction of the Town of Saskatoon, Dr Willoughby and a majority of those living in Riversdale chose to remain an independent entity. Following a petition to the Territorial government, they would be incorporated as the village of Riversdale in January, 1905.97

Meanwhile, following a vote of its residents to do so, the east bank settlement was incorporated as the village of “Nutana” in October, 1903. They had adopted this name earlier to distinguish their postal addresses from those living in Saskatoon. Whether it was derived from a variation of Saskatoon spelt backwards or a native word for “firstborn”, is unclear.98

The three small incorporated settlements in 1905. WPD

On the evening of April 14th, 1904, those living near the railway bridge reported hearing creaking noises as the water rose behind large masses of ice piled against its piers.

Ice had damaged the wooden piers of the bridge in the spring of 1891, and again in 1898. In April, 1902 it had taken out the north span, causing three pedestrians crossing at the time “to break every speed record in a dash for the south side”.99 This span had been rebuilt. The repaired bridge had survived the ice going out in the spring of 1903. But
there had been above normal snowfall during the early months of 1904, followed by a rapid thaw.\

About 8:45 on the morning of April 15th, Miss Dowler, the Nutana teacher who boarded in Saskatoon, was walking across the bridge on her way to school. She was about half way, when a timber below her broke loose and fell. Recovering from momentary fright, she ran as fast as she could over the uneven ties. As she reached the south shore she looked back to see a section of the bridge fall among the huge cakes of ice churning on the river.

With the cry “the bridge is going out”, the townspeople had rushed to the river bank to watch the ice, having torn away the sheathing, snap the wooden piers of the bridge like matchsticks. The northern span came down first. Then came the next three spans, which hung for a time by the rails attached to them before being swept away with the moving ice.

Access by rail from Saskatoon and Riversdale to the east side of the river would be cut off for a record 49 days that spring. It was due to the bravery of a man staying at the Queens Hotel that telegraph communication with the outside world would be maintained during this period. He had voluntarily crawled along the one remaining structural cable of the collapsed bridge, carrying the end of the broken telegraph wire, which would be reattached to the line that ran along the tracks on the east side.

Flooding in the Qu’Appelle valley would cut off all trains from the south to Nutana for weeks as well. During this period some thirty commercial travellers, who had been working their northern districts, arrived in Saskatoon on the train that had continued to run from Prince Albert. When rail traffic from the mainline was restored as far as
Nutana, they managed to be ferried across the river on a small steam launch used during the construction of a temporary replacement bridge. From there they were able to get back to Regina by riding in the box car of a work train.\textsuperscript{105}

With the completion of the temporary railway bridge that June, a backlog of settlers and their effects were offloaded at the Saskatoon station, along with the usual shipments. This only sharpened the resolve of local civic leaders to have better transportation connections put in place between their town and the world south of the river.\textsuperscript{106}

Local residents observe the temporary railway bridge after ice took out portions of it in the spring of 1905. Part of the village of Nutana is visible on the east bank. \textit{Photo R-B9364 SAB}

The temporary bridge would go out with the ice in the spring of 1905, but by then plans had been made for the QuLLR Railway Company to build one on concrete piers. As the newly elected Mayor of Saskatoon, James Clinkskill inquired as to whether traffic lanes might be added to this new bridge. The railway’s agents, Osler, Hammond and Nanton, informed him that this might be done, but at a cost of 60 thousand dollars.\textsuperscript{107}

As legislative representative for the Saskatoon district, Clinkskill requested that the Territorial government provide the funds for these proposed traffic lanes. But as the Territorial legislature was to be replaced by a provincial counterpart that fall, it did not proceed with his request.\textsuperscript{108}

So the new railway bridge was completed without traffic lanes attached. However, the Canadian Northern Railway (CNorR), which took over the QuLLR line a couple of years later, would add a pedestrian walkway along one side of it.
By 1905, Mayor Clinkskill and the local Board of Trade were well aware of the need to persuade officials of the new transcontinental railways, being constructed across the central prairies at the time, to route their lines through Saskatoon. Only then could Saskatoon’s potential as the retail-wholesale centre of the region be realized. They also hoped to establish Saskatoon as the political centre of the new province of Saskatchewan by persuading those responsible to choose Saskatoon as the site for the proposed new capital building.\(^{109}\)

But to do so would require the installation of public utilities such as electrical power and a sewer and water system. Other amenities, such as a hospital and parks would be expected as well.

Drinking water, drawn directly from the river or private wells was then being delivered to Saskatoon homes by tank wagons. Sewage, disposed of on individual properties and at the nuisance grounds, was getting into the river by ground seepage as well as surface drainage. The reported cases of typhoid in the town had been increasing each year, especially in autumn when the water in the river was at its lowest level.

In order to afford the electrical plant and the sewer and water system recommended by consultants, Saskatoon’s civic leaders realized they would have to have a larger population and tax base.\(^{110}\) The most practical way of achieving this would be to convince the residents of the adjacent villages of Riversdale and Nutana to accept amalgamation with those of Saskatoon.

Representatives from the three communities considered a proposal for union at a series of meetings held that summer.\(^{111}\) Those from Riversdale accepted it when they were assured that a school would be built in their community, and access would be improved across the railway yards between it and Saskatoon.

The Nutana representatives insisted that their acceptance of such a proposal would require the existing ferry service be replaced by a road bridge. This was guaranteed early in 1906, when the Saskatchewan Department of Public Works let contracts for a traffic bridge, the first in the province across the South Saskatchewan, to be constructed between Nutana and Saskatoon.\(^{112}\)

Amalgamation of the two villages with the town and its incorporation as the City of Saskatoon took place on May 26\(^{th}\) of that year.\(^{113}\) Mayor Clinkskill presided at the official ceremony held that July 1\(^{st}\), in conjunction with Dominion Day celebrations and the opening of the annual exhibition, at the City Park (now Kinsmen Park) grounds.

After some deliberation, a site for the traffic bridge was provided next to where the ferry was operating. The concrete piers, poured by the Winnipeg company that was then erecting the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) railway on the upstream limits of the city, were
ready in January, 1907. The steel trusses, duplicates of those used for a bridge across the North Saskatchewan river at Battleford, were put in place that summer. The 20 foot wide road bed constructed between them was considered ample for two wagons travelling in opposite directions to pass. Provision was made for the later addition of a foot walk on one side and street railway tracks on the other.

The Traffic Bridge was officially opened on October 10th, 1907 by Lieutenant Governor Forget. That the crowd in attendance at this ceremony was larger than that for the incorporation as a city speaks to the significance of this bridge to the people of Saskatoon and area. The barrier the river had been between the communities on its east and west banks had been essentially overcome.

It would take the personal guarantees of James Clinkskill and Russell Wilson to finance the completion of the combination electrical power and water plant, located next to the river at 11th Street West. But, by the end of 1907, those utilities were available to all parts of the city. Underground lines carried sewage and storm water to an outlet on the river at 33rd Street East, the northern city limit. City Hospital, the first such municipally owned facility in western Canada, was established on the northern end of City Park (now Kinsman Park) that same year.
The nuisance grounds would once again be relocated, this time to a site north on what is now Warman Road.\textsuperscript{118} The existing one on the riverbank would be cleared and used as the City Gardens (now Victoria Park). From there a tree planting campaign would be launched that would result in elms being planted along the river bank and street boulevards, as envisioned by the TCS founders.

In 1906 Dr Willoughby had offered to sell the east side (Idywyld flats) corner of section 29 to the City of Saskatoon so that the existing public reserve along the east side riverbank might be extended. However, Council decided the price he was asking for it was too high.\textsuperscript{119} As a result the twenty some lots now backing on the river in the Idywyld area would be the only privately owned property within the city extending to the river’s edge.

Though they failed to have Saskatoon chosen as the capital of the province of Saskatchewan, by 1908 its community leaders, including James Clinkskill, were campaigning for Saskatoon to be selected as the location of the newly-founded provincial university.\textsuperscript{120} One of the reasons for their success in this case was the attractive site they were able to provide for the campus of the University of Saskatchewan on the high east bank of the river.

By that year there were three railway trestles and the Traffic Bridge spanning the river within the City’s limits. The addition of the GTP mainline and a CPR trunk line through Saskatoon had assured its role as the main distributional centre of central Saskatchewan.

The significance of the South Saskatchewan, and its seasonal fluctuations, to the economic base of Saskatoon and area had diminished. The river had become primarily a domestic and industrial water source. Yet, that spring, it would be the site of the “greatest marine disaster in Saskatoon’s history” when the last steamboat on the river crashed into the Traffic Bridge and sank.\textsuperscript{121}

During the preceding couple of years, Captain Horatio Ross had been conducting excursions on the Saskatchewan River system from Medicine Hat. He had had a 130 foot flat-bottomed sternwheeler, aptly named the \textit{SS City of Medicine Hat}, built expressly for navigation on the South branch. The 125 horsepower engine and the fittings of this vessel were reportedly, the best available at the time.

The ice was off, but the river was still running quite high when the \textit{SS City of Medicine Hat} left its home berth on May 29\textsuperscript{th}. On this occasion Captain Ross was setting out on a combination pleasure cruise/business voyage to Winnipeg. Besides himself and his crew, there were five businessmen aboard. They were equipped with fishing and hunting gear for planned stops along the way. As well there was a cargo of bagged flour in the hold,
destined for the Winnipeg market, and a barge in tow, loaded with 50 tons of coal to be used as fuel for the voyage.122

The trip down the South Saskatchewan had been uneventful until they reached Saskatoon on the morning of June 7th. At the outskirts, Captain Ross had pulled over to the west bank to let his passengers off. The plan was for them to spend sometime in the city, and then board the vessel again after it had cleared the CPR bridge at the north end.123

By lowering the smokestack, Captain Ross was able to have his steamboat pass under, first, the GTP railway bridge and then the former QuLLR bridge that, by this time, was part of the CNorR system. He was then going to steer to shore, secure the ship, and personally measure the clearance under the Traffic Bridge. But the rudder had become entangled in some old telegraph or telephone wires hanging under the second railway bridge. Unable to steer the vessel, Captain ordered full astern in an attempt to run it aground.124

However, the current carried the SS City of Medicine Hat downstream, where, after hitting a girder of the Traffic Bridge, it was pushed up against an east side pier. There it was stuck, while the fast running water caused it to turn on its side.

The engineer had already jumped overboard and swam to shore. Captain Ross and the rest of the crew managed to climb to safety on the bridge, where a large group of spectators had gathered. They were forced to scatter because a small herd of cattle, destined for the west side stockyards, was being driven down the “long hill” road and across the bridge.125
Later, fearing that the hung-up steamboat might damage the bridge, which had been opened only nine months earlier, city workers pried the craft free from the pier. As the capsized vessel was carried downstream it filled with water and sank. Pieces of furniture, cushions and life preservers were seen floating down the river.

The barge the steamboat had been towing, had overturned as it broke free and dumped its cargo of coal into the river. It was later pulled to shore. As well, some upper timbers and the engine would be later salvaged from the SS City of Medicine Hat, after its hull had settled on the river bottom some distance downstream.  

Needless to say, following this unexpected termination of their voyage in the heart of Saskatoon, Captain Ross, his passengers and crew returned home by train.
1907 Fire Insurance Maps showing the development in the present River Landing area. C of S Archives
Summation

In the decade following the amalgamation of the three original settlements, the spaces between notably, the Immigration Hall, Knox Church and the Clinkskill house would be filled by similar structures. Over time, the uses of many of these buildings, and the character of the area would change. Railway associated industries would dominate on the Riversdale side of the CNorRR bridge while the Armories and “Chinatown” would arise on the “downtown” side. Then, between the World Wars, much of the area would be cleared to make way for the A.L. Cole Power Station on the Riversdale portion and the Arena Rink, Legion and Riverview Collegiate in the south downtown.

The stories of the people and situations involved in these developments in the River Landing area of Saskatoon during more recent years, and the role of the South Saskatchewan River in them, wait to be interpreted as well.

ENDNOTES

2 Morton, Arthur (ed), Narratives of Saskatoon 1882-1912, University Book Store, Saskatoon, 1923, p. 10.
3 Kerr, Don and Hanson, Stan, Saskatoon the First Half-Century, NeWest Press, Edmonton, 1982.
4 Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB) File # 36857 interview with J. Livingston (TCS secretary. He states that Order-in-Council (Dec. 1881) had clarified that the TCS grant only pertained to the odd numbered sections in the tract, but that D. McPherson (Deputy Minister of Dept. of Interior) had assured him that the regulations could be modified so the TCS could administer the even-numbered sections of the tract as well.
6 Kerr and Hanson, opcit., p. 2.
7 Ibid., p. 4.
8 Morton, opcit., p. 10.
9 SAB, file # 70429, correspondence of F. Blake (DLS) with Dept. of Interior, Dec. 7, 1883.
10 Ibid., correspondence Dec. 19, 1883.
11 Ibid., correspondence Dec. 27, 1883. The valuation set on section 28 was 5.00 acre for 496.36 acres, excluding the river. The TCS would pay $2,481.75 for the section.
12 Ibid., correspondence, Dec 27, 1883.
13 Kerr and Hanson, opcit., p. 20.
14 John Lake’s firm is credited with designing the Spadina Addition, which is noted for having streets twice as wide as those in that part of Toronto to accommodate street cars running both ways and tree-lined boulevards down the centre.
15 Kerr and Hanson, opcit., p. 5.
16 Morton, opcit., p. 10.
17 Kerr and Hanson, *opcit.*, p. 5.
18 SAB, File # 70429, correspondence between F. Blake (DLS) and Dept. on Interior, Dec. 27, 1883.
20 Willoughby, Gerald, *Retracing the Old Trail*, (publisher not stated), Saskatoon, 1935, pp. 6-10 provides an account of the trek of the first colonists to Saskatoon.
22 Ibid., p. 30.
23 SAB, unpublished “Reminiscences” of R.W. Caswell, notebook # 4. notes that Joseph Caswell made on return trip to Moose Jaw for windows, doors and floor boards for the house they were building because they were not available in Saskatoon.
24 Morton, *opcit.*, pp. 45-47. Captain E.S. Andrews describes the voyage of the SS May Queen down river to Saskatoon.
25 Peel, Bruce and Knowles, Stanley, *The Saskatoon Story*, General Printing and Bookbinding Ltd, Saskatoon, 1952, p. 23. states that C.W. May brought the materials to build a house down river by scow in the summer of 1887.
Anderson (Hunter), Barbara, *Two White Oxen*, (publisher not stated), Lethbridge, 1972, pp. 44-47. describes how her father, William Hunter, and other Temperance colonists travelled to Batoche and Duck Lake to trade frozen wheat for flour in order to make it through the winter of 1884.
28 McPherson, Arlean, “The Nutana Cemetery”, *Saskatoon History Review # 5*, 1990, pp. 15-20 provides a detailed history of this original cemetery and the families of many of the people buried there.
29 Ibid., p. 20.
31 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
33 Duerkop, *opcit.*, p. 46.
34 *Saskatoon Sentinel*, August 9, 1884. It is the first edition of a hand-written newspaper, edited by J.W. Powers, the local school teacher.
36 Ibid., Robert notes that these objections by Will were instigated by a rival for Frankie’s affections.
37 Peel, Bruce, *Steamboats on the Saskatchewan*, Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, 1972. provides names and description of voyages of these steamboats on the South Saskatchewan from 1872 through 1908.
40 Duerkop, *opcit.*, p.49.
41 Qu’Appelle Record, August 14, 1884, Clipping File, LHR, Saskatoon Public Library.
42 Barris, *opcit.*, pp. 81-88. provides a comprehensive description of the involvement of the SS Northcote in the Northwest Rebellion.
43 Ibid., p. 82. the settler was James Eby, an original Temperance colonist.
44 Ibid., p. 83. Captain Young, the officer in charge feared that Gabriel Dumont, who had escaped capture at the fall of Batoche might be waiting upriver to ambush the SS Northcote as had been done at Batoche.
45 Ibid., p. 86. The SS Baroness had been used to transport wounded troops from Saskatoon south to Elbow earlier, but it was found that the wagon rides from there to Moose Jaw were too hard on the convalescents.
46 Ibid., p. 87.
47 Ken and Hanson, *opcit.*, p. 28.
48 Ibid., p.22.
50 Peel and Knowles, *opcit.*, p. 26. states that the railway bridge was completed “five weeks later”. One man lost his life in the river during its construction.

51 Kerr and Hanson, *opcit.*, p. 30. Though a Sept, 1905 *Phoenix* article states that he did it in foresight of a future street railway system.


56 *Ibid.*, p. 58. Clinkskill and his family had been living in a small suite of four rooms over the store on 1st Avenue.


64 *Ibid.*


69 *Ibid.*, 9. 44. The annual exhibition had been held on section 29, with displays in the railway roundhouse, since 1895 because there were more exhibitors from the west side of the river.


72 *Ibid.*, p. 46. the passengers were John Evans (an east side settler), his daughter and their horses.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 50. This committee included James Clinkskill, Dr. Willoughby and Thomas Copland.


80 Duerkop, “Our Marine Service: The Saskatoon Ferry 1883-1907”, *opcit.*, p. 49. states that this was Paul Sommerfeld, an east side settler.


85 *Ibid.*, p. 64. Dr. Willoughby purchased the NW ¼ for $107.00 an acre.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 64. the settlement was first referred to as “Richville”, possible after the first resident on the site, then Riverdale and finally, “Riversdale” when it was incorporated as a village.

87 Peel and Knowles, *opcit.*, pp. 43-44.

88 It would become right-of-way for the Goose Lake branch line of the C.Nor.R. in 1909.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 39. the Territorial statute called for 15 occupied houses within a square mile before a hamlet could become a village.


93 *Ibid.*, p. 43. this count is said to have included those registered at the hotels as well.


95 Morton, *opcit.*, p. 68. the park was purchased for $20.00 an acre.
96 Peel and Knowles, *opcit.*, p. 43.
99 Peel and Knowles, *opcit.*, p. 44.
104 *Bridges: QuLLR Railway*, (LHR) Saskatoon Public Library, likely from *Star Phoenix* (date unknown).

The man’s name was Charles Martin.

112 Duerkop, John, “The Vital Link: Saskatoon’s Traffic Bridge”, *Saskatoon History Review* #9, 1994, p. 36. The contracts let for the construction of this bridge totaled $106,000.

113 Morton, *opcit.*, p. 73.
114 Duerkop, *opcit.*, p. 36.
118 Peel and Knowles, *opcit.*, p. 50
119 Sutherland, Jim, “Idywyld:: Where the River Bends”, *Western Living*, November, 1989, p. 31. the price quoted was $45,000 for about 22 acres.

120 Morton, *opcit.*, pp. 78-79.

125 Duerkop, *opcit.*, p. 39. Bert and Jack Potter were bringing the cattle to Saskatoon from a ranch at Dundurn.