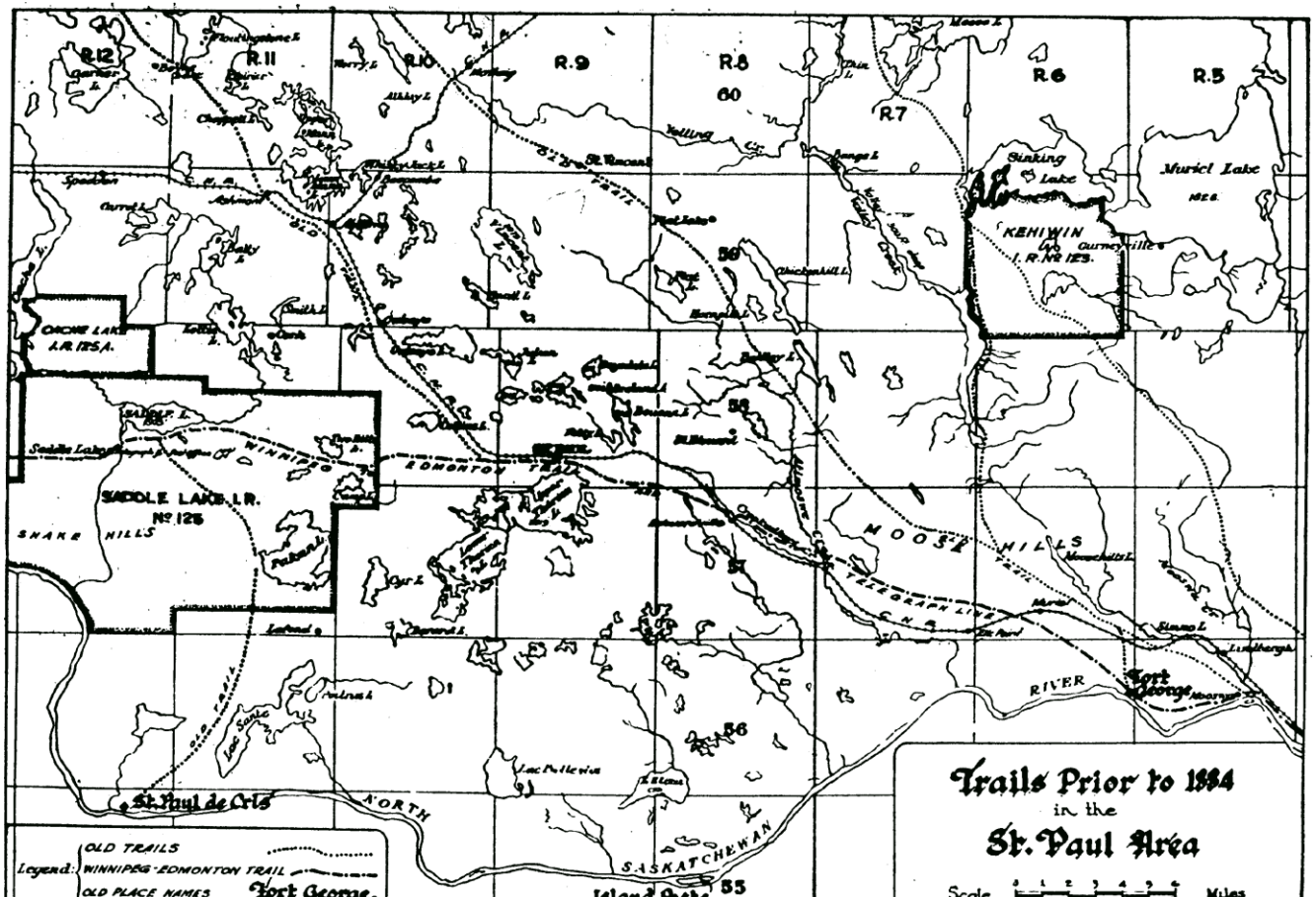


A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. PAUL

(Compiled by Paul E. Boisvert)

Some historical documentation indicates that the earliest efforts to develop a colony for the Metis in this area date back to 1866. Father Albert Lacombe had founded the colony of St. Albert in 1863, and he opened a mission called St. Paul des Cris on the north banks of the Saskatchewan River at present site of Brosseau. Following the outbreak of a smallpox epidemic, the mission was abandoned in 1874. For almost 20 years, little effort was made to establish another mission in this immediate area. The efforts of building a colony seemed to be focused on the Frog Lake mission which was begun in 1843 and the Lac La Biche mission started in 1853.



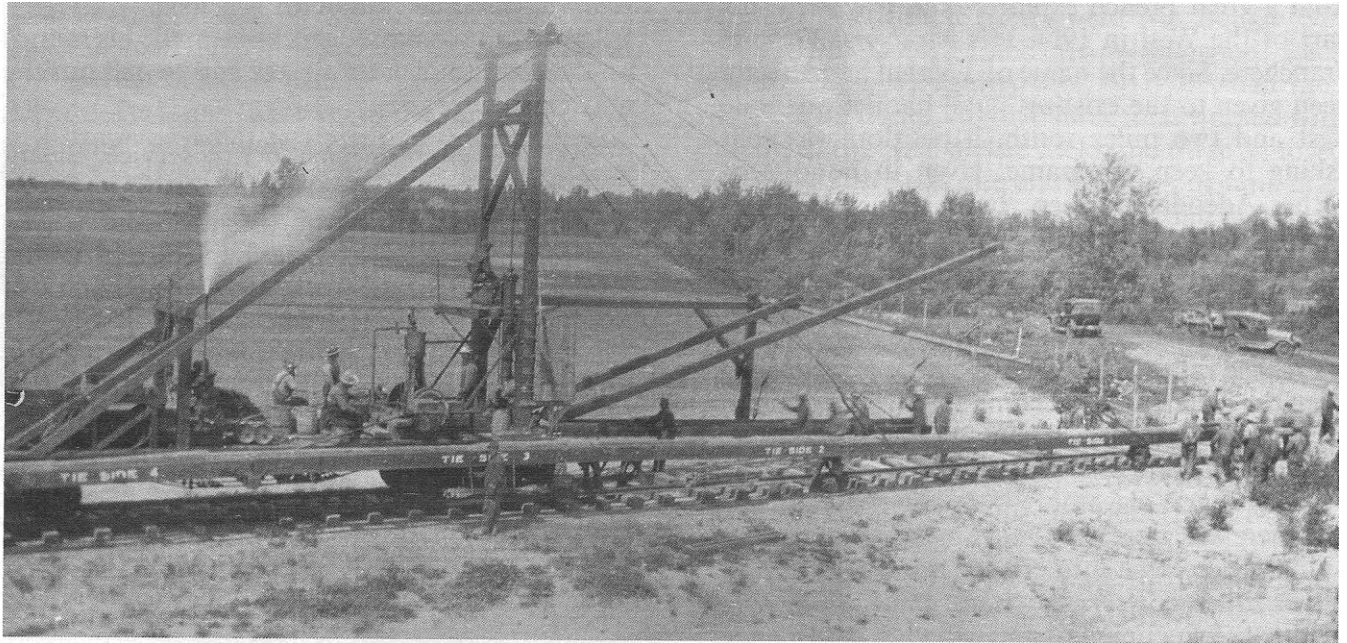
The Northwest Rebellion of 1885 caused a change in the policies of the government of the day and on January 15th, 1896, the colony of St. Paul des Metis was officially opened. A few Metis families already lived in the area, and it was anticipated that they would soon be joined by many others. In July of his same year, Father Adeodat Therien was appointed by Bishop Grandin to take charge of the colony. The first residence built at the new mission was the rectory and it is still used for that purpose today, being located immediately south of the Cathedral. By 1897, a school had been constructed and the colony was showing healthy growth. Records indicate that by 1898, 32 families resided within the two townships which made up the colony.

In January 1905, a fire destroyed the magnificent resident school which had been built to serve the 85 school age children of the 80 families who lived in the colony. This misfortune combined with the rapid encroachment of white settlers in 1908, on lands surrounding the colony and nearby Saddle Lake Reserve caused some dramatic changes to occur. Many of the Metis who were more comfortable living as hunters and trappers, felt that they were being forced to abandon much of their traditional way of life.

By 1909, it was obvious that the influx of settlers was bringing about changes which was not acceptable to many of the Metis who preferred a more nomadic way of life which was congruent with their desires to be hunters and trappers rather than tillers of the land. Consequently, a

significant number of families moved from the colony back to Lac La Biche or other remote areas. The pressure brought about by the rapidly increasing number of settlers and the desire of the government to encourage the settlement of western Canada, made the decision to open to homesteaders the land of colony and other surrounding townships an easy one. The Metis families who chose to remain on the land they had worked, were given full ownership of that parcel. On April 10, 1909, the area was officially opened to the homesteaders and some 500 of them, mainly of French-Canadian origins, lined up at the Dominion Land Office in Edmonton, ready to file their homestead claims.

To travel to their new homes, the homesteaders had limited choices. They could raft their goods down the river from Edmonton or travel by train to Vegreville and then by wagon or on foot from there. These limitations did not prevent the growth of the settlement from occurring. Soon several businesses had sprung up to serve the needs of the ever-increasing settler families.



Early Railroad Construction near St Paul

The onset of World War 1 and the lack of proper travel links with the rest of the province was not a deterrent to the residents. In 1914 they had begun lobbying the railway companies to extend a rail link to the community. As a result of the determination of the residents and their willingness to do the actual rail-line construction, the first train arrived in St. Paul in October of 1920. It is beyond a doubt the most significant event which allowed for the development of St. Paul and the surrounding area. Ironically, in August 2002, the last train departed from St. Paul with a load of grain and shortly thereafter the tracks were lifted. History will probably show that the departure of the railroad had very little impact on the community, very much unlike its arrival.



St Paul 1930s



St Paul's Elevators and train station in 1960s

In 1967, a proposal was made to build the world's first UFO Landing Pad as a landmark for the town. The Government of Canada responded to this proposition and, during the grand opening on June 3, 1967, St. Paul was declared the Centennial Capital of Canada.



St Paul's UFO Landing Pad

In the 1990's, Mayor, Paul Langevin officially opened an adjacent UFO Tourist Information Centre to welcome visitors. As you enter St. Paul from the west, drop in to visit this landmark and see the UFO exhibit downstairs. This is an opportunity to view actual photographs of UFO's, crop circles and cattle mutilations. The exhibit is designed to educate. A UFO Hotline compliments the display with reports of UFO sightings and encounters of all kinds.

