

A Brief History of Bonnyville

(Summarized from Echos of the Past: History of Bonnyville and District)

Fur Trade

In 1790 Angus Shaw was at Moose Hill Lake, up the river from the Beaver River. This post helped Peter Pond develop the Beaver River as a main fur trade route into the rich Athabasca fur country.



It was in the early spring of 1907 that Rev. Father Therien saw the first evidence of success in his colonizing efforts. He had gone to visit friends at Beaumont, a small French Canadian settlement some fifteen miles south of Edmonton. There he succeeded in challenging Philorome Ouellette age 25, Wilfrid Ouimet age 45, Albert Dargis age 21, to venture into the Moose Lake area. They were joined by Honorius

Lamoureux age 24.

With the snow still on the ground they began to load two sleighs - provisions, blankets, a tent, cooking utensils and oats for the horses. Honorius Lamoureux rode with Wilfrid Ouimet, Albert Dargis with Philorome Ouellette. Leaving Beaumont, the four brave men travelled north to the North Saskatchewan River, crossed it, climbed the hills and turned east onto the Freight Trail along the river to Brosseau. There they turned north and headed toward the Saddle Lake Indian Reserve some ten miles away. There, at the Mission of the Holy Heart, they were warmly welcomed by Rev. Father Balter O.M.I. who served them a succulent meal and put them up for the night.

Next morning they were on their way eastward. After covering some fifteen miles they arrived at St. Paul-des-Metis, the afternoon of Easter Sunday. They had been on the road seven days. After an overnight stop they hired a guide surnamed Boudreau and set off for their 45-mile trip into the "wilderness". Towards evening two days later they saw the waters of Moose Lake. There they stopped and there they spent the night. During the next few days, they explored the surrounding land. All except Honorius Lamoureux decided that this was, indeed the place they wished to settle. They returned home to pack up their belongings and friends. Towards the end of May 1907 our first eight pioneers arrived: Wilfrid Ouimet, Albert Dargis, Philorome Ouellette plus Aime Marcotte, Hormidas Boisvert, Joseph Mercier, Oliva Martel and Come Ouimet.

It was in 1908 that the first Post Office and store were established - about a mile and a half west and one mile south of the present site of Bonnyville. Philorome Ouellette was Postmaster of this St. Louis de Moose Lake Post Office and proprietor of this store.

It was soon discovered in Ottawa that another Post Office in Alberta was called Moose Lake; therefore, the Postmaster General asked that a new name be suggested for ours. The people decided that would be a good idea to add "-ville" to the name of their newly arrived, first resident priest, Rev. Father Francis Bonny. The official name of our locality then became Bonnyville. It is thus that the pioneer began his career. He came, he looked at the land; then, taking in hand his axe and facing the forest, he carved into it, as it were, the name of Bonnyville.

In 1916, a few French-Canadian families decided to embrace the faith of the Presbyterian Church; Rev. Duclos answered their call and came from Edmonton by horse and buggy. He held a B.A. degree from Queen's University; he was a graduate of the Montreal Presbyterian College of Theology. He was a gifted orator and perfectly bi-lingual. At this time, he was 62 years old. Shortly after his arrival here, as he surveyed the large field of activities awaiting his efforts, he divided his projects into three departments: The Church, The Hospital, The School. In the spring of 1917, the work on the Church construction began. In 1925 the Churches of the Duclos Mission joined the United Church.



1 Bonnyville Train Station



