

Why History Matters and The EY&P.....

What is it that draws us to a place? It could be anything from friends and family, to a chance for new adventures, to a job, good schools, to ease of transportation, or the pure beauty of its environment. I could write a much longer list, but I think that you have an idea that it is a complex of decisions and happenstance that brings us together to a place. The group of families that created Hazeldean in the 1950s found a place where homes were reasonably priced and where there was plenty of open space to enjoy.



Hazeldean Community

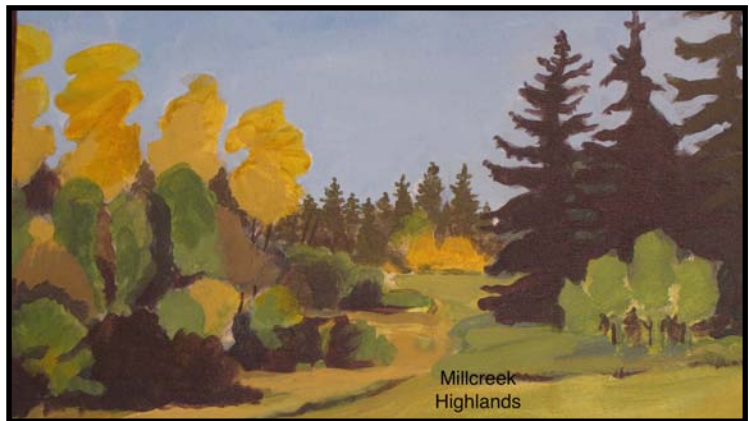


1950s house in Hazeldean



Hazeldean CPR right-of-way

Painting of Space In Hazeldean
(Mill Creek Ravine)
by Kathryn Ruckman 2012



While I cannot answer the question of why you or your family chose to live in Hazeldean, I am going to tell you the story of how the dream of a rail line that could connect South Edmonton to Edmonton, the rest of Canada, and the world had come a reality. This “dream” went right through the district we now call Hazeldean. The railroad controversy over its placement and construction separated people. Battles were won and secrets were kept, but the railroad was built and communities developed as a consequence.

The history of the land involved began long ago, hundreds of thousands of years ago, but I want to take you back to the 1800s when trains changed the landscape forever. In the 1890s, there were no cars, or buses, highways or even roads, just lengthy prairie trails.

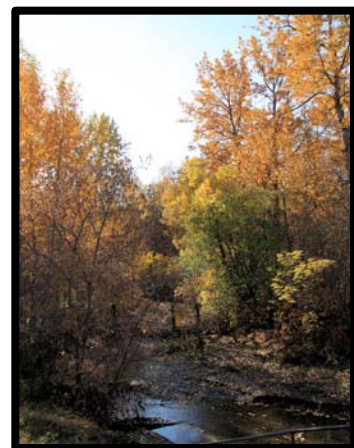


Prairie Trails

Long before the 1890s, these trails had been stamped into the memory of this land by peoples whose names we no longer know. Eventually, the Blackfoot, Cree and other nations would choose this area around the future Edmonton as a sacred place, the Pehonen¹, where other First Nations would travel to from all over the western lands for a festival of shared music and language, dance and marriage, exchange, and celebration of the earth. While this was held down in Rosssdale, it is no significant matter that they travelled all through the Edmonton area and set up camps on both sides of the river. On the south side of the river was a particular place filled with berries, game, water and shelter and was across from the Pehonen. This was the Stony Creek, what we now call Mill Creek. It flowed through Hazeldean, which makes your community a very important part of the history of this p



Stony Creek or Mill Creek



Métis, and Hudson Bay colonists came together to once again shape the land. The Saskatchewan River was used for transportation, but new land trails were also made by foot and with horses that came up from Mexico in the 1600s. One of the trails grooved onto the plains went from Edmonton down to Calgary. What we call Calgary Trail. Calgary calls its end of the road Edmonton Trail. Soon a new form of transportation, the stagecoach, would run between Fort Edmonton and Fort Calgary five days a week. One could also head off for one month on horseback to Jasper House. Traveling from Winnipeg was a six-week



Red River Cart

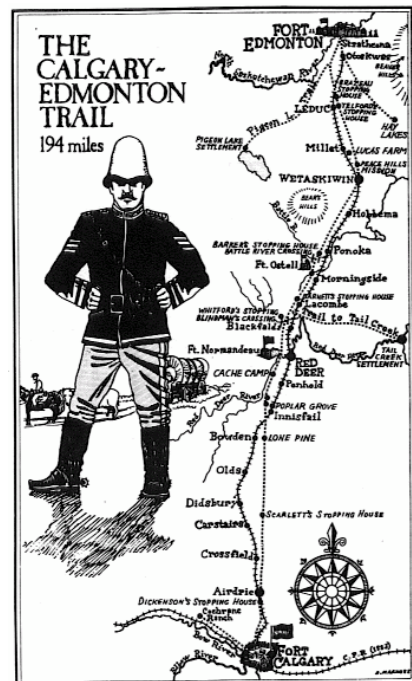
journey by Red River cart. By 1875, stern-wheeled riverboats could be seen on the river, but service was both unpredictable and irregular². Trails still connect, even if they are very narrow and small. Today by Hazeldean School, I see trails cutting across the school field showing where the students created a short cut so as not to miss the first bell.

The “great trail”, across Canada, was built not by the local governments nor children, but by the federal government under Sir John A. MacDonald. In the 1860s the use of steam locomotives was moving through the United States, and Canada needed a train system to get settlers to occupy the west

before the Americans. (An amusing story about the first rail lines is that even long ago these two great countries used different measurement scales. When the two railways of each country tried to connect across the border in the east, they found that the dimensions did not match and the cargo had to be unloaded at the border and transferred between trains!)

Eventually the federal government gave local levels of government charters for railways to hand out to developers. The main question that was occupying businessmen and homesteaders alike was where a rail line would go. The government had mapped out various routes, mostly with Edmonton as a stop on the best route. Yet, at the last minute, decisions changed the fate of Edmonton and the planned mainline went through Calgary. After epic battles between communities and governments as to where the railway would travel across the country it was decided that a southern route across the prairies and the Rocky Mountains would be the best. This left Fort Edmonton and surrounding communities out of the rail loop. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) line brought business to Calgary. To get business and people up to Edmonton stagecoaches had to be used following the trail to South Edmonton and then across the North Saskatchewan River to Edmonton.

In those days rail lines truly decided where communities would be built and which ones would grow into

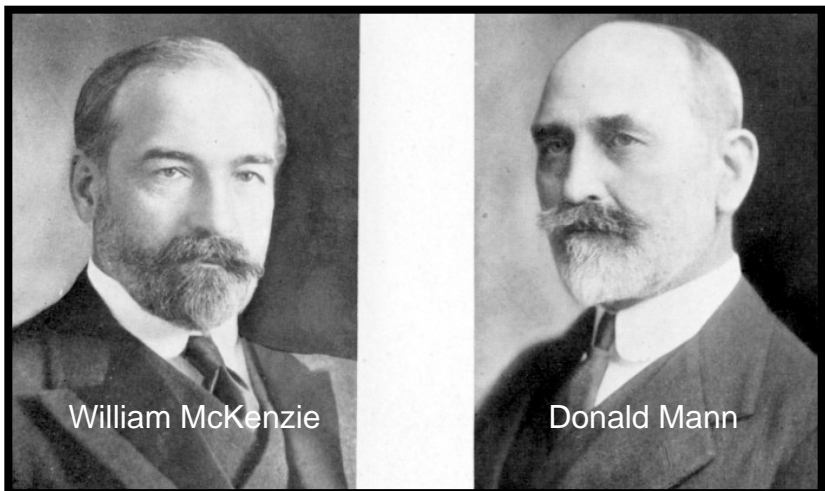


cities. In fact, people would lift their houses off of their foundations and move them closer to the railway line to create more “connected” communities. It was that important! But Edmonton wanted to retain its connection to the north and so people and businesses remained by Fort Edmonton and Rosedale, waiting for a bridge. Eventually the Dominion government agreed to have a bridge built over the North Saskatchewan³. The possibility of a bridge to cross the river made it more likely that a railway would reach Edmonton. In 1895, Edmonton applied to the Dominion Government to create a charter for the Edmonton District Railway (EDR), which they were awarded a year later⁴.

Edmonton’s financial situation was still risky and after a short period of time the government asked for the charter to be sold back. The government then sold the charter to J. McAvity and Associates of New Brunswick. The charter owners were “gold struck” with the prospects of the yellow metal and amended the charter to extend to the Yukon Territory. During the Klondike gold rush many prospectors tried to reach the Yukon by foot or on horse back, but few made it in time to profit from the soon to be picked over gold fields and returned poorer for the experience. On August 11, 1899 the Edmonton District Railway was re-named the Edmonton, Yukon and Pacific railway (EY&PR), which with a new charter allowing the company to build a line from Edmonton to the Pacific Coast and also a line from Edmonton to the Yukon⁵.

In 1899, a consortium of businessmen led by William Mackenzie and Donald Mann (president and vice-president) created the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) and also purchased the EY&P from McAvity. Their idea was to connect the EY&P with their rail line to the east through Winnipeg and Ontario, and to push the EY&P west to the Pacific coast. At the same time, they also announced that they would build a route from Calgary to Edmonton naming it the Calgary & Edmonton Railway (C&E).

Mackenzie and Mann were shrewd businessmen who realized that it was more profitable to build a railway than to operate one. In particular, they would take advantage of land grants given to railway owners by the Dominion Government for private sale at a future time. Their purchase of the EY&P would fulfill their desire to run a line across Canada. They would be able to connect the EY&P to the C&E and then to the CPR, which would run through Calgary. Mackenzie and Mann, however, were not in a hurry to build this rail line, which annoyed the Edmontonians greatly⁷. Writer James MacGregor recorded that the mood in the old settlement was not amicable. “From then

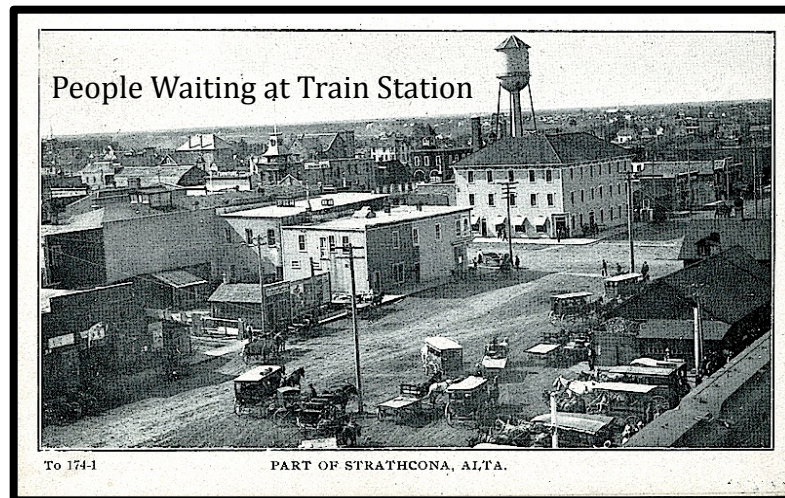


William McKenzie

Donald Mann

on the new town [Strathcona] began to figure into Alberta’s history, the town which Edmonton in their huffiness declared had been born a mule, a creature with no pride of ancestry, which they hoped, like a mule, would have no prospect of posterity. Buttressed by the railway, the Strathcona mule was soon kicking Edmonton’s ass.”⁸

Mackenzie and Mann did not incorporate the C&E with its other charters under the CNoR, but intended to lease to it to another operator. The CPR agreed to operate the C&E railroad, which was completed in 1891. At first the C&E was leased to the CPR on a renewable 6-year lease. The CPR, worrying that the Canadian National Railway (CN) would take over the C&E line, initially signed a 99-year lease and later purchased the line outright holding it as a subsidiary of the CPR⁹. In an interview, Helen told me that long after the lease agreements were in place, in 1948, her Dad came to Edmonton on that C&E line. He was an engineer and was hired to work on the downtown Airport and to build the second



road on the Low Level Bridge. The trip was quite eventful as 11-year-old Helen, her mother and siblings decided to take the car. Her dad waited for two hours to catch the freight train. People were not allowed to be on the freight train and the CN police were chasing him. As he climbed up on top of the train he slipped, but was able to catch his footing and hid from the police. He made it to Edmonton¹⁰.

Many lines were being built around Alberta with several going to Edmonton and area. Mackenzie and Mann kept their finances tight, which led to cheap construction of the C&E line. There were continual complaints about the line's service and safety. Mackenzie and Mann purchased land quietly, as needed, when they headed north from Calgary to discourage wild land speculation. The railway backers negotiated in secret with landowners in South Edmonton to purchase land and subdivide it into lots. This move made the company rich, but put them in conflict with shareholders of other railways charters. In the process William Mackenzie became one of the wealthiest men in Canada and both he and Mann were awarded knighthoods for their efforts in 1911¹¹.

"The first train arrived in South Edmonton - from Calgary - at 1:00 p.m., August 1, 1891. The load consisted of mixed freight care and passenger cars, with lumber and other building supplies and twelve passengers bound for Edmonton."¹².

The first station was a small wooden building which is now located at 10447-86th Ave and preserved as a historical building. (From 1891 to October 1902, CPR



operating timetables referred to the station as Edmonton. Then in 1931, the station was



C. P. R. Depot, Strathcona, Alta.

renamed in Strathcona, but only until June, when another change renamed the station South Edmonton.) Later, in 1907, the CPR built a new, more elaborate structure to meet the needs of the increased passengers coming to South Edmonton. Located south of the 1891 depot at 81st Ave and 103 St, this new station was a classic two-story brick structure typical of turn of century

CPR design. The platform was 600 feet long, and the station itself measured 134 ft long and 38 ft wide¹³... a size that reduced the congestion at the smaller building.

The C&E engineers had originally planned the train track to cross the river to Ross Flats, just east of downtown Edmonton. Although initial plans for a river crossing were developed, they were never carried out. McKenzie and Mann decided to stop in Alex McLeod's field on the south banks of the river near what is now called End of Steel Park¹⁴.

McKenzie and Mann knew from experience the difficulties of building a bridge across a large deep river valley. They felt that since the beneficiaries would only be a community of 700 people and was not worth the expense and effort. As Dr. Rod MacLeod noted: "The surest way to make money in the railway business was by determining the location of town sites and developing the surrounding lands. Control of a thousand acre parcel of land on the south side together with the very considerable engineering difficulties and expense involved in building a bridge across the river provided a double disincentive for not extending the line to Edmonton"¹⁵.



Edmonton, Alberta : Strathcona Bridge over River Saskatchewan

Shocked Edmontonians appealed to the C&E to extend its line across the North Saskatchewan River, or at least to the water's edge; but their pleas fell on deaf ears. Mackenzie and Mann's ingenious plan expanded South Edmonton to include a train station, a hotel and commercial area, and a large amount of land that they sold to private interests. This left Edmonton worried that their south side neighbours would soon out-populate them.

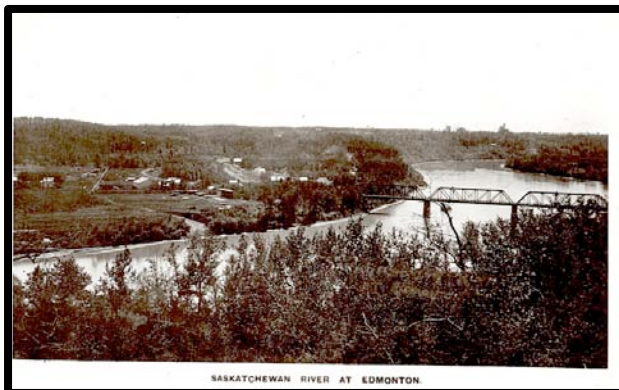
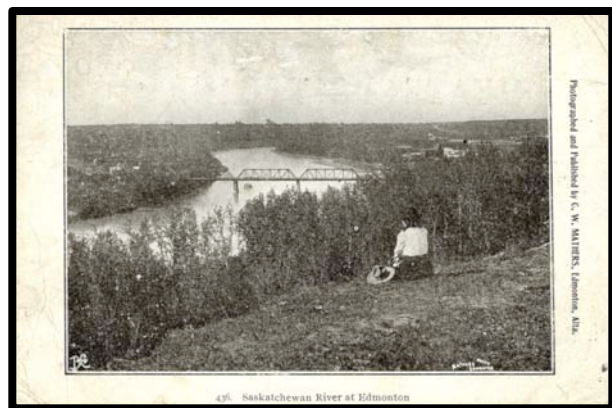


In the early 1890s Edmontonians were frustrated with the CPR because it did not add a connection to Edmonton from Strathcona as promised. The only ways to cross the river were by the unpredictable Walter's cable ferry and a secondary ferry closer to where the Low Level Bridge was to be built. During the freeze-up and thaw seasons, amounting to 6 weeks per year, the North Saskatchewan was impassable. Either

the ferry could not pass through the ice, or the ice-roads across the river were too soft. This was fine when the Edmontonians were only importing 100 lbs of goods and materials per week. But, after the C&E railway was built more people came to settle or to pass through on their way to destinations north or west. Although their needs for goods increased each week, the heavily loaded wagons were not able to negotiate the steep and slippery riverbanks on the North Side¹⁶.

Early in the discussions, Edmonton mayor John McDougall together with other

Images of the Interurban or McDougall or Edmonton or Low Level Bridge



prominent businessmen, including Frank Oliver, urged the federal government that the promised bridge over the North Saskatchewan River be finally built. To prove it was worthy of a bridge, Edmonton incorporated itself as a town in May 1892, and adapted strategies to

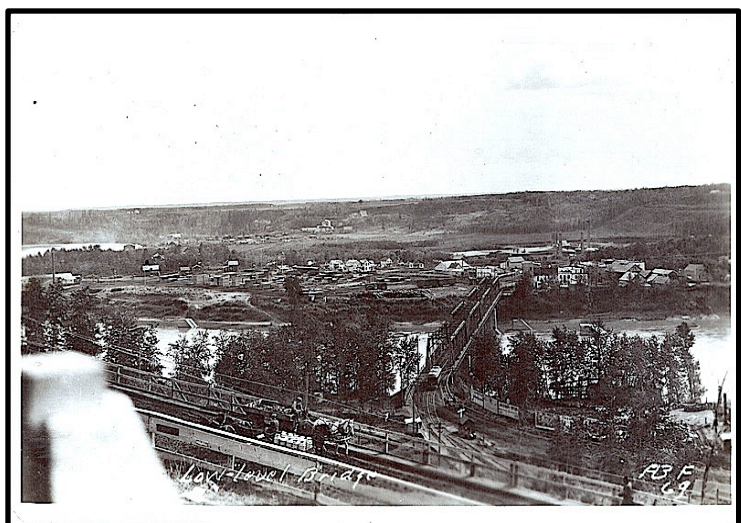
increase its population. Finally, the federal government agreed to build the Edmonton Bridge (also called the Interurban or McDougall, and once the High Level Bridge was open, Low Level Bridge), provided that Edmontonians came up with \$25,000. Edmonton, by this time only had a population of 1500 citizens, but had enough wealthy businessmen to gather the necessary funds to send to Ottawa¹⁷.

In 1895, they received a grant to build a 703 foot long bridge. This limited the location of the bridge to the bottom of now Scona Hill. With a potential bridge completion in 1901, Edmontonians were excited that the railway would finally come to Edmonton. Further excitement arose when the original route of the CPR through Edmonton to the Yellowhead pass was approved for the future. As well, the CNoR and the Grand Trunk were developing a northern line from Winnipeg through Saskatoon to Edmonton and on to Vancouver. Both projects were many years away, but avidly anticipated. The contract was awarded in August 1898 to the Dominion Bridge Company. Part of this tender was ensured that the bridge would be not only suitable for horse and foot traffic, but for trains.

Because of the minimal amounts of available cement and steel and lack of companies wanting to subcontract for the bridge platform, the bridge was delayed. Ironically when the steel finally arrived a year later, the North Saskatchewan River began to flood and the piers were completely submerged by 4 feet of water. This was an amazing 42 feet above the normal water level. The height of the flood convinced the designers to add 8 feet to the pier height. By December 1902 the final rivets were set into the centre pier by Donald Ross completing the connection between Rossdale and Cloverdale (Edmonton and Strathcona). The rail track was laid in the centre of the bridge deck on standard ties, a dirt road followed the same curves as the track on the west side of the bridge and a footpath was laid on outboard trusses spanning the same side¹⁸.

A rail track was planned from the Strathcona station winding through the Mill Creek Ravine to cross the bridge. The Edmontonians were persistent and hired surveyor Mr. Bruce for a possible entrance to the creek bed where the Big and the Little Mill Creeks joined. The line would then follow the creek bed to where the Edmonton Dairy was located on the Gallagher Flats by the proposed entrance to the bridge.

Mr. Bruce's design called for a 1.5% grade, 2.4 miles in length at a cost of \$44,000¹⁹. The eventual line did not follow Mr. Bruce's plans, but would "come down the west side of Mill Creek Valley to the bridge site a little south of the creamery at a higher level. After crossing the River, the line is carried at a comparatively high level across Ross's flats to strike the bench on which Mr. Ross' house stands then along the bench to the Hudson Bay Company Fort and up the hill by way of Eleventh street and thence eastwards to a terminus about the race tracks"²⁰.



Inside of the Ross Station a large heating stove was set up in the waiting room and a good fire was kept going all the time. The doors of the waiting