

North Bay Old Home Week, 1925 and 1935

by Dr. Francoise Noel, Nipissing University

"Birth of Gateway City Initiated Development of Great Importance." The Nugget, 5 August 1935, 1 and 10

Birth of Gateway City Initiated Development of Great Importance

More than two and a half centuries after the birch bark canoes of Samuel de Champlain's exploration party slid down the La Vasse River.. glided out on the smooth waters of Lake Nipissing... and swirled on into the sunset, two ribbons of steel penetrated through swamp and virgin forest to reach the spot now known as North Bay, the Gateway City.

In other words, the Canadian Pacific Railway arrived... and its arrival meant the birth of North Bay.

It was in July, 1615, that Champlain passed this way, momentarily drawing aside the curtain of oblivion and mystery which surrounded Nipissing district. When the great French explorer disappeared into the west that curtain dropped back into place again and remained that way for 265 years. The Nipissing Indians watched 1,060 seasons fade into history and gradually the story of the "pale face" who visited the region became a legend, dim in the minds of even the oldest of the tribe.

At the end of that 265-year period the quiet of this wilderness was at last broken. Surveying parties, discouraged when they

tried to route the Canadian Pacific Railway around the south shore of Lake Nipissing and ran into unforeseen difficulties, pushed their way north in 1880.

Once again canoes came down the La Vasse... and this time they did not fade into the west. They brought the surveyors and their families.

Two years later the steel came through. Construction work cleared a little space on Lake Nipissing's shoreline ... carved, as it were, a niche in the thick forest, where a few cabins and shanties sprang up haphazardly. It was the beginning of North Bay.

Christened in 1882

The Gateway City was named North Bay in 1882, because of the fact that its first habitations were clustered on a great, sweeping bay on the north shore of Lake Nipissing. A legend that North Bay was named through shipment of a keg of nails has been disproved.

Shortly after the steel of the railway wound its way through the district North Bay was surveyed into lots and subdivisions. By 1885 it was fairly well established. When the C.P.R. got through to British Columbia, cattle and wheat trains rattled through the little settlement heading east. Machinery and other manufactured products were transported west. Trains, trains and more trains puffed their way through North Bay.

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In the end, C.P.R. officials established the place as a divisional point. Shops and offices were located here and a population boom resulted.

The next big step forward was North Bay's incorporation as a town in 1890. John Bourke was first may-

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BIRTH GATEWAY CITY

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or, and April 7, 1890 will always remain a red letter day in the city's history.

Not content with being a mere town, "The Bay" lost no time in entering the county town election in 1895. With Sturgeon Falls and Mattawa as her opponents, North Bay waged a bitter battle for the honor. Two elections were necessary. They were the famous elections in which "dead men and children voted." Sturgeon Falls did not participate in the second, and North Bay just edged out Mattawa.

That meant another boom, coincident with the establishment of judicial and governmental offices. The election victory brought North Bay a court house, registry office, and jail, two judges, and various other government employees.

Start T.&N.O. Railway

Undoubtedly the biggest jump in the progress of the city occurred in the period 1902 to 1905. This time the ribbons of steel were the rails of the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario railway. Flung north to Cochrane in 1902, piercing the very heart of

the richest gold and silver mining areas in the world, the T. & N. O. "made" the North country and Northern Ontario. North Bay was and is its headquarters, its southern terminus, and the main settlement along its lines.

Smooth steady progress was temporarily halted by the Great War, but after four trying years the town, like all other Canadian towns, cities and villages, marched forward again.

By 1925 North Bay had become modern in her appearance. She was overdue to become a city. She had become a famous railway and distributing center, and a true gateway to the North. Her business and residential sections were up-to-date and beautiful.

And so, Old Home Week of 1925. With her incorporation as a city, North Bay completed the last step towards 20th century modernity. She was on her way as one of Ontario's key cities.

Ten-year Eras

North Bay's progress can be briefly sketched in ten-year periods: 1885, definitely established as a village on the C.P.R.; 1895, made county town; 1905, boom as the T. & N. O. railway hummed with activity; 1925, attainment of modern cityhood; 1935, emerging from depression years in fine condition, ready to face a promising future.

Since 1925, North Bay's progress has not been slow. A few important events in the past ten years include: Extension of the Ferguson highway 341 miles north of North Bay to Kapuskasing, with branches to Timmins, Kirkland Lake, etc.; extension of the T. & N. O. railway to Moosonee, on the shores of James' Bay; building of Canadian

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National Railways divisional offices; building of a new Nipissing Home for the Aged; building of the North Bay College; building of the Vocational School; St. Joseph's Hospital; new Public and Separate schools; the Masonic Temple; the Empire Hotel; the Capitol Theatre; the Presbyterian Church; the St. Vincent de Paul Church and St. Simon Church; the suburban United churches; Lee Park; Amelia Park; establishment of a provincial laboratory, a provincial mines office; growth of the suburb of West Ferris, including new schools, laying out of two lakeside parks, and erection of thousands of summer cottages along the beach.

Aside from the major improvements, the appearance of North Bay became more attractive year by year, as succeeding city councils and citizens at large co-operated in an effort to beautify their city.

Population Growth

Official statistics reveal North Bay's growth since 1895. In that year the population was 2,024, the area 500 acres, the property value \$431,790, the business and income assessment next to nothing and the taxes \$9,122.

In 1905 the population of 5,204 was residing on the same 500 acres, but property value had increased to more than a million dollars, the sum being \$1,636,250. The town had a business assessment of \$134,980 and income assessment of \$119,770, and taxes amounting to \$40,122.

In 1915 the population had jumped to 10,041 and the area to 2,160 acres, the property value to \$6,821,613, the business assessment to \$400,960, the income assessment was \$146,168, and the taxes \$167,109.

In 1925 the population was 13,011, the area 2,100 acres, the property value \$8,445,300, the business assessment \$130,515, and income assessment \$438,225, and the taxes \$365,773.

Today North Bay has a population of 16,181, an area of 2,100 acres, a property value of \$10,991,908, a business assessment of \$642,370, an income assessment of \$161,576, and taxes amounting to \$569,487.30.

North Bay is the capital and judicial seat for the District of Nipissing. It is the focal point of various provincial government branch offices which serve Northern Ontario, including Crown Lands, Game, and Fisheries, Northern Development, Provincial Police, Hydro Electric, Provincial Laboratory, and Provincial Mines Office.

It is Northern Ontario headquarters for Railway Mail Service, office of the District Superintendent of Postal Service, Customs and Excise, Employment Service, Department of Marine, and Department of National Defense, all branches of the Dominion Government.

Hopes of Future

Among the improvements that North Bay is looking forward to are: Completion of the highway to Timiskaming, Quebec; erection of a new bridge over Duchesnay Creek; erection of a new hockey arena, city hall, and district court house, and establishment of a branch of the new provincial bank.

The Gateway City got her start as a railway, distributing, educational, church, government, and tourist center for Northern Ontario. The railroads established North Bay. In later years the highways made their advent. Now the city is connected with

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good roads leading in all directions, north, east, south and west. She is a true “hub” in the wheel of northern development and progress. Her position is strategic in every way.

Practically all tourists (and there are thousands weekly) who visit Dafoe Hospital to see the Dionne quintuplets make their headquarters at North Bay for two or three days.

The city is the leading educational center of Northern Ontario, and ranks with the best in the southern part of the province. The See of the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie is located here. Head offices of the T. & N. O. are here, as well as divisional offices of the C.P.R. and C.N.R.

In 1925 North Bay had 27 miles of permanent sidewalks, 16 ½ miles of sanitary sewers, 9 ¼ miles of storm sewers, 38 miles of watermains, 6 ¼ miles of pavement, and 30 miles of improved streets.

Today it is estimated the city has about 40 miles of permanent sidewalks, 30 miles of sanitary sewers, 15 miles of storm sewers, 50 miles of watermains, 30 miles of pavement, and 50 miles of improved streets. Add modern homes, stores, parks, and buildings, and the description is that of North Bay.

North Bay’s lighting system compares favorably with any in the province. The city is equipped with a waterworks system capable of taking care of the needs of a metropolis with a population of 50,000 souls.

Thus has North Bay has developed, progressed, and prospered since first the C.P.R. reached here more than 50 years ago. Old Home Week of this year marks a half

century of growth for the Gateway City, a fitting celebration for such an occasion.
