



The History of the Municipality of Machin

The Municipality of Machin is approximately twenty miles west of Dryden and includes the Townships of Sandford, West Aubrey, Temple and Langton, which also includes the communities of Eagle River, Minnitaki and Vermilion Bay.

In 1908 meetings were held to organize the western end of the Dryden District. Meetings were held in Eagle River, Vermilion Bay, Waldhof, Minnitaki and Oxdrift. The real purpose of the organization was to obtain a license for a hotel in Eagle River. Waldhof and Oxdrift withdrew but a majority carried the motion. In 1909 the Municipality of Machin was incorporated. The Municipal offices were first established in Eagle River along with service garages. When the old school in Vermilion Bay became available the Municipal office was moved to the larger facility.

The name Machin has been attributed to Harold A.C. Machin. He served in the First World War as Lieutenant-Colonel and then became active in provincial politics serving in the Legislature from 1908 to 1919. He lived in Kenora.

The early records of the Municipality of Machin were accidentally lost and the information available in articles by W.W. Howell were invaluable.

Minnitaki

Minnitaki first appears as a railway section on the completion of the C.P.R. from Thunder Bay (previously known as Lakehead) to Winnipeg. The origin of the name is in doubt. The interpretation of the name by the Indigenous people is "Muddy Waters" and the Beaver River which flows through the community might well be the excuse for the name. However, an inquiry to the local school master at the time on the Eagle Lake Reserve brings to light another meaning of the word. Mr. James Fox, the word Minnitaki came to mean the shadow on the water cast by the clouds passing in front of the sun, hence shaded or shadowed waters.

There was no settlement here until the beginning of the century, the townships of Eton, Sanford and Aubrey were surveyed and laid out in 1896 by T.B. Speight, Ontario Land Surveyors and this was when the earliest settlers took up homesteads.

Eagle River

The history of Eagle River has altered with changing modes of transportation. The railhead from Port Arthur (Thunder Bay) was in Eagle River on August 25th, 1881. The completion of the new East/West railway had the last rail spike driven at an unknown location west of Eagle River on June 19th, 1882. By the late 1890's, Eagle River was a major point with settlers and supplies coming in by rail and furs and fuel wood being shipped out. Eagle River station was an important coaling and water spot for the C.P.R. The railway docks were later demolished in 1968 and 1969. The train station was demolished in the fall of 1973.

The oldest business, although not currently in operation in Eagle River was the Hudson's Bay Company. The earliest reference so far traced to the fur trading operations at Eagle Lake for the winter of 1869 - 1870. During this early period Eagle Lake was considered as an outpost generally only kept up during the winter. The various outpost buildings merely consisted of small log houses simply built and easily repaired. To protect the Hudson Bay's territory the Eagle Lake post was moved to near the railway on Wabigoon Lake in 1882. The latest reference of trade being carried on at Eagle Lake was May of 1903. The first fishing and hunting lodge was built in 1935 on Eagle Lake. Two Hydro Power Houses were built on the Eagle River in 1928 and 1937 to supply electrical power to the Dryden Paper Company Mill in Dryden.

Vermilion Bay

The earliest references to Vermilion Bay are in the archives of the Hudson Bay Company. In their records of activities at Eagle Lake from 1869 on, the post that the Company maintained on Eagle Lake was described as "about 6 miles south of Vermilion Station on the C.P.R."

The construction of the C.P.R through this area was very slow due to the difficult terrain.

At that time Vermilion Bay was a construction Camp, with railway workers based at the site. Two miles to the East a sawmill was in operation. The railway was completed in 1882. Over the next years a Station and houses for maintenance crews were built. A forty-foot pump tower to refill the steam engines was erected. These buildings were clustered near the tracks and the Mathers Mill was moved just west of the present town site. The township was surveyed in 1906. Mining activities were underway on Eagle Lake and the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific (C.N.), nine miles to the north, had begun in 1902. Gold and Soapstone mines situated on the southwest shore of Eagle Lake in the early 1900's used Vermilion Bay as a supply center and the ore and stone were shipped from the village. It was the late 1930's when the Trans-Canada Highway was built, Vermilion Bay began to grown again. Vermilion Bay prospered with the development of the forest industry and a large part of the economy for this area was Tourism. By the 1940's tourist camps had begun to spring up on the East and North shores of Eagle Lake. The owners and employees used Vermilion Bay as a business center.

Acknowledgement: Evergreen Reflections published by the Nor-West Historical Society 1986