

Previous to the spring of 1874, the site of the present city of Emerson was merely a prairie, with small cultivated patches here and there, and no indication of a future city was apparent. The nearest point at which any signs of a settlement were visible was where the old fort and the Hudson's Bay Company's post existed, just across the boundary line, while three miles distant, on the American side also, was the hamlet of Pembina, and the united settlers at both places, at the beginning of the year we have mentioned, did not exceed 150 persons.

There are few but remember the hard times which succeeded the great panic of 1873, and lasted for several years thereafter. It seemed, therefore, a badly selected time, in the spring of 1874, to lay out a new town site in a frontier district, and expect it to have a prosperous or healthy growth in the near future. Yet at such a time, and amid such great and general commercial tribulation, the birth of Emerson, the Gate City of the North West, took place. That spring Mr. Thomas Carney and Mr. W. N. Fairbanks had 640 acres of the present city site laid out into lots, and the same summer Mr. F. T. Bradley and Capt. Ash laid out 200 acres more. Thus the original town plat of the city included 840 acres, an extent unusually large, and certainly indicative of great faith on the part of the founders of the city. One circumstance augured well for the growth of the new town, and certainly gave it a start at first, and that was the locating of a land office by the government, soon after the laying out of the town, with Mr. George Newcomb as commissioner. People in other portions of the North West began to believe that it was possible for a town to exist here, and before the winter of 1874 had set in quite a few business institutions of different descriptions were permanently located in the village. About the first mercantile concern established was the general store of Ashdown & Co., which is still the leading house of its class in the city, and now does a volume of business equalled by few in Manitoba. Mr. Winkler, who has all along been closely allied with the progress of the city, was clerk for this firm at first, and afterwards went into the lumber business. Some smaller mercantile concerns were soon afterwards started, while the manufactures were limited to a couple of blacksmith's shops, the first of which was started by Mr. Kenneth McRae.

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