

Emerson.

Emerson is one of the most widely known towns of Manitoba. Years before the great majority of our thriving prairie towns and villages were heard of, Emerson was a bustling little frontier town. Only a few years ago the wolf and the gopher played catch (the catch being disastrous to the gopher) on the virgin prairie, now occupied by such busy places as Brandon, Morden, Virden, Glenboro and many other of our leading provincial towns, but even at that time Emerson had a distinct existence as a town, second only in importance to Winnipeg. Indeed, in the palmy days of the Gateway City, the enterprising Emersonians would hardly admit the "second in importance," and they hoped and at times sanguinely expected that the time would come when their city would be the great commercial metropolis of the prairie province.

The early rise of Emerson was due to its geographical position. It was indeed the gateway to the Canadian wonderland, both by water and by land, and when the town grew up, it was appropriately designated the "Gateway City." In the early days the Red River was the great and only artery of export and import commerce and trade, and all the traffic and travel flowed through the portals of Emerson. When the railway came to supersede the river as the channel of traffic, Emerson was the first point to be reached, and for years it remained the gateway by rail. All settlers coming into Manitoba passed through Emerson, and many made it their headquarters and base of supplies. Before the construction of railways westward and southwestward from Winnipeg, the principal course of settlement was westward from Emerson. Perhaps the most important and most frequented trail or road in the province ran westward from Emerson, through the country now served by the Pembina branch of the C. P. R. There was a large stream of immigration into this excellent region, and all this country was tributary to Emerson. The newly arrived settler purchased his outfit at Emerson, and started westward to look for a homestead, and those previously settled in the region, came from an indefinite distance westward, to Emerson, to dispose of their produce and buy supplies.

With these favorable influences Emerson soon grew to be a prosperous town. During the boom years of 1881-82, it reached the zenith of its prosperity. It was a favorite for a time with the real estate speculators, and large sums of money changed hands for Emerson lots. Money was also invested freely in business and building enterprises, and some handsome business blocks and private residences were erected. This accounts for the fact that Emerson has the finest business block, finest hotel building and finest residences in Manitoba outside of Winnipeg, but unfortunately many of the buildings have fallen into the hands of the loan companies, and are now largely unoccupied. The advances on Emerson property have therefore not been very profitable to the loan companies. The companies would now be glad to exchange some of these properties for even a small portion of the original mortgages upon them.

The Hudson's Bay Company established a

general business and flour mill on the west side of the Red River, opposite Emerson, and called the place West Lynne. This also grew to be a thriving village, but it was finally united with Emerson, the two towns being incorporated as the city of Emerson.

When the iron horse crossed the Red River at Winnipeg, and railways were constructed westward and southwestward from Winnipeg, the effect was soon felt very disastrously upon the trade of Emerson. The most deadly blow was given to the place when the Pembina branch of the C. P. R. was constructed. New towns grew up upon the railway, west of Emerson and soon cut off this valuable trade, upon which the town so largely depended. Emerson made an effort to obtain connection with the Pembina branch, with the hope of doing a wholesale trade with the merchants in the new towns springing up along the railway. In this she was unsuccessful, and the wholesale and jobbing trade of the southwestern country went to Winnipeg. The opening of the C. P. R. to Lake Superior and eastward, took away from the prestige of Emerson as the only gate of entrance to the country, and with railways radiating in all directions from Winnipeg, incoming settlers no longer found Emerson a convenient base of supplies.

Altogether, those who invested their means in Emerson during the era of its prosperity, have had a hard time. In addition to the collapse of the "boom," from the effects of which they had to suffer in common with the people of nearly all the old towns of Manitoba, they have had other drawbacks. Before they could recover from the collapse of the real estate boom, they found their trade being cut off by the construction of railways throughout the province; and the place was left with a heavy municipal indebtedness to carry. Railway construction has therefore been the great cause of Emerson's decline. The people held out bravely for a time, but one after another was obliged to succumb to the inevitable. During the years following 1882, a great many of the residents pulled out for fresh fields, and some who had done a prosperous business, left with their funds at about zero.

Emerson as it now stands has a population of about 550, not including West Lynne, the union between the two places having since been dissolved. The town would appear to be much larger from the number of buildings, but many of the houses are vacant, and this gives the place a somewhat dreary appearance to the visitor. Business, however, is not so dull as the number of vacant buildings would indicate. The town has got down to a solid basis, and with the fine crop last year, the merchants did a very good trade, and the town was fully as prosperous as the average of Manitoba towns. From Jas. Thompson, who has a grain elevator at Emerson, it was learned that about 275,000 bushels of wheat were taken from farmers last year. This shows the importance of the place as a primary grain market. This year deliveries are not expected to be as large, owing to lighter crops and some damage to wheat. A very large amount of breaking and fall plowing has been done in the district, and with a good crop next year, grain deliveries will be very large. One drawback is the lack

of a flour mill. There is no mill in the district in operation, though where so much wheat is handled, and so many farmers come to market, a mill would do a good trade.

Most lines of business usually found in a town of the size, are represented in Emerson. J. J. Smith & Co. and McGirr & Hinton carry large stocks of general merchandise. R. A. Whiteman also does business in groceries and general goods. Jas. A. Pyka carries a large stock of boots and shoes. J. I. Johnson does the merchant tailoring line, and carries a considerable stock of clothing, furnishings and cloths. S. A. Hamilton is the leading hardware dealer. E. Cassleman carries a considerable stock of drugs, fancy goods, etc. E. M. Gatliff handles lumber and building material, and has a branch business lately established on the Red River Valley road. D. McArthur conducts a private banking and brokerage business. A. R. Irwin also does business as broker. Thos. Sturdy, who handles groceries, etc., lately succeeded to the business of V. R. Johnson. H. H. Root does the principal furniture trade of the town, in which business, in connection with undertaking and contracting, he has been established for some time. Christie & Fares do the local meat trade, and also ship stock and meats largely, mainly to Winnipeg and Port Arthur. T. B. Rehill carries on a harness shop, in which business he has been established for four years. There are four hotels. The Carney House, kept by Wm. Robinson, is the largest hotel building in Manitoba, outside of Winnipeg. It is a four story brick building. The Russell House, kept by J. A. Williams, is a quiet and comfortable place, and a favorite house with the travelling public. The press is well represented by the *Times* and the *International*, the latter paper published by C. S. Douglas, who is well known in political circles. Mr. Douglas has stuck to the town through prosperity and depression, and still holds the fort. During the palmy days the *International* appeared daily, but now it is published weekly. Perhaps the most important recent addition to the business places of the town is the carriage manufacturing industry just established by D. J. W. & J. B. Ackland. These three gentlemen have lately arrived from Almont, Ontario, and have selected Emerson as a desirable point to carry on their business. They propose turning out new work in carriages, sleighs, etc., on a considerable scale, and as each member of the firm is master of a particular department, they should be able to work to good advantage. There are a number of other business places in the town, including the implement agencies, blacksmiths and wood workers, law offices, physicians, feed and grain dealers, etc., altogether numbering about forty business concerns.

At West Lynne the Hudson's Bay Co. is the only store left. A general stock of goods is carried, the same as at the other posts of the Company. W. D. Hamilton is the local manager for the H. B. Co. The company also owns a splendid mill building at West Lynne, but the mill is not in operation. The engine and machinery is first-class, but the mill is fitted on the stone process. The mill is convenient to the Northern Pacific railway and could be readily connected with the railway by a spur track. Now that railway connection can be had, the mill should prove a profitable investment, if fitted up with improved milling machinery.

Emerson is connected with West Lynne by two bridges across the Red River. One of these bridges was built with the object of securing connection with the Pembina branch of the C. P. Ry. It is a substantial structure, and would answer for a railway bridge. The Emerson people hope to have the Northern Pacific railway enter their town over this bridge. At present the depot on the new railway is situated at a considerable distance from both Emerson and West Lynne, which renders it very inconvenient for the travelling public. The station is fully a mile or more from the town.