

Boyne River (Rivière aux Îlets-de-Bois)

A Brief History



Carman/Dufferin Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee

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Compiled by
C/D MHAC in recognition of the outstanding work of the Boyne River Keepers
September, 2022

History of the Boyne River

Back in May, 2019, while C/D MHAC's Nikki Falk was kayaking on the Boyne, she was struck by the continuing beauty and peacefulness of the river.

“It felt like another world, floating along for hours with the massive trees canopied over the water. We enjoyed seeing a wide variety of different birds, fish jumping, turtles sunbathing on logs, etc. It really felt like a connection to the past, as if we were stepping back in time and experiencing just what the generations before us had, and what the future generations could have if we can only safeguard it. What we also sadly witnessed was the pollution, the debris caught up along the river banks, the downed trees impeding the vital water flow and finally, the realization that later in the summer the toxic algae would put a stop to our kayaking.”

That winter, Nikki and several friends began “researching what options are available for communities for the revitalization of our rivers. How can we preserve and protect the Boyne River's heritage for future generations to enjoy? How do we instill a sense of community stewardship to the care and well-being of our precious water resource?”

Nikki contributed to the knowledge pool by presenting “heritage moments” drawn from our own fascination with the significance of the river in local history. One of the key takeaways from their research was “the potential for helping the river once more become a focal point in the Town of Carman and a part of local efforts to enhance the tourist value of the Town.” Recognizing that the river doesn't begin or end in Carman, they concluded that “Ideally, respect for the river would carry through to other property owners and communities along its banks and to maintenance of one of the few remaining wildlife corridors east of the escarpment.”

Since then, their ideas and enthusiasm for restoring and conserving this important heritage resource have blossomed through the activities of the Boyne River Keepers and fired the imagination of the community.



BRK

The success of this venture is evident in BRK's rapidly growing membership and in their projects, ranging from completion of the trestle dock to clearing popular winter skating and walking trails, launching their new website and creative celebrations of World River Day 2022. This year's festive gathering and fund-raiser towards a new dock at Ryall Park is evidence that the BRK has found that sweet spot where creative ideas catch fire, enabling the group to write an exciting new chapter in local heritage.

History of the Boyne – as we know it.

From what perspective should the story of the river be told? Histories are interpretations of the past, based on the narrator's own experiences and view of the world. Most of our local sources –

histories, life stories, photos and newspaper accounts - date from the post -1870 era. As such, they largely reflect the experience and viewpoint of our early settlers and their descendants. These river stories speak primarily of floods, pollution, dams, bridges and recreation.

What if the story of the river were told by the Indigenous people who lived here in the centuries before 1870? Given their different perspective on nature, an Indigenous history likely would focus more on the life-giving importance of water, ceremonies, plants and animals native to the area or the best places to find medicinal herbs. This part of our local heritage was passed from one generation to the next by oral tradition. So far, we haven't retrieved these early stories of the river we now know as the Boyne.

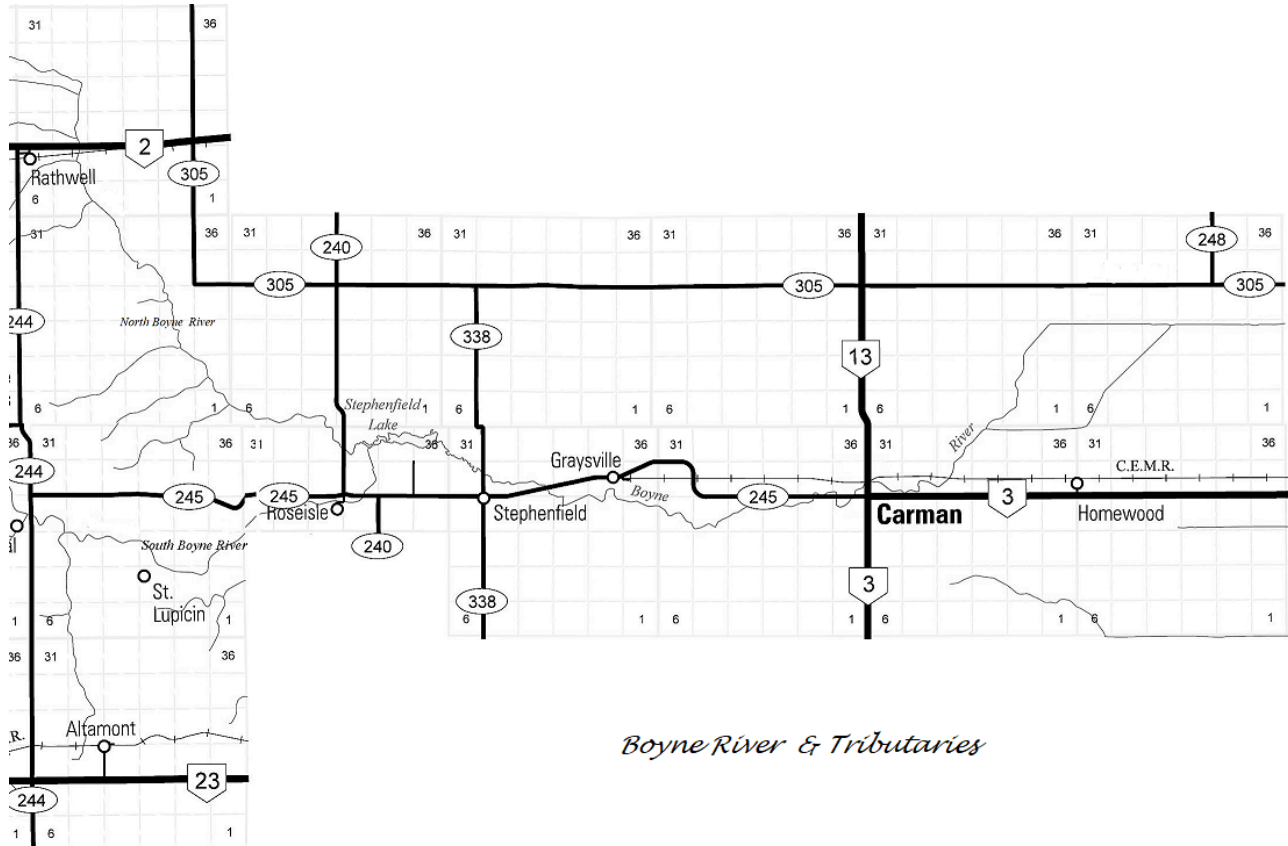
And what if the river were to tell its own story? What would it have to say about its use and abuse by human cohabitants?

Identifying and preserving local heritage is an ongoing process. We'll continue trying to fill in the gaps in our knowledge by seeking out oral histories and memories of the past. We're also taking careful note of the new chapters of river history being written by groups such as the BRK. That said, here is an outline of what we know so far about the history and heritage of the Boyne River.

In the beginning. The story begins centuries ago when glacial Lake Agassiz receded, leaving behind an expanse of rich prairie soil and a winding stream that drained the land between the western escarpment and the Great Marsh¹ east of present-day Carman. From there, the water flowed into the larger Red River drainage system. Although the Great Marsh itself was drained in the early 1900s, the river remains a key factor in local water management and a major feature of the Carman/Dufferin landscape. Of equal significance is the role the river has played in our local heritage.

The river, with its heavily forested banks, was a source of fresh water, fuel, wild fruit, medicinal plants and small game for early Indigenous hunter-gatherers. During the era of the fur trade and western exploration, larger rivers and waterways provided the fastest and most efficient means of transportation. Although our river was too shallow and meandering to serve as a major transportation route, it played a crucial role in the history of that era.

The Boyne River



Boyne River & Tributaries

The two tributaries of what is now known as the Boyne River flow eastward from the escarpment. They join northeast of Roseisle to form the Boyne. In 1963, a dam was built near the junction of the tributaries to form Stephenfield Lake. Along with the surrounding Stephenfield Park, in recent years this section of the Boyne River has become a popular recreational area as well as a refuge for migratory birds and the location of a water treatment plant.

The Missouri Trail² was the major pathway followed by early Indigenous peoples, on their way to gather and trade at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in the north and the headwaters of the Missouri River to the south. It was the route to the sacred site at Calf Mountain and the pathway later used by fur traders and buffalo hunters. The trail followed the western shore of the Great Marsh, passing through miles of swampy land and open prairie before crossing the river about a mile and a half east of present-day Carman. The wooded crossing provided an oasis where travellers found water, food, and fuel as well as wood for repairing their Red River carts. In springtime, maple syrup was harvested. By the 1830s, a number of Métis families were living in the area. The name they gave to the river was the Rivière aux Îlets-de-Bois (‘islands of wood’), possibly a translation of an earlier Indigenous name.



Sign installed by C/D MHAC at Dufferin Historical Museum

Most of our local written histories date from the 1870s. This leaves a huge gap in our knowledge and understanding of the earlier centuries of Indigenous interaction with the river, making it a

part of our heritage that remains largely unrecorded and unrecognized. We know from a large volume of other oral histories and Indigenous writings that water, as a giver of life, was sacred, that it held a central, spiritual place in Indigenous cultural belief systems.³ We can only hope that local oral history projects will capture some knowledge and understanding of these beliefs and their significance to the river's story.

Settlers arrive. In 1870, Manitoba became a province of Canada and was opened to homesteading. Given the rich local resources, it is no surprise that the first settlers to this area chose land near the river.

Samuel Kennedy, the first arrival, settled at the key point where the Trail crossed the Rivière aux Îlets-de-Bois. A staunch Irish Protestant Orangeman, he is said to have renamed the river the Boyne, in honour of the defeat of Catholics at the Irish Battle of the Boyne.⁴ The river thus became a factor in the tensions that arose between the local Métis and the new arrivals around differences in culture, language, religion and attitude to land ownership⁵ - issues that have remained part of the broader context of local history.

The change of name didn't change the nature of the former Rivière aux Îlets-de-Bois, whose heavily wooded banks remained a source of both fuel and shelter for the new arrivals. In 1879, William Clendenning built a dam and flour mill on NW 24-6-5w, later adding a lumber mill.⁶



Clendenning Mill

DHM

The local mill saved settlers long trips to settlements at Nelsonville or Emerson to grind grain for flour and feed. It also provided lumber for building and helped pave the way for development of the Town of Carman.

Beauty of the woods. It's not surprising that early news items frequently refer to the beauty of the area. Church groups and other organizations held annual picnics and gatherings in groves and parks along the Boyne. In the summer of 1900, the *Dufferin Leader* carried this glowing account of a local picnic:

On Friday, July 27th, the members of the Old Maids' Society of Orr, together with a few invited guests, spent an enjoyable afternoon in Mr. Usher's grove, on the banks of the Boyne. Repairing to the rendezvous, the pleasure-seekers first amused themselves by wandering through the lovely greenwood, admiring the many beauties of the spot and plucking the luscious cherries that hung so temptingly on the branches of trees. After roaming around some time the party gathered together under a majestic maple where they enjoyed a recherche repast of sandwiches, cake and other delicacies, Songs and other amusements were then indulged in and in the evening the party returned to their respective homes after having spent a most pleasant and profitable afternoon.⁷

A generation later, the *Dufferin Leader* (1924-10-30) published an essay written by a high school student on the beauty of the area around the local swimming hole:

In autumn, any place on our lazy Boyne is beautiful with the colourful trees overhanging it until they almost meet. One of the most beautiful of these spots, however, is the swimming pool, enclosed by tall sentinel-like trees in autumn foliage of gold and brown. Its sloping banks are the resting place of the autumn waifs, which form a beautiful carpet, very pleasant to walk upon with the shuffle, shuffle of the dry leaves.

Parts of the banks of the beautiful stream are clothed with green and over the water's edge, the long slender grasses droop daintily, with but their tips yellowed by the early frosts. The water nearby acts as a shining mirror for their green. Reflected also are the long trunks and twisted branches of the tall trees. The sun, shining across the water, adds to this mirror-like effect and adds also to the brightness of the grass and the silver grey of the trees. A gentle east wind is blowing. Above, it propels a fleecy white ship, trimmed prettily in gilt by the already slanting rays of the sun. Below, it fills the sails of the brown

and yellow fairy sailing boats – the leaves. In the harbour formed by spring washouts a great fleet is collected of these autumn-built boats....

Another small item in the local paper gives a hint of the age of the woodlands along the banks of the river. In 1889, the *Carman Dufferin Leader* reported that “H. Clendenning has on his premises an oak tree which measures twelve feet in circumference two feet above the ground.”⁸ How many decades would it have taken for a slow-growing oak tree to reach that size? What became of the tree? These popular picnic groves and immense trees are largely part of our past. Could this part of our heritage be revived for future generations?

Wildlife. Like our present-day boaters, early residents of Carman were intrigued by wildlife in and along the river. They were aware of beavers and the impact of their upstream dams on local water flow. This was knowledge they used during periods of drought when they built man-made dams to ensure a water supply for the town.

Beavers and turtles that boaters now are thrilled to see along the stream were part of the early habitat. Back in 1907, the *Carman Standard* reported that:

A very large turtle, or tortoise was captured by Mr. Leary, of Roseisle, the other day, and exhibited in Carman on Monday. It weighed over 30 pounds, and opinion was divided as to whether it was a tortoise, a terrapin or a snapping turtle. Its shell was strong enough to support a man.⁹



More than 100 years later, the turtle appears on the logo of the BRK.

Back in the early 1900s, the paper also reported that wolves were “plentiful along the river west of Carman”.¹⁰ With the arrival of settlers in the area, these predators were seen as a danger to livestock and

substantial bounties were put on their heads.

With the arrival of this new population, the story of the river began to change. As the turn of the century approached, details of local life were now recorded in memoirs and in the two weekly newspapers, the richest sources of information about our past. Many of these news items refer to the Boyne River and affirm its importance in local life.

Water Supply. As more settlers arrived, small communities grew up along the river where they had access to water. One of the challenges they faced was maintaining the quantity, quality and safety of the water supply.

By 1906, when Carman incorporated as a town, plans were under way for providing water and sewer services. Over the next few years, the challenge of providing these facilities dominated local news. The process was slow and costs soon exceeded estimates. In an era when typhoid and other diseases were major cause of mortality, health concerns also arose.

The opening of the old waterworks on Fournier avenue, between McLeod’s corner and the river, revealed some scandalous and often criminal work. The water pipes were placed before the sewer mains, but that is not the worst feature of it, there was not a speck of cement on any joint of the sewer pipes and some of the joints were not even connected, so that all sewerage had free course to percolate into the defective joints of the water-mains. Had the system been alright otherwise and the water system ever used for domestic purposes, think of the result.

The photo below show a section of the early water main. The water system was first installed between 1906-10. This pipe was dug up during road work and is now on display in the Dufferin Historical Museum. The water pipes were made of wood, bound together by wire.



Early water main pipe

DHM

We may think of concerns about the environment and pollution as modern issues; these items from early newspapers suggest otherwise:

The practice of cutting ice on the river below the town should be looked into by our health authorities. A number of stables are situated along the river banks, and the offal from these pollutes the water to some extent and renders it unfit for use for dairy and other household uses, and those who store such ice for summer use are laying up a first-class disease breeder. We throw out this hint in hopes that steps will at once be taken to stop cutting ice except above the town.

Dufferin Leader, 1898-12-15

A number of citizens make the river a dumping ground for garbage, manure and other debris. The town authorities should shut down on this practice at once. It is not only a violation of sanitary laws, but a breeder of contagious diseases. Very soon the cutting of ice will be in progress and the crop will be beautifully flavored with the juices of manure, dead animals and even more revolting refuse. The public health should not be subjected to the selfishness of a few who have no regard for sanitary rules.

Dufferin Leader, 1901-11-21

A number of dead animals have lately been discovered floating down the river from time to time. Heavy penalties are attached to such pollution of streams, and a few examples should be made of parties found guilty of such unlawful acts.

Dufferin Leader, 1903-05-13

By 1903, the problem had not yet been resolved and a petition was circulated in town to demand action.

A largely signed petition is going the rounds, asking the town council to have the river banks cleaned of refuse now thrown down there, and in future have the practice of making the river a dumping ground for all manner of filth, prohibited. The town has been to considerable expense yearly in providing a nuisance ground, and it is time that existing by-laws regarding garbage and other refuse was strictly enforced.

Dufferin Leader, 1903-05-09

It would seem that some civic action was taken; no further complaints of this nature appear until around 1907 when water and sewer systems were being installed in Carman and concerns were raised by residents who objected to having sewage flowing into the river near their property.

Thanks to growing awareness of the cause of disease and enforcement of sanitary laws, as well, perhaps, as growing pride in community, news items of this nature become less prevalent. Later references to cleaning up the river more often speak to efforts to clean up branches and debris as a matter of civic pride:

A visitor at the Leader office the other day made the following remark: "Why does not your Council clean up the river and make it more presentable? It is a shame to the town." This is the expression of only one visitor; how many dozens of others make the same remark after leaving town? It does not fit in well with the advertised beauties of the town and its surroundings. If only for sanitary reasons, the nuisance of making the river banks a dump heap ought to be abated.

Dufferin Leader, 1920-08-05

As one reporter remarked following a severe drought, it was to be hoped at least that the river would "rise high enough to obliterate some of the superfluous junk lying on the river bank."¹⁶
Dufferin Leader, 1920-11-04

There is little documentation of what happened outside town limits. One life story relates how:

We used to pile the manure we cleaned from the barn on the bank of the river. When it flooded in spring, the bank was swept clean, ready for the next pile. We did that until the garden and fields started getting overworked. Then we started spreading the manure on the land to fertilize it. Nowadays the concern is about all the pesticides and chemicals that leach from fields into our water systems. A bit of manure doesn't look so bad anymore.¹⁷

Concern about the state of the river is one aspect of our heritage that persists to this day – one of the many ways in which history repeats itself.

Recreation.

In spite of these concerns about water quality, it's clear from early stories that recreational use of the river and interest in its environment were a rich part of our past.

Skating was a favorite winter pastime. Flora Sexsmith (1896-19490) recalled:

I remember one night in particular when I skated with my brother Freddie on the river all the way downtown to Browning Avenue and back to the mill dam and back home in the moonlight. I was maybe twelve years old. I still remember that magic night.¹¹

And from the western end of the municipality, the local correspondent reported that “Roseisle has been very quiet this winter. Almost the only entertainment our young people have had has been skating on the river.” (Dufferin Leader, 1898-03-30).

The length of the early skating trails might offer a challenge to today’s enthusiasts. Under the heading “Skaters Busy on River”, a 1926 edition of the local paper reported that:

The freezing temperatures of the nights of the past week have resulted in a good sheet of ice forming on the surface of the waters of the Boyne and this, with the absence of snow, makes things very nice for those who like to skate. A party of boys went up the river yesterday to a point about six miles west of town and found the going fine.¹²

Swimming. From the time of early settlement, swimming holes along the Boyne River were popular areas for fun and recreation. The most notable of these was the Carman Swimming Hole. Opened in the mid-1940s by the Carman Swimming Club, this was one of the most popular gathering places in the town. Annual swim meets drew crowds of up to 2,000 people. The Carman Band entertained the crowds from a bandstand on the south side of the river. The site was a major recreational center until the 1960s when the Kinsman opened the pool in Kings Park.



Carman Swimming Hole

DHM



Carman Swimming Hole

DHM

Less formal swimming holes, like those below, were found the length of the river.



In 2014, C/D MHAC installed a sign at the site to commemorate this important part of local heritage. The photo shows Margaret Riddell, one of several local area residents who maintained the former swimming pool area since closure of the old swimming hole.



Fishing. Long before Stephenfield Lake was stocked with fish, local youngsters spent many a summer hour fishing for the small chubb that lived in the river. Their fishing gear was homemade – just locate the right branch, add a piece of string, a small hook and a can of worms and the fishing outfit was complete. Because the fish were so small, a whole, lazy afternoon could be



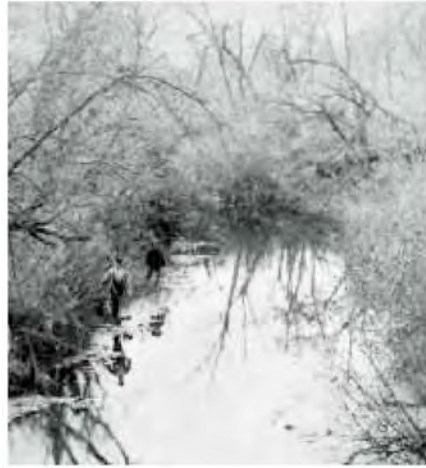
Summer fun fishing in the South Boyne River IJB

spent catching enough fish to fill a frying pan for supper. Then there was the challenge of picking your way carefully around a multitude of tiny fish bones. But the lazy hours by the water, thrill of the catch and sweet, tasty fresh fish supper made fishing one of the memorable

Boating. This vintage photo from the Dufferin Historical Museum collection, taken around 1900, suggests that the BRK weren't the first enthusiasts to discover the joys of boating on the Boyne.



Hiking. In summer, much of the hiking along the river took place in the shallow water, wading or hopping from stone to stone, walking along the bank around deeper pools.



Hiking the River DHM

Railways. When the railways arrived in Carman/Dufferin area in 1901, the river served as a source of water for the steam-driven engines. Dams were built at key points such as Carman and Roseisle to ensure adequate water for the pumping stations.



Railway water tank J.B. Coleman

Railway bridges or trestles, such as the one that marks location of the BRK dock, are among the few reminders of the importance railways played in transforming this part of Manitoba from a traditional hunting/gathering/trading area into a settled, agricultural market economy. For any community built beside a river, bridges as well as trestles become an important consideration.

Bridges. As the Town of Carman grew, building bridges became a major focus for the town. Town Councils reports note ongoing debates about funding for a Fournier Street (1st Street) bridge, repairs to the Villard Street bridge, or rebuilding the McKnight Bridge to allow for better access to settlements in the west.



Early McKnight Bridge, near present-day Boyne Lodge.

DHM



Bridge to Island E. Tucker



Midland railway trestle

DHM

Impact of Drought. From time to time, the routine of life along the river was disturbed by periods of drought or larger than usual spring floods. In the 1930s, this area like other parts of the country, experienced a prolonged period of drought. The impact on river levels was a cause for concern.

Low Water in Boyne River Creates Serious Situation As Winter Approaches

The local water situation has been giving town authorities and citizens in general much concern of late. The river is at the lowest level ever known, with barely four feet of water at the town's pumping plant intake. It is believed inevitable that such water as still lies above the dam will be frozen solid to the bottom before the winter is well begun and the town's supply will thus be cut off.

Springs which feed the Boyne, in the hills around Roseisle and Rathwell, have recently revived a little and there has been a slight increase in the flow of water coming down. A beaver dam three miles northwest of Stephenfield held back a considerable bit of water and this was released Tuesday morning when the town obtained permission from the provincial game department to open up the dam. Whether much of this water will get down as far as the Carman pumping station remains to be seen. Some of it will go back into the soil, from which the river has drawn all reserve moisture in recent years, and more will remain in water holes which farmers have provided for use of their stock. Because of the exhaustion of sub-soil moisture it is considered improbable that the springs will make anything like a normal flow, and with rainfall now practically out of the question the supply at the pumping station is unlikely to be much better than at present as winter sets in.

projects, of course, would require considerable time to complete. Mr. Main said there were no immediate remedies for present difficulties. He will make a report of his investigation which it is expected will be available before long. The railway companies are also greatly concerned about the general situation, as they require much water for their locomotives. C.P.R. and C.N.R. pumping stations are located at Carman.

It was Mr. Main's opinion that natural conditions, meaning the return of a period of normal rainfall ending the drought would relieve the situation in a year or two, with heavy rainfall in 1937. It is very necessary, however, he states, to provide now against another drought which the cycle of wet and dry periods is certain to bring again before many years, and therefore a vast scheme of conservation is needed for the west.

A report of an address on this subject made in Winnipeg by Mr. Main last week appears elsewhere in this issue.

Destruction of beaver dams further west on the river brought temporary relief to the Town.

The water released from the beaver dam near Stephenfield Tuesday of last week got down as far as the dam at Carman last night, and this morning the level of the river here had raised several inches. It is hoped there will be enough come down before freeze-up to give the town pumping station a supply sufficient for the town's requirements through the winter.

Dufferin Leader, 1934-11-08

By 1938, the full impact of the prolonged drought was being felt by the Town of Carman:

Water Service Shut Off In Carman Tuesday

Town waterworks service was cut off Tuesday in accordance with a decision made by the town council Friday morning at a special meeting. Advised by the town engineer, A. Curcay, that the supply of water remaining in the river was very low and rapidly being exhausted, the board considered it impossible to maintain service to the hospital and school, while cutting off the remainder of the users, and thus the entire supply remaining will be kept for possible use in case of fires breaking out. Service to the school was maintained until today, when the school closes for the holidays.

Domestic users are putting in ice or, as in a few cases, are installing electric pumps and pressure tanks to pump water from outside wells into their residences. Equipment of this kind is being installed at the hospital. At the rink water for flooding the ice will be hauled from places in the river where deep holes have held a supply. The Memorial Hall rest rooms have been closed and an outside heated toilet for women has been erected near the power house, half a block away. The school board will have outside heated toilets constructed, considering it too costly to haul water to provide an adequate supply. The town council and the school board both considered putting down a well, but decided that the possibility of thus obtaining a good supply was too uncertain to justify the expense.

Dufferin Leader, 1938-12-22

Dams. Part of the solution to stabilizing water supplies along the river was construction of dams.

Town Council Discuss Feasibility of Building Dam on River Boyne

The board of works of the town council was appointed at the meeting of the council last Friday night to investigate the feasibility of building a small dam on the Boyne river near the swimming pool, above the town, to help prevent the loss of water from the river in the spring flow. In discussion prior to this decision, which followed the reading of a report by T. C. Main, C.N.R. water supply engineer, on the results of his inspection of the river, the members of the board were found sharing the opinion that the town is not able to finance any extensive or costly dam project necessary to create a reservoir of considerable size. It was felt that two or three small dams along the river would put enough water into sloughs and gullies along its course to ensure a fair supply, and a suggestion that a reasonably good dam could be built at a cost of \$400 or \$500 near the swimming pool site was favored by the meeting.

Coun. North stated that, with the town's waterworks system in need of replacement in many places, the cost of which might be \$15,000, the town

was faced with a serious problem and certainly the question of a dam could not be considered until the future of the waterworks system was decided. If it would be necessary to scrap it or to discontinue use of it for a few years, there would be no need for a dam. It was pointed out in the report by Mr. Main that since the cost of making repairs to the waterworks is greater than the interest charges on replacement costs, it is poor economy to continue spending money for such repairs.

Mayor Greer was not present at the meeting and Coun. McGowan was in the chair.

The council met in committee last night, when Mayor Greer was able to be present, and discussed the matter further, and today members of the board are looking over the ground at suggested dam sites.

Dufferin Leader, 1934-11-15

Town Council Decides to Build Small Dam

At the town council meeting Friday night last week the report of the committee of the council appointed to investigate the matter of a dam on the Boyne river was received and discussed. Acting upon this, the board decided to proceed with the building of a dam at Chas. Clendenning's place, a limit of \$300 as cost of same being set. Applications for the position of town constable during the absence of Coun. Bodie from duty, on account of his illness, were received. Fred Patterson was engaged to fill the position for one month, at a salary of \$50. A grant of \$25 to the Children's Aid Society of Winnipeg was made and an honorarium of \$100 to Mayor Greer was voted, in recognition of his services to the town during the year.

The board decided to continue its plan of having ice cut from the river during the winter. Seven parcels of town property to which the town has recently obtained title were ordered removed from the tax roll. The Jas. Land stable was rented to W. A. Benn at \$3 a month.

Dufferin Leader, 1934-12-06



Clendenning Dam

DHM

Floods. The same river that brought life-giving water to the area periodically brought destructive floods. Until recent years, floods were an annual concern in the Town of Carman. The Town experienced major floods in 1893, 1923, 1970, 1974 and 1979. Floodwater caused millions of dollars of property damage. Floods also resulted in irreplaceable loss, including municipal records prior to 1924, which were destroyed when waters flooded the basement of the Memorial Hall. Finally, in 1991, a diversion was built to redirect flood water from west of the town through a six-mile ditch into the Norquay Channel northeast of Carman. This has substantially reduced the risk of flooding in the Town.



Flood on Villard Ave, (Main Street) 1893

DHM

Floods also affected properties along the course of the Boyne and its branches. In the spring of 1933, flooding along the river destroyed railway tracks and bridges, bringing rail service to a temporary halt. This excerpt from a life story describes one family's experience:

There was thick ice on the river that year. We were sleeping upstairs one night when we were wakened by the crash of ice and logs on the walls of the house. Downstairs was flooded and we could hear the clink of glass jars as they floated up from the storage area in the basement. We could see through the windows that the house was already surrounded by fast-flowing water and ice. It turned out that an ice dam had formed upstream from us and when it broke, the water rushed down-river, taking everything moveable with it. [Our son] was just 18 months old at the time and we couldn't tell if the

house would stay on its foundation. We were trapped upstairs until morning when the water went down enough that we could wade out back to higher ground. We lost all the cordwood the men had spent the winter cutting and hauling. The water took out the railway trestle and a lot of the track. The family across the road slept through it all and never even knew we were in trouble.¹⁸



1933 flood destroys railway tracks

IJB

Early photographs document the force of the river and extent of flooding.



McKnight's Bridge in flood

DHM

Among the photos in the recently donated Briggs collection are these pictures of the 1927 spring breakup and flood taken by his aunt, local resident Elsie Tucker:





Flooding in Carman 1970s

DHM



Flooding in Carman 1970s

DHM

Water management. The Boyne River also serves an important role in the growing concern for water management.

In 1963, a dam was built near the junction of the north and south branches of the Boyne River, at the west end of the R.M. of Dufferin. This created Stephenfield Lake in what is now Stephenfield Provincial Park, a popular recreational centre and site of a water treatment plant. Water levels at the dam help regulate use of the river for irrigation of local farm crops.

Since piped water has largely replaced the time-honoured practice of hand-pumping and carrying water from wells, facilities such as indoor plumbing, automatic washing machines and dish washers have become ‘necessities’. They also increased water consumption. When we add to this more efficient drainage systems and growing demands for irrigating farmlands, it’s clear that water has become one of our most precious commodities.



Stephenfield Provincial Park

IJB

The lake also provides an important habitat for migratory birds. Local drainage projects have reduced the number of ponds and sloughs, and wildlife management has become an increasingly important consideration. There also is a growing awareness that the Boyne River watercourse is the one remaining wildlife corridor in the Carman/Dufferin municipalities.

The river was here long before the land was settled and converted to farmland. Knowing the history of the Boyne River helps us understand why protecting the river and its environment is so significant for all facets of our lives – from the joys of outdoor recreation and wildlife management to water management and the quality of life for future generations in the Carman/Dufferin municipalities.

Endnotes

For the purposes of this brief overview of the Boyne River history, we have drawn primarily upon a couple of sources that are readily available locally and online. The most comprehensive source of information on local heritage is the *The History of the R.M. of Dufferin in Manitoba, 1880–1980*, compiled and edited by June Watson and committee and published by the Council of the R.M. of Dufferin. The book is available online through the [University of Manitoba digital collection of local histories](#). Early newspapers are another rich source of local history. The *Carman Standard*, *Dufferin Leader* and *Valley Leader* can be accessed online through the [Pembina Manitou Archive website](#).

1. Watson, June. *The History of the RM of Dufferin in Manitoba 1880-1980*, (Council of the R.M. of Dufferin, 1982), pp. 145-15
2. Ibid., pp.4-7
3. See, for example, <https://www.resilience.org/stories> for an account of the role of Indigenous women and water.
4. Watson, June. *The History of the RM of Dufferin in Manitoba 1880-1980*, (Council of the R.M. of Dufferin, 1982), pp.2-3.
5. See *The Confrontations at Rivière aux Îlets-de-Bois*, by historian Alan B. McCullough for an account of the implications and impact of the arrival of post-1870 settlers to the area.
6. For more information on the Clendenning mill, see Nicholson, Karen. *A Review of the Heritage Resources of Boyne Planning District* (Heritage Resources Branch, 1984), pp. 101-102. Available online <https://carmandufferininheritage.ca/> (search ‘Nicholson’).
7. *Carman Dufferin Leader*, 1900-08-02
8. Ibid., 1889-09-08
9. *Carman Standard*, 1907-06-20
10. Ibid., 1906-12-06
11. Watson, June. *The History of the RM of Dufferin in Manitoba 1880-1980*, (Council of the R.M. of Dufferin, 1982), p. 728.
12. *Dufferin Leader*, 1926-11-11
13. Ibid., 1898-12-15
14. Ibid., 1901-11-21
15. Ibid., 1903-05-13
16. Ibid., 1920-11-04
- 17,18. Note that persons agreeing to share their life stories may opt to remain anonymous.