Planting a Flag in the Muskeg
History of Early Edson and Area

Galloway Station Museum

This report will touch on the Tête Jaune and aboriginal peoples, the fierce rivalry of competing railway companies, racing to along the same route to reach the Pacific Ocean, the namesake of Edson, Edson J. Chamberlain, the short-lived but well-travelled Edson to Grande Prairie Trail, the wild side of the area and those who helped tame a frontier town, the impact of the Coal Branch area and the stories of people who impacted local history.

What's in a name? Tête Jaune
In exploring the rich, but relatively short history of the Edson area, it is necessary to reach back before its existence back to the days of fur traders, First Nation People and Métis People and the formation of the nation.

The Leather Pass (as it was first known by trappers and traders) was one of four passes through the Canadian Rockies into New Caledonia (what is now British Columbia). It was used by First Nation People for centuries, probably because of its low elevation, but this pass was also used for from the mid-1820s to the early 1850s principally by the Hudson's Bay Company[1]

The Pass was mainly used to transport leather (hence the name Leather Pass), especially moose hides, from the Saskatchewan District to its posts in New Caledonia now known as British Colombia.[2]

Hudson's Bay employees were first led through this pass by an infamous Iroquois guide – and a man with many names. Referenced by historians as both Pierre Bostonais or Pierre Hatsinaton[3] the debate illustrates the difficulties of tracing trappers and guides through the fur trade. The occupations were, by their very nature, transient.

"People moved from place to place with relative ease and freedom, and often could adapt their cultural identities too. Given the many similarities in names and even nicknames in the fur trade, and the inevitable gaps in the surviving historical documents, figuring out whether or not a fellow from Red River and a chap working in the Rocky Mountains are the same man can be infuriatingly inconclusive."[4]

While the given name of the Iroquois guide many still be up for debate, the moniker given to him by French voyageurs is almost universally agreed upon. Because of his blonde hair, Bostonais became known as Tête Jaune, which translates directly to Yellow Head.[5]

It is interesting to note that the Grand Truck Pacific, in a pamphlet expounding the incredible, unspoiled vistas of Jasper Nation Park in 1911, erroneously proclaimed that Jasper Hawes (the namesake of Jasper)

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[1] Smyth, David, The Yellowhead Pass and the Fur Trade, BC Studies no. 193 Spring 2017, pg: 48-73.
[2] Smyth, David, The Yellowhead Pass and the Fur Trade, BC Studies no. 193 Spring 2017, pg: 48-73.
[3] Barkwell, Lawrence J., Biography of Pierre "Tête Jaune" Hatsination, an Iroquois-Métis voyageur, January 15, 2014.
[4] Stephen, Scott, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Who Was Tete Juane, https://spstephen.wordpress.com/2010/03/01/who-was-tete-jaune.
[5] MacGregor, J.G., Overland by the Yellowhead, Saskatoon, Western Producer Book Service, 1974.

was "celebrated for the great shock of yellow hair that he wore … referred to him as Tête Jaune – thus the Yellowhead Pass – at the portal of which Jasper House is located."[6]

David Smyth posits that, although there were many historians who guessed at Tête Jaune's identity, through careful research in comparing Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company documents and timelines, the 'real' Tête Jaune was indeed the light haired, Iroquois (often referred to as Métis) Pierre Bostonais who was one of many brought west by the North West Company.[7]

The earliest reference to the guide and trapper was in a 1816 North West Company ledger, however by 1819 Tête Jaune was a free Iroquois and traveled, hunted and trapped in between the Smoky River Post, Jasper and Fort George. He and his brother Baptiste, would occasionally accept employment from the Hudson's Bay Company and first appeared in the company's records in this region 1819. In the 1820s he built a fur cache in BC near the Grand Forks, where the Robson River joins the Fraser.[8]

The Hudson's Bay was eager to establish trade into New Caledonia (up to this point, no HBC employee had crossed the mountains) and Tête Jaune would prove to be an invaluable asset to the fur trading company. Not only did he supply the company with a chart of the country to be crossed, in 1920 he also guided an expedition through the pass at the end of April, returning with his party on October 29. Wanting to establish a firm presence in New Caledonia, the HBC approached Tete Jaune to continue to guide their people through the pass, however they were unable to come to terms. To illustrate this point, George Simpson, the officer in charge of the Athabasca District wrote to an officer in charge that "…no pains or expense will be saved in establishing us on a firm and respectable footing in that valuable country. The Iroquois must be engaged without delay. I shall not limit you to terms, we absolutely need their services and you will therefore make the best bargain you can." [9]

Later, in 1925, HBC Chief Trader James McMillan would 'heap praise' on Tête Jaune for his prowess and knowledge of the area, however within the year both Tête Jaune and his brother Baptiste had fallen out of favour with the company.

Tete Jaune did not live to hear the Pass that bears his name. In September, 1827, the brothers and their families were killed, in what was presumed to be revenge by the Beaver Tribe, who 'for a long while past looked upon the Iroquois as robbers and despoilers of their lands.'[10]

One of the most colourful descriptions of Tête Jaune comes from the New Garden of Canada, by F.A. Talbot, published in 1912: "He was an Iroquois of huge stature and physique, blessed with flowing locks of bright auburn hair … promptly dubbed him Tête Jaune, while the path he followed through the

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6 The Canadian Rockies Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, Winnipeg Canada, 1911, Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Company. General Passenger Dept. The Canadian Rockies: Yellowhead Pass route. Winnipeg: General Passenger Department, Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, 1911, pg. 21.

7 Smyth, David, Alberta History. Vol. 32, no.1 (Winter), 1984 pg: 2.

8 MacGregor, J.G., Overland by the Yellowhead, Saskatoon, Western Producer Book Service, 1974.

9 Smyth, David, Alberta History. Vol. 32, no.1 (Winter), 1984 pg: 4.

10 Smyth, David, Alberta History. Vol. 32, no.1 (Winter), 1984 pg: 6.

mountains became known as the Pass of Tête Jaune, afterwards turned into its briefer English equivalent, Yellowhead Pass."[11]

"Tête Jaune … the man who had led the way through the Yellowhead Pass had come to the end of his travels, all unaware that because of his cache, his name would pass down the ages." (Quote from *Overland by the Yellowhead* by James MacGregor.)

In 1917 Louis Loyer provided a first person interview stating that he was the grandson of Tête Jaune. Decedents of Loyer live in the Brule area.[12]

What's in a name? Hornbeck

As the years went by and more individuals plodded their way West, legend tells of a man named Hornbeck, who travelled through what was soon to become the Edson area. Hornbeck, along with his business partner, had purchased a large herd of horses which they planned to move to Prairie Creek to sell to the Grand Truck Pacific Survey team. By the fall of 1906, the two men had driven the horses to the confluence of the Sundance Creek and the McLeod River - the future site of the Big Eddy -in what is now Yellowhead County. Survey crews from the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway had already been through the area and a few had built cabins there. [13]

Both Hornbeck, his partner and their livestock were exhausted from the long journey and, on the advice of the owner of a small trading post at the Big Eddy, decided to rest on a flat along Sundance Creek to regain their strength. An early storm came through the area that lasted weeks, and the two men decided rather than risk travel, to build a cabin for shelter and settled in for the season.

Although the men had enough supplies to last through the winter, the horses could not find enough grass to sustain themselves. It has been written that Hornbeck grew more and more anxious as he watched his investments dwindle away. On the occasion of the first horse's death, Hornbeck went berserk. His partner fled back to the trading post above the Big Eddy, but Hornbeck followed, broke through the front door and started spraying bullets into the post. Three men (Noorgaard, Berthou and Mourrou) managed to escape the building to another shack close by and watched as Hornbeck started throwing their winter's supply of food into the snow. Days went by with Hornbeck regularly shooting at the trapped men. Out of desperation they decided to shoot at Hornbeck simultaneously the next time he became visible, sharing responsibility for his death. After the shooting a message was sent to the Northwest Mounted Police detachment in Edmonton requesting an officer to attend the scene. [14] [15]

Due to heavy storms and extremely cold weather, it took NWMP Constable Hubert Shand a total of three weeks to trek to the Big Eddy, complete the investigation and return to Edmonton with the herd

[11] F. A. Tallot, *The New Garden Of Canada By Packhorse And Canoe Through Undeveloped New British Columbia (1912)*, (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1912)

[12] Mountain Metis, otipemisiwak – freemen, www.mountainmetis.com/pages/tete_jaune.html

[13] Ross, Toni. *Oh! The Coal Branch.* 2nd ed. (Edmonton, AB: D.W. Friesen and Son Limited, 1976) pg:2.

[14] Ross, Toni. *Oh! The Coal Branch.* 2nd ed. (Edmonton, AB: D.W. Friesen and Son Limited, 1976) pg:3.

[15] Shand, H. NWMP Incident Report. Edmonton, AB: North West Mounted Police, 1906, pg: 169.

of starving horses. Shand, in his report to G Division in Edmonton, described the unfortunate Hornbeck as a large fellow and that due to the sheer size of the man and the inclement weather, it is implied that Constable Shand was unable to continue on to Edmonton with the body but was forced to leave Hornbeck somewhere along the route back in the woods. [16]

Currently, there are two distinct areas that bear the Hornbeck name. The first is the Hornbeck Creek Provincial Recreation Area 16 kilometers west of Edson. The second is the Hornbeck Cross County Ski Trails, located 14 kilometers northwest of Edson. While there is no documentation to connect the ill-fated Hornbeck to these areas, his name may have been used as a marking place and descriptor for locals who were familiar with the story.

What's in a name? Edson Joseph Chamberlin, the Grand Truck and the Town of Edson.
Although Edson, Alberta owes its existence to the railway – specifically to the Grand Truck Pacific – few know the full story of the fierce competition between the two Canadian railways that were both pushing their way to the Pacific Ocean and what would end in what some historians call the 'million dollar folly' in the 1920s.[17]
The Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) and the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) provide the perfect analogy for the old adage that hindsight is twenty-twenty. In the early part of the twentieth century both companies built transcontinental lines through the Yellowhead Pass, the lowest elevation route through the Canadian Rockies. In a colossal bungling of the tax payer supported rail industry, adversarial lines ran parallel and often crossed one another.

Inspiration for the Grand Trunk Railway (the parent company of the Grand Truck Pacific) was found in the trunk roads of imperial Rome and it was initially envisioned as a government-owned project with the lofty ideal to bind and unite the colonies of British North America. However, the original purpose (and route) lost out to powerful politicians who saw the railroad as a vehicle to build wealth and personal empires. "The story of the Grand Truck Railway's formative years is a twisted tale of corruption and swindles, of politics, high finance and mismanagement."[18]
During its early years, the Grand Truck Railway largely ignored the West after the federal government resisted their suggestion of running tracks through Chicago, wanting instead an all-Canadian route to the Pacific coast. That decision would lock the Grand Trunk Railway out of the West until the turn of the century.
Finally, in 1903, the eastern-focused railway company with and then-president Charles Melville Hays realized the opportunities emerging from the West and, after coming to terms with the federal government , the Grand Truck Pacific (GTP) was formed.[19] Government guarantees were necessary for this expensive undertaking. The cost for the GTP prairie section was $13,000 to $45,000 per mile and for the mountain section was $30,000-$100,000 per mile.[20]

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[16] Shand, H. NWMP Incident Report. Edmonton, AB: North West Mounted Police, 1906, pg: 169.
[17] McDonnell, Greg. *The history of Canadian railroads*. London: Footnote Productions, 1985, pg: 15.
[18] McDonnell, Greg. *The history of Canadian railroads*. London: Footnote Productions, 1985, pg: 15.
[19] McDonnell, Greg. *The history of Canadian railroads*. London: Footnote Productions, 1985, pg: 54.
[20] Norman J. Lowe, "Canada's Third Transcontinental Railway" Journal of the West Oct 1, 1978 pg: 60

The GTP wasted no time, sending surveyors west that same year. By 1905 they were building across the prairies and by 1909 the first GTP trains reached Edmonton.[21]

Meanwhile, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) had cornered the western main line and taken over a collection of small railroads. The advantage that the Canadian Pacific had was that everything heading west had to use its mainline as did the railway cars coming east filled with grain.[22]
To build railways in Western Canada, CPR received twenty five million acres from the government to dispose of in whatever manner they saw fit. The most lucrative way was to carve it up into town lots. CPR townsite locations were meticulously chosen and rigorously executed. The CPR deliberately selected Southern Canada for its route because it was largely uninhabited, giving the CPR control over town site selection, design and sales.[23]

Two of the major players in the Canadian railway conflict, William Mackenzie and Donald Mann were partners and started off their careers in 1904 as construction bosses to Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR), then rose to become tycoon promoters for the company. They were laying the foundations of their own transcontinental railway and their line reached Edmonton in 1905; four years before the GTP. They would be the GTP's main competition, however, federal and provincial political infighting and general unrest kept the CNoR stalled in Edmonton until 1910.

GTP president Hays reached out to the CNoR partners, suggesting a form of cooperation between the two companies from Edmonton through the Yellowhead Pass, but Mackenzie and Mann, being fiercely independent refused the offer.[24]   Indeed, there was apparently no love lost between the rail company heads. Hays, an American corporate 'bigtimer' with the ear of the Prime Minister and considered (at the time) to be the saviour of the 'chronically insolvent' Grand Truck Railway saw Mackenzie and Mann as 'uncouth products of the Canadian backwoods, mere opportunists and fly-by-nighters.' In return, Mackenzie and Mann saw Hays as 'an American pirate, ruthless even by the standards of the US railroad industry.'[25]

By 1910, both the CNoR and the GTP were securely snared in the fatal lure of the transcontinental line and were laying track from Edmonton through the Yellowhead Pass at the same time; running parallel through the Rocky Mountains with nearly 250 miles of side-by-side track – occasionally running with as little as 50 feet between the two lines. This set the stage for what historian Ted Byfield called the greatest (financial) calamity in Canadian transportation history.[26]

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[21]Ibid

[22] Byfield, Ted. *Alberta in the 20th century*. Vol. 2. The Birth of a Province: United Western Communications Ltd., Edmonton, 1992, pg: 107.

[23] Ron Brown, The Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Page 33

[24] McDonnell, Greg. *The history of Canadian railroads*. London: Footnote Productions, 1985, pg: 50.

[25] Byfield, Ted. *Alberta in the 20th century*. Vol. 2. The Birth of a Province: United Western Communications Ltd., Edmonton, 1992, pg: 103.

[26] Byfield, Ted. *Alberta in the 20th century*. Vol. 2. The Birth of a Province: United Western Communications Ltd., Edmonton, 1992, pg: 103.

Construction costs for both companies was high, the final cost of the GTP Railway Mountain Division (from Wolf Creek to Prince Rupert) was $140 million.[27]

Wolf Creek

The GTP route to the Pacific coast was fraught with obstacles that included muskeg, deposits of clay that caused landslides (which then had to be hollowed out and filled with rock), canyons, roiling rivers and numerous tunnels.[28]

The end of steel, and the start of the GTP's Mountain Division was located at Wolf Creek, about 200 km west of Edmonton.

Railway mania gripped Canada at various periods. People realized the advantages of having a line run through their town. Transportation unified regions and the easier exchange of goods, services and people yielded profit, progress and development. Construction of the railroads also provided lots of work.[29]

Commercial and social activity suggested a prosperous future for Wolf Creek for it was here the Grand Trunk Pacific planned to build its Divisional Point. A town of 2000 rose nearly overnight at Wolf Creek, with banks, hotels, restaurants, boarding houses, dirt streets and rough dwellings.[30]

Wolf Creek's , real estate fell victim to the speculations of 'land boomers.' The land boomers knew the GTP required a considerable area of land, so they bought up all likely territory hoping to realize a lucrative return . "The GTP was held ransom with no compromise. Negotiations were futile so it prompted the decision to move the Divisional Point eight miles farther west, leaving the boomers standing on the platform as the train pulled out. This new location was neither known nor considered and didn't appear on any maps." [31]

It was here that the railroad engineers planted their flag in the muskeg, beginning the birth of the town which would eventually become Edson.

The GTP Railway brought the spotlight to Edson and area, in the winter of 1909-1910. Even before the railroad steel pushed into Edson, construction crews were working furiously on one of the big obstacles, the gorge of the Sundance Creek where it flows into the McLeod River.[32] Here, the GTP built one of the largest wooden trestles in western Canada. The trestle was one thousand feet long, eighty feet high, one million boards of timber and one hundred thousand pounds of bolts and washers and was fondly known as the Big Eddy.

Finally, on April 17th, 1914 the GTP Railway line was completed in Prince Rupert, BC. The man to drive the last iron spike into the line was Edson J. Chamberlain. Chamberlain was named the vice president of the GTP by Hays in 1909. The charismatic, if flawed GTP president would not live to see the final spike driven as, after soliciting financing for the beleaguered railway company on a business trip to England,

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[27] Pole, Graeme. *Great railways of the Canadian West: building the dream that shaped our nation*. Canmore, Alta: Altitude Pub. Canada, 2006 pg: 76.

[28] McDonnell, Greg. *The history of Canadian railroads*. London: Footnote Productions, 1985, pg: 54.

[29] Ties that Bind, www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/trains A Brief History of Railways in Canada

[30] Byfield, Ted. *Alberta in the 20th century*. Vol. 2. The Birth of a Province: United Western Communications Ltd., Edmonton, 1992, pg: 116.

[31] Marguerite Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, (Winnipeg: Jostens Publications, 1986), pg: 7.

[32] Marguerite Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, (Winnipeg: Jostens Publications, 1986), pg: 24.

Hays had booked passage for himself and his family on the Titanic. He was survived by his wife and daughter. Shortly after Hays death, Chamberlain was named GTP president.

The death of Hays was a blow to the GTP, and the CNoR/GTP parallel track through the Yellowhead was seen as both foolish and wasteful by historians. In 1917 four-fifths of the government subsidized Canadian Northern line was torn up because the steel rails were needed for the war effort. By 1920 both companies would be bankrupt and be absorbed into the new Canadian National Railway.

Edson Chamberlin

Edson Joseph Chamberlin was the son of Joseph Mark Chamberlin, born August 25 1852 in Lancaster, New Hampshire. In his youth he received his education at Montpelier Methodist Seminary. In his teens he started his career working with the Central Vermont Railway in 1871. [33]

Chamberlin worked his way up the ladder with the Vermont Railway, eventually becoming the superintendent of smaller rail lines.[34] In 1886 he joined the Canada Atlantic Railroad that was eventually bought out by the Grand Trunk in the early 20th century.[35]

There was much controversy surrounding the decision to appoint Chamberlin GTP president after Hays death. Although generally applauded in the West, some said that if electing Hays' as the president was a mistake then choosing Chamberlin was a catastrophe. Chamberlin had limited education in the field, he entered the railway business very early, and he had no right to be in the same ring as such able adversaries, (such as CNoR partners Mackenzie and Mann)[36] however Chamberlin accepted the position. On the political side Chamberlin had a knack for irritating members of the cabinet, it was obvious he lacked the finesse that Hays had when dealing with the government and other political figures. It was stated that he had the "infuriating ability to inflame an already tense situation by leveling provocative accusations."[37]

Chamberlin visited Edson (along with Hays) in June 1911 and again after the hamlet of Heatherwood brought a petition against the postmaster and officially changed their name to Edson. [38] There was some concern around confusion with the town of Edison Alberta but the government still endorsed the change stating that "Edison was an unimportant place and their name could be changed and the inventors could be honored on some other line in Alberta or Saskatchewan."[39]

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[33] Memorable Manitobans: Edson Joseph Chamberlin (1852-1924), Memorable Manitobans: Edson Joseph Chamberlin (1852-1924), September 5, 2008.

[34] Theodore D. Regehr, "CHAMBERLIN, EDSON JOSEPH," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 15, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/chamberlin_edson_joseph_15E.html.

[35] "The Central Vermont Railway," American-Rails.com, http://www.american-rails.com/central-vermont-railway.html.

[36] History of the CN railways 284

[37] "Grand Trunk Railway Reporting Mark: GT," Grand Trunk Railway, http://www.canada-rail.com/ontario/railways/GTR.html#.V6Y-V7grLIU.

[38] *Edson Leader*, June 2, 1911 and April 25, 1912.

[39] Marguerite Ahlf. *Edson: 75 Years*, (Winnipeg: Jostens Publications, 1986), pg: 12.

Pittsburgh of the North

George M. Phillips reported to the Edson Leader newspaper on March 30, 1912 that when the steel arrived in Heatherwood in 1910 the population of the area was fifteen. By January, 1911, the population grew to 490 and to 800 by September 21, 1911, with the development of several coal mines in the Coal Branch 40 miles south, a large cement factory west of town in Marlboro and logging camps in the surrounding area.[40] On March 15, 1912 the population again exploded to 1233 and the town had 67 places of business.[41]

As the town grew, the GTP built a large station at the end of Main Street. Like other stations of the time, Edson's was a wonderful building with a semaphore, bay windows, platforms and a waiting room full of memories.[42] The station was vital for all train operations and customers. It was a place to live, work and play. Stations became magnets for children of the area because of the activity that surrounded it. Often, if the agent of the station needed help with a job, a child would be paid $1 for his labour.

Since the train station was situated at the end of Main Street, all water ran down toward the building and often caused the train tracks to be flooded. The first sight of Edson for many travelers was the station surrounded by a mess of mud and water.[43] Although the station sat at the lowest point in the community geographically, it was a source of pride for residents of the town. Over the 60+ years of its existence, the station greeted King George VI, Queen Elizabeth II, the outspoken Nellie McClung, and many more from across the globe.[44]

As mentioned, the original Yellowhead Trail avoided the future town site of Edson by miles due to the thick forest and deep muskeg. Survey crews hired by the Grand Trunk Pacific dug ditches to try and drain water, while fill was brought in for roads and the railway grade on the Tote Road between Wolf Creek and the area that would become Edson.[45]

Main Street, which ran south to north beginning at the station, was built 80 feet wide – 20 feet more than other streets.[46] By the time the first passenger train arrived in August of 1910, a square mile of land had been surveyed into 50 by 100 feet lots.[47]

The first building in Edson was built by J.H. Lloyd, who bought two plots of land on 3rd Avenue. It was a simple two storey shack that was lined with tarred felt. This building was later bought by Johnny

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[40] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 13.

[41] The Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Ron Brown, pg: 9.

[42] The Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Ron Brown, An Illustrated History of Railway Stations in Canada 3 Rd edition, pg: 9.

[43] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 23-24.

[44] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 62-63; Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch,* 55.

[45] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 11.

[46] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 10.

[47] F. A. Tallot, *The New Garden Of Canada By Packhorse And Canoe Through Undeveloped New British Columbia (1912)*, (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1912), 32; Toni Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, (Edmonton: D.W. Friesen and Sons Ltd., 1976), 13.

Bonniface, who had recently emigrated from China. He started a hotel in the building and it soon became the meeting place for men coming to the area to purchase land.[48]

F.A. Talbot describes the townsite. "… the most interesting spot was about eight miles west of Wolf Creek. Here we pushed into the Town of Edson, or rather, where Edson is planned to exist, for it was then in the 'is-to-be' stage, as the Westerner puts it. Here we saw the foundations of a typical Canadian western town being laid. Imagine a stretch of densely wooded country, with the bush as thick as the jungle, and about 20 feet or so in height. A square mile of this is pegged off. The railway station site is selected , and immediately opposite extends what is to be eventually the principal thoroughfare. On either side, at regular intervals, are run parallel roads of uniform width. From each of these streets, at intervals of 300 feet, transverse highways are driven at right angles."[48]

During the rush in 1911 to the 'Last Best West' in the Grande Prairie Region, the Edson Board of Trade – along with the newly formed Alberta Provincial Government – created a trail joining Grande Prairie to Edson. This trail was to cut out days, and potentially weeks, of travel time for pioneers settling in the Grande Prairie region. However, the path was an incredibly difficult one to traverse, as the muskeg was deep, the rivers wide, and the hills steep.[49] The trail was only in service for four years, at which point the E.D. and B.C. Railroad reached Spirit River – near Grande Prairie – from Edmonton.[50]

As a 'boom town', Edson attracted a wide variety of entrepreneurs. In 1913, many said it would be considered the 'Pittsburg of Canada' or the 'Calgary of the GTP'.[51] The vast amount of wealth in resources from the Coal Branch would ensure the town's future. Since the Board of Trade was newly formed and wanted to promote its services, it came up with an unusual and intriguing motto: "Boosting Edson is like making love to a widow, it can't be overdone."[52]

While Edson was turning into an economic hub in 1912, two miles south the town of Tollerton was just beginning. The town was designed as the divisional point for the GTP's rival railway company, Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR). Situated along the McLeod River and on high ground, Tollerton had what seemed to be a solid future and construction of the town site was nearly completed even before the tracks had arrived.[53] This was possible because all supplies for the town were drayed (hauled by horse) from the nearest station, Ansel.

A difficult decision had to be made when CNoR and GTP merged to create Canadian National: Which set of tracks would be kept, and what would be the resulting fate of each town? In 1917, the Board of Railway Commissioners had to decide if either Edson or Tollerton would become the divisional point for the new Canadian National Railways. There was much discussion as well as a letter writing campaign to from the Edson area to convince the Railway Commissioners that theirs was the most 'responsible and viable' option. In fact, Edson's town council asked all the townspeople to come onto Main Street to

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[48] Tallot, *The New Garden Of Canada*, 31.
[49] For more information see the *Gateway to the Last Best West* report.
[50] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 180-181.
[51] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 20.
[52]Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 14.
[53] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 26.

make the town look like it 'had potential'- more than 2,000 people were in attendance.[54] It was decided after many months of deliberation that Edson would become the divisional point. As the population of Tollerton moved to Edson, many businesses followed, having their buildings drayed to the chosen town. Seven of them would eventually be located on Edson's main street.[55]

While Edson began to thrive, the clouds of war were gathering overseas. In 1914, Canada was a territory of the British Empire, but it did not control its own foreign interaction.

"The Canadian government would decide the extent of Canada's war effort, but legally the country was at war the instant Britain declared one. In 1914, most, but by no means all, Canadians would have agreed with the 1910 statement of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier that "when Britain is at war, Canada is at war. There is no distinction." They nevertheless debated vigorously the size and nature of Canada's war effort and, increasingly, its relationship with Britain."[56]

About 619,000 Canadians had enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force for service overseas, approximately seven percent of the total population of Canada was in uniform at some point during the war, and hundreds of thousands of additional Canadians worked on the home front in support of the war.

J Mellor Poucher was an Edson resident from 1912 to late 1914 and recounts the story of Canada joining the war effort through the eyes of a resident. (Audio)

Wild Western roots

Since its inception Edson was a true frontier town, with people from all walks of life. This had some negative consequences since many transient workers came through town, fueling up on liquor and feminine company.[57] The venues around town that catered to these workers were stripped of their liquor licenses by the government - the law stated there was to be a certain 'alcohol-free' distance around all government funded work, and this included the railways.[58] As a result, about 15 blind pigs – speakeasys that sold liquor illegally - sprung into business in and around the town. Second Avenue was especially notorious and it was suggested by locals that it was best avoided, due to frequent robbing and doping incidences.[59] In an attempt to keep order, locals were hired as patrolmen. After only two weeks of service, they resigned due to the unruliness of the local citizens.[60]

The first North West Mounted Police (NWMP) detachment was established in the area in 1910, with Inspector Charles Cummings Raven, one of the force's most experienced policemen, as the first acting officer. [61] It was one of twenty five detachments opened in 1910 and was mainly built to enforce the law

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[54] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 19.
[55] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 164.
[56] http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/going-to-war/canada-enters-the-war/?anchor=21
[57] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 14.
[58] Tallot, *The New Garden Of Canada*, 7.
[59] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 14.
[60] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*,15.
[61] Marguerite Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, (Winnipeg: Jostens Publications, 1986), 16

during the construction of the railway. [62] The detachment had one Inspector, one Corporal, and one Constable for which Town Council paid a fee of $100 per month. [63] The location of the original NWMP detachment in Edson is unclear; however, we do know that the organization purchased a building originally owned by L. Moynihan on 4th Avenue East, on the North side near the town hall [64] (this was a huge improvement from the 'shack' the detachment was housed in prior).[65]

However, despite the presence of law enforcement, Edson was often referred to as a blot on the map of Canada.[66] Many men and women were attracted to the frontier town to prey on the lawful families of the area. Citizens that patronized certain establishments could expect to be 'doped, rolled, drugged, and robbed.' [67] A curfew was put into place to keep the law abiding citizens safe from the notorious people who lurked around Main Street. [68]

Two incidences illustrate the problems the area had with both law enforcement and those who chose to circumvent those laws. The first, in May of 1912, involved the Town-appointed chief of police, Mr. Wilson; who, incidentally, was not a member of the NWMP.

Chief Wilson noticed local trainman Frank Etter tipping his hat to an acquaintance, a local woman named Mrs. Adler. However, Chief Wilson was unaware the two knew each other. The chief was incredibly alarmed by Etter's actions and advised Etter to come with him. As the two men walked down the boardwalk they approached Mrs. Adler at the Creamery Café. The chief questioned Mrs. Adler about the situation, asking if she knew Frank Etter—to which she replied that she did indeed know the man. The over-enthusiastic Chief, however, was not convinced and started to club Etter with his revolver, threatening anyone who would try to intervene, and soon took him to jail.
Etter was released on $10 bail. Outraged, he applied to Edson's first Mayor Gilbert Lawrence for a warrant for Chief Wilson's arrest. The Mayor did not want to start a fight and he declined to issue the warrant. Etter then applied to Inspector Raven claiming the Chief had 'assaulted him while flourishing his revolver and spewing obscene language. News of the event spread through town.

The Police Chief and his brother, Constable Wilson, were walking down the boardwalk when a crowd started to push them around. The two officers pulled out their revolvers and attempted to clear the street—which lead to a riot. Constables McLeod and Saul were sent from the RNWMP barracks by Inspector Raven to try and calm the crowd. However, upon arriving and seeing the spectacle that the Chief of Police and his brother were causing, McLeod tackled Chief Wilson to the ground. The mob saw an opportunity to get revenge on the man. They seized him out of McLeod's hand and clubbed him on the head. Inspector Raven arrived within a few minutes and arrested the police chief and his brother. After a special meeting with town council, Chief Wilson resigned and the RNWMP were paid $100 per

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[62] Horrall, S. W. Edson Detachment. Report no. 76.10.266.

[63] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 17.

[64] "Local Events." *The Edson Leader* (Edson), March 21, 1911.

[65] "Local Events." *The Edson Leader* (Edson), March 21, 1911.

[66] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 23.

[67] Marguerite Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, (Winnipeg: Jostens Publications, 1986), 14

[68] Edson Leader October 31, 1912.

month to patrol the town thereafter. [69] Raven would not have accepted the offer to patrol the streets had the situation not been so dire, later stating that the town was 'full of thugs and prostitutes.' [70]

Because of the riot of 1912, along with a series of other crimes, the townspeople presented a petition to council stating that all of the policing of Edson should be handed over to Inspector Raven of the RNWMP, who would become police commissioner. [71] Raven would later discuss the idea with the detachment out of Regina, who would then deny the request. [72] At the time the RNWMP would merely patrol Edson's unruly streets.

A heated debate started at the town council meeting following the riot. Councilor Leydon thought that the town was losing significant revenue by having to pay the RNWMP to patrol Edson, instead of having a town- based police force. Leydon suggested reinstating the former police chief Mr. Wilson. This suggestion was not agreed to by all. The other five councilors were firm that the town should continue to be patrolled by the RNWMP. Mayor Lawrence sided with Leydon, in terms of wanting to reinstate Mr. Wilson. During the debate, Mayor Lawrence walked out in anger, claiming that he was resigning as mayor. [73]

The founding fathers of Edson grew concerned that many families did not want to stay in the area, or worse, that outside families would not want to settle in the area because of the lawless people who haunted the frontier town. Hoping for a solution to clean up Edson, almost the entire town turned up for the next council meeting. However, of the entire council only Mayor Lawrence attended, despite his claim to have resigned at the last meeting. As there were not enough members to fill quorum, nothing could be officially decided. Angered by the council's lack of action, the people of Edson decided that they would have to out council, officially asking for a re-election. [74]

During the weeks leading up to the election, the townspeople created a fury of petitions against the council and current police force which included one against Thos Gordon as the night policeman;[75] and another against the newly appointed police assistant W.J. Elliot, who was caught patronizing a blind pig.[76]

Many people of Edson fought hard for change, but the election results showed voters did not agree. Five of the seven possible positions were taken up by previous councilors. The newly elected council (including Gilbert Lawrence as mayor) decided to re-instate the Chief Wilson, as well as hire Edsonite Constable George Porter. [77] It would not be long before the council would once relieve Wilson of his duties again due to public intoxication and appoint Porter as Chief of Police.

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[69] Marguerite Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, (Winnipeg: Jostens Publications, 1986), 15
[70] William Beahen, *Tribulations of a Frontier Police*, (RCMP Quarterly, 1982), 29   bv
[71] "Council Meets." *The Edson Leader* (Edson), September 26, 1912
[72] "Council Meets." *The Edson Leader* (Edson), October 10, 1912
[73] "Council Meets." *The Edson Leader* (Edson), October 10, 1912
[74] Edson Leader November 7, 1912.
[75] Edson Leader March 7, 1912.
[76] Edson Leader Nov 21, 1912.
[77] "Council Meets." *The Edson Leader* (Edson), December 19, 1912

Porter ushered in a brief period of policing competency in Edson, many claiming him to be Edson's new hope, his policing was reported to be the "most comprehensive and the best to come in since the force's inception.' [78] However, this was short lived as Porter would be relieved of his duties by Alert Detective Agency of Edmonton in February of 1913 after the town hired Richard Stafford to intervene in policing the town. No reason could be found regarding Porter being relieved from his position.

Law and order proved only temporary as real trouble occurred again shortly after Stafford was hired. Determined to strike fast, on February 22, 1913, Stafford appointed ten local men as special deputies and drew up a list of 14 illegal liquor vendors that he planned to close that Saturday night. It turned out to be a very long and very bad night for the new chief of police.[79]

Frank Henry, the proprietor of the first establishment the law keepers intended to raid, (The Alberta House on 2nd Avenue) refused to open the door, forcing the men to break it down. Inside was a large quantity of alcohol and four suspected 'ladies of the night,' who attempted to escape through the back door. The ladies were apprehended, loaded into a wagon and taken to jail.
News of the arrests spread quickly through town and a 'large, hostile crowd' of people, sympathetic to the lady's plight, gathered on Main Street. The crowd freed the prostitutes and the ladies fled the scene.

Hearing the commotion, Stafford and his men leapt into the fray, leaving one of his special deputies to guard the massive stock of alcohol. The chief of police soon discovered that they could not contain the large, angry crowd and returned to the brothel, where he found both the deputy and the alcohol gone.
[79] [80]
Despite the setback, the raid continued to Cotton's Restaurant next door.

To ensure that no one escaped from their next target, a man was placed at each door. Once inside, Stafford found a secret room which contained almost a wagon load of whiskey. Four more prostitutes were found and were immediately escorted to jail .

After returning to the Alberta House, Stafford was confronted by the Main Street mob. The crowd had convinced Frank Henry to resist arrest. Henry took out a revolver and threatened to shoot Detective Stafford. Stafford shot into the air as a warning, then he and his men wrestled Henry to the ground brought him to jail. Although 14 blind pigs were known to the police only the above mentioned were raided.

By the afternoon of the following day, everyone who had been arrested was out on bail, which made Stafford's work seemingly redundant. Inspector Raven was then tasked with arresting Detective Stafford for 'grievous harm from shooting a firearm' after his warning shot grazed Henry's hand. Stafford was released on a bail of $100 a few days later. [81]

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[78] "Local Events." *The Edson Leader* (Edson), January 23, 1913
[79] Tribulations of a Frontier Police: The RNWMP Detachment at Edson Alberta, 1910-13,The Quarterly Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Vol. 47.
[80] William Beahen, *Tribulations of a Frontier Police*, (RCMP Quarterly, 1982), 26
[81] "Sensational Raid Saturday Night." *The Edson Critic* (Edson), February 27, 1913

Raven would later put Frank Henry and his lady associates of the Alberta House on trial for the operation of a bawdy house and illegal sale of liquor. In total 27 people were convicted; Henry received four months hard labour in the Lethbridge Provincial Jail, while the ladies each received a fine. [82] A sum of $300 in fines for the town and $700 for the province was collected from the night of the raid. The town only broke even on the raid as it cost $300 to hire the Alert Detective Agency. [83]

Boosting Edson

To try and encourage people from across North America to move to Edson, the Board of Trade carried out a huge advertisement campaign showcasing the promising future of the new 'boom town'.[84] However, these utopian models of Edson were not true to the rough life that was reality. Many news reporters came to the town to give reports on their experiences in the 'Pittsburg of Canada'.[85] As one Mr. Canon Matheson said, "it would appear that according to Eastern newspapers and street talk, not only is the condition of morals a blot on the town but Edson itself on this account a blot on Canada."[86] Bob Edwards from the *Calgary Eye Opener* wrote that "Edson is a little burg of one short straggling street, all a muskeg, [go west] if only to have a hearty laugh at the Edson town lots."[87] The editor of the Edson Leader replied: "Well one can only surmise that he must have had a heavy jag if he couldn't tell the difference between a whisky keg and muskeg."[88]

Meanwhile, on the Coal Branch

Like many other western Canadian communities, rail barons and their lines created the series of settlements southwest of Edson, Alberta. National boosterism mixed with overblown opportunism and railroad mania induced turn-of-the-century discussions of a second transcontinental line through Edmonton and a northerly Rocky Mountain Pass line - in addition to the Canadian Pacific Railway's (CPR) southerly route through Kicking Horse Pass. For this to be possible, however, another significant fuel source would be needed – and that meant more coal. The GTP ramped up its mineral seeking efforts when they sent out their prospector, Raymond Brutinel and fixed their gaze upon the Northern Brazeau Branch – specifically, the Cardinal River area's carbonized fossil fuels.

The area had been known for its coal deposits for some time already, since the Canadian Geological Survey staff had begun mapping the area in 1884[89]. The area was also home to the Embarras Gold Rush in 1909, which was sparked by prospectors searching the McLeod River headwaters in 1886. [90] After the North West Rebellion, a general Butler travelled through the area and recorded aboriginals who had stones that burned. One of the earliest surveyors in the area was John Gregg. Gregg aided Brutinel in finding the first coal deposit on the branch – near the future site of Lovett. Later, Gregg and his

[82] William Beahen, *Tribulations of a Frontier Police*, (RCMP Quarterly, 1982), 28
[83] "Tea Pot Tempest Disturb Councillors." *The Edson Critic* (Edson), December 23, 1913
[84] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 16.
[85] Ahlf, *Edson: 75 Years*, 20.
[86] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 23.
[87] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 23.
[88] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 23.
[89] Toni Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch* (Calgary: Toni Ross, 1974), 7.
[90] Kyba & Ross, *Exploring the Historic Coal Branch* (Rocky Mountain Books: 2001), 181.

companions were helped and guided by his Métis wife Mary Gregg (Cardinal) and the local Stoney aboriginals, and this led to the discovery of Mountain Park and Luscar in 1907.[91] On finding the coal, Mary Gregg came back to her husband with blackened hands and 'playfully grasped Jack Gregg's face between them and blackened it with the coal.'[92] Between 1906 and 1909, several more discoveries were made by a number of different prospectors, including local personalities such as Donald McDonald, Bill Baillie, and P.A. "Baldy" Robb.[93]

Cadomin (an acronym for Canadian Dominion Mining) was the largest of the Coal Branch towns, boasting approximately 1800 residents in the 1930s.[94] Ten miles north of Mountain Park and six miles west of Luscar, Cadomin was the hotbed of activity on the branch. In the mid 1920s the town's population was flourishing so quickly it threatened to outpace Edson.

At the height of the Coal Branch's production, the three largest towns were Luscar, Cadomin, and Mountain Park. These communities were isolated from the rest of the branch as there were no roads connecting them to the outside world. In 1936, the 3 towns owned a total of 100 vehicles but only had 17 miles of road to drive on.[95] Mountain Park, Cadomin and Luscar became their own close knit community and would rely on each other in case of emergencies, or celebrate together on joyous occasions.

Over the next century, Edson remained an industry town. The vast amount of resources which started the creation of the town will ensure that town's future. The once important railway has now dwindled to a sidenote in the everyday lives of Edsonites. Landmarks of Canadian National's presence here - the coal chutes, the station, and the rail yards - have since disappeared, leaving behind a distant memory of their importance.

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[91] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 7.
[92] Foothills Research Institute, Northern Rockies Highway Guide (Foothills Research Institute,2012),35
[93] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 9.
[94] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 29.
[95] Ross, *Oh! The Coal Branch*, 139.

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