

Some Early History of the Exhibition Neighbourhood

In 1884, a recent arrival to Saskatoon, named Robert Clarke, had the dubious honour of becoming the first official resident of what is now the Exhibition neighbourhood when he died after helping fight a grass fire. The spot overlooking the river where he was buried became the [Nutana Pioneer Cemetery](#).

A later arrival to the cemetery was Nevil [Pendygrasse](#), who fell from the ferry in 1887 and drowned. His mother, Sarah, arrived in Saskatoon only just a couple weeks later. She took out a homestead in the quarter section just north of the cemetery, building her log house on the corner of what is now St. Henry and Isabella, just a short walk down the trail to where her son still lies.

In 1907, developers bought up this area, surveyed it into streets and lots, and marketed it as the “Bellevue Addition.” In 1909, the Saskatoon Exhibition moved to its present location at the south end of Lorne Street. Streetcar tracks were laid down Lorne to Ruth in 1912, to connect it with the rest of the city. But it was the construction of the CNR’s South Nutana Yards, on the other side of Lorne from the Exhibition, that really brought people into the area as men employed there looked for homes nearby.

“It was a great place to grow up,” one resident recalled of living on Coy Avenue in the 1940s and ‘50s. “We had the riverbank, and the railway bridge, and the river itself. Lots of sandbars there to swim off of, and the sandhills across the river as well.” In the winter, they tobogganed and skied at places like “Tyson’s Hill” – a steep bit of bank just south of Taylor Street. They sometimes skated on the river, back when it still froze solid before the Queen Elizabeth Power Plant was built. Winter also meant watching Arctic Ice crews harvest ice blocks off the river and, in spring, lining the bank to watch the ice break up.

The Exhibition was a huge draw, and for many, it was the presence of the army base there during the war that was most exciting. “A lot of our fathers served during the war,” the resident recalled, remembering the excitement of their return and the sad face of a girl in his class whose father never came back. When the Saskatoon Light Infantry came home in the fall of 1945, “the train stopped at the Exhibition so the men could meet their families first, then get cleaned up before going on to the downtown station where they got off and paraded down 21st Street.”

Speaking of trains, older boys from the neighbourhood sometimes hitched rides on slow-moving trains coming in from downtown. It was a quick way to get home, but not so good if you got caught!

For a few years starting in 1946, there was a commercial toboggan slide on the riverbank just past Taylor Street. It had two steep, 500-foot, runs, lit by strings of coloured lights and crossing each other at a viaduct. Built by a group of returned soldiers on land leased from the city, it was open evenings and weekends and cost 50 cents per hour for adults, 35 cents for students and 25 cents for children (accompanied by adults).

It opened late in 1946 and was immensely popular. But it closed abruptly in January of 1950, when four teenagers were severely injured by a broken wooden guide rail sticking out into the track. Thanks in part to the quick work of several student nurses who were there, all four teenagers survived. Two of them were impaled together by the broken rail which had to be sawed in half before they could be put into ambulances and transported to hospital.



The Exhibition area was also home to greenhouses and market gardens, many of them run by Chinese immigrants to Saskatoon. One of them was where Exhibition Park is now. For years, there was an old Curtiss “Jenny” biplane stored in a building there, a relic of the Keng Wah School of Aviation, which operated out of a hangar north of Mayfair, and trained pilots for the Chinese Nationalist League in the early 1920s. There were also greenhouses on Lorne Avenue, including Millar’s at 2019 Lorne. Originally owned by the Gold family and operated as the Lorne Avenue Nursery in the 1920s, it was finally demolished in the late 1990s.

The Seventh Day Adventist grounds were also there, where from about 1919 until 1976, some 1,500 people would gather each year for camp meetings and services. The Seventh Day Adventist Junior Academy (nowadays the Riverside Christian School) was built in 1947 and the Sunnyside Nursing Home in 1965.

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