

Town of Birch Hills History

The community takes its name from hills in the area, which were once heavily treed with birches that were used in manufacturing birch bark canoes during the fur trade era of the 18th century. For well over 200 years the hills to the south of the townsite were called the birch hills and had tremendous stands of large birch trees.

1763-64 Joseph Smith for the Hudson Bay Company was sent to this area to trade for furs. He wintered along the Saskatchewan River to the north and assembled 73 canoes for the return trip with the furs to York Factory. The canoes were built with birch from the birch hills just south of the river.

1785 Fort des Isles was built west of Fenton by the North West Company

1790 James Curtis Bird believed to have been in this area collecting large sheets of birch for building and repairing canoes. He was a writer and later Chief Factor for the Hudson Bay Company. His grandson, Charles George Bird and his 5 sons later settled in the birch hills (in the early 1880's) just south of the present townsite.

1795 Independent traders built on Crossing Island at the bridge site north of Birch Hills.

1840 The canoe trade along the south branch lessens as the Red River Carts on Carlton Trail and other trails become the favored method of travel. There is no further demand for the large birch and therefore little activity in the birch hills until the settlers of the early 1880's came.

1882-84 William Harper settles on quarter adjacent southwest to present townsite. The settlement was called Harperville with a Post Office called Harperview with William Stevens as postmaster. The Grist mill was also built and the first Methodist service was held at Harperview.

end of 1899 Birch Hills population was all farmers (as per Henderson Northwest Territories Directory – 1900)

Anderson, Gordon	Cromartie, William G.	Shipman, Claud
Bird, C.G.	Gibish, James	Shipman, Frank
Bird, C.T.	Gray, John	Shipman, Samuel
Bird, Joe	Harper, Robert	Sutcliffe, John
Bird, William	Harper, William	Smith, Richard
Bostly, William	Hopper, Moses	Stevens,
Charlie, Thibetore	Isbister, James	William(postmaster)
Clarke, James	McAndrew, Donald	Thistlewight, Miles
Clift, James	Nelson, William	Thompson, John
Cromartie, John	Parks, James	Work, Peter
	Scott, John	Young, Robert

1902-06 Great influx of settlers, particularly in 1905

1904 H.O. Halverson opens the 1st grocery store and is the 1st family to live in the present townsite.

1905 Canadian National Rail (CNR) arrived with Carl Beedy as the 1st station agent.

The St. Savior's Anglican Church was also built.

1906 Premier Hotel, a grand building

H.A. Wilson , general store

Tommy Johnston, blacksmith shop

Fred Gerber, lumber yard

Scott Bros., flour mill

H. James, harness shop

Alex Graham was the 1st grain buyer and the 1st elevator was built

Dr. G.N. Giles, set up his drug store and practice of medicine

Mrs. Anne Simpson, teacher of the 1st public school

1907 *Village of Birch Hills Incorporated*

- 1908** Birch Hills Echo (newspaper published in Kinistino)
Creamery was built and was the largest in the province under government supervision. Won 1st price for butter in 1909 Regina Fall Fair.
Harperview School has 26 students, Miss Sterns as teacher. The name was changed to Birch Hills Public School in 1909.
- 1910** Bank of Ottawa opened.
- 1912** R.M. of Birch Hills formed. J. Sutcliffe, Reeve and J.R. Taylor, secretary/treasurer.
Farmers had the option of working to pay their taxes at 12 ½ ¢ per hour.
- 1912** Tarves Hall, an early centre of commerce and entertainment opens on Bellamy Avenue and 2nd Street.
- 1913** Construction of jail.
- 1914** Birch Hills Gazette was published in town with Harry Ash as publisher.
- 1915** Four room brick public school opened
- 1916** Bank of Commerce was opened.
- 1917** Agricultural Society formed with Andrew Jamieson as president
- 1918** First Fire Chief was Bill Blackadder.
- 1919** Earl Lumley was the 1st druggist and served for 35 years.
- early 1920's** August Gerber had a broadcasting station, 4C
- 1922** St. Mary's Anglican Church opened.
- 1924** High School Teaching commenced with J.H. Frazer as principal
- 1927** Closed-in skating rink was built.
Electric light bylaw was passed.

- 1930** Tarves Hall was sold to Jack Vinell who renovated to form Birch Hills's 2nd Hotel, The King George Hotel – open today.
- 1934** Puffed Wheat Plant in operation on 2nd Street
- 1947** John R. Taylor retires as secretary/treasurer of the R.M. of Birch Hills after 35 years. He also served Birch Hills as M.L.A. for 20 years.
- 1951** Birch Hills Memorial Union Hospital opened
- 1954** Skating rink was renovated.
Golf course was opened.
- 1958** T.C. Douglas makes official announcement of medicare at Birch Hills
- 1959** Natural Gas was installed.
- 1960** *Town of Birch Hills was incorporated as a town.* Phil Sampson was mayor.
- 1961** Water and Sewer was installed. Officially opened by Premier W.S. Lloyd.
Four sheet curling rink opened and the airfield plans were started.
- 1963** Composite High School was completed.
- 1966** Civic Centre was opened.
Artificial ice in the curling rink
- 1976** Bellamy Avenue was paved.
- 1980** New water reservoir.
- 1983** 30 bed Birchview Nursing Home was opened.
- 1983** New lagoon