

Auld Ardrossan

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Ardrossan today is a small hamlet with just over 500 residents, but 100 years ago it was a growing community of hardy settlers who had come from across the world in search of quality farmland and a better life.

The hamlet got its start in the 1880s when settlers started to come to the area from Ontario, Norway, Scotland and the mid-west United States in search of rich farmland, which the Ardrossan area could offer.

Many of the early settlers and forefathers of Ardrossan residents today came from Parry Sound, Ont.

In 1892, about 300 people left the Ontario settlement as they were having a difficult time on the land. They were persuaded to come to Alberta and many put down their roots in the Ardrossan area because of its rich farmland.

In 1901, the first Presbyterian church was built, and a year later a Methodist church was constructed one mile east. A cemetery was added beside the Methodist church. While the church no longer stands on that location, the cemetery is still there and is now flanked on either side by the westbound and eastbound lanes of Yellowhead Trail.

While many hamlets prospered from the expansion of railways into Alberta in the early 20th century, others, like Partridge Hill, suffered. It was once a blossoming town but when it was bypassed by the railway, it was hurt, giving way for hamlets like Ardrossan, which was fortunate enough to be on the Grand Trunk Railway.

In the beginning, the area was known as the Grasshopper Settlement because so many settlers had come from Nebraska. However, the name didn't stick and a local resident came up with the name Ardrossan, which was the name of a seaside resort town in Scotland. The Ardrossan name was first registered in 1908, but it was never incorporated.

Then the community got a huge boost in in 1909 when the railway was built, running right through the hamlet. The railroad attracted small businesses, residents and development to the area.

The two churches were moved from where Highway 16 currently runs, to the Ardrossan townsite closer to the newly-built railway. After the move, the Methodist church burned down in a brush fire, but was rebuilt in 1910, where it still stands today as the oldest church in the hamlet.

The railway, when it first opened, was mainly for passengers and it was infrequent. Over the years, that has changed greatly and it is now mainly for freight trains with the Via Rail train passing through as well.

In the early days, there were no schools in Ardrossan, so students went to Glen Garden School, at Wye Road and Range Road 221 or Baker School, which served the community for 50 years.

Although the homesteaders were hard workers, they needed recreation, too. There were no organized sports early on, but there was skating and tobogganing in the winter. In the summer, families would take day trips to Cooking Lake, which was much deeper than it is today and had sandy beaches.

The first post office came to Ardrossan in 1910, but it wasn't until 1927 that the first mail delivery was started.

Ardrossan was always very community minded and its first community hall was Orange Hall, built in 1913. By the 1940s, it was worse for wear and in 1947 the Memorial Hall was built.

In 1972, a grass fire ripped through the area, which prompted the idea of starting a fire brigade. The next year, they had a tanker truck stored in a shed next door to the Williams' store. It was manned by volunteers. Later in the 1970s, a true fire hall was built.

Ardrossan is now the largest of Strathcona County's eight rural hamlets, which also include Collingwood Cove, Antler Lake, South Cooking Lake, North Cooking Lake, Half Moon Lake, Josephburg and Hastings Lake.

Source: Sherwood Park News, <http://www.sherwoodparknews.com/2013/08/22/auld-ardrossan>