

WINNIPEG THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Indigenous settlement

– *Original occupation:*

The movement of humans into the region as the last glaciers receded led to the populating of the area and the formation of distinct cultural/linguistic groups. These groups developed extensive trading alliances, land-based societies, agriculture, government, and legal systems.

– *Archaeological sites:*

Important archaeological sites for Indigenous peoples are found along all of Winnipeg's rivers, creeks and streams and as these waterways provided food, fuel and transportation for the many inhabitants of the region. The Forks was an historic Indigenous meeting place for centuries.

– *Treaties:*

Lord Selkirk or Peguis Treaty (1817) was signed between Lord Selkirk and the Native Bands living around what would become Winnipeg. It covered territory along the Red River from Lake Winnipeg to the 48th line of latitude (south of today's U.S.A. border) and the Assiniboine River from the confluence of the Red to present-day Portage la Prairie. The treaty created farming reserves for the exclusive use of Selkirk's European settlers in two-mile strips along both sides of the rivers. Chief Peguis described the agreement as a lease, not a sale of land.

The signing of the "Numbered Treaties" across all of Western Canada was understood by the signatories to be a legal agreement between two sovereign nations. Treaty No. 1 was signed on August 3, 1871 at Lower Fort Garry. The Government of Canada saw it as a framework for the transfer of land rights from the Indigenous occupants to the Government of Canada and thus paving the way for European settlement. The seven Anishinaabe (Ojibway) and Ininiwak (Cree) First Nations: the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Sagkeeng First Nation, Long Plain First Nation, Peguis First Nation, Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation, Sandy Bay First Nation, and Swan Lake First Nation, saw it as a way to share the land "Mother Earth" and to ensure that they and their children would be a part of the future growth of the region through education, agriculture and ongoing support. Unfortunately, many of the promises of the treaties were never fulfilled by the government.

– *Métis:*

The Red River Métis are a distinct and unique culture that developed and flourished in we now call Winnipeg. A combination of First Nations and European cultures, the Métis people developed their own identity, social and kinship relationships, language (*Michif*), art, music, and government. Through negotiations with the Federal Government, the Métis, led by Louis Riel and others, were instrumental in gaining more favourable terms for the creation of Canada's fifth Province, Manitoba, in 1870.

– *Rooster Town (Pakan Town):*

A tight-knit Métis community that developed in the late 1800s on land south of the City of Winnipeg near what is today's Grant Avenue. It was referred to as Rooster Town by outsiders and Pakan Town by its inhabitants. When developmental pressures increased in the late 1950s, the people were displaced and the neighbourhood bulldozed.

Location- The Gateway City

– *Fur trade:*

The availability of natural resources prompted European-based companies to build commercial relationships with the established Indigenous culture, creating a strong economic bond throughout much of the continent. Winnipeg became the natural centre of the fur trade, with rival companies constructing forts throughout the area beginning in 1738. Winnipeg ultimately became the headquarters for the main trading company, the Hudson's Bay Company.

– *Pioneer families:*

Families like McDermot, Bannatyne and Ross translated early commercial success into vast fortunes and economic and political influence.

– *Warehousing – The Freight Rate Deal:*

Recognizing the importance of exploiting their continental location, Winnipeg's political and business leaders negotiated a favourable deal with the Canadian Pacific Railway that guaranteed the growth and success of the warehouse sector.

– *Immigration:*

From fur traders from the British Isles in the 18th century to the mass migration of people from Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century, Winnipeg's immigration population was a prime agent of change, not only in its North End but throughout the City.

– *Agriculture:*

On October 12, 1876, the first shipment of wheat was sent from the Province of Manitoba to Toronto. It was the beginning of the agricultural economy that would fuel Winnipeg's expansion. The city became the regional headquarters of the economy, Winnipeg Grain and Produce Exchange established in 1887, was the only agricultural commodities exchange and futures market in Canada, and was second only in size to the Chicago market by the 20th century operating out of its headquarters at 167 Lombard Avenue, at one time the largest office building in the British Empire when it was completed in 1908.

– *Banks:*

The financial sector, with capital from Eastern Canada, the United States and especially England, bankrolled the expansion of the West and the establishment of the agriculture economy.

– *Headquarters/Regional Centre:*

As Western Canada’s premier city from the 1880s to World War I, Winnipeg was home to hundreds of head and regional offices. Many Eastern Canadian, American and International companies chose the city as its western headquarters.

– *Hotels:*

The transient nature of the early population, the lack of alternative housing and the rapid growth of extensive business connections with Eastern Canada and the United States supported the development of dozens of small, medium and large hotels throughout the city. The hotels’ restaurant and bar were well supported by short-term and long-term guests.

– *The Rivers:*

One of the realities of the location of Winnipeg is its susceptibility to flooding. In 1950, the spring flooding caused millions of dollars in damages, took a life and necessitated the evacuation of parts of the City. Permanent river dykes, raised streets and the Winnipeg Floodway (opened in 1968) have reduced the mitigated the worst effects of regional flooding in the city.

Transportation Hub

– *Rivers:*

The confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers – The Forks – has been an important meeting place for centuries and the rivers and creeks have been important communication lines and sources of food and fuel. Ferries connected settlements on both sides of the river and later, riverboats transported goods and people from the south until they were replaced by railroads.

– *Main Street and Portage Avenue*

What began as simple prairie paths and Red River cart trails connecting trading posts grew into the modern streets and avenues pushing outward from the downtown, connecting the developed areas that had evolved from Rural Municipalities to towns and cities that would ultimately become part of Greater Winnipeg.

– *Transit*

Public Transit in Winnipeg was founded by Albert William Austin (1857-1934) and began with a horse-drawn streetcar on October 20, 1882; fares were \$0.10 cash or 15 tickets for \$1.00. In the winter fares dropped to \$0.05 cash per ride. Electric streetcars were introduced a decade later.

– *The Railroads*

The first railway service to the Winnipeg area from St. Paul, Minnesota began operation in 1878, its terminus across the River in St. Boniface. The Canadian Pacific Railway chose Winnipeg as its regional headquarters and the first transcontinental train arrived in the city on July 1, 1886. Winnipeg quickly grew to take its place as the undisputed hub of railway transportation in Canada by the early 20th century.

Regional, international and transcontinental lines had terminal facilities in Winnipeg, which included many kilometres of downtown spur lines to facilitate the movement of boxcars to and from the warehouses.

– *Warehousing & freighting*

The Exchange District National Historic Site features blocks of intact warehouse buildings mostly dating from the 1880-1920 period when the city's warehouse and freighting functions were at their height. The District housed companies from across the continent distributing every description of manufactured goods from around the world.

– *Power supply and generation*

The supplying of electric power to Winnipeg customers began in the 1870s and expanded because of the heightened use of electric street cars in the 1880s. The production of electrical power began in 1906 at Pinawa (private company), Pointe du Bois in 1911 (Winnipeg Hydro), and Slave Falls in 1931 (Winnipeg Hydro). The expansion of services meant an increase in infrastructure throughout the city, even after electric streetcars ceased to exist (1955). Winnipeg Hydro was sold to Manitoba Hydro in 2002.

– *Aviation*

The bush pilots of the 1920s gave way to commercial airlines of the 1930s, using an airfield in the Rural Municipality of St. James named Stevenson Field. Canada's first national airline, Trans-Canada Air Lines, was headquartered in Winnipeg when it was founded in 1936. World War II greatly increased the use of the airfield and this facility has continued to modernize and expand, keeping pace with the airline industry. In 2011, the Canada's newest and greenest airport, the James Richardson International Airport opened to travellers.

4. Building the Modern City

– *Indigenous settlement*

Seasonal settlement allowed the Indigenous population greater yearly flexibility depending on the availability of fuel and food.

– *Surveying the River Lots*

The long, narrow river lots that formed the basis of early agrarian settlement patterns for Métis and European families along the Red and Assiniboine rivers translated into today's unusual street patterns in downtown Winnipeg and beyond.

– *Logs and stones*

Using the skills brought from the Old Country, log and stone buildings provided residential, commercial and spiritual space for the newly arriving European population.

– *Boom town – 1880s*

The coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the early 1880s brought not only people but construction material which led to a greater variety and number of

structures. This real estate boom also permanently established districts in the downtown – warehouse, commercial, political and residential.

– *Parks*

Winnipeg’s Public Parks Board was established in 1893 to oversee the development of public green spaces throughout the city. What has developed is a series of renowned parks with a variety of resources supporting many activities.

– *Chicago of the North – 1900-1915*

Very few cities on earth grew at a faster pace than Winnipeg did in the 1900 to 1915 period. The city’s desire to replicate the growth of the mid-western giant to the south produced Winnipeg’s nickname – Chicago of the North. This rapid and wide-spread expansion had far-reaching and not always positive impacts on Winnipeg’s society but much of modern Winnipeg is built on the foundation laid during this time.

– *Neighbourhoods*

Winnipeg population increased and created new residential developments around the City’s core, each with their own unique geography, socio-economic makeup and each with building stock reflective of the popular architectural styles of the times. The list of neighbourhoods includes:

- Hudson’s Bay Reserve (Broadway)
- Point Douglas
- Fort Rouge (including Osborne Village, Roslyn Road and Corydon area)
- Armstrong’s Point
- Crescentwood
- Elmwood
- Wolseley
- West End
- Kildonan
- North End
- Tuxedo

– *Local materials*

Architects and contractors profited from the growth and development of local building materials, especially Manitoba-made brick and quarried limestone from Tyndall and Garson, Manitoba.

– *Mid-Century buildings & City Planning – 1950-1980*

A number of factors, local, regional, national and international, combined to give Winnipeg’s development added impetus after World War II. This translated into some of the most original and innovative responses- from architecturally significant buildings to an adoption of tenets of modern city planning.

– *Exchange District National Historic Site*

In 1997, Winnipeg’s Exchange District was designated a National Historic Site because the clearly discernable boundaries held a range of “architecturally significant built resources” illustrating the city’s “key role as a centre of the grain and wholesale trade, finance and manufacturing in the historically important period in western

development – between 1880 and 1913, the period during which Winnipeg grew to become the gateway to Canada’s West and the region’s metropolis.”

5. Municipal Government to Unicity (From Many to One)

– Hudson’s Bay Company

The Hudson’s Bay Company, already asserting economic control of the region, had assumed administrative control by the early 19th century. This political control lasted until shortly after the creation of the Dominion of Canada.

– Provincial status

The Dominion of Canada’s assumption of control of Western Canada was met with anger and opposition, leading to armed revolt and the negotiation of more favourable terms for the citizens of the new Province of Manitoba, the majority of whom were Indigenous and Métis.

– Local governments & municipalities

Each government in the municipalities that surrounded the City of Winnipeg felt an increased demand for services within their own boundaries. Police and fire departments, the high-pressure water system, sewers, roads and bridges, waste removal, power and telecommunications were some of these provided services.

– The City of Winnipeg

On November 8, 1873, the City of Winnipeg incorporated with a mayor, Francis Evans Cornish (1831-1878) and three aldermen for each of the four wards. The City limits on the north was Burrows Avenue west of Main Street, and Aberdeen Avenue east of Main Street; on the south by Assiniboine River; on east by the Red River; and on the west by Maryland Street, Notre Dame Avenue and McPhillips Street. On January 19, 1874 at noon, the first meeting of City of Winnipeg's Council was held in a new building at north-west corner of Portage Avenue and Main Street. It would be two years before the first City Hall was officially opened on Main Street.

– Winnipeg Aqueduct

In 1914, the City of Winnipeg began the development of the Shoal Lake Aqueduct to bring fresh water to the City from 135 kilometers east. In order to gain access to the water, Shoal Lake 40 First Nation was displaced from its historic village site and moved onto a roughly 25-square-kilometre peninsula jutting into Shoal Lake, cut off from the mainland. This had serious negative and long-term affects on the community including a boil water advisory that lasted from 1997 to 2021 and the lack of permanent year-round connection to the mainland until the completion of “Freedom Road” in 2019.

– Unicity Experiment

By the late 1950s, the City of Winnipeg was surrounded by 11 distinct districts: the Rural Municipalities of Charleswood, North Kildonan, Old Kildonan and Fort Garry, the cities of St. James-Assiniboine, St. Boniface, St. Vital, West Kildonan, East Kildonan and Transcona and the Town of Tuxedo. In an effort to foster better

planning and area-wide development and growth, the provincial government created the Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg or “Metro” in 1960 to share common services – the second such civic government organization in Canada. It was the foundation of the 1971 City of Winnipeg Act – Unicity – which incorporated all 13 entities as the new City of Winnipeg. The inaugural meeting of the new council occurred on January 4, 1972.

– *Our many Main Streets*

The surrounding communities developed their own unique commercial centre along a major thoroughfare. Buildings along Provencher Boulevard, Henderson Highway, Portage Avenue, Regent Avenue, Main Street, St. Mary’s Road and others are reminders of this localized development of the early 20th century.

6. Art and Society

– *Rise of the Performing Arts*

Before World War I Winnipeggers could see the world’s most famous performers at the Walker Theatre or Pantages or see day-long Vaudeville performances at a number of smaller venues. Winnipeg’s extensive history of live performing venues has grown to include iconic facilities like the Civic Auditorium, Rainbow Stage and Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre and produced internationally noted performers. The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and Royal Winnipeg Ballet are also important aspects of this history.

– *Movies*

Like the live stage, movie theatres enjoyed wide-spread popularity whether it was at the small moving picture houses along Main Street or the grand and gaudy movie palaces downtown.

– *Museums & art galleries*

There has always been strong support for fine arts in the city and art galleries in their various forms are now housed in one of the city’s most iconic buildings on Memorial Boulevard. Museums, artefact collections and document archives (both private and public), have long been an important part of the fabric of Winnipeg’s society.

– *Religious institutions*

The spread of organized religion in Western Canada most often began in Winnipeg. With its diverse population, Winnipeg has been home to a wide array of Christian and non-Christian congregations and their religious structures.

– *Growth of Social Conscience and the Poor*

The darker side of Winnipeg’s heightened economic growth and increased population of the early 20th century was the rise in poor, especially among the immigrant inhabitants. City Council and organizations like the Kindergarten Settlement Association, All People’s Mission, Associated Charities and others, and leaders like J.S. Woodsworth and Margaret Scott worked with families to better their lives through education and social services.

– *Labour and unrest:*

The sometimes-uneasy relationship between labour and business saw expression in various forms throughout Winnipeg’s history, the most dramatic being the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, lasting from May 15 to June 26 and strengthening unions and collective bargaining in Canada.

– *Sports and Recreation*

Amateur and professional sports have always been an important part of Winnipeg’s culture, and facilities have grown and development to meet the demands for modern venues. Community Clubs, scattered throughout Winnipeg and its surrounding municipalities, offered important centres for strengthening neighbourhood bonds.

– *Hospitals*

Winnipeg General Hospital opened in 1872 to deal with the growing typhoid epidemic caused by the use of polluted river water by most Winnipeggers. This collection of small, unremarkable buildings grew into today’s Health Sciences Centre. It and other health facilities throughout the city have grown into our modern health care system.

– *Media*

Winnipeg was long considered a leader in many aspects of media – newspaper row on McDermot Avenue became a mecca for the printed word. Local publishers, with the help of printers and typesetters and photography studios, produced publications available across the country. The rise of radio and television also had local implications.

– *Libraries*

The Red River Library was created from the private collections of Selkirk Settlers, and Lord Selkirk himself, in 1848. This was the beginnings of the public library system that has heavily invested in the education of Winnipeggers.

– *Tourism*

A growing part of the local economy has seen a number of initiatives meant to highlight Winnipeg’s unique and attractive features to global visitors.

– *Education – private, public and post-secondary*

Whether the early, church-based system or the public system transplanted from Ontario, Winnipeg has possessed a highly regarded education system, including some of the finest school buildings of their time, including colleges and universities.

One of the darker sides of the education history of the city was the operation of the Assiniboia Indian Residential School, 621 Academy Road from 1958 to 1973. Operated by the Grey Nuns and Oblate Fathers with federal funding, it boarded and educated high school students from across Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Northwest Ontario.

– *Environmentalism*

The growing awareness of the need for environmental stewardship has heightened citizens’ appreciation of environmental issues and shaped the decision-making and planning processes for the city.

– *Cemeteries*

As Western Canada’s premier city of the 19th century, Winnipeg’s was home to many of its most outstanding and influential citizens. The headstones of the church cemeteries reflect this history. Civically, the City opened Brookside Cemetery west of the city in 1878. Today it is the largest cemetery in Western Canada, containing the graves of more than 200,000 people and a Field of Honour with more than 10,000 Veterans, Service Members and War Heroes interred.