MILESTONES

Wawanesa’s Significant Historical Themes and Events
A Project of the Wawanesa Heritage Group

The Wawanesa Heritage Group would like to acknowledge the support of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism in the development of this initiative, through a grant from the Heritage Grants Program and through ongoing guidance and support of the Historic Resources Branch.

On the cover:

A special day in Wawanesa’s history, the 1921 dedication of the War Cenotaph, which also featured the large tent (at the left) set up the same day for Wawanesa Chautauqua, a popular public event in the late 19th and early 20th centuries where speakers and entertainers gathered to engage a whole community.
THE TOWN OF WAWANESA has a fascinating and important history. Beginning in the early 1880s, when the first settlers began trickling in, leading to our incorporation as a village in 1909, and up to the present, we have been an industrious, productive and vibrant community.

This booklet will help anyone, Wawanesa-ites and visitors alike, to appreciate the basic contours of our past. Sections on various themes, noting key events, dates and personalities, will enrich an exploration of our past, and bring to life our proud heritage – the rich and busy life that has defined us for more than a century.

The following essential historical themes contain this story:

- Community Development
- Government Development
- Public Services
- Transportation
- Commercial Development
- Wawanesa Mutual Insurance Company
- Manufacturing and Industry
- Spiritual Life
- Education
- Health Care
- Culture and Recreation

We trust that this booklet will inform and inspire, suggesting the rich pageant that has been our community’s story. We leave readers with this thought, which has inspired us as we developed this project:

Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward.

- Søren Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher
Wawanesa Milestones

**Community Context**

The archival photograph of Wawanesa from the turn of the 20th century suggests the historic nature of our town.

The map of community will help situate the various buildings and sites that are noted in the text.
View of Wawanesa from the southeast, showing the "Old Red" traffic bridge, flour mill and elevators.
Wawanesa Milestones

Community Development

The town of Wawanesa has its origins as far back as 1797, when the famous explorer David Thompson camped here on his way to something. At that time the site was called Sipiwske, an Aboriginal word meaning “light through the trees.” As western Manitoba was gradually opened for settlement, this area had its first settlers in 1880, noted by Dominion land surveyors at the time, and mostly from Ontario and Britain. By 1882 farming was well established in the region, and a small commercial centre developed, called Souris City, about three miles west of the Sipiwske site – at 16-7-7W. The little townsite had a grist mill, hotel, two stores, several houses and a post office. Any community in western Manitoba was eager to get access to a rail line, and in 1888 it was announced that the Canadian Northern Railway would build a line through the region. Unfortunately the site at Souris City was deemed too difficult for a crossing and so the site at Sipiwske was chosen by the railway. Souris City was quickly abandoned for the new site, which eventually was called Wawanesa. The origin of the community name is slightly clouded, but for many it was thought to be an Aboriginal word meaning whip-poor-will (for the many birds of that type in the area then). By 1890 the CNo line was completed in Wawanesa, and a station was built that same year. The quick construction of two grain elevators along the line – Martin and Mitchell and Manitoba Elevator Company – suggested a bright future for this new community.
Early Wawanesa, taken from the west bank.