

The County of Flagstaff is mainly a mixed farming area with fertile soil and well adapted to the growing of all grain crops. Stock raising is important to the economy of the region, as most farmers raise or feed beef cattle. There are also producing gas wells, an important oil field, and huge supplies of excellent coal along the Battle River.

The enlarged municipality was made up of the small districts of Flagstaff, Asquith, Wheatland, Sterling, and Kinsella, although the latter district was, almost half, absorbed by the County of Beaver.

Kinsella, with its office in the hamlet of the same name, was a Local Improvement District until the end of 1916. The Councillors, at dissolution, being Messrs. Williams, Lennox, Lisson, Clark, Ward, and Newbound.

Much of the district was grazing land and the early homesteaders depended greatly on cattle, as there was open range on CPR, school, and Hudson's Bay land. But during the early 'twenties there was trouble on the range. Several hundred cattle owned by non-residents were driven in, to the detriment of local farmers. These then organized groups of riders to haze the cattle out at night. The stock, driven out at night and back by day, found but little time to feed, so the invaders finally gave up in disgust and took their cattle out of the area.

Jarrow, a hamlet six miles east of Kinsella, was, in the 'twenties, a busy thriving community centre. It had all the essential services: stores, garage, bank, hotel, lumber yard, livery barn, church, and school. But with the construction of the hard-top highway, business drifted away to larger centres. Now nothing remains but the grass-grown scars of foundations where buildings once stood. It cannot even be called a ghost town; for the ghosts, too, have gone away.

It may be interesting to note that of the councillors of Kinsella M.D. who served during 1920, 1921 and 1922, four of them (Carter, Erickson, Christensen, and Art Falla) are still in the district, and active.

The Municipal District of Wheatland No.395 was formed in 1912. Council meetings were held in Grainland School, in what is now the Galahad area, from the formation of the district through 1915. By that time the Village of Galahad had come into being so a Municipal office was established there.

At first there were five divisions in the Municipality, the initial councillors being Messrs. Banks, Stormat, Misner, Allen, and Lund, with the first named being chosen as Reeve. Mr. Hugh Taylor was the first Secretary-Treasurer. In October of 1913, at a meeting of Council, the District was made into six divisions. Thus the election of a sixth councillor became necessary.

At the third meeting of the Council the secretary was instructed to order the following road machinery: 4 wheel scrapers and 14 slips. In 1914 a further order of ten wheelers was authorized, as well as the purchase of a Steel-beamed plow. Compare the cost of such equipment with that of the power machinery we use today! But the buying then was done on a Municipal tax of four and one-half mills. Working on the road at that time, a man was paid \$2.50 per day and a man with a team, \$4.50, for a ten hour day.

It is noted in the minutes of July 29, 1918 that, because of the disastrous frost in July of that year, "the previously authorized contract for road grading be cancelled; and that all road work not considered vital be discontinued for the season."

The Rural Municipal District of Flagstaff No. 394

The M.D. of Flagstaff came into being in December of 1912, and the first meeting of Council was held on January 6, 1913 in the Village of Loughheed. As in Wheatland, there were at first just five divisions in the District, the first Council being made up of Messrs. Frank Thompson, E. McShane, B. M. Rombough, C.J.W. Shepperson and Chas. Arkinstall. Later, of course, the divisions were increased to six.

There was a great deal of open range, especially in the southeast part of the district, and one summer about fifteen hundred head of stock were driven in from the Sounding Lake country. They practically denuded the grassland, causing much annoyance and hardship to local residents who needed the range for their own stock. It thus became necessary for the Council to enact strict by-laws and to establish pounds to restrain domestic animals from running at large.

At the first meeting of Council, in 1914, there were three applications for the position of secretary and ten ballots had to be taken before a choice was made. Quite some competition for a thousand-dollar-a-year job.

Robt. C. Johnson, who was first elected to Council in 1922, made without doubt, the greatest impact on public and municipal life in the community. He served for more than twenty years, most of them as Reeve. He was one of the main movers of the Hospital and Medical scheme, and was also one of the first to grasp the advantages of an elevated and gravelled road system.

The Rural Municipality of Asquith

The first election of Council was held in 1914, with the initial meeting taking place in January, 1915, in the Village of Loughheed.

The Councillors were W. Gray, Wm. Hallum, E. Losness, H. J. Harding, J. A. MacDonald and C. F. Quinlan, with A. B. Grieve as Secretary. The first items of business with which the Council had to deal were: By-laws to restrain domestic animals from running at large, establishing pounds, appointing pound-keepers, and purchasing road-building equipment. All of these matters were naturally of common concern to each Council of a new district.

In 1919 Council, although having a very efficient secretary, received applications for that position from two returned men. The secretary offered to resign to afford an opening for a veteran. Although loath to accept the resignation, Council did so, and the returned soldier was hired as secretary.

Asquith, in common with the other Municipal Districts, advanced money to farmers for the purchase of seed grain. This service, although quite necessary, was an added burden for the Council as collections, in case of crop failure, were at times not easy to make.

There were many C.P.R. settlers in the Asquith area. Many were well known, some for their utter lack of knowledge of farming, others for their eccentricities.

There was this lady, known for liking an occasional "nip". Coming home from the village with pony and buggy and with a bottle of 'Three Star' on the seat beside her, she chanced to meet the Councillor, driving his new Ford. Fearing that her steed would take fright at the unusual sight of an automobile, she jumped from the buggy; and, as the Councillor drove carefully by, she stood holding the pony by the bridle with one hand while the other as firmly clutched her precious bottle!

The M.D. of Sterling

The M.D. of Sterling No. 425 was established by Ministerial Order on December 9, 1912. Members of the Council in 1913 were: E. H. Malcolm, Reeve, H. G. Vickery, J. R. Pointer, J. T. Rattray, N. P. McEachern, with J. W. Rattray as secretary-treasurer.

The M.D. of Sterling formed the north-west part of present-day Flagstaff. Mr. John Gair, an early Councillor, served for more than twenty years as Reeve. Business followed much the same routine as that of other districts; being concerned with animals running at large, road building and maintaining, levying taxes, and making deals with doctors.

As there were two villages within the district and some ratepayers adhering to each, some Council meetings and all annual meetings were alternated between the two. Bank business, too, was evenly divided between the two villages. Each village had its newspaper, so there were keen rivalry and competitive bidding for Municipal business.

Wavy Lake, just north of Strome, was, in early years, a fairly large expanse of water. City nimrods built several cottages near it as great numbers of ducks and geese congregated there in fall.

The depression of the 'thirties hit the district hard. But Council met the situation well. The tax levy was drastically cut, road construction was curtailed, and the secretary took a voluntary ten per cent reduction in salary. The Federal Government distributed some apples, cheese, fish, and beans to the ratepayers; but it was token relief only, and at best no better than third grade stuff. The road back to prosperity and competence was not easy, but citizens and district have made the come-back and the depression is now but an evil memory.

By order of the Minister of Municipal Affairs issued in December of 1943, the enlarged Municipal District of Killam was formed and later renamed Flagstaff, as petitioned by the Council. The first meeting was held in the Co-op Hall in Killam, on March 14, 1944; the councillors being Robt. C. Johnson, Chas. P. Hayes, Scott McLennan, Allan Bradley, Nels Toppe, Fay Pendleton and Harry Pottage. Mr. Hayes was elected as Reeve; R. C. Johnson, Deputy Reeve; and Cecil Brown became the first secretary.

Sedgewick, being most centrally located, was chosen as the site of the Municipal office. Temporary quarters were acquired in the Club Room of the Pioneer Hotel. The Municipal office became a reality in 1946; and, when a District Agriculturist was appointed, his office was added in 1949.

Municipal business now became big business. As more and more services were demanded by rural people, more money was needed so the tax load grew accordingly. As rural school-houses were closed and pupils transported by bus to towns and villages for schooling, high graded, gravelled, all-weather roads became a must. These, then, had to be regularly maintained and kept clear of snow in winter; both of which were expensive operations. With the high grading and gravelling of roads, larger and ever larger and consequently more expensive machines became necessary. A far cry from the slip and team of horses of the homestead era!

Flagstaff Municipality was rather unique in its Hospital and Medical scheme. Each small district had done something in the way of providing public care and when the enlarged unit came into being, Council tried, profiting by past experience, to set up a plan embracing the best features of each. From the ratepayer's point of view, the plan evolved was eminently satisfactory. Had it been allowed to function as intended, it could well have been a pilot project that merited copying throughout the Province. But there was trouble in retaining doctors under contract and in 1952, when two doctors cancelled their contracts Council came close to scrapping the whole scheme as unworkable. Fortunately, though, it was salvaged as two doctors remained amenable and different arrangements were made with the recalcitrant practitioners, so that the plan will carry on until the end of 1967, when the Alberta Health Plan takes over.

In 1948 a District Agriculturist, Mr. Larry Williams, was appointed. He was a returned soldier, a veteran of the Dieppe raid. He was later transferred to Camrose.

In 1950 the west - to - east pipeline was laid through the Municipality; and, in the same year the Municipal workshop and machine shed was built.

In 1952 a Service Board, under the direction of a Field man, was set up. As is customary, such matters as weed and pest control and soil conservation are within its jurisdiction. The Bangs vaccination program and seed cleaning plants are also administered by the service board. The Strome Seed Cleaning Plant, the first of four to be built in Flagstaff M.D., was opened in November of 1953. As a matter of record, this is the only local area having four plants.

Tens of thousands of trees have been planted by the Flagstaff tree-planting machine, providing shelter belts and wind breaks for farmsteads.

Through the efforts of interested farmers and in co-operation with the Service Board, Flagstaff, (1954), became a brucellosis restricted area.

Realizing that there was a need for a home for the aged and infirm of the area, the Council of Flagstaff energetically proceeded to provide one. In co-operation with contiguous villages, a plan was drawn up and consummated. A disused, though fairly new, school dormitory in Sedgewick was bought from the Killam School Division. Costing a token sum only, it was thoroughly renovated and re-finished. Given the name Flagstaff Lodge, it could, when completed, accommodate thirty-two guests. Now filled to capacity, the best care and attention is provided for those who dwell therein. They, as the saying hath it, "never had it so good." When first envisioned and during its construction, the Lodge was intended to be a local project, with Flagstaff assuming 75% of its cost. But at completion the Government of Alberta, as part of its plan for the care of the aged and infirm, took it over and paid the total cost. It is now administered by a Foundation, comprised of local citizens. In addition to the services provided by Flagstaff Lodge, there is now an Auxiliary wing, a joint project of Flagstaff and County of Beaver, added to Killam Hospital. Here are accommodated the patient who, although not bed cases, yet need nursing care.

Two designs which greatly boost the economy of the district are the Battle River Power Plant and the Home Oil Company promotion. The former is a steam-generated, coal-fired electric power plant, located on the Battle River near Forestburg. At peak capacity the plant will require one-quarter million tons of coal annually — coal which is cheaply produced by strip-mining. A number of modern dwellings have been erected in Forestburg for the accommodation of plant employees.

At Hardisty, in the eastern part of the Municipality, Home Oil has erected a one-hundred eighty foot high "butane splitter", part of a 3.5 million dollar manufacturing complex. At a depth of 4500 feet a two hundred eighty foot deep salt bed is encountered. In this, huge caverns are washed out for the storing of butane and propane. The water for washing the salt is drawn from the near-by Battle River; and the resultant brine disposed of, on vacuum, in the porous D3 zone Leduc at about the 3,200 foot level. This obviates the necessity of surface disposal, which is area consuming and quite messy.

In 1964 a municipal constable was engaged. It appears that he is chiefly concerned with traffic and liquor violations. It is apparent that his presence is an effective deterrent to evil-doers, on both counts.

Two villages have, during the past years, achieved town status. These are Sedgewick and Killam. They are now served with natural gas, through a system locally owned and from wells located about midway between the two towns.

The town of Hardisty is now also supplied with natural gas, through a

pipeline from the Kinsella field. One may now say that these places are fully modernized.

The latter town suffered a severe setback through loss of C.P.R. payroll when the round-house and railway shop shut down, on the locomotives being converted to oil-burning deisels. But the recent Home Oil Project has now provided a stimulus, a much needed "shot in the arm."

Despite the fact that it seems a normal trend for business to flow towards larger centres, the three towns named are thriving and bid fair to survive the competition of city chain-stores.

Hardisty has an annual two-day stampede; and Sedgewick a large Recreational Centre with bowling lanes, artificial ice for curling, and a skating and hockey rink. Killam also has facilities for hockey and curling.

Highway No. 36, the north - south artery running midway through the municipality, is now being re-built. When completed, it will be a great asset to the district and will relieve the traffic load on Highway 2.

As long ago as 1952 the council of Flagstaff considered changing to the County system of local government. In 1967 application for county status was made, and Flagstaff became a county as of January 1, 1968.

Chas. P. Hayes

First elected as councillor in Sterling in 1927, Charles P. Hayes of Strome, served for thirty-three consecutive years, during twenty-seven of which he was Reeve. On formation of the enlarged municipal district he guided its affairs with wisdom and prudence. He remained in office as Reeve until his retirement from Council in 1960. He was for seven years Vice-President and for nine years President of the Alberta Association of M.D.'s and Counties; member of the Royal Commission on Metropolitan Development of Edmonton and Calgary; Alberta representative to the Federation of Agriculture; and presently heads the Alberta Municipal Finance Corporation, as well as being a director of the Alberta Agricultural Centennial Commission. In September of 1967, in recognition of the part he has played in public affairs, locally and provincially, he was named to the Agricultural Hall of Fame. He was received by Premier Manning and presented with an inscribed scroll by Lieut. Governor Grant McEwan. Immediately following, the Premier unveiled a plaque in the Hall of Fame room where Mr. Hayes' picture adorned the wall.

STORY OF
RURAL MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT
IN ALBERTA

1909 to 1969

