

Yorkton Stories

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What's in a (street) name?

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Dick DeRyk

What's in a name, a street name specifically? Sometimes more than we know or assume, sometimes obvious, sometimes just fantasy, a product of imagination, a name with no obvious connection to anything Yorkton, sometimes a complete mystery. And sometimes a connection to a little known but fascinating bit of local history.

There is a one-blocked piece of street between Livingston Street and Argyle Street, one block that is basically a continuation of Beck Avenue, which runs north and south from Foster Street, south of the railway tracks, to Livingstone Street, where the old flour mill stands. The street sign on the corner of that street and Argyle says Beck Avenue. But that's not the name of that block.

For years until the new downtown street signs were put up, very attractive signs I might add, the plain old green and white sign said Second Street. The official city maps and plans and Google Maps all say Second Street. It has been Second Street for more than a century until somebody put up a new sign with the wrong name. In the grand scheme of things, I'll admit, it's not important. There are no buildings on that one block piece of street. Nobody's address was affected by changing the name. But it has done away with the most interesting piece of Yorkton history, and that's a shame.

History and folklore related to where we live and work and play is important. It gives us and our community a sense of who we are and where we came from. And 2nd Street has a history. Back in the early part of the 20th century, there was a very successful businessman in Yorkton named Levi Beck. He owned a number of businesses and a huge farm that stretched from present-day King Street to York Lake. Four square miles of land so big that even he didn't know what all he owned. The story goes that someone tried to sell him a piece of his own land and he almost fell for the scam.

There was also a hotel owner, Harry Bronfman, who owned and operated the Balmoral Hotel, the Yorkton landmark for decades until it burned down some 30 years ago. Harry was of the famous Bronfmans, later of Seagram distillery fame. Harry was also in the distillery business when he was here during the prohibition years, from 1915 to 1924 in Saskatchewan. Alcohol was permitted in Saskatchewan for medicinal purposes. Doctors in Saskatoon and Regina wrote more than 200 prescriptions daily, it is said. Well, someone had to make that alcohol. And Harry built an addition to the Balmoral Hotel and established the Yorkton Pure Drug Company. The pure drug, of course, was alcohol, some of which, it is said, found its way across the border into the United States. Or so the story goes. More about that another time when we look at the history of the Balmoral Hotel.

But back to the street and the street sign. Harry apparently was not all that well liked, ran against Levi for mayor of Yorkton in 1910. It was a two-way race, and Harry lost. But as consolation, Levi promised him that a street would be named after him. And so the 2nd Street. In Yorkton, all north and south arteries are avenues. Streets run east and west. The name is an anomaly, but it has a history and it deserves a proper street sign.

Another street with, shall we say, interesting history is no longer on the map. Somewhere along the way, it became part of commercial properties on the south side of Broadway at the east end of the city. There was back in the 1980s, a street between what is now Value Tire and Fedorowich Construction. The name was Suds Avenue. Land surveyor Roy Brown told Stu McFadden, then the city's building department manager, that the name was originally given to the road by a surveyor years earlier when it was outside the city limits, because that's where the young crowd would go for bush parties where the consumption of beer was somewhat prevalent. So, Suds Avenue. In that same area, there is another street on city maps, and part of it shows up on Google Maps that also doesn't exist anymore. A street named Standard Street ran along the south boundaries of those commercial properties on East Broadway, but no sign of it anymore. Definitely not a standard street.

The story about Suds Avenue can be found in the book *Windows On Our History: The History of Yorkton from Pre-Colonization to 2005*, the province's centennial year. Information in the book was gathered by the city's municipal heritage subcommittee and written by Therese Lefebvre Prince -- Terri Prince -- who was the city's heritage researcher. The book is still available at City Hall and at Tourism Yorkton. It contains seven pages of information about street names, or at least those names that were in place at the time, now almost 19 years ago. And it was a valuable resource for our look at Yorkton street names.

Yorkton has, by our count, about 240 street names. If you count the ones that have both north and south added to the avenue name, or east and west added to the street name. Count those as only one name, and you're still just under 220. That's a lot of names. And somebody had to come up with them and still has to when new areas of the city are developed.

Michael Eger is the director of planning, building, and development for the city. And we talked to him about that process. How does the city decide, or who decides, how streets are named? I'm guessing that you have a policy because the city has policies about just about everything. What is the process for when a subdivision or a section of the city is built for coming up with the street names?

Michael Eger

I guess the natural process for it is always that council ultimately decides on and they approve the street names that are implemented or the neighborhood names, subdivision names, et cetera. The origins of those names definitely depend on the situation. We don't have a lot of private land developers in Yorkton, but they do come about occasionally. And when that's the case, we rely on them to suggest names. And then we have, like as you mentioned, we do have a policy that we try to apply some consistency because, of course, street names, their primary purpose is for navigation. So we are trying to ensure that names don't have duplication, that they aren't confusing with other names that might exist that could lead to errors in navigation. So especially

as emergency services are concerned, that's the major priority there. And then we go on to sort of, I guess, try to take advantage of maybe our local geography or sort of our notorieties and their history. So we do try to emphasize that. Private developers, not so much in the history and the heritage, but the city definitely emphasizes that whenever we're looking to name properties or streets or names.

Dick DeRyk

So Silver Heights was the first and really the only major residential private development, right?

Michael Eger

Yeah, to my knowledge, that's right.

Dick DeRyk

And the Pattison property west of the city was commercial. Have there been other private developments of some size in the city?

Michael Eger

Nothing that's really been formalized. There is an approved concept plan, which is a high-level subdivision plan for the land east of Weinmaster subdivision. That land is privately owned and had a preliminary subdivision plan with street names put forward in that. Those names are all very thematic and relating to the name of the subdivision, which I believe was proposed to be Willow Creek Estates. So taking advantage, I guess, kind of the proximity to the Yorkton Creek and kind of going onward from there.

So again, a lot of names related similar to trees and kind of geographic and geological features. More recently, and you mentioned the subdivision, the Pattison subdivision. We gave them the opportunity to suggest a name, and they were happy to continue the Fitchner Road name that was established to the north of them. And then, there is a subdivision at the southeast end of the city by Flaman's, and which is the new truck wash there as well, Soak Zone. And the developer of Soak Zone was required to pay for the road improvements that went in alongside their subdivision. And that street was actually just named Service Road formally. So we gave them the opportunity to suggest a slate of names, and ultimately they asked for Hershey Road. And so that was put forward by the developer. No historical significance or heritage, but was deemed kind of appropriate through our policy and approved by council. So there isn't that many private examples for sure.

Dick DeRyk

We also talked about 2nd Street and there's something can or should be done about that, since the name of the sign doesn't match the official name of the street, even on city maps.

Michael Eger

One challenge with navigation is when streets change names when you don't turn off of them. So when you're on a thoroughfare that continues on and the street name changes, that wreaks havoc from a navigation and emergency response. We might try to correct or attenuate some of those situations as we can. So an illegal name change may not be required. And if there's no address on it, then we may not have to do a formal name change. But what you may see a situation where there's a street sign that is providing continuity rather than a different name.

Dick DeRyk

The city was first established at its present site when the railway came through in 1891. And the main street was Front Street, running parallel to the north of the rail line at the same angle as the tracks. It was likely named after Front Street in Toronto, which was home to most of the first settlers here. In Old Toronto, Front Street was the main street along the rail lines, and just beyond them, Lake Ontario. On the other side of the tracks in Yorkton was South Front Street. It still exists by that name, although its namesake to the north was renamed Livingstone Street in 1917, in honor of lawyer Charles Donald Livingstone, who was Mayor in 1913, but soon left to join the military and was killed in action in World War I in 1916.

Dick DeRyk

Within a few years, another main street was developed, running directly east-west, just to the north of Front Street. Apparently, the businesses on Front Street were not all that happy, having to deal with the soot and smoke and noise of the steam engines. And Broadway, as it was called, soon became the heart of the city. Why Broadway? The powers that be of the town at the time decided to make the street 99 feet wide, a broad street to handle all those horses and buggies that were coming from miles around to get their goods in Yorkton. Little did they know how foresightful a decision that was. Livingstone was not the only mayor to have a street named after. In fact, almost all mayors from the founding of Yorkton until 1960 are remembered on street names. MacFarlane, Kilborn, Collacott, Dunlop, Clarke, Beck. There were two by that name in the first decade of the 1900s, Charles and Levi, Peaker, two of those as well, James and Charles, 20 years apart. Gibson, Pinkerton, Stewart, Barbour, Langrill, Novak, and Fitchner. No street for Hopkins, though, who was actually the first mayor, his two predecessors were overseers. But the lake between the ball diamonds and the city campground in the northwest of the city, just south of York Road, is named Hopkins Lake. And no street for the mayors who followed Bill Fitchner following his retirement in 1968.

Speaking of him, the road named for him runs north and south to the west side of the Harvest Meats Plant off York Road. It goes north to the rail tracks and south into the new commercial development housing the UFA fuel station and Pattison Agriculture. There are no street signs up for Fitchner Road yet, which may be a good thing. On all official city maps and Google Maps, his name is spelled incorrectly. A common mistake, even when he was mayor. I happen to know that because I was a reporter for The Enterprise while he was still mayor, and learned very early on that his name is Fichtner. F-I-C-H-T-N-E-R, not Fitchner, as the city maps and Google have it, with the T in the wrong place before the CH. But renaming streets, Michael Eger explains, is not a simple process.

Michael Eger

One point in time, the city did contemplate renaming, and that happened in a few instances. We renamed a portion of Catherine Street in front of the college, and Kinsman got renamed to Prystai Way.

Dick DeRyk

There were three Prystai brothers, one of whom was on City Council, Bill, back in the 50s and 60s, and they all played hockey for the old Yorkton Terriers back in the 40s and 50s. And Metro Prystai went on to play, I think, six seasons in the NHL, won a couple of Stanley Cups with Detroit, played

for Chicago and played for Detroit. So I don't know whether Prystai Way was named after one of them or the family, because all three, Bill, Harry, and Metro were all very active in sports in the communities. And it's appropriate because you know the arena is right there, and the football field is right there.

Michael Eger

So that was the last renaming that I'm aware of, and we kind of had to live with the challenges that renaming presents for quite a while after that. I think the College, from what I understand, was generally on board with it. I don't think they really fully understood the gravity of the effect of a civic address change. You don't realize, and I think all of us face that when we move or something happens, we don't realize how many places have our address and a street name is the critical component of that, of course. And then the other thing that's happened as we've, you know, a society's evolved, I guess, for lack of a better term, digital mapping. And it creates a whole new wrinkle in the sense that Google Maps, which is quite likely the most used digital mapping service, doesn't necessarily do a great job, especially in smaller communities, of updating their maps for what we're using. So we had to basically lobby Google for years to get their map updated so that Catherine Street in this example would now show up as Prystai Way. And we still fight that challenge on some things. Google, they don't maybe match up with what the signage is in the real world or even the survey plans, which is where all these come from. We are kind of in a pattern of trying to avoid renaming as much as possible because it hasn't gone overly well, if we're being honest. So hopefully we have some new developments soon where we can utilize some of these names rather than looking at renaming things.

Dick DeRyk

I do remember one renaming, either just before I arrived in Yorkton or at about that time in the mid-1960s. Smith Street was a straight line over the rail tracks west of downtown and continuing to Gladstone Avenue, where it ended when the road south of the high school on which the Western Development Museum is located, was built to take traffic out to Highway 16. Smith Street was extended in a northwest direction to meet that bypass at Gladstone Avenue. That left two blocks of the old Smith Street east of Gladstone, nameless. It was renamed Booth Street in recognition of the Salvation Army founded by William Booth, which is located on that street.

The older parts of the city, generally the area between Dracup Avenue and Beck Avenue to the east, and Wallace and Franklin on the west, from York Road in the north to Independent Street and King Street in the south, were designed with rectangular blocks bordered by streets running east and west and avenues running north and south. Broadway Street was the main east-west, along with Smith Street and Darlington Avenue to the north, and King Street to the south. North and south main routes were Gladstone Avenue, Myrtle Avenue, which was the edge of the city in the earliest years and the place where the railway ended until it was extended westward in 1893, the numbered avenues from First to Eighth, and Dracup Avenue. All of those are pretty straightforward and standard. Except Eighth Avenue, which comes in three pieces. One block east of Home Hardware, one block between Darlington and Dunlop Street, which is the only block with residences, and one block south of York Road.

Smith Street was named for Dr. John Smith, one of the early settlers and a medical doctor. His son J.J. Smith built a flour mill, had a store and a brickyard. Darlington was named for Dr. John's wife. That was her maiden name. Myrtle Avenue? Well, that remains a mystery. But Betts Avenue, just

to the east, is not. It was named for George Betts, who came here with his family in 1889 and homesteaded on the quarter section of farmland that went west and north from what is now Betts Avenue. And he was a town council member from 1900 to 1903. York Road harkens back to the original name, the York Colony. And King Street, well, there is King Street, Queen Street, James Avenue, Victoria Avenue, Alexandra Avenue, Ontario Avenue, Dominion Avenue, Imperial Street, Elizabeth Avenue, all reflecting the strong ties of early York to Toronto, Britain, and the British royal family. And Gladstone Avenue was named after the British Prime Minister at various times from 1868 to 1894, and so well known to the early settlers.

The older part of the city also has the shortest street in the city, Balmoral Avenue, likely named for Balmoral Castle in Scotland, one of the homes of the British royal family since the 1850s. When the city started to expand after World War II and into the 1950s and 60s to meet demand for more housing, the grid system didn't necessarily stay in place. First was the post-war housing built for returning soldiers by the federal government. The square small houses with the peak roofs that can still be seen in the south part of the city, along King Street, on Peaker Avenue, Roslyn, Second and Third Avenues South. Those were all straight streets and avenues, which do make it easier for people to find their way around, as Michael Eger points out.

Michael Eger

Gladstone Avenue, for example, that roundabout, and you actually literally have to turn onto King Street to continue back down south on Gladstone. And it's caused some issues. And I don't know if it's the current situation, but for many years, if you use Google Maps, for example, to take you from Saskatoon to Winnipeg, it would take you down Gladstone Avenue through the roundabout and then down Gladstone Avenue South. And so we've seen a few semis hung up on the roundabout at Gladstone, and it's because Google Maps is telling them that's the way to go through Yorkton. But it's also confusing for people because they turned and they are confused as they think they go back down the roundabout and try to get down Winchester, which would be a continuation straight south of Gladstone. So it's definitely a balancing act where you want to have that continuity where you can.

Dick DeRyk

The mobile home park in the southeast of the city and the larger subdivision in the southwest of the city consist of crescents and bays and drives that have multiple terms but keep the same name. The mobile home subdivision names are those of former city council members, but the names of streets in the southwest subdivision, built in the 1950s, have no connection to anything Yorkton. But so people could find their way, it was decided that streets running off Allanbrooke would all start with the letter A, those off Circlebrooke with C, those off Dalebrooke with D, and those off Riverview with R. Well, almost. Dalebrooke, which runs from Clarewood to Circlebrooke, doesn't meet that test, and when the large vacant area across Parkview Road from St. Paul's School, initially reserved for a public school, was turned into residential lots, Parklane Drive met that rule, but then somebody came up with Morris Bay, named for inventor and implement manufacturer George Morris, worthy recognition, but an outlier to the rule.

Back in the 1950s and 60s, Logan Crescent was the upscale neighborhood, running the full length of what is now Logan Green, a large green area which was not suitable for building because of a high water table, which was also the source of Yorkton's drinking water at the time. It had wide lots, and for those on the south side of the street, a great view south. It was named for James

Logan, a master carpenter who emigrated to Yorkton in 1903, and five years later joined up with William Black to form Logan and Black, a major force in construction on the prairies. On his death, his son Don took over the business, which later became Logan Stevens. In 1976, Silver Heights was developed by Erv and Beatrice Shindle, the first and only private residential development in Yorkton to date. The Shindles farmed and launched Yorkton Oil, Coal, and Wood right after the war, then got into the construction business. They built Yorkton's first indoor mall, Broadway Park Plaza, in 1968. That's now the present site of the Painted Hand Casino. And Bea owned and operated Century 21 Real Estate.

Silver Heights was intended to be an upscale subdivision, initially with controls on the colors of houses and roofs to ensure a classy look. Street names were also intended to reflect that objective. Thus, Marquis, Sunset, Windfield, Parkwood, and Willow. Recent growth has all been in the east end of the city, with no further room to expand to the west without running into lakes, highways, and a golf course.

The Parkland Mall had opened in the 1970s, and there was room to expand for both businesses and for residential developments. First came Heritage Heights, north of Darlington, bordered by Highway 9 on the west, York Road to the north, and Mayhew Avenue, which was built in the 1970s and named for Ken Mayhew, reporter and editor of the Yorkton Enterprise weekly newspaper from 1928 to 1960. Street names in Heritage Heights are primarily former mayors and aldermen: Matheson, McBurney, Langrill, Larmour, Mackenzie, Gibson, Stewart, McNeil, and Morris.

The exception is Delaere, for Father Delaere, the Belgian Redemptorist priest who founded St. Gerard Roman Catholic Parish and was instrumental in the establishment of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Yorkton.

Weinmaster Park, east of Mayhew Drive, was next on land owned by Henry Weinmaster. Streets there were named primarily for more council members, city officials, businessmen, and community leaders. Morrison Drive for lawyer Bill Morrison, Spice Drive for businessman Bob Spice, Wynn Place for publisher Sam Wynn, Switzer Bay for local historian and activist Milford Switzer, among them.

The next phase was the land north of there. The names of those streets took a different approach, no historical significance, but names that reflect the geography, trees, flora, and fauna of the region. Good Spirit, Madge, Whitewater, Partridge, Pheasant, Stillwater, Tamarack, Aspen, Poplar, White Sand, Riverside Drive, and across the creek, large lots on Riverside Terrace.

But before the mall and the development east of Highway 9, the Harris subdivision was already there, south of Broadway. But it was not within the city limits as it is now. It was built by James Henry Harris on his own land. The streets were named after the family, Harris Street, his son Gordon, and other family members and friends, Lawrence, Ray, Calvin. To the west, on land once occupied by the drive-in theatre, the streets in the commercial area dominated by Walmart are named after explorers of western Canada: Thompson, Peter Pond, Hamilton, Palliser, McLeod, and Kelsey.

There hasn't been much need for new street names in the past 10 years or so. The area which is still largely underdeveloped north of York Road and east of Highway 9, behind SGI, which is residential, has names.

Is there any area of the city within the city limits that is coming up for development where names will actually be where you'll be looking for names for streets? Or are we kind of in a holding pattern now, to fill the areas commercial behind the tourism chamber office, residential north of York Road. Is there anything coming up?

Michael Eger

Short answer, no, nothing is coming up. We are in a bit of a holding pattern. As you mentioned, the names are already decided and allocated within our residential subdivision, what we're referring to as York Landing. And that subdivision was named kind of to commemorate the York colonization company that founded the initial site of Yorkton, and then therefore includes prominent persons from that era and that company. And then in our commercial subdivision, we have the roundhouse subdivision, which is named after the CP train roundhouse that used to exist there. And then the names are all very much rail themed in there and all basically established for any future roadways.

That said, we've definitely had a stagnant land sales situation here, as everyone knows. Hopefully, we're on the cusp of seeing some more development. And when that occurs, we will soon have to create a new industrial subdivision similar to what we have around the Ball Road area, which we refer to as the Gladstone Industrial Park. And at that time, we would definitely, as a city development, we would be looking to implement a new slate of street names and hopefully implement some of the suggestions that we've been, I guess, collecting over the last number of years. But that would be the next sort of point at which we have an opportunity to utilize some of the names that have been put forward.

Dick DeRyk

The York Landing Subdivision, Michael mentions, has streets named for Cook, Keith, Reed, Fergus, Langstaff, Armstrong, and Watson. Armstrong is considered the founding father of Yorkton. He was the general manager of the York Farmers Colonization Company and spent much of his time here, while other founders tended to travel back and forth to Toronto. John J. Cook, a merchant in Toronto and an official of the company, frequently joined Armstrong here, and the two were the main promoters to attract other settlers to the new village.

Langstaff, Reed, and Fergus were all early settlers, although a search of original documents of the company failed, for me at least, to find any reference to the name Heath. There were two Watsons involved at the original town site, a farmer and Major Thomas C. Watson, who came to the colony to build a fort during the Riel Rebellion. The fort was built on the banks of the Little White Sand River, 150 square feet in size, surrounded by a ditch. It was apparently built in April of 1885. The Riel Rebellion ended on May 15th, and the fort was abandoned a month later. No sign of the fort, made entirely out of log, remains to this day. There is also a street planned from Highway 9 North into the York Landing called Potoski Street, named for Dr. Stephanie Potoski, who came to Yorkton in 1946 and set up a medical practice with her husband, Dr. Peter. She was the first woman to serve on Yorkton City Council in 1955 and 1956. She had nothing to do with the original settlers, but her street is right there.

I asked Michael if there's opportunity for the public to be involved in naming streets.

Michael Eger

We haven't really had a formal process for it. So, but that said, we definitely would always welcome all input. As far as naming suggestions go, definitely is a regular occurrence where we have naming suggestions put through and we try to play those out in the sense that we try to gain more information so that we can make informed decisions when we do want to implement a name. And then the processes involve sort of ad hoc committees, and we're learning a bit more from our civic recognition program. So trying to create a mechanism where people from the public or public representatives can help make determinations on these road names. So we would look to committee members who are volunteer members of the community, as well as council and maybe some staff just to ensure continuity in selecting names. But definitely, again, we lack a formal process, but we are trying to create something that is open, transparent, and receiving input from multiple different interests.

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