

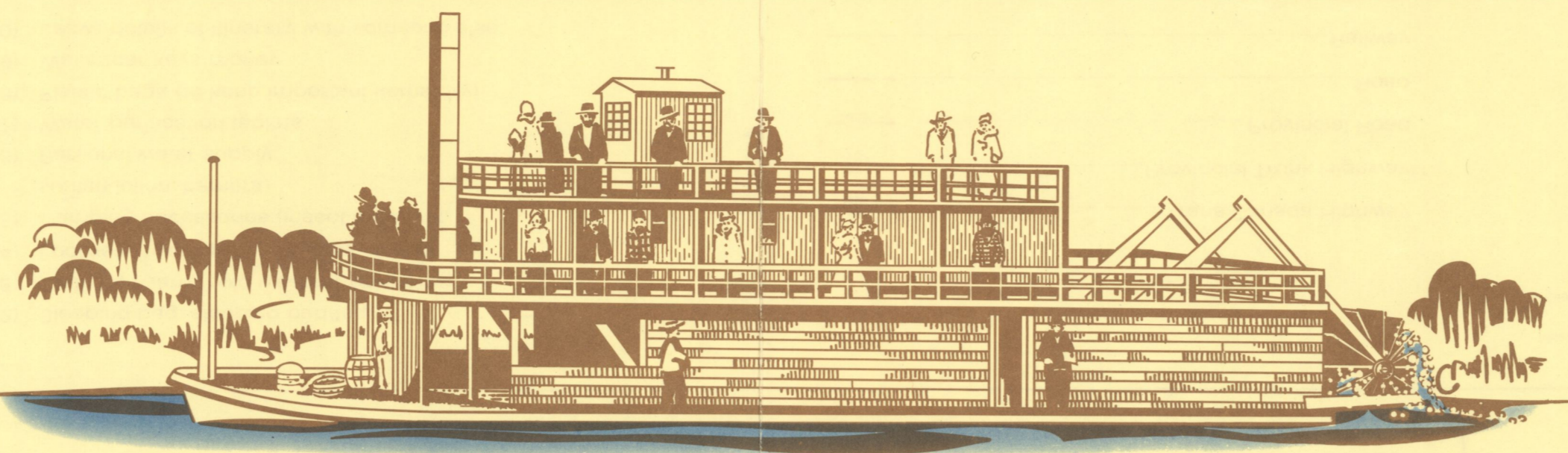
ASSINIBOINE RIVER

City of Brandon to the Cypress River

MANITOBA 1883

The year is 1883, and Manitoba is experiencing unprecedented growth as settlers and businesses establish themselves across one of Canada's newest frontiers. Only 13 years old and nicknamed the "Postage Stamp Province" because of its small size and square shape, Manitoba already boasts two cities: Winnipeg, its capital, and Brandon, a respectable prairie city of over 2,000 people. Brandon, typical of the rapid growth of the times, began its existence in May 1882, not as a village or a town but Manitoba's second largest city.

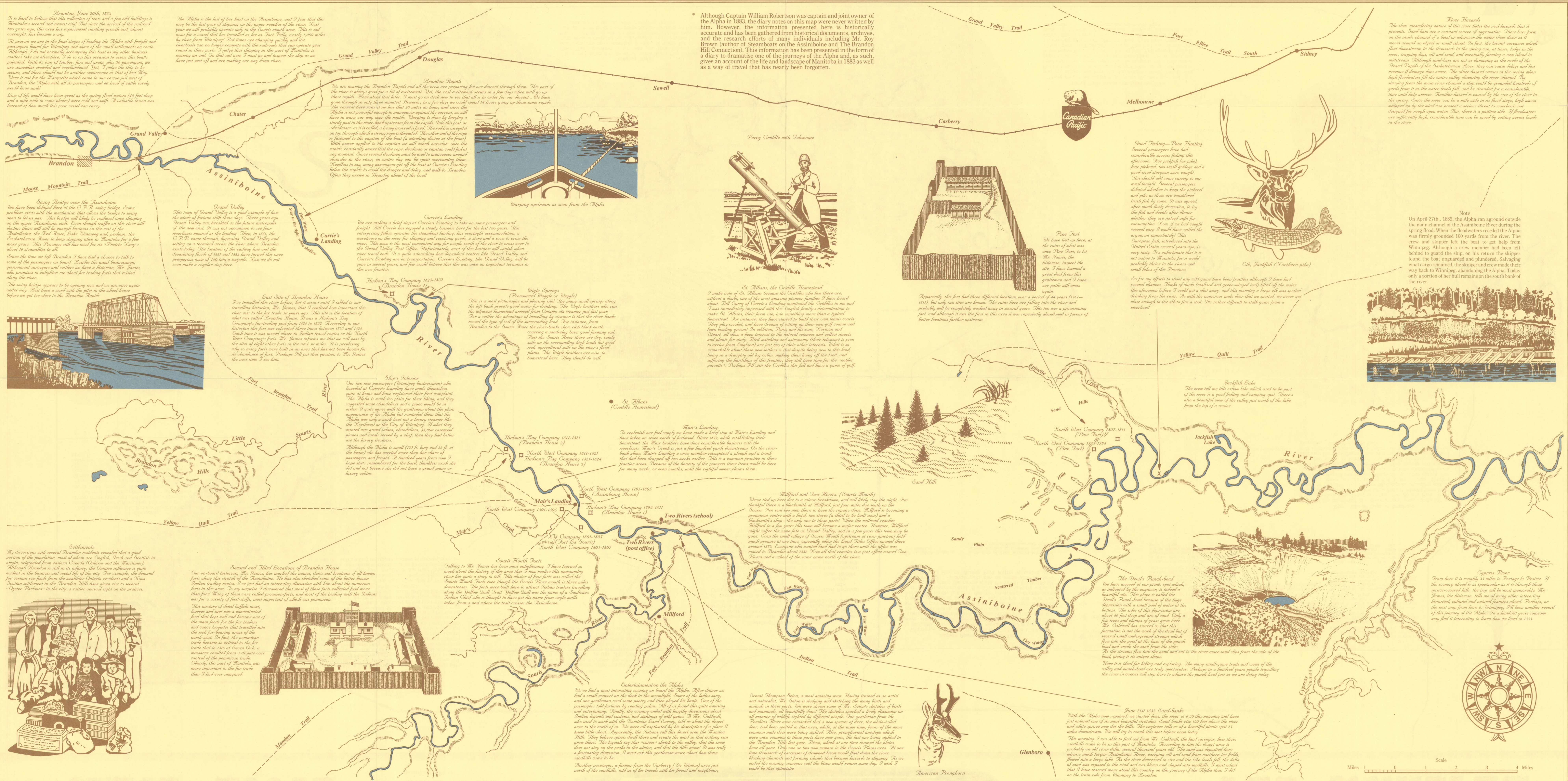
Canada is celebrating its 16th year of existence within a Confederation of seven Provinces: British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. In an attempt to unite this far-flung Dominion, the Canadian Pacific Railway is being built across the prairies and has just reached a little known place in the Northwest Territories called Calgary.



While the railways are becoming increasingly more important to Canadian growth, another form of transportation, the riverboat, is declining in significance in Manitoba. Although some riverboats are carrying 40 carloads of lumber on one trip, their dependence on water levels and meandering rivers like the Assiniboine make them not match for the railways.

However, the shipping demands on the remaining riverboats are increasing. At Brandon's wharf on the Assiniboine River there is a sense of urgency and some uneasiness about the loading of a small riverboat, the Alpha. Captain William Robertson, a partner of the new owners, the Northwest Navigation Company, watches his crew of nine men load the small steamship beyond its capacity in order to increase the profits for the new owners of the boat. On one of his navigational maps of the Assiniboine River, Captain Robertson records this journey of the Alpha as it leaves Brandon for Winnipeg on Wednesday, June 20th, 1883.

JOURNEY OF THE S.S. ALPHA



Brandon, June 20th, 1883
It is hard to believe that this collection of tents and a few odd buildings in Manitoba's second and newest city. That since the arrival of the railroad ten years ago, this area has experienced startling growth and almost unexampled, has become a city.

As present we are in the final stages of loading the Alpha with freight and passengers bound for Winnipeg and other points. Although I do not normally occupy this boat as my other business matters take up my attention, it is on this occasion we have the boat's potential. With 45 tons of lumber, fuel and grain, plus 20 passengers, we are somewhat crowded and overworked. Yet, I judge the ship to be secure, and there should not be a considerable occurrence on that trip. They were it not for the Margate which came in our view just west of Brandon, the Alpha with all its passengers and 60 head of cattle surely would have sunk.

Even if life would have been great as the spring flood waters (40 feet deep and a mile wide in some places) were cold and swift. A valuable lesson was learned from the small ship, never sail on a river.

The Alpha is the last of her kind on the Assiniboine, and I fear that this may be the last year of shipping on the upper reaches of the river. Next year we will probably operate only the lower reaches. This is a sad news for a vessel that has travelled as far as Fort Tully, nearly 1,000 miles by river from Winnipeg. That times are changing quickly and the riverboats are no longer compatible with the railroads that our separate year round in these parts. I judge that shipping on this part of Manitoba is nearly at an end. It is not so much that the river is too shallow, but that we have just cut off and are making our way down river.

We are nearing the Brandon Rapids and all the crew are preparing for our descent through them. This part of the river is always good for a bit of excitement. Yet, the real excitement occurs in a few days when we'll go up these rapids. We don't start until late. I must go on a boat now to see that all is in order for our descent. The lower runs through in only three minutes. However, on a few days we could spend 18 hours going up these same rapids. The current does not run in a straight line, and since the Alpha is not powerful enough to manoeuvre against the current, we will have to wrap our way over the rapids. We are going to be carrying a sharp point in the rear-end upstream from the rapids. This is the point or "blowdown" as it is called, a heavy iron rail is fixed. The rail has an eyelet on its through-hole. This eyelet is fastened to the capstan of the boat (a winding device at the front) with power applied to the capstan we will wind ourselves over the rapids, constantly moving that the eye, floaters or capstan could fly off at any moment. Since several blowdowns must be used to manoeuvre around obstacles in the river, an entire day may be spent manoeuvring them. So-called to say, many passengers got off the boat at Currie's Landing below the rapids to wait the longer and stay, and walk to Brandon. Often they arrive in Brandon, instead of the boat.

Currie's Landing
We are making a brief stop at Currie's Landing to take on some passengers and freight. This Currie has enjoyed a steady business here for the last ten years. This enterprise follows operation the steamboat business, has overnight accommodation, a warehouse on the river for shipping and receiving goods, a store and a saw to cross the river. This was in the old agreement may be people walk of the river to cross over to the Grand Valley. This office, unfortunately, most of this business will vanish when river travel ends. It is quite astonishing that the Grand Valley and Currie's Landing are in transportation. Currie's Landing, like Grand Valley, will be gone in several years, and few would believe that this was an important terminus in the past.

St. Albans, the Credité Homestead
I make note of St. Albans because the Credité who live there are, without a doubt, one of the most interesting people families I have heard about. The Credité of Currie's Landing mentioned the Credité to me and I was immediately interested with this English family's determination to make St. Albans, their farm site, into something more than a typical homestead. The intention, they have decided to build their own town, court, they play croquet, and have dreams of setting up their own golf course and have building great. In addition, they are also a "Warrior and Hunter". They are all keenly interested in the natural sciences and collect insects and plants for study. Their manners and customs (from the time of their arrival in Currie's Landing) are just like those of other settlers. What is so remarkable about these men is that they are being so in this land, doing in a thoroughly old-fashioned way, making their own land, and suffering the hardships of this frontier, they still have time for the "old-fashioned" pursuits. Perhaps I'll visit the Credité this fall and give a piece of my life.

The Devil's Punch-bowl
We have arrived at this small spot which, as indicated by the name, is a beautiful site. This place is called the Devil's Punch-bowl because of the huge boulders and small ponds of water at the bottom. The water in this depression are about 10 feet deep and the water is very cold. Only a few ferns and clumps of grass grow here. The Credité has assured us that this formation is not the work of the great last of several small underground streams which flow into the pond at the base of the punch-bowl and create the mud from the river. The streams flow into the pond and out to the river some sand slips from the side of the bowl as it is being eroded.

Entertainment on board the Alpha
After dinner we had a small concert on the deck on the moonlight. Some of the ladies sang, and some gentlemen read some poetry and they played the piano. All of the passengers told fortunes by reading palms. All of us found this quite amusing and interesting. Finally, the evening ended with lengthy discussions about the future of the river, and the possibility of a new canal. The Credité, who used to work with the Thompson Canal Survey, told us about the desert area to the north of us. He said that the Credité had a description of a place I know little about. Apparently, the Credité call this desert area the Manitoba Hills. They believe spirits dwell there and create the wind to that nothing can grow there. He hopes that some day the wind will be tamed, that the men do not stay on the banks, and that the hills will be a fine farming destination. I wish that the gentleman more about how these windfalls came to be.

Another passenger, a farmer from the Carberry (De Winter) area just north of the mouth of the Assiniboine, told us of his travels with his friend and neighbour,

Although Captain William Robertson was captain and joint owner of the Alpha in 1883, the diary notes on this map were never written by him. However, the information presented here is historically accurate and has been gathered from historical documents, archives, and the research efforts of many individuals including Mr. Roy Brown (author of Steamboats on the Assiniboine and The Brandon Hill Connection). This information has been presented in the form of a diary to dramatize the journeys of the Alpha and its crew, and gives an account of the life and landscape of Manitoba in 1883 as well as a way of travel that has nearly been forgotten.

Sailing Through over the Assiniboine
We have been delayed here at the C.P.R. using bridge. Some problem exists with the mechanism that allows the bridge to swing open to let us pass. This bridge will likely be replaced once shipping on the upper Assiniboine ends. Even though traffic on this river will decline there will still be enough business in the city of Brandon to justify the cost of the bridge. The cost of the bridge is estimated at \$100,000. The bridge will be a fine addition to the city and will be a landmark for many years.

This town of Grand Valley is a good example of how the world is being shaped up here. These years ago Grand Valley was located as the future metropolis of the river west. It was not until 1882 that the C.P.R. came through, bypassing Grand Valley and setting up a terminal across the river where Brandon exists today. The location of the railway line and the disbanding of Grand Valley in 1882 have had a profound effect on the progress of the city. It is not so much that the river is too shallow, but that we have just cut off and are making our way down river.

Two travellers this morning before I started, I talked to two travelling fishermen, Mr. Stamer, that I had met on the river. They were from the Grand Valley. It was a fisherman's life that they were living. They were from the Grand Valley. It was a fisherman's life that they were living. They were from the Grand Valley. It was a fisherman's life that they were living.

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Second and Third Locations of Brandon House
Our first location, Brandon, has been mentioned in the history of the Assiniboine. The house was built on the site of the first Brandon. The house was built on the site of the first Brandon. The house was built on the site of the first Brandon.

Ship's Interior
Our two passengers (including the fishermen) who boarded at Currie's Landing have made themselves comfortable at home and have registered their first complaint. The Alpha is a most nice ship for their liking, and they suggested some changes and a pump would be in order. I judge they will be well satisfied with the ship. The ship is a most nice ship for their liking, and they suggested some changes and a pump would be in order.

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The discussion with several Brandon residents revealed that a good portion of the population, most of whom are English, Irish and Scotch in origin, originated from eastern Canada (Ontario and the Territories). Although Brandon is still in its infancy, the Ontario influence is quite evident in the houses and social life of the city. For example, the demand for certain goods from the millinery district is a clear sign of a "New" Ontario influence in the Territories. Hills have given rise to several "Oyster Fisheries" in this city, a rather unusual sight on the prairie.

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