

# History of Charleswood

*Charleswood, a suburban community located in the southwest corner of the City of Winnipeg, was originally bounded by the Assiniboine River to the north, the R.M. of Macdonald to the south, the former Town of Tuxedo to the east and R.M. of Cartier to the west.*

## Early History

The area was originally part of a vast territory known as Rupertsland, granted to the Hudson Bay Company (H.B.C.) in 1670.

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charleswood was the location of the “The Passage”, a natural ford at the foot of Berkley Street, where the Assiniboine River was shallow enough to cross. The Passage was frequently used by buffalo hunters travelling to Pembina, and independent traders wanting to bypass the Forks in defiance of the H.B.C.’s monopoly.

In 1857, the H.B.C. surveyed and divided land on both side of the Assiniboine into narrow river lot farms, extending two miles from the riverbank. The original river lots were extended to a depth of four miles in 1880. Among the earliest settlers on these river lot farms were the Beauchemin, Hogue, Morrissette, and Branconnier families.

Around 1865, a river road was cut through the dense woodland along the south bank of the Assiniboine River to Baie St. Paul. A ferry was established at the Passage in 1870 linking Berkley Street with Rouge Road.

## R.M. of Assiniboia

In 1869, the H.B.C. ceded the territory to the Dominion of Canada, and the Province of Manitoba was created in 1870. The R.M of Assiniboia was

incorporated in 1880, combining the Parishes of Headingley, St. Charles, St. James and part of St. Boniface on both sides of the Assiniboine. In 1899, a highway, (Roblin Blvd) was surveyed along the south side of the Assiniboine River. The Manitoba Government purchased 117 acres in 1903 for an Agricultural College (later Fort Osborne Barracks). A year later, the City of Winnipeg purchased 283 acres for Assiniboine Park. By 1905, the Tuxedo Park Company had acquired 3,000 acres for a residential subdivision that became the Town of Tuxedo.

These changes required resurveying a portion of the 1899 highway through Tuxedo and part of Charleswood in 1908. That same year, the electric street car line was extended west on Roblin Blvd. to Kelly’s store by Berkley St. near Beaverdam Creek. Due to shallow water, the ferry at Berkley Street was moved upstream in 1908, linking Xavier Drive and St Charles Street. The St Charles Ferry remained in use until the opening of the Perimeter Bridge in 1959.

Two transcontinental railway lines passed through Charleswood, the Canadian Northern (now the C.N.R. Mainline), and the Grand Trunk Pacific (now the abandoned CNR Harte Subdivision). The latter had a railway station at “Pacific Junction” east of Elmhurst Road and north of Wilkes Ave.

## R.M. of Charleswood

As roads improved and the Assiniboine River became more of a barrier, the Rural Municipality of Charleswood was incorporated in 1913.

The name “Charleswood” has two probable sources of origin. One is that it was named for Charles Kelly who served on the first municipal council. The other

is that it is a combination of the Parish name “St. Charles” and the dense woodland that filled the area.

In 1913, the first Municipal Council met in Patrick Kelly’s General Store, built in 1907. After 1914, the council met in Charleswood School, the present site of Beauchemin Park Place. The red brick school was built to replace a one room log school house. Other early schools were Loudoun (c. 1909) and Chapman (c. 1914), the latter named for Charleswood’s first reeve, George Chapman.

In 1922, the first church in the area, St Mary’s Anglican opened, then the Odd Fellows Home on Roblin Blvd. and the Normal School (Teachers College) in Tuxedo. The first United Church opened in 1933.

Prior to World War II, Charleswood was largely rural with residential pockets scattered throughout the municipality along gravel and mud roads. The local economy was principally agricultural with dairy and poultry farms, market gardens and mink ranchers. During the Great Depression, the “Back to the Land Settlement Act” brought an influx of settlers to the area.

After World War II, Charleswood began to grow rapidly beginning with the development of a Veteran’s Land Act Project “Roblin Park”. To meet population growth, new schools, churches and recreation facilities were built.

During the early 1940’s, a commercial district, Charleswood Village, developed along Roblin Blvd between Wexford Street and Alcrest Drive. In 1965, the first permanent Municipal Civic Centre was built at 5006 Roblin Blvd.

The low density nature of Charleswood began to change with large scale subdivisions like Westdale and River West Park as well as infill along existing streets and vacant backland.

In 1972, after 60 years as a separate municipality, Charleswood was amalgamated with the City of Winnipeg. With the secession of Headingley in 1992, the former municipalities on the north and south sides of the Assiniboine River were reunited after 80 years as the Assiniboia Community. In 1995, they were physically linked with the opening of the Charleswood Bridge (William R. Clement Parkway).

## Charleswood Historical Society

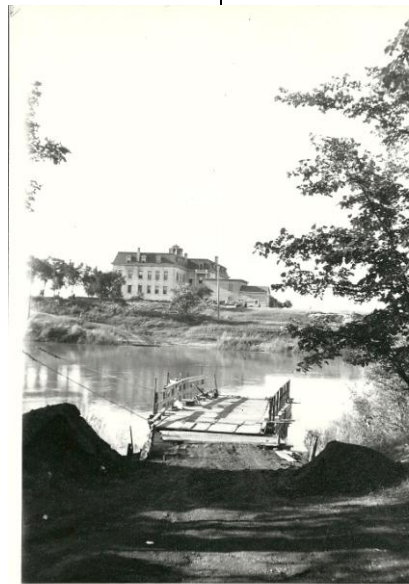
The Charleswood Historical Society (CHS) was formed in 1974 to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Winnipeg.

The mandate of the Charleswood Historical Society is two-fold:

1. To promote and encourage interest in, and to study and compile a history of that portion of the City of Winnipeg in the Province of Manitoba, formerly known as the R.M. of Charleswood.
2. To acquire and collect by gift, purchase or otherwise, and to maintain artifacts, memorabilia, articles, mementos, and items of historical interest and significance relating to the former R.M. of Charleswood.

## Activities

In September 1975, the CHS held a tea to honor 45 long time residents who had settled in Charleswood prior to 1920, and who continued to reside there. Since 1976, the Annual Pioneer Dinner, held in October, honors residents who have continuously lived in the community for 50 years with a complementary dinner and a framed parchment. Other honorees have included former school



teachers and early residents who no longer reside in the community. The Society submits the names of pioneer families and individuals of Charleswood to Park and Street Name Reserve Lists with the City of Winnipeg. The CHS has been active in naming over 25 park areas in Charleswood, with signage and plaques honoring those who lived in Charleswood.

Past-president Len Van Roon Sr. has copied over 500 photographs of early Charleswood, on loan from the collections and family albums of local residents. A visual history of Charleswood, assembled in slide form, is available to show in local school programs, and to senior citizen groups among others.

The CHS conducts an active and oral history program, recording the reminiscences of many of our "old-timer's" early life in Charleswood. Many of these oral histories are on file with the Assiniboine South School Division for use by local students.

## Major Projects

The proudest achievement is the preservation and rehabilitation of the historic Caron House. The 2 ½ storey Queen Anne style home was built in 1905 by George Caron who first settled in the area in 1880. The Caron House is one of the last original farm houses still standing in Charleswood along the Assiniboine River. The CHS leases the house from the City of Winnipeg, and in turn rents it to a family who assists with the on-going renovation. Every year in May, the CHS host tours of Caron House at Doors Open Winnipeg where the general public is invited to attend.

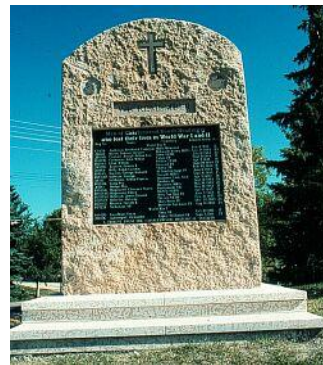


In October 2015, Interpretive Panels were installed at Caron Park for Caron House and the old St. Charles Ferry Crossing.

The on-going research of the CHS led to the designation of "The Passage" at the north end of Berkley Street as a Provincial Heritage Site in 1992. The Passage, a shallow ford, was key transit route for all, not only buffalo but hunters, traders and Red River settlers on the "Old Pembina Trail" near Charleswood Road. In June 2014, Interpretive Panels were installed at The Passage.

The CHS has placed historical plaques at Chapman and Pacific Junction Schools. As well, they have erected an identification sign for the historic Holy Trinity Cemetery in Headingley.

The CHS gathered information on the young men from Charleswood and South Headingley who were killed in action during the First and Second World Wars. This led the CHS to erect a memorial to the fallen soldiers, unveiled October 1995. The Winnipeg Foundation gave the CHS a start-up grant and donations were received from many sources culminating in complete payment of \$13,000.



In 2002, the CHS erected a new "Welcome to Charleswood" sign at the east end of Charleswood on Roblin Blvd., similar to an earlier sign.

In April 2007, the Charleswood Museum was officially opened and dedicated to Len and Verna Van Roon – *The Keepers of Charleswood History*. We are indebted to the Van Roons and many others who lived the dream of keeping our history alive for us.

The Museum holds many artifacts and printed materials of days gone by. It is open every Saturday (except holidays) throughout the year from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM. The Museum is located at 5006 Roblin Boulevard, next door to the Firehall. Free Admission.

*Charleswood Historical Society Members meet on the fourth Tuesday of every month (except February, July, August and December) at 5006 Roblin Blvd., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor at 7:00 pm*

*Other benefits include:  
Pot-Luck Supper in February  
Caron House Picnic in June  
Pioneer Dinner in October*

*The Society also presents a Heritage Lecture Series as well as presentations in Charleswood Schools.*

*Annual Membership (Tax Deductible) is \$15.00 per person or \$20.00 per family*

*For further information, leave a message at 204-832-1140 or visit our website at:  
[www.charleswoodhistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.charleswoodhistoricalsociety.ca)*

*The CHS is interested in copying any old photographs of early life or landmarks in Charleswood – all original photographs are returned to owner.*

EST. 1974

# Charleswood Historical Society

