

Brief History of Watrous

The following short history of Watrous is not intended to be exhaustive. It was very difficult to decide what to include and what to leave out. A complete history of Watrous and Area can be found in the book, Prairie Reflections, from which this material is taken. It was compiled by the Watrous & District History Committee and completed in 1983.

Location

Watrous is located in the Province of Saskatchewan, Canada and is midway between the Alberta and Manitoba borders, approximately 110 kms south-east of Saskatoon and 180 kms north of Regina.

Watrous is between the Trans-Canada Highway (#1) and the Yellowhead Highway (#16). The town of Watrous, the resort village of Manitou Beach and the hamlet of Renown lie within the R.M. of Morris. It is bordered to the north by Little Manitou Lake. The topographical features vary from flat, arable land in the south and northwest to gently rolling land in the southeast. Most of the area is considered productive agricultural land. The Canadian National Railway mainline passes through the towns of Watrous and Young. No. 2 Highway links the R.M. with the cities of Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert. Highway No. 365 connects No. 2 to Manitou Beach.

The Pioneers

The geography of the country was a virgin prairie, Indian trails, paths made from buffalo, far horizons and all so unfamiliar. Settlers were unaware of the climate - the long, long winters, darkness, temperatures that fell below extremes, the snowfalls and the blizzards.

Settlers came regardless. They came with talents, courage, determination and a vision for a new world. They brought with them a great variety of educational backgrounds, languages and dialects. They came with religious views, loyalties that differed widely, and they came in search of freedom.

With farming just beginning and the land untouched, the question was, "What can we grow?" Wheat, oats, barley, flax, alfalfa. Could settlers raise livestock or poultry? It was trial and error. Today the land produces millions of bushels of grain and many head of livestock. The prairies are the granary of the world.

In 1871 a decision was made by the government of Canada to adopt the square survey system so popular in the United States. The land in the northwest would be divided into townships, six miles square containing 36 sections of 640 acres each. Each section was to be sub-divided into four quarter sections of 160 acres. Townships were numbered northward from a base line on the American border. Sections were numbered from the southeast corner of each township.



Round House at Watrous [Source: Bill Mollard]

Homesteads

Any male over 18 or a widow, who was head of a family, had the right to a homestead of 160 acres for a fee of \$10. No birth certificate was required. As a result many 18 year olds appeared at the land titles offices. Additional land could be purchased for \$3 per acre, and paid in installments.

To 'prove-up' your homestead you were required to erect a house on the land and live there for six months in each of three successive years and break a

minimum of 30 acres in that time.

A few settlers were here in 1903 but it was not until 1904 that settlement occurred in volume and by 1906 most of the available homestead land was taken.

They came by foot, walking miles and going through snowbanks and herds of antelope. They came by spending days in a boxcar on a train. They came by horseback, a yoke of oxen, wagons, and sleighs. They 'cussed' the prairie trails and the alkali flats. But they came. They slept under wagon tongues, and tents that leaked. They lived on a diet of rabbits and turnips.

Land Seekers from U.S. [Source: Bill Mollard]

Mandal

Our pioneers of yesterday were looking for available homestead land. In the summer of 1904, three young men journeyed to the Manitou Lake district looking for just that. They found good land just south of the lake and decided to settle there when the land was open for filing on. They built sod shacks to live in and homesteaders' shacks dotted the country for miles around. A group of settlers got together and agreed to call the place "Mandal" after their hometown in Norway.



Mandal popped up like a mushroom. They made application to open a post office because the nearest one was 51 miles away. A general store, a blacksmith shop, a drug store, a real estate office, a restaurant, a butcher shop and a lumberyard soon opened. The first school was held in a sod shack of a homesteader. Also the first church service, organized by the Norwegian Lutherans, was held in a farm home.

When engineers came through in the fall of 1906, surveying for the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, they chose the location one mile east of Mandal because it was more adaptable for railway yards. Following that decision the village of Mandal was moved and the name was changed to Watrous by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Company. This kept the divisional point name in alphabetical order on the line. Watrous was named after Frank Watrous Morse, the general manager of the Grand Trunk Pacific.

Watrous - A Boomtown

There was a ten year period, between 1904 to 1914, that witnessed the greatest influx of settlers. This resulted in most of the homestead land being taken by 1916, although some scattered quarters of inferior quality were not homesteaded until well into the 1920's.

In the spring of 1908 the townsite of Watrous was put on the market and the town grew rapidly and was recognized as the leading boomtown on the Great Trunk Pacific (G.T.P.). Watrous was incorporated as a town in 1909, four years after the province of Saskatchewan was formed. The population was 659. In June 1982, Watrous had an unofficial population of 1857, according to a community profile survey.

The original townsite included four sections of land or more than 2,500 acres, while the map showed a proposed electric railway line running from the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.) depot at Renown to Manitou Beach. Numerous places of businesses were erected almost overnight. Labour was plentiful.

Real estate lots were purchased for approximately \$500 each. Land was cheap and the country of opportunity. In record time, hundreds of carpenters were busy erecting business places and as many as 30 residences were under construction at the same time.



By 1908 there were 27 businesses: five lumberyards, theatre, Trading Co. store, Dr. Stipe's Drug Store, Koehler's Hardware, two halls, barber shops, Waukee Laundry, Stephenson's Jewellery and several restaurants and general stores including T. N. Bjordahl's and the Pioneer Restaurant.

GTP Officials at Watrous 1909 [Source: Bill Mollard]

The Telephone

The telephone service helped bring people closer together and took away the loneliness and sense of isolation. Rural party lines were a means of communication in more ways than one. It was common practice for people interested in the doings of the community to lift the receiver deftly, so that the click was inaudible, and listen in or "rubber" as they called it - a feast for the ear of the gossip!

There were several subscribers on each line. Each subscriber had his own ring - one long and one short or two long and one short, etc. Some could tell by the vigor of the hand cranked ring who was doing the calling. The "general ring" was the operator putting a call through to all lines about a public announcement. The operators also assisted in locating someone who was needed in a hurry.

By 1910 there were sixty local subscribers in the Watrous exchange. The first switchboard was installed in a back room in Hixon's drugstore. A bed was installed beside the switchboard to ensure 24 hour service. Secretary's salary was \$25 per year and the phone rental was \$5.

In 1912 long distance service came to Watrous and the exchange was moved to Second Avenue West, a building behind the Bank of Commerce. By 1928 an additional 1220 switchboards were installed.

In 1951 an automatic telephone exchange was installed. It took two months with five men to install the new equipment and four days with six men to remove the old telephones. The new location was on Main Street, north of Roxy Theatre. The estimated cost was \$130,000. By 1981 the exchange had 1,683 connected phones. Watrous was the fifth exchange in Saskatchewan to become completely automatic.

Direct distance dialing came into effect in 1964 and this change-over eliminated the need for operators at the local office. In 1967 Sask Tel completed a 140 ft. microwave tower on the property.

Main Street 1909 [Source: Bill Mollard]



Electric Power

Prior to 1911, when the town of Watrous was awarded a 20 year light & power franchise, most rural areas were powered by individually owned gasoline powered generating plants. These were used to keep 32 volt battery systems charged. Wind chargers were also used, but provided varying amounts of power. The Watrous plant, however, had many problems, being closed for weeks at a time for repairs. A notice in 1916 stated "no electric lights for six weeks." In 1918, the plant was out of operation for five months because of a fuel shortage. During the depression, there was no money to replace batteries.

In 1931, the Power Commission purchased the equipment from Canadian Utilities. As demand for power rose, equipment changed to meet new requirements. In fact, an extra generating plant had to be brought in to guarantee enough power to supply the new CBK radio transmitter site that opened in 1939. The radio operators would call the generating plant before going "on air" so that the necessary power was available, and then call again before going "off air" at night. This actually benefited Watrous customers because the plant ran longer hours than most others to provide the transmitter.

In 1952, transmission lines were constructed from Prince Albert and the three engines in the local plant came to a stand-still. In 1954 the old plant was converted to a warehouse and office for district operators. Rural electrification started in the late 1940's. Natural gas became available in 1968.

Newspapers

Three newspapers have been published since the town's incorporation. Two newspapers published at the same time. The Watrous Signal was established in February, 1908 and continued until 1941 and was located on Second Avenue East, just east of the Masonic Hall. The Watrous Post was the second newspaper in 1911 and continued until 1916. It was located at a site on Main Street. The third newspaper was established in 1933 and continues to this present day. It is called "The Watrous Manitou" and is located at the site where the Watrous Post was. The newspaper appeared as a five-column publication of four pages. Within a few weeks it was increased to a six-column paper with 50% ready print being used. Within some five years the ready print pages were discarded and

came out as an all-home print newspaper. The newspaper was printed on an automatic Heidelberg press, and type was produced from hot metal equipment. By 1947, a linotype machine produced the paper and in 1977 it was done by photo-type setting (offset) equipment.



Main Street 1910 [Source: Bill Mollard]

Law Enforcement

All of Saskatchewan was divided into police areas with a Royal North West Mounted Police in charge of each area. Each mounted policeman patrolled his own area on horseback but did not police the town. He had charge of all matters of a criminal nature in his given territory and was responsible for law enforcement. The mounties wore uniforms of bright red coats and blue trousers. The town was policed by men hired by the town.

In July of 1942 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police began policing Watrous, Manitou Beach and surrounding rural areas. Watrous was the second or third town in Saskatchewan to employ the R.C.M.P. The police at that time wore blue uniforms. The police barracks were located in the Post Office building, corner of Main Street and Second Avenue.

The duties of the R.C.M.P. was to enforce the town bylaws, provincial and federal statutes. They were in charge of complaints and court cases. Court was held in the Legion Hall and later moved to the Saskatchewan Water Supply Board building.

The Fire Department

The fire department was organized on April 4, 1910. The Council stated that the engineer of the fire engine be paid \$1.00 for practise and \$2.00 per hour during the fire. Volunteers were to get 25 cents a practise and \$1.00 an hour during the fire. A \$5.00 reward was given to the first team to hitch to the fire engine in case of fire.

The firemen uniforms consisted of a helmet, coat and boots. The chief's helmet was white which immediately distinguished him from the others.

The Firemen's Annual Ball and Basket Social became one of the big social highlights of the year.

In 1912 a fire was recorded at the G.T.P. depot. Volunteer brigade used chemical flow and water was pumped from the reserve tank on Second Avenue. One of the yard engines also brought up three cars of water and the railway hose was brought into action.

Some of the major fires were the Lay Block in 1931, the flour mill and theatre in 1938, the lumber yard in 1953, MacKay's store at Manitou Beach in 1970, and in 1976 Swift's Electric, Watrous Manitou and Watrous Bakery.

In 1959 the new Fire Hall was incorporated in the Watrous Civic Centre. Fire trucks purchased in 1937 were replaced in 1969 with a fully equipped unit. In 1973 a van was purchased by Watrous Union Hospital and the conversion for ambulance was done by local tradesmen. The ambulance service is organized and run by the Ambulance Committee and the Watrous Fire Brigade. A new ambulance was purchased in 1982.



Trading Post c1910 [Source: Bill Mollard]

The Water Supply

In 1910 the town obtained its water supply from individual wells. The first attempt came from a cribbed well on Main Street, opposite All Saints Church on Fourth Avenue. A pump was placed in the well for the convenience of town's people. Another well was drilled on Second Avenue East.

In 1912 the well at Manitou Hotel was reported not working because the pump was damaged by frost. To prevent freezing a fire was built around the well. Water was piped into Watrous with C.N.R. financing the "north" well, east of Manitou Lake. A water tower at the west end of Third Avenue started construction in 1913. A water wagon was used and carried in pails weighing 65 lbs. in summer, plus 15 lbs. of ice coating in winter.

In 1935 a summer water line from the fire hall to Eighth Avenue was installed and in 1938 Winnipeg contractors completed a pipeline for a new water supply to town. By 1960 the water system extended to all residences through the provincial government's water supply program.

The Hospital

Up until 1948 the hospital was a building located on First Avenue across the street and west of the C.N. station. It was a converted rooming house operated by Drs. Hixon and Stipe. When the Saskatchewan Hospital Plan started in 1946, a hospital district was formed with members from Watrous, Young, Zelma, Venn, Manitou Beach and surrounding municipalities of Morris, Wood Creek, Osborne and Wreford.

On July 5, 1948 the new Watrous Union Hospital admitted their first patients. The hospital had 30 beds, one for each 250 people in the hospital district. The estimated cost of the construction was \$150,000. Many donations of furnishings and cash were received.

The original heating plant and cook-stove were coal and wood requiring much attention. Later this was changed to oil and eventually to natural gas. The hospital grounds were landscaped, trees and flowers planted, plus a vegetable garden.

In 1952 the iron lung was placed on indefinite loan from the Department of Health. In 1953 a contract with the Red Cross for the establishment of a Blood Bank was drawn up. In 1958 a new nurses residence of 16 bedrooms was built. In 1963 a solarium, pediatric and maternity ward were added to the hospital.

Extensive kitchen and laundry renovations were made in 1975. In 1977 the hospital kitchen began providing Meals on Wheels, sponsored by Rebekah Lodge. A physiotherapist in attendance, a resource person for in-patient and out-patient treatment and teaching have been valued members of the hospital staff since 1979. Also a dietitian visits every twelve weeks for counselling.

The nurses worked long hours with 12-hour and often 18-hour shifts. They also tended the old coal furnace in the basement with a boiler to be kept at a specific temperature. The nurses on the night shift washed diapers by hand and hung them on the outside line to dry. They also washed the operating and case room linen in a tub.

Around 1946 the town decided they needed a Hospital Auxiliary, an organization that works in unison with the hospital, nurses and staff. They try to do what they can for the patients' comfort and to make their stay as comfortable as possible. Their work is all volunteer. They also assisted the hospital by sewing and raising money for things needed, such as making sheets, gowns and dressing gowns for the patients. Later the organization changed their name to the Watrous Union Hospital Aid. They had around 40 members but the average attendance was nine to twelve. This group disbanded in 1951.

In 1957 fifteen ladies met to form a new organization. It was called the Watrous Union Hospital Auxiliary. They held meetings once a month, carried on sewing and many took boxes of sewing home. Funds were raised by having teas, tag days, raffles, and rummage sales.



This dedicated group has been responsible for the addition of much needed equipment for the hospital through the years including dividing curtains, laundry carts, ice machine, refrigerators, meal carts, coffee maker, electric typewriter, vacuum cleaner, carpet for the hospital entrance, x-ray film development equipment, wall lamps, chairs, teapots and the portable defibrillator.

Parade c1912 [Source: Bill Mollard]

Manitou Lodge

Manitou Lodge officially opened October 8, 1958 - a home for senior citizens in the area. Many citizens and organizations donated towards the furnishings. There were 20 self-contained suites. With weekly entertainment by the community and surrounding district, monthly birthday parties, daily card and shuffle board games, there was little time for boredom. The craft room was always a beehive of activity with quilting, knitting, crocheting, rug-making and sewing in progress.

In 1975 a new wing for Level III residents was opened, also a new kitchen, laundry and a larger dining and lounge area.

In 1982 Telemiracle presented Watrous with a van which is a special convenience for wheelchair residents.

The Manitou Lodge Auxiliary was formed for the aged in November 1971. The purpose was to acquaint the community with the needs of the home and to make it a more efficient, pleasant, and interesting place.

The Public Library

In May of 1948 two ladies decided to do something about having a library in Watrous. They set out and got a petition of 400 names and presented it at the next council meeting. After much discussion, the go-sign was given. The council provided a room on the north side of the Council Chamber, which was up stairs in the rickety old firehall on Third Avenue.

During the summer the board members talked library, and people started to become aware. 200 books were donated. Leather bound set of works of Charles Dickens, a set of "The Books of Knowledge", and novels were donated. Donations of money were also received. Volunteers served as librarians. The shelves started to fill up. By September 1st the library was officially opened and the bylaw declared it a Public Library.

In March of 1962 the library moved to a new location in the Civic Centre. In 1967 the Provincial Government declared the Wheatland Regional Library a body corporate in politic.

In 1950 the total number of books borrowed was 2,243. In 1981 total number was 28,260!

The CBK Radio Station

For years the claim to fame of Watrous was its proximity to Lake Manitou. On July 29, 1939 an additional attraction was added with the opening of the CBK, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's 50,000 watt prairie transmitter. It was the only CBC outlet between Winnipeg and Vancouver. Engineers tell us that in order to get as large a coverage area as CBK, a transmitter located in Ottawa would have to have 20 times the power. The reason? Well, it's the same as for Lake Manitou - minerals! This gives the soil greater conductivity and hence, greater coverage. Radiating from the base of the 465 foot tower, like the spokes of a wheel, 120 wires each five hundred feet long are ploughed underground for a proper ground system. Reception has been reported from as far away as New Zealand and Australia. The low broadcast frequency of 540 Ke. also helped give excellent primary coverage to the prairies - so Watrous was chosen.

The brick, tile and stucco building was very modern - imagine having air conditioning in 1939. It has four split levels. The main floor houses the transmitter with its forty-foot long red panel and chrome trim. The top level has two studios, a steno office, a main office and half-bath.

CBK was a very popular tourist attraction. Hundreds of people toured it daily. With the start of World War II in September, however, it was closed to visitors for the duration. The war delayed the prairie expansion which the CBC had planned so that the temporary programming from Watrous continued until 1948. This programming was in English and French. CBK was the only French station west of Winnipeg. In 1948, studios moved to Winnipeg and a few years later to Regina, the present location. Staff was reduced from 14 to about 7.

In the 1960's an addition was built to house an emergency power plant with a 10,000 gallon fuel tank. This was partly due to the atomic bomb scare. Later a fall out shelter was added for the same reason. This was about 24 feet square with 18 inch concrete thickness all underground. Transmitter and diesel controls were duplicated here.

In 1974, it was retirement time for the reliable old RCA 50 Kw transmitter. It was in service for 35 years - quite a record considering the guarantee period is only 10 years. It was replaced by a newer type of the same power but only about 1/20 the physical size. This could be controlled from Regina studios.

On June 4, 1976 the 465 foot tower blew down during a violent windstorm. A 40th anniversary at the transmitter in 1979 drew hundreds of loyal fans and in 1980 an extra 10 Kw emergency transmitter was installed.

In all the years of operation, CBK has an enviable record for safety - never an accident. This was due to excellent maintenance procedures and safety features built into the equipment.

There has been talk of moving the transmitter from Watrous but "soil conductivity" still prevails to keep it here radiating the most powerful signal in the West!

Watrous Businesses

Businesses sprang up, owners changes, partners changed and they moved in and out of available buildings. It was like a game of checkers. When a new block was erected it was time for offices and stores to be on the move. The buildings, too, often changed lots - and so it continues today. Dr. J. H. White's Drugstore building moved seven times by March, 1911, when it was finally relocated near the roundhouse shops at the east end of town.

Businesses in 1910 were:

First Avenue: Sash and Door Factory; Hultgreen and Thurston Lumber Yard; Monarch Lumber Co.; Grest Bros. Lumber Co.; Hotel Manitou; Pioneer Restaurant; Manitou Medicine Co. and Bath House; North American Lumber Co.; and Walkers' Restaurant.

Main Street: Red Cross Drug Store; J. Cumming Real Estate; B. L. Martin Men's Furnisher; Frank Koehler Hardware, Harness and Tinware; Watrous Drug and Stationery Co.; R. B. Davidson, Solicitor, etc.; C. White, Baker and Confectionery; Dadson Bros. Co. General Merchants; Dr. Agar, Dentist; Watrous Trading Co. General Merchants; Jacob Stover; Real Estate; Whitmore's Cafe and Bakeshop; A. Moir, Photographer; Majestic Theatre; Hotel Tourist; Fotheringham and Veitch Furniture; H. Igel, Butcher; Union Bank of Canada; Hiltz Block of Offices; Canadian Bank of Commerce; E. W. Hixon and Co. Druggists; Pool Room and Bowling Alley; Telfer and Goff, Tailors; W. J. Stevenson, Jeweller; A. Lewis, Barber and Pool Room; A. E. McDougall, Notary Public; T. N. Bjorndahl, General Merchants; F. C. Wright, Real Estate.

Second Avenue: Reliance Lumber Co.; Victoria Restaurant; Cowie Bros., Flour, Feed and Supplies; Signal Office, Printer and Publisher; W. R. Jamieson, Harness; Watrous Meat Co. Butchers; J. Fear Furniture; J. Fisher, Fruit, Lunch Counter and Candies; C. E. Oliver, Real Estate; Presbyterian Church Building; Maple Leaf Restaurant.

Third Avenue: Leeson's Livery; Telfer Bros., Livery; J. E. Robin's Tinsmith; A. Burke, Blacksmith; Finlay and Edmunds Blacksmith; Bon Ton Livery; Hyde Bros. Chopping Mill; C. Haley, Veterinarian Surgeon.

Following is a brief history of some of the businesses:

Harness and Hardware to Meat & Locker Plant

Frank Koehler built the first building on the town site, beginning a harness and hardware business in 1907. The first car load of hardware was shipped on the Grand Truck Pacific via Saskatoon. As the main line was not yet completed the shipment of goods was unloaded into a ditch near the railway tracks two miles west of town.

Frank remained in business until 1928 when he moved to Regina. He returned to Watrous in 1954 to take over W. H. Fowler's shoe repair business which he operated until his death.

A 12' x 14' lean-to was added to the Koehler building and Cosford's Bakery served early residents from here.

In 1947, Don McKenzie and W. E. Clark opened Model Meat & Locker Plant at this site.

Stephenson's Jewellry

One of the original buildings in the town. In 1908 Wm. J. Stephenson and Dr. R. Stipe built a duplex building. Stephenson occupied the south side for his jewellery and watch repair business.

Bjorndahl Block.

In 1908 Tom Bjorndahl moved his general store and post office building from Mandal to Watrous. As was the custom, as the business prospered, additions were made to the building. He was also the agent for different machinery companies.

During 1908-1910 Rollie MacLeod operated a hardware store in the north section. He sold it to Clarke and Tollack and moved to Winnipeg and from there he started the chain of Macleod stores.

In 1912 the building was sold to H. R. Finlay, a real estate broker. In 1918 it was transferred to Harry and Charlie Nemetz. Charlie operated the agency for Overland and Chrysler cars from the rear of the building.

In 1920 a partnership with McMillan and Rivers formed and started the White House Department Store. T. Fotheringham moved into the north section and operated his furniture and funeral home.

In 1925 W. J. Lay bought the Block from the Memetz Bros. and the general store was leased by Canter, Horn and Portigal. The clothing section was known as Tip Top Tailors. Also, during this period the top floor was used for various activities: Lutheran church services from 1908-1916, school classes for senior students, and Sandy Gordon's law office in 1920.

In 1932 this building was destroyed by fire.

From Pool Hall to Beauty Salon

Built in 1908, this building was one of the first poolrooms in Watrous. Mr. Fleming, an employee of the Grand Truck Pacific was the original owner. A bowling alley operated in conjunction with the pool room. Later, a barbershop opened.

In 1957 the building was divided into two sections: Chuck's Barbershop; Blanche's Beauty Salon and Hazel's Ladies Wear.

Drug Stores

A familiar landmark for many years was a building built in 1909 by E. Evenson and bought by Dr. W. E. Hixon that same year. The main floor was used for Hixon's Drug Store. The second floor originally housed the Telephone Exchange and later converted to offices for Drs. Hixon and Stipe.

From White's Drugstore to Confectionery

Dr. J. H. White, the first doctor to Watrous, built a drugstore in 1908 and Frank Fenton was the druggist. In 1913 Dr. White left and Dr. Stipe and druggist, Mr. McKechnie, moved into the premises.

In 1915, P. Wald ran a grocery store and confectionery until 1920 when R. A. Reitzen bought the business. In 1927 Chris Pontikes opened Chris' Confectionery and remained in business until 1958. The building was torn down leaving the lot vacant until 1983 when Busy Bee Ceramics erected their new building.

Watrous Drug & Stationery to Cafe

In 1908, Dr. Stipe and pharmacist C. C. McKechnie built and operated Watrous Drug & Stationery. The drug store was at the front of the building and Dr. Stipe's office was at the rear. In 1913 when they moved to Dr. White's office at the south end of the same block, the building became a cafe. The building has been used primarily as a cafe since that time - The Rex Cafe; then the P O Cafe, Bob's Kem-Colour Centre; Doris' Fine Foods; then, J. & M. Restaurant in 1969.

Evenson Block.

From Furniture Store to Jewelry Store This two-storey block building was built in 1908-1909 by E. Evenson. The first business on the ground level was B. L. Martin who managed a men's furnishings store.

In 1925, J. H. Brown & Co. bought the property and moved his dry goods and grocery store from the Clarke Block. The second floor was mostly office space. One of the first lawyers, R. B. Davidson, operated his business. In later years the upstairs was converted to suites.

The building was also used as a Fitness Club and recreation centre during the war years.

In 1945 Dr. Stipe purchased the building and used the lower floor as a doctor's office. Later it was occupied by the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, the Long Lake School Unit, and the Saskatchewan Department of Culture and Youth.

In 1971 Julius Pleier purchased the building and opened a jewellery store on the ground floor.

Manitou Hotel

Built in 1908, by Henry Haskamp, the Manitou Hotel was the first hotel in Watrous and was located at the corner of Main Street and First Avenue East. An elegant dining room faced First Avenue. Advertisements read: "Steam heated, gas lighted, rates \$1.50 and \$2.00 per day." A bar operated in the north side of the main floor until 1915. Dr. Agar operated his dental practice from the hotel.

Between the late 1920's until 1935, the government liquor board had a store in the hotel. From 1946 to 1960, Bill and Helen Proctor operated a cafe.

During a storm in 1976 the roof was damaged and the top floor of the hotel was removed.

Walker's Hall

The first public hall in Watrous, known as Walker's Hall, occupied the lot north of the hotel. It was a two-storey building and the upper floor served as the public hall and later it was known as Speer's Hall.

Cosford Block.

From Bakeries to Tailor

Early in the town's history the Cosford block was established. The Harris Bakery and Confectionery operated here. In 1913 J. S. Demorest took over and renamed the business Ye Olde Home Bakery. In 1920, it was sold and the new owners called it the Buckley's

Bake Shop and Confectionery. They moved to the Evenson Block and D. A. Robertson, a tailor, moved in. In 1936 the building was torn down.

Dadson-Jones Block.

From Gent's Wear to Cafes to Long Lake School Unit

The building was located on the corner of Main Street and Second Avenue East. It was built in 1908. The north section was used for gent's wear, dry goods and groceries, while the south section was the first Bank of Commerce branch. In 1910 the Dadson-Jones partnership dissolved and several cafes operated from here. New York Cafe and the Royal Cafe. Suites were located on the second floor.

In 1925 the OK Economy store was located here. But in 1929, they moved to the Grain Grower's Building beside the Clarke Block.

The Dadson-Jones building was torn down to make way for the new Post Office which opened in 1936. The RCMP had their headquarters on the top floor.

In 1971 the Long Lake School Unit acquired the building for their offices.

The Hiltz Block.

From School Classrooms to Pharmacy

The Hiltz Bros. built the first building on the corner of Main Street and Second Avenue West. From 1908 to 1910 the space was used as a school classroom. From 1910 to 1923 main businesses were located here: International Securities; Watrous Liquor Board Store; Austin Bros. Real Estate; Fowler's Shoe Repair; Princess Cafe; Dominion Cafe; J. J. MacLachlan Teaming & Draying business office; D. A. Robertson, tailor; M. Devine, barbershop; and George Steven's shoeshine shop.

In the mid-twenties to 1940, Marcoe & Lerner established a general store. In 1948 Manuel Spector took over and operated Spector's Men's & Ladies' Wear. In 1964 Charlie Elviss purchased the building for Rexall Drugs. Today it is Watrous Pharmacy.

Whitters' Hall.

From school classes to bank to law offices to bath rooms

Next to the Hiltz Block and built in 1908 was a hall owned by Mr. and Mrs. Whitters. In the back school classes were held for two years. The first Presbyterian church services were held here. The front portion of the building was used by the Union Bank from 1909 to 1912 until the new building opened across the street.

Renovations were made in 1913 and the law office of R. B. Davidson and W. E. Thorneloe moved in. Later the north part became Langille's Barbershop, Beauty Parlor and Bath Rooms.

Thorneloe Block.

This is where the Cameo Cafe had its beginning. The old building was moved to the back of the lot, serving as a kitchen and living quarters. The cafe rooms were built at the front of the property.

The building next to the Cameo Cafe was built in 1908 by Henry Igel for Igel's Butcher Shop. In 1919, Sam Memetz bought the business and started Red & White Store. The premises has had various businesses: Hazel's Ladies Wear; The Style Shop; Jan's Fashions; and Elaine's Fashions.

From 1912 to 1917, Sten and Britz operated a men's clothing store in the next building. In 1923, V. R. Code's Men's Wear moved in. The Masonic Lodge rented the upper floor for their hall.

In 1949, James S. Gibney purchased the business and operated Gibney's Men's Wear. The upstairs was renovated for living quarters. In 1980, Craig Inkster bought the business and continues as Inkster's Men's Wear.

Clarke Block. The Tourist Hotel

The Tourist Hotel was built in 1909 by Adam Reid and was on the corner of Main Street and Third Avenue. It was a three-storey structure and housed many businesses in its time. The rotunda was very pleasing, featuring a stand-up bar and an up-to-date dining room. There were 42 rooms on the second and third floor. When Watrous was incorporated as a town in 1910, one hundred guests attended the first citizen's banquet.

In 1910 the hotel was purchased by Chas Wilson. The bar closed in 1915 and the hotel discontinued business and became vacant for a number of years. In 1919, J. F. Clarke purchased the premises for a general store and operated as J. F. Clarke & Co. In 1920 the store became known as Clarke Bros. and were joined by Mr. Rivers from the Nemetz Bros. store.

Business changes in the block were many, including: A. O. Bentley's Meat Market; The Pioneer Restaurant; Liquor Board Store; Manitou Motors; Morrow Bros.; Bowling Alley; Vic Rowe Variety Store; Pat Collins's Law Office; Pat's Style Shop; Hazel's Ladies Wear; Swift's Electric; Austin Bros. Real Estate; S & S Store; Watrous Agencies and also served as the Credit Union.

During the thirties, Mr. Clarke removed the top floor as a means of lowering taxes. In 1946, Ab McLachlan purchased the hotel. The OK Economy bought the building in 1956 and it was demolished in 1958. A page in the town's history had been removed.

Union Bank - Royal Bank

The bank opened January 10, 1910, renting space in Whitters' Building. In 1912, the new bank building was completed on the corner of Main Street and Second Avenue East. It was a two-storey brick structure which cost \$15,000. In 1925 the Union Bank was taken over by the Royal Bank of Canada. The original building was made larger and in 1954 the bank area was fully modernized with living quarters for the bank manager on the second floor. In 1977 the building was replaced.

Watrous Trading Co.

On the second lot north of the Union Bank was the Watrous Trading Co. and established in 1908 by Del Mollard, George Mollard, Edwin Meadows and George Saunders. The business was advertised as General Merchants. They handled fine carriages, wagons and farm supplies, along with groceries and dry goods.

In 1913 the Watrous Trading Co. purchased the stock of T. E. Fenby and that same year Charlie Nemetz bought the company. Later that year the building was destroyed by fire.



Memorial Unweiling Aug 27, 1933 [Source: Bill Mollard]

The above information was taken from the book, Prairie Reflections, compiled by the Watrous & District History Committee for the Town of Watrous, 1983. Mrs. Ruth Schellenberg adapted and abbreviated it for use on this Web Site, and relocated some pictures that had been used in the original book.