

THE FIRE BUG

This mass resignation took place the same year that the firebug broke loose. The culprit, a fellow named Sam Mirk, was finally caught and sentenced to five years in jail, but not before he had burned and destroyed the fire hall and then set fire to 75 percent of the business buildings in the east end of Portage la Prairie.

The Dodge Block, Rossin House, Queen's Hotel, London House, Lorne House, Pratt Block and many other buildings either burned to the ground or suffered heavy damage in the fires.

The man who had incited Mirk, James White, was acquitted on the grounds that he had been under the influence of liquor and was not wholly responsible for his actions.

The fires did accomplish one good thing. Previously, the Hudson's Bay Company had control of the west end and refused to sell land for building or business purposes around their trading post on the corner of the Saskatchewan Trail and 18th Street. The land between the east and west ends was all field, with only the Trail connecting them. The fires deepened and strengthened a feeling for centralization and gradually the east-west division was pushed aside and business began appearing on what was later to be called "Saskatchewan Avenue".

A bakery was erected, which was taken over by Paulin's Biscuits Company in 1885. It made hardtack for soldiers fighting against Riel.

Two brothers, R. and J. Watson, who had come to Portage la Prairie in 1876, established a machine shop and planing mills in 1886. (Previous to the latter date, R. Watson had built two mills, one at Portage and the other at Stonewall.)

THE COMMUNITY HALL

The date that the Community Hall, shown next page, was built, is uncertain. However, it was built after the fire on the site of the Rossin House and served Portage well until it was demolished in 1966. This was the building where Reeve and Council held their meetings and where the Rural Municipality paid their taxes for many years. In this building there was also a large room that could be rented to organizations for meetings.

A public 'Ladies Rest Room' on the main floor was an appreciated accommodation for country ladies shopping in Portage.