

The Evolution of Greater Winnipeg

To understand how the small village at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers evolved to form the complex of administrative units eventually to comprise Greater Winnipeg, one must commence with the "parish". Religious affiliation was the major reason for the parish, but ethnic and language characteristics were also associated.

St. Boniface was the first parish started in 1818 to minister to the need of the Catholic Métis and white settlers. St. John's was formed two years later to serve adherents of the Anglican Church and as time went on various other parishes were formed, each centred on a church. By 1870 when the Red River Colony entered Confederation there were twenty such divisions. Their names and boundaries left an impress on the system of rural municipalities which later emerged.

Since the river at this early period was the main street of communication, the homes and buildings of the settlers were arranged along it. Parish boundaries, therefore, straddled the river, extending back for approximately two miles. When the Hudson's Bay Company undertook its survey of river lots first established by the Selkirk settlers, it set up base-lines parallel to the river and about two miles back from it. The lots were then surveyed at right angles to the base-lines which later became important roads such as McPhillips Street and Bird's Hill Road. The parish was superimposed on the river-lot system, and from the parish unit, the *county* and then the *municipality* subsequently emerged.

When the Red River Colony was admitted to Confederation the parish became the electoral district from which members were sent to the Manitoba legislature, created in 1870, as well as the House of Commons in Ottawa. From the twenty parishes extant in 1870, twenty-four provincial electoral districts were created along with four federal constituencies (Fig. 1). Of the latter, the District of Selkirk contained eight parishes besides the town of Winnipeg. In 1880 the County of Selkirk, as originally constituted, comprised, besides Winnipeg, six rural municipalities: St. Paul and Kildonan to the north of Winnipeg, Assiniboia to the west and south, St. Boniface to the east, and Cartier and St. Norbert farther to the south (Fig. 2). By 1960, just before Metro government was established, there had evolved seventeen administrative units comprising in whole or in part the area of Greater Winnipeg (Fig. 1).

The stages by which various administrative structures finally evolved to eventually make necessary a second tier of administrative authority are outlined in the accompanying maps. Underlying the extensive