

**Silver  
Sands**

A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF SILVER SANDS VILLAGE  
County of Lac Ste Anne, Alberta

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Chapter 1

In recent years I've collected some of the history of the Silver Sands district prior to the formation in 1969 of the Summer Village. The material which was recently presented in your Village Newsletter a chapter at a time is now assembled into this booklet - for the curious to read about in the next century. To set the stage for historical happenings within the Village itself (which I admit is 'modern history' by any standards), this first chapter covers the period up to 1911. That happens to be the earliest date I can find of pioneers settling in what is now Silver Sands.

1906 - In this year the land on which our Village stands was surveyed and recorded in Ottawa (along with the rest of Alberta). I've often marvelled that they got it all done without mosquito spray or a cool beer!

- White Whale Lake (so named because the plentiful whitefish were really huge) was renamed to Wabamun lake (Indian for 'looking glass').

- Perley Cull and Arthur Hovey arrived from Massawippi, Quebec and built a cottage of the same name at the future site of Seba Beach Village, our neighbor to the southwest. That cottage still stands there, 86 years later.

1907 - Coal was discovered at Wabamun and created another industry alongside fishing and trapping.

1908 - The settlement at Fallis was named - after a railway engineer involved in pushing the iron road west from Edmonton.

- Which way were the railways going to go? (There were 2 competing companies.) Dozens of people from near and far speculated and bought a quarter or a section of land to hold for a while, and hoped to sell high. Others decided to settle and homestead where the action was developing. This included the area between Wabamun and Lake Isle, as well as the north shore of Lake Isle.

1910 - Horseback was still the only way to go if you wanted to hit the trail to the trading post at Jasper. Travelling from Edmonton, the first night stopover was often at a 'lodge' located 1½ miles due east of our Fallis post office. The main building is gone, but a smaller stopover cabin of those days still stands beside that part of the old Jasper road. In those days it was usually referred to as the "Edson Trail".

- A mile or so further east from there, the Anglican church was being constructed (St. Aidan's and St. Hilda's). It is still in use during the summer months.

1911 - The Grand Trunk Pacific began to serve the Wabamun settlement. One commodity hauled to Edmonton was ice-blocks harvested from Wabamun Lake.

- Seba Beach started flowering as a fashionable resort. At first, Edmontonians would take the train to Wabamun, then continue by boat to reach Seba. That must have seemed delightfully adventurous to the city folk.

- The 12-room Superior Hotel (still standing - almost - at this date) was built at Gainford.

- The 150 acres of farmland that now joins East and West Silver Sands together received its first owner. Edward Thompson bought it - for \$88.00.

Ed. - I wish to acknowledge the booklet "Hills of Hope" which provided some of the items noted in this chapter.

## Chapter 2

So far we've covered only local events which occurred in the very early 1900's. We'll now advance through the years leading to the less ancient times of the 40's.

1912 - While the Grand Trunk Pacific was pushing its railway westward from Wabamun along a line roughly parallel to where Hwy. 16 is now, tracks were also being laid north of Lake Isle by the Canadian Northern Railway. By 1915, Northern was providing rail service through Alberta Beach, Darwell, Lake Isle, Magnolia, Entwistle, and onward to Vancouver. The line ceased functioning in 1936. The concrete supports for the Canadian Northern bridge across the Pembina River are still to be seen in Pembina Provincial Park. The right-of-way from Alberta Beach through Magnolia was converted to a road and is now Hwy. 633.

- Settlers were arriving so fast on the north side of Lake Isle that by 1911 the first school had to be built, in Magnolia. It's interesting that quite a number of new arrivals were from Latvia, one of Europe's Baltic states. Amongst the earliest settlers at the north shore were Gordon and Louisa Ambrose (both from Devon, England) who had to hike the last 8 miles to their homestead, and got busy farming. They proceeded to raise 9 children, several of whom still live in the area.

1920's - About 1925 the first structure put up within Silver Sands appeared, on what is now Carl Schnell's property. Traces of this one can still be found, but the log cabin which still stands (and is visible from Silver Sands Drive) was not built till the mid-30's. But there's no question that this cabin takes the ribbon as the oldest building existing in our Village. It's owner was Ken Murray, whose name was associated with the beach which is now part of the Village Recreation Park. He and his wife and child lived there and farmed for almost 20 years - without of course the comforts of electricity, running water, or gas heating.

1930's - John Bruce, who lives a mile north of our Post Office, tells me that his father Wesley arrived here with his family in the early 30's. His experiences included driving some of the first horse-drawn school buses to Darwell School. John said that that doesn't mean just

one horse. Sometimes the mud required as many as 4 horses to get the students to school. It was also Wesley Bruce who bought the 150 acres which now includes the Silver Sands Golf Course, Hillside Crescent, and Bay Drive, for 57¢ an acre. 25 years later he sold for \$330 an acre.

- Jack Orchison (father of "post office" Jim Orchison) and family moved here to the log cabin which still stands on the Fallis Road ½ mile south of Baybridge. They needed a team of horses to make the last 4 miles. Highlights of rural recreation in those days were baseball, picnics, fishing, and Christmas parties. (What? - no TV?)

- Another arrival in the 30's was Carl Schnell's father. He filed on the quarter-section where Carl's brothers Martin and Norman now live - on what many of our Villagers call the Middle Road. A quarter of land (160 acres) was about all one family could farm, given the limited equipment they had then.

1940's - It won't surprise my readers if I don't manage to cover all the nearby residents who knew this area before the bulldozers did. Space and time will not allow that. The first owner of the Hughes property plus what is now West Silver Sands was Cyril Reader, who in 1947 paid \$600 for the 300 acres. Reader wasn't an enthusiastic payer of land taxes, and caveats for tax recovery are sprinkled thru the old records. But the man had a warm heart. One day he watched 8-year-old Carl Schnell playing hockey with friends on the Lake Isle ice. Unlike the others, Carl had no skates, just boots. So Cyril Reader went shopping, and Carl had his first pair of skates!

## Chapter 3

We're moving right along in this brief history, and have arrived at the 50's, where some of our present Villagers appear.

It was in 1951 when Oral and Mary Carter bought their 240-acre farm - just across the road from Silver Sands Golf Course. There was no road west of them (to reach the present West Silver Sands location), and not much of a road from the east to reach their own place. Mary recalls it took 16 hours with horse and wagon to cover the 4 miles from the highway to their new home. After almost 40 years of farming this land, the senior Carters passed the land, the sweat, and the opportunities on to the next generation, and retired at Wabamun.

Another early arrival that some of you remember was Bill Lumsden, who in 1954 bought the 150 acres across from the Hughes property. Visiting it as a weekender, he farmed for 20 years, and built the log-style cottage on the lakeshore that Carl and Georgina Schnell have been upgrading this year.

Even in those faraway days a concession was operated at the beach near the present Recreation Park, where hotdogs, ice cream etc. were sold. Later this was operated for a while by Pearl Jarvie (Hazel Ave.), and her late husband Muir.

Before the end of the 50's a notable new direction was shaping up for this area. A group of businessmen, some from Saskatchewan, decided that Lake Isle's south shore had good potential for development. It was in 1959 that the Bruce family and relatives sold the farm that then covered East Silver Sands, to this new group called Major Holdings. They surveyed and subdivided the land along the lake, much as it is today, in preparation for an intensive sales campaign on the 300 or so lots. Some promotional show-cottages were erected and the east stretch of Silver Sands Drive was built. Bill Dirksen recalls that lake lots were \$1500, and back lots \$300 to \$600.

Most eye-catching of all was the master drawing they showed to potential lot buyers, covering all the land now encompassed by our Village, plus the 240 acres that Lew and Sue Hughes later purchased.

The plan revealed the "Ultimate" resort, complete with a hotel, motel, trailer park, 18-hole golf course, swimming pool, trout pond, racetrack, 2 churches.... what more could you want? Well, on what is now Hughes property, they also showed a drive-in theater, miniature railway, baseball diamond, tennis court, rifle range, and a deer park. Enough to keep you exhausted every weekend! Let's be kind and just say the developers were over-enthusiastic. These original developers faded away, with few lots sold. Next, Charlie Blais arrived on the scene - "I came out for the fishing". And Harvey Moore liked what he saw and bought from Cyril Reader the westerly 300 acres. These 2 businessmen took over Major Holdings, and worked out a more realistic program and layout.

As noted already, most of the lots were staked out in 1959, but smaller subdividing occurred in later years, in both East and West Silver Sands.

Harvey Moore's land purchase included a log cottage built in the 1940's by Reader about where the Janke property now is on Cedar Ave. Moore moved it to the Abramic's lot (Hazel Ave.) where it survived until 1991. In 1962, Harvey, with the help of Ben Carrigan, Bob Andrews, the McDowells and others, built the barn which now stands just north of the Hughes house.

The first few years of the 60's can be called the pioneer years of the cottage builders here, leading to the formation of the Village in '69. In these terms then, pioneers at West Silver Sands included Ben Carrigan, the Bissells, the Bains, and the Jarvies (all on Hazel Ave.) Those at East Silver Sands included Orvil Carter (Birch Ave.), McCready (Hillside Cres.), Dirksen (Bill has been a permanent resident since '64), and 3 families on Alder Ave. - Byers, Blais, and Ainslie (who sold it early to Bob Andrews). If there's a more complete listing somewhere, I couldn't find it!

When asked how the road was when he first came to Lake Iske in '59, Ben Carrigan told me he had the choice of driving from Fallis or Euraka Beach and both choices were bad. He recalls getting stuck in the mud many times, and sometimes 'reshaping' the underbody of his truck. He added that the mosquitoes were as bad as ever then, but there were no caterpillars.

1954 had brought rural electrification to most parts of Alberta, but came no closer locally than Eureka Beach. In the early 60's, Charlie Blais, Ben Carrigan, and 8 or 9 other local folk signed up at \$300 each to get electric power brought here from Eureka Beach.

The population was growing. In 1968 Charlie and Penny Blais opened the Silver Sands Golf Course. By the late 60's it was clear that some municipal incorporation of the area was essential.



## Chapter 4

By 1968 the pressure was building up for local control of services provided to the cottage owners. The citizens of Silver Sands represented 140 taxable properties, including cottages and the empty lots that had been bought. Over half of these were registered in the names of owner (male and female) and spouse. No more than 2 or 3 of the people were permanent residents.

As taxpayers of Lac Ste Anne County, the people here were growing frustrated with the lack of County attention to our roads, and the feeling of being ignored and overtaxed because they were "just weekend residents". It was decided to look into the Summer Village possibilities and the pros and cons of self-government. It appeared to be the way to go, and people were canvassed for the necessary 70 signatures to go with the application.

Most of the organizing work was carried out by Charlie Blais, with a major assist by Pearl Jarvie. The status of Summer Village was approved in January '69. Until the Village could be established and rolling, the Province appointed an interim Administrator, Mr. Kennedy. Pearl Jarvie took on the job of Secretary-Treasurer.

The changeover from County taxation to Village taxation was one of the earliest functions. A general assessment of Village properties was undertaken in '69 in preparation for future tax levies. Another important preliminary was making application to the Province for a Municipal Assistance grant.

Also necessary was the transferring to Village ownership of the titles to all public reserves that existed within the Village boundaries. Further, the Chief Public Health Inspector ordered the Village to provide for a garbage disposal site.

By early summer of '69 a call went out to encourage candidates to offer themselves for the 3 Village Council positions. Four candidates came forward, and in July an election was held. It was enthusiastically supported and 178 votes were cast! The 3 Councillors, elected for a 3-year term, were Don Bain, Bill Dirksen, and Paul Harnois. Shortly afterwards, at an organization meeting of

Council, Don Bain was elected to the Mayor's chair - the first Mayor of our Village.

In the previous chapter I noted the names of Village pioneers of the 60's. Now I think it's worth recording the cottage owners in that first year of self-government who are still associated with the Village, some now as permanent residents. Their names are: Andrews, Bain, Blais, Byers, Carrigan, Dirksen, Gardiner, Jantz, Jarvie, McDowell, Plowman, and Skinner.

Not surprisingly, the first few months for that initial Council were especially busy. Some of their responsibilities were: establishing a budget and a mill rate, handling of complaints about the new property assessment, a fire protection policy in the Village, insurance of Village assets, buying a roadgrader and gravelling the roads, acquiring 10 acres for a garbage site, drilling water wells - all items required in quick time to have a functioning Village. Then there were building permits to administer, requests to approve further subdividing, joining the Association of Summer Villages, etc. etc.

Some of the early Village meetings got pretty warm, and generally a large turnout of 'opinions' filled the chairs. Some there were who got over-enthusiastic, and suggested we needed street lights, garbage pickup at each driveway, sidewalks, and so on. These folks settled down when an estimate was presented of what level the taxes would soar to, with high-cost improvements like those.

Within a year Councillor Harnois left and Ben Carrigan replaced him. Silver Sands was well served by this first Council. It was very important that the small Village got off to a sound basis, for during the 1970's an active building program roughly doubled the activities and dwellings of Silver Sands. Thanks are due to those who looked ahead, worked for the common good, and formed our Summer Village.

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SUMMER VILLAGE OF SILVER SANDS  
(General Orientation)

