

THEME:

The development of land transportation in Saskatchewan from the Red River cart to the present.

OBJECTIVES:

To familiarize the student with the transportation developments in Saskatchewan from past to present.

To increase the students' appreciation of the conditions of travel for the people of past generations.

VOCABULARY:

Red River Cart

Bennett buggy

coal and wood burning locomotives

cutter or sleigh

velocipede

streetcar

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The first forms of land transportation which the early settlers used on the prairies depended upon human or animal power.

Red River Cart

Settlers often used the Red River Cart to reach their homesteads. This cart was ideal in many ways for early prairie travel. Made entirely of wood and rawhide, this vehicle was light and strong as well as easy to repair while travelling across the prairie trails. Bridges were not yet built across streams, but the Red River Cart had detachable wheels which could be strapped to the bottom, and then the entire cart could be floated across.

The load capacity was around seven or eight hundred pounds, more than the amount that a single animal could carry on its back. Of course, there were also several drawbacks to this form of transportation. The most memorable drawback was the shrieking of the wheels as they turned due to lack of lubrication between the dry wood turning on a dry axle. The rate of progress with these vehicles was quite slow. Oxen, or sometimes ponies, could pull the Red River Carts about fifteen or twenty miles on a good day.

Prairie Schooners (Covered Wagons)

Other settlers travelled to the prairies in **Prairie Schooners**; four wheeled wagons with a high, curving cloth cover under which the women, children and belongings were placed. Heavy freight wagons needing 6-12 pairs of oxen. These schooners hauled large loads of goods over the plains.

Buggies

Like the automobiles of today, the buggies of pioneer days came in many styles, shapes and sizes. Most popular was the four-wheeled buggy, often drawn by a team of horses. They ranged from the relatively luxurious surrey to the **Bennett buggy**. The Bennett buggy was an automobile modified to a horse-drawn buggy in the 1930's when the Depression struck and gas was no longer affordable.

There was a great range in the degree of comfort of the various buggies. All had some sort of spring suspension system. Most had metal rimmed wheels but some had hard rubber tires on the rims to reduce road noise and to improve the ride. Some had upholstered seats, foot rests, arm or elbow rests, metal steps, rubber floor mats and front splash guards.

Cutter or Sleigh

In winter, the settlers could travel smoothly over the snow by sleigh. Sleighs or cutters were vehicles, with runners, used for winter travel. They were usually drawn by one horse.

Enclosed cutters with runners were used to transport children to school and to carry supplies to and from town. Occasionally a small wood burning stove was placed in the cutter for warmth. Straw, which acted as insulation, was sometimes used as well.

Railway

After the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, immigrants usually travelled by train, in colonist cars, as far as they could, before switching to animal-drawn vehicles.

The early steam locomotives entrusted with the task of hauling settlers and their provisions to the west, were impressive machines. The earliest were wood or coal burners, with chimneys fitted with a spark arrester, a precaution necessary to prevent setting the prairie grass on fire. These locomotives hauled colonist cars which contained only benches, wood bunks and a stove.

Bicycles

In the 1880's and 1890's, the **velocipede** or bicycle, became a popular mode of transportation in the prairie towns. Bicycles were a speedy, healthy means of transportation for people who could not afford a carriage and a team of horses. The early bicycles made of big wheels and solid tires earned the name of "bone shakers" from their performance on rough roads. A later model, the safety bicycle, was a great improvement. It had wheels which were approximately the same size as pneumatic tires. The tubular metal frame was light and easy to manage.

There were many advantages of the bicycle over horse drawn transportation. Bicycles were much cheaper to purchase and operate than horses. They were also cleaner and required much less maintenance.

Motorized Road Vehicles - Automobiles and Motorcycles

Following closely upon the bicycle rage were the first motorized road vehicles - cars and motorcycles. The first motorcycles started to appear in the early 1900's. They were first put into production around 1904. Several motorcycle manufacturers appeared at the start of the industry but through 1920-30 the U.S. industry dwindled until only the two strongest companies remained - Harley Davidson and Indian.

At the turn of the century, the railroads began to ship the first automobiles to the prairies. At first, automobiles were regarded as a passing fad by the majority of the people. Indeed, in the early years, many of these criticisms were justified. Horses balked and shied at the strange new contraptions. Horses and oxen were obliged to pull stuck cars from mud holes, and car owners were obliged to tinker with the machines when they malfunctioned as service stations and spare parts were unknown. In addition, the earliest cars often cost a great deal of money for the times (from \$700 and up).

The advent of Henry Ford's Model T in 1909, produced on an assembly line and of a simple design drastically changed this state of affairs. The low price and suitability made the "Tin Lizzie" a popular prairie automobile.

Streetcars

When towns and cities began to grow, the transportation systems within the centres needed development. The first mode of public transportation was the horse-drawn streetcar. The first cars were open, wooden frames which rode on a track-rail system.

Around the beginning of the 1900's, the old horse-drawn streetcars gave way to a new system - the electric railway. The new cars were more luxurious, being equipped with springs and generous padding in the cushions. The electric railway received its current (energy supply) from overhead wires. The direction of the car was determined totally by a set of rails which protruded above the road surface.

The Regina Municipal Railway began operation in July, 1911. The electric railway system was successfully operated for many years until it was gradually phased out. The final streetcar run in Regina was made in September 1950. Gradually, the rails and steel wheels were replaced with rubber tires but the system was still run by electricity. Finally the electric rail system was replaced by gasoline motor coaches which are better known today as buses.