

A BRIEF HISTORY  
OF  
**LENNARD**  
AND  
**SHELL VALLEY,**  
**MANITOBA**

BY JOHN GOODES



## I. Lennard

**F**or the settlers from Bucovina who began to arrive in the Asessippi district in 1900, there was no easy access to the business, health and social services taken for granted today. Thomas McLennan's store and post office in the nearby village of Asessippi provided them with the most basic necessities that they could afford, such as sugar, flour, salt, soap, matches, cloth and coal oil (kerosene). To obtain other needs, such as hardware, building materials, harnesses, clothing and footwear necessitated a full day trip by horses and wagon to Russell. In many cases this only happened once or twice a year.

As increasing numbers of settlers were arriving in the area, the newcomers were living in a community without a name. All this changed in 1911 when Joseph Norquay detected a business opportunity in the area and constructed a general store at the crossroads on NE 13-23-28. The following year (1912), a post-

office was established and the name Lennard assigned to it. Norquay became the first post-master. The new settlement was named after William Barrett-Lennard, one of the original homesteaders in the R.M. of Boulton and a councilor and reeve of the municipality in the early 1880s.

Shortly after, George Romalis erected a store kitty-corner from the Norquay facility, selling mainly groceries and dry goods. Sensing that a new business centre was in the making, other small enterprises began to appear. A blacksmith shop was opened across the road from the Norquay store, and Elie Burla, noting the need for a meeting and recreational facility in the community erected a hall at the northwest corner of the cross-roads. Burla also opened a small convenience store, bringing to three the number of stores in the emerging business centre. A pool room was also opened, but information on its location remains sketchy. It was apparently operated by Dan (?) Starchuk. These enterprises, along with the existing two school buildings, a teachers' residence, several other residences housing the business owners and their families, and the St. Elijah Romanian Orthodox Church and manse, created a lively business and social centre for the new settlement.

Between 1915 and 1930, several other businesses were established. Ted Paulencu erected a store and hall at the southeast corner of the crossroads. Meanwhile, Joseph Norquay sold his

store to Constantin (Sam) Mintencu, who also became the post-master. When Mintencu closed his store permanently in the 1930s, the post-office was moved to Ted Paulencu's store. At about the same time, George Romalis sold his business to Gheorghe (George) Paulencu. Now all the businesses in the community were owned and operated by immigrants from Bucovina.

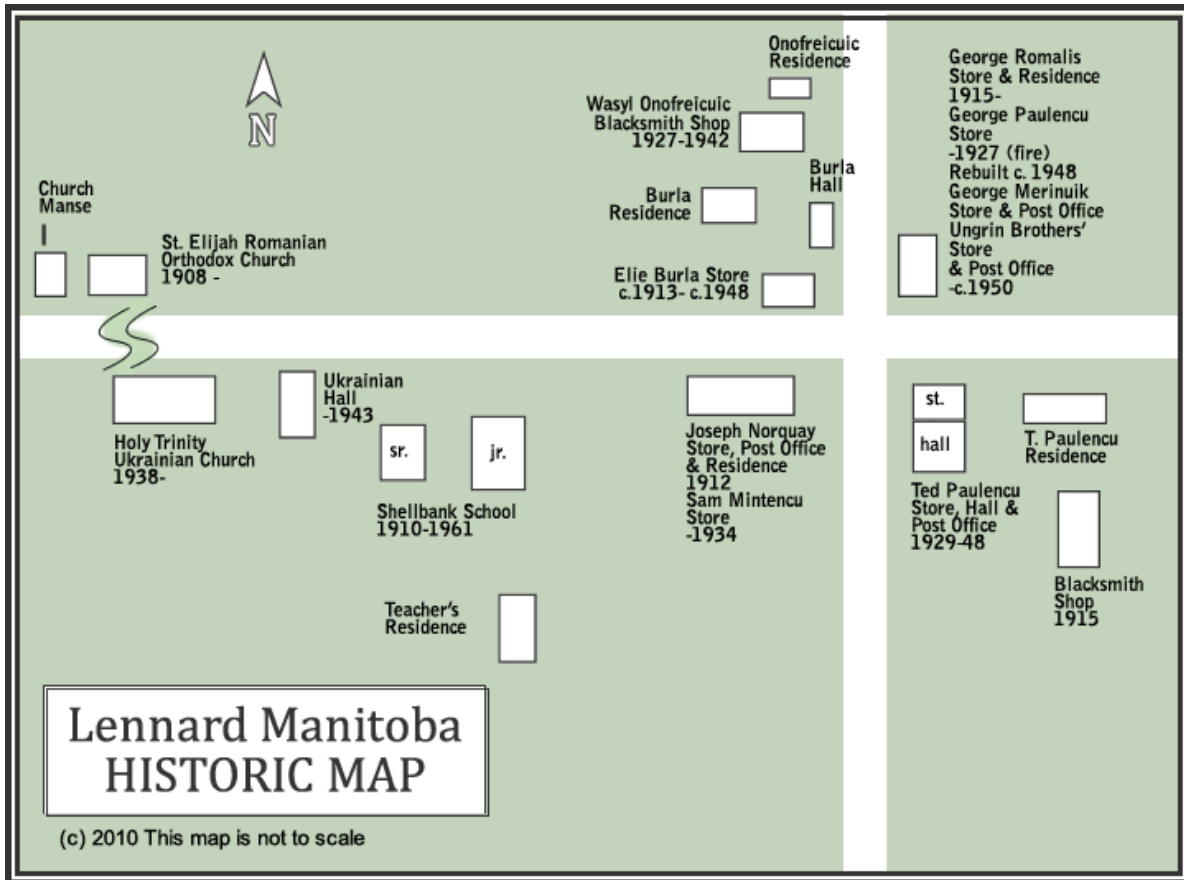
Meanwhile, competition was coming from the newly established town of Inglis where the railway had arrived in 1920. Local farmers were attracted to the new business centre by the presence of four grain elevators and a stock-yard, as well as train connection to Winnipeg and elsewhere.

The adjustments in the business community continued during the 1920s and into the 1930s. The former Romalis store, now owned by George Paulencu, burned down in 1927. Wasyl (Bill) Onofreicuic established a blacksmith shop just north of Elie Burla's store and hall, which he operated until his death in a steam engine accident in 1942. In 1938 the Ukrainian community erected a new church just west of the Shellbank school. Nearby, a large hall was constructed that was destroyed by fire in 1943. The manse at the St. Elijah church had also burned down in 1939.

The period between World War II and 1966 saw the gradual decline and eventual demise of the business-social centre of

Lennard. In 1948, Ted Paulencu closed his store and moved to Hamilton, ON. The post-office was also removed at that time. Elie Burla ceased to carry on business and retired. Meanwhile, George Merinuik built a new store at the northeast corner and the post-office returned to the community. Merinuik sold his store to Elie (Al) Ungrin and his brother Ted (Ed) and moved to Hamilton in 1949. Sometime later the Ungrin brothers closed their store and post-office in Lennard and took over the C.J. Crawford business in Inglis. (The building that housed the last store in Lennard burned down in 1992). In 1966 the Shellbank school closed permanently, leaving the community with only two churches and a restored Ukrainian community hall near the church.

Now, all that remains of the former bustling business-social centre in Lennard are the two churches, where irregular services are held, as well as the occasional wedding or funeral. The manse at the St. Elijah church is unoccupied. However, rising from the ashes, a new focus has emerged in the community. Plugging into the region's growing tourism industry, St. Elijah Pioneer Museum was developed and attracts many visitors from all over North America and elsewhere. Like the immigrants from Bucovina, Lennard also became absorbed into the greater community. Today, a stone cairn is located at the crossroads where Lennard once stood.



Map created from a sketch by Peter Gaber, supplemented by the author



Old Burla Residence, abandoned. (left: close-up, right: showing placement)  
 Photo: 2010



*Lennard Corner Merchants. Ted Paulencu (son of John) (center), was a long-time operator of a store and dance hall on the south-east corner. He moved to Hamilton in the early 1940's. George Mereniuk (right), who married Ted's daughter, Florence, operated a store on the north-east corner. He also moved to Hamilton, c.1948. John Ungrin (left), who bought the store from George and operated it with his brother, Al (Eli), before moving to Hamilton c.1958. Photo c.1960 in Hamilton. (Source: Jim Ungrin, 2010)*

## II. The Community of Shell Valley

**A**s the available supply of homesteads kept getting scarcer in the immediate area of Lennard, the newly arriving immigrants moved farther north and east. As a result, two new communities were settled - Shell Valley, to the north, across the stunningly beautiful eastern arm of the Shell River valley, and later Blue Wing, to the northeast, on the western edge of the Blue Wing marsh .

The Shell Valley community did not create a business and social centre similar to the one in Lennard. However, it did develop the basic facilities required to meet the educational, spiritual and business needs of the settlers. As in the Lennard area, the process started with the establishment of a spiritual centre when the Parish of St. John the Baptist was formed and a



new church building erected seven miles north of Lennard. The original parishioners came from among the newly arrived Romanian and Ukrainian immigrants, and from those who moved over from the overflowing St. Elijah church at Lennard. It was agreed that the new church would serve both the Romanian and Ukrainian settlers and would try to have services in both languages.

Because of the unique design chosen by the parishioners, a local craftsman from Lennard who was familiar with similar structures in Bucovina was chosen to design the church and supervise its construction. Miron Slusarchuk was, among other things, a carpenter and blacksmith. He had come to the Lennard community from Hlinitza in Bucovina. With the help of local volunteers and donated building materials, the church was completed in 1919 and dedicated to its patron saint, St. John the Baptist. A separate bell tower was constructed near the church, and an area set aside for a cemetery. Many of the church's relics and props were either donated or constructed by local parishioners. Some of these may still be viewed in the church today.

Meanwhile, a business-social centre was established when Jack (Procopie) Paulencu built a store one half mile south of the new church. The community received a post-office called Shell

Valley and Paulencu became the first post-master. Nearby, Paulencu constructed a hall that became a popular dance spot and where plays and Christmas school concerts took place. A clearing near the hall, which was also a part of the owner's pasture, was used for soft ball games and tournaments, and annual sports days during the summer. To address the community's basic educational needs, a one-room school house was constructed one half mile north of the church where grades one to eight were taught. At the peak of its enrollment, more than 70 students attended the Shell Valley School.

As in other small agricultural communities, Shell Valley began its decline shortly following the end of World War II. The store burned down in 1949 and at the same time the hall was permanently closed. Another store and post-office building was erected to serve the declining population of the area. The store was owned by Nick Chescu, and later by Andrew Onofreichuk and George Motososki and operated as a convenience store in the area. It closed down permanently in the early 1970s. The school had also closed down in the 1960s as many families moved away and the number of students declined.

Today, St. John the Baptist Church continues to serve the few remaining parishioners and visitors with irregular services performed by visiting priests. Occasional weddings and funerals

are held as required. In 2009 the church celebrated its 90th anniversary with a special service and cultural program attended by many former residents and descendants of the original pioneers.

The building that once housed the store and post-office is now an inn catering to skiers, hunters, fishers and other tourists visiting the many attractions in the revitalized Asessippi region. A few of the farms in the immediate vicinity of the Shell Valley community, once owned by immigrants from Bucovina, are now part of a ranch operated by Kevin and Wanda Larson from Alberta. The Larsons also manage the Shell Valley Inn that provides accommodation and recreational experiences in a genuine ranching environment. As its neighbours around it, the old Shell Valley community is gradually adapting to the new economy, largely based on the raising of livestock and the development of its natural features and beauty to attract tourists.