



John Ferguson

The History of North Bay

In 1882, the train reached the north bay of Nipissing, the area we now call "North Bay". On the train, a passenger by the name of John Ferguson, disembarked, looked around, and decided that the area held promise. He constructed a log cabin, became the first postmaster for the area, and purchased 288 acres of the land which now makes up North Bay's downtown core. Within a year, John Ferguson had brought his new bride to the area and began to have a large framed home constructed in what was the central area to North Bay.



As settlers began to arrive to North Bay, as the train began to run more frequently, and as the lumber began to escalate in the area, North Bay was soon incorporated as a town in 1891. The first mayor of North Bay was John Bourke. Not only did he have the position as mayor, but his Sawmill supplied North Bay with the necessary electricity until he sold the company to North Bay Light Heat and Power in 1904. Other notable figures were J.W. Richardson, John Deegan, Robert Rankin, and David Purvis. Through their efforts, the growth and beautification of the town was carried out. Sitting on school boards, town council, or the Board of Trade, each of these men played more than one role in North Bay, becoming figureheads within the community.

The town began to prosper from the benefits of three railway companies and the lumber industry. In 1919 John Ferguson was elected mayor of North Bay and continued to serve a mayor until 1922. Much of the land which he had purchased upon his initial arrival to the area was sold or donated to churches and schools. The first two room school house was built on land donated by John Ferguson, and was later dubbed the "Blue School House" as the building was painted blue. The Anglican and Baptist churches both benefitted from the generosity of John Ferguson. While the land itself was very rocky, it was do in part to the kindness of Ferguson, that these religious groups were able to provide a permanent place of worship for their parishioners. Until the construction of many of the early churches, services were often held in old train cars or in the homes of North Bay residents.



North Bay was incorporated as a city in August 1925, and it became fitting for John Ferguson to act as the president of the Old Home Week Committee. No longer considered a town, North Bay had reached a turning point in its brief but turbulent history.

In January 1968 the City of North Bay amalgamated with West Ferris and Widdifield townships.

Thanks to the North Bay Area Museum for this article.

North Bay as a Transportation Centre

From its beginnings as a settlement of the Nipissing Indians, North Bay has been a transportation centre. The first commerce in the area was carried out by canoe and the fact that North Bay was on a system of interconnected waterways was very important. As the early voyagers quickly discovered, these waters provided the fastest route from Montreal through to the Great Lakes and beyond. Students of Canadian history will remember the descriptions of Samuel de Champlain paddling "up the Ottawa River and down the Mattawa", on his exploratory trip up through the North Bay region in 1615.

With the increased development of lumber and mining interests in the area, North Bay became a rail centre. The Canadian Pacific, Canadian National and Temiskaming and Northern Railway (today's Ontario Northland Railway) had lines in the North Bay area by the mid-1880s. Today, location means access to major



highways and air carriers, and North Bay has both.



The building of the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways, and then the Ontario Northland Railway, established North Bay as the major transportation centre for the region. The arrival of the railways opened new markets for both lumber and the other natural resource activities in the

area. Easy access to primary resources (nickel, iron, copper, gold, platinum, silver and cobalt) drew a wide range of light and heavy industry to the area. As mining and lumber developed in regions to the north and east, North Bay became a supply centre, and a secondary manufacturing base grew to service these industries. North Bay also developed as a regional centre for education, health care, retail and other personal and professional services.

North Bay, critically situated at the junctions of Highway 11 and the TransCanada Highway 17, remains a major transportation centre for Northern Ontario. In addition to the railways, three bus lines and six major trucking companies currently operate out of North Bay. North Bay boasts one of the best airports in the country, located within city boundaries, with all-weather facilities supplemented by military radar equipment from the adjacent airbase. Telecommunications infrastructure within the City is state of the art for information-based businesses and industries.

