

# A Walk to Remember...

Block 2, Lot 8, 9 & 10

## The Co-op

James Balmer Preston, one of the early homesteaders, realized that settlers and those passing through were often in need of supplies such as flour, sugar and tobacco. Even when farming near the original location of Carnduff, he supplemented his income by being a merchant to others. In the fall of 1884, with the proceeds of his crop of \$110, he set out for Pilot Mound, Manitoba and bought his first shipment of goods, establishing a general store in the old town site.

To replenish his stock he made many trips on his white faced pony, Schokey which he had from 1882 on as his companion and protector. Snorting and pawing at the ground Schokey kept the wolves at bay as they camped on the bald prairie in their lonely travels to replenish supplies. In the fall of 1891, Schokey pulled the plow to turn the first sod on the newly relocated town site of Carnduff.

With the town's location being firmly established, J. B. bought Lots 8, 9, and 10 on Railway Avenue as the site for his new general store. Construction was completed in the fall of 1891 and the sign "J.B. Preston" was mounted on the two storey, wood frame building as one of the first businesses established in Carnduff. The finishing accents included iron hitching rods to tie the horses while shopping.

The first restaurant in Carnduff was established on this location as well. As the Preston store did not occupy the full three lots, John Anderson operated an eating house in a tent on the lot, between the store on the east and the Fairbairn business to the west. As Carnduff grew so did the need for store space and in 1900, an addition was added to the south end of the Preston store, including a second entrance.

The general store was a gathering place for people who often only made the trip to town once or twice each month. Hours reflected this with the store being open from 7am until 10pm and even as late as midnight on Saturdays. During harvest, it was not unheard of for the general store to be open until 1 in the morning. The selection of goods varied and included open boxes of dried fruits in the grocery section along with 70 lb. blocks of cheese. Bartering was the norm as money was tight, with women trading eggs and butter, and men sometimes bringing furs to exchange for goods.

School was considered secondary in these days and at age 13, Preston's son, Clarence was instructed that the school days were over and it was time to become a storekeeper with his father. In 1919, with 18 years of experience already under his belt, Clarence took over the business with his brothers, Victor and Gurney. Victor sold his share and moved to Colorado in 1925 for health reasons. He had contracted tuberculosis while serving overseas during World War I which left him with only one lung.

In 1946, Preston's store was sold by Clarence and Gurney. Harold Spencer, returning from the Royal Canadian Air Force and World War II in August 1945 went into partnership with his cousin, Herb Spencer to buy the business. At the time of Spencers purchase, the original portion of the building, with 2 large display windows bordering the entrance housed the dry goods section of the store. Up two steps to the south was the grocery department located in the addition which could also be accessed by steps up to an east door off Broadway. An interior stairway led to two suites upstairs. Harold and wife,,Marj lived in the northeast suite for the first seven years of their return to Carnduff.

In January 1949 fire badly gutted the building but volunteer firefighters saved it from total destruction. By spring the store was back in business with Harold and his wife as sole owners. With business not being sufficient to support two families, Herb's share was bought out. The south portion of Lot 10 was sold to Herb Emrick at this time for a new post office.

In 1952, the remaining property was sold to the Co-op, with the new Carnduff Co-op store and service station opening a few years later. This resulted in four grocery stores operating in town. The Spencers by then had relocated their store to its present location, the site where Harold's grandfather, Nelson Spencer had built his original hardware store in 1904.

In 1957 a new, modern grocery store and two-bay service station were opened on the corner of Broadway and Railway. The store was completely renovated in 1996 affording a bright new facility for staff and customers. The service bays were closed but the gas bar and card lock remained. In 1998, the storage shed to the west was added. The Co-op continues to be a strong presence and supporter of the community of Carnduff today.



Carnduff Co-op & Gas Bar with Service Bay (c. 1965)