



Twin Oaks, 1932.

## The Heritage of the River Road Manitoba

by Jean Friesen

The River Road which follows the west bank of Manitoba's Red River through the old parishes of St. Andrews and St. Clements first appeared on maps in 1836. This was never the King's Highway, like that linking Lower and Upper Fort Garry, but was maintained by statute labour until the 1880's as a parish road. Dusty in summer, frozen and windswept in winter, impassably muddy in spring, it remained the 'high street' of an extended village of largely English speaking mixed-blood families once connected with the fur trade of Rupert's Land.

St. Andrew's parish consisted of the gentry of the fur trade, many of them descendants of Indian women and Orkneymen with names such as Isbister, Kennedy, Sinclair, and Flett. Several residents became active politically in the new Manitoba and one, the Hon. John Norquay, became premier of the province in the 1880's. Most were small scale farmers on narrow river lots established in the 1830's. In accordance with the treaty made between Chief Peguis and Lord Selkirk in 1817, the settlers' rights existed only two miles back from the river. By custom, however, the settlers used the timber on the east bank of the Red and a hay 'privilege' on the common ground behind their lots. Each of these lots might contain one or two houses and as many as twelve stables, byres, or storehouses. Because few families could survive by farming, most also participated in trade, wage labour, fishing, and at times, hunting. From the 1850's to the 1880's, St. Andrews appeared to visitors to be a prosperous community with larger cultivated fields and more traders than other parishes. The people, some of whom had been of Church of Scotland origin, were, in this new land, united by an Anglican faith, family ties and friendship derived both from common experience in the fur trade and the pleasantries of daily life in an isolated community.

By the turn of the century, however, the prairie west had undergone a major transition and St. Andrews and its people had been eclipsed by the new metropolis, Winnipeg. The once prominent place of the mixed blood entrepreneurs and politicians of the old Red River was taken by settlers from Britain and Ontario. The parish itself continued as a farming settlement with the addition of Ukrainian and German farmers in the 1920's and 30's. At this time too, some older houses became country residences for wealthier Winnipeggers and elaborate decorative gardens replaced oats, corn and barley.

By the 1940's, although the road was still well travelled, it had begun to be threatened by erosion. During the early years of Parks Canada's involvement with Lower Fort Garry, inventories of the several heritage buildings were conducted by Barbara Johnson, a descendant of an old fur trade family. Mary Elizabeth Bayer, a deputy minister in the Manitoba Government whose family home was at the north end of the parish took a keen interest in the preservation of the district. As a personal centennial project, a Winnipeg doctor, Edward Shaw, purchased Kennedy House and tried to develop it as a private museum. The parish of St. Andrews itself, under various ministers, has had a long term interest in the history of the church. Thus when the state interest in heritage so characteristic of the 1970's, turned its attention to the west, there was a small group of local activists ready to promote the interests of the Red River and the Britannic history of Manitoba.

As part of this expanded government interest in 'heritage' a federal-provincial arrangement A.R.C. (Agreement for Recreation and Conservation) to "identify, preserve, interpret and develop the natural, historical and scenic heritage resources" of the Red River corridor was signed in

1978. This was a 13 million dollar agreement to last 7 years. It was administered by an ARC management board, a Technical Steering Committee and a Public Advisory Council who, in 1981, approved a Master Development Plan for 18 projects within the Red River Corridor.<sup>1</sup>

The River Road project and the interpretation of Kennedy House was thus only part of a very large and unprecedented development of Manitoba heritage. This larger context influenced the selection of historical themes for the Road. Indian life both pre-historic and historic, the fur trade and French Metis society were commemorated elsewhere in the corridor. At St. Andrews Church and in the reconstruction of the adjacent rectory it was understood that Parks Canada would take the themes of the role of the Church of England and particularly that of the Church Missionary Society. The Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation had already erected at Little Britain Church a plaque to Duncan Macrae, the Scots stonemason, builder and amateur architect reportedly responsible for most of the mid-nineteenth century stone architecture of the Lower Fort Garry area. The choice then of the four themes for this Heritage Corridor—River lot agriculture, parish life, the role of English mixed bloods and the Great Transition from 1840-80—was made to complement other regional heritage resources and to emphasize economic and social history rather than the political heritage. Each of these themes is presented on illustrated bilingual plaques at both north and south entrances to the parkway.

Along the approximately nine kilometres of the road and adjacent bicycle path are a variety of interpretive "nodes" which add to the historical framework already established at the entrance. The most important of these in terms of heritage resource development is Kennedy House, constructed in 1866 on the banks of the Red, close to St. Andrew's Church. Known originally as Maple Grove (Kennedy House) was built for Captain William Kennedy, the mixed blood son of Hudson's Bay Company chief Factor Alexander Kennedy and his Cree wife Anannathas. Mrs. William Kennedy (Eleanor Cripps) was the daughter of an English sea captain, distantly related to Lady Franklin through whom she met Captain Kennedy who had been engaged in the search for Sir John Franklin.

William Kennedy had been educated in Orkney, returned to North America to work for the HBC in Labrador but parted from them over the issue of their distribution of alcohol to Indians. He engaged in various commercial enterprises before returning to the land at Red River where his mother and her younger children had remained. He retained his hostility to the Company and campaigned vigorously for a Canadian province at Red River. A strong Churchman and temperance reformer he served briefly as a missionary for the Moravians on Lake Manitoba, and with less success, amongst the Ojibwa of North Western Ontario. After the 1870's, he, like many Metis became peripheral to the society of the New Manitoba. He served as a Justice of the Peace and on the Board of Education but his economic condition declined, for he was a small scale trader dependent on the prosperity of his neighbours. He endured disastrous losses in the collapse of the real estate market in the 1880's as many of his customers had paid in Metis scrip. He was horrified by the kind of Canadians who came to dominate Manitoba and who had little regard for the older society of country born, mixed blood people. His daughter, Mary, wrote of him later that he was too generous and too easily led.

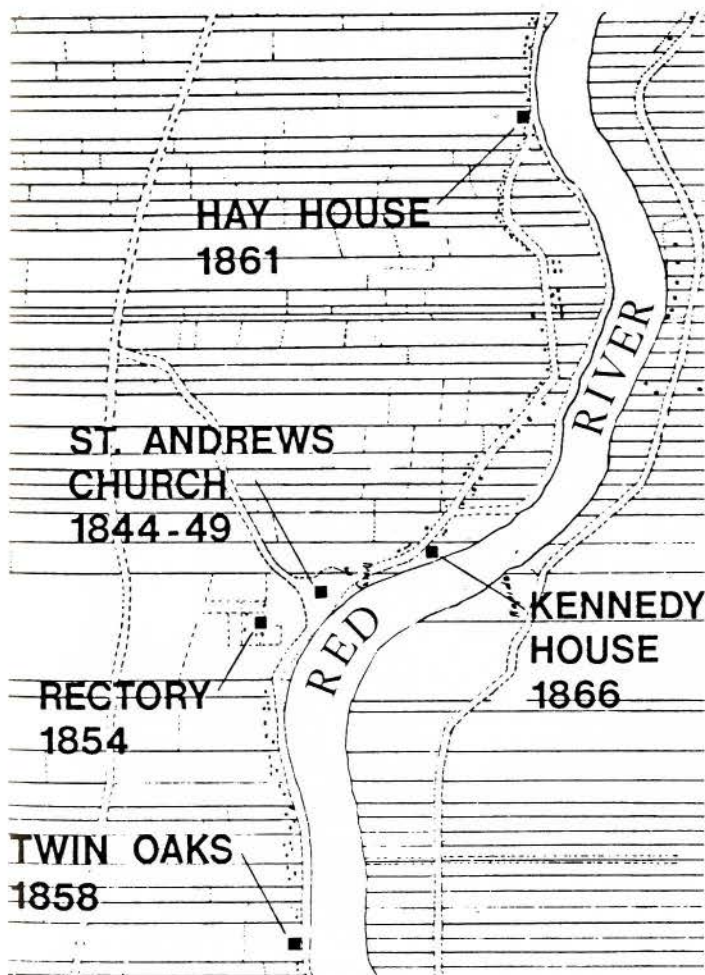
Mrs. Kennedy, a moderately well-educated English-woman, bore two children, William and Mary. She also supported the family during her husband's long periods of ill health by conducting a millinery and ladies clothing import business. She taught music at Miss Davis' Academy on River Road, played the organ at St. Andrews, led the choir at the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society, organized charity work during grasshopper invasions, vaccinated the people of the district in the epidemic of the 1870's, entertained visiting dignitaries to St. Andrew's and was referred to, appropriately, by her neighbours as the "Duchess."

Mrs. Kennedy ensured her daughter was educated partly in England which isolated Mary from some of her contemporaries and she never married, although she did eventually become a court reporter and enjoyed her later years writing and painting. William, it was hoped, would enter the ministry but he became a land office clerk and married too late in life to produce a family. The interpretive 'story' of the Kennedy family is unusual in the sense of being composed of a marriage of a white woman and a native man. It is typical, however, in the way the family became economically marginal and politically irrelevant to the new commercial Manitoba.

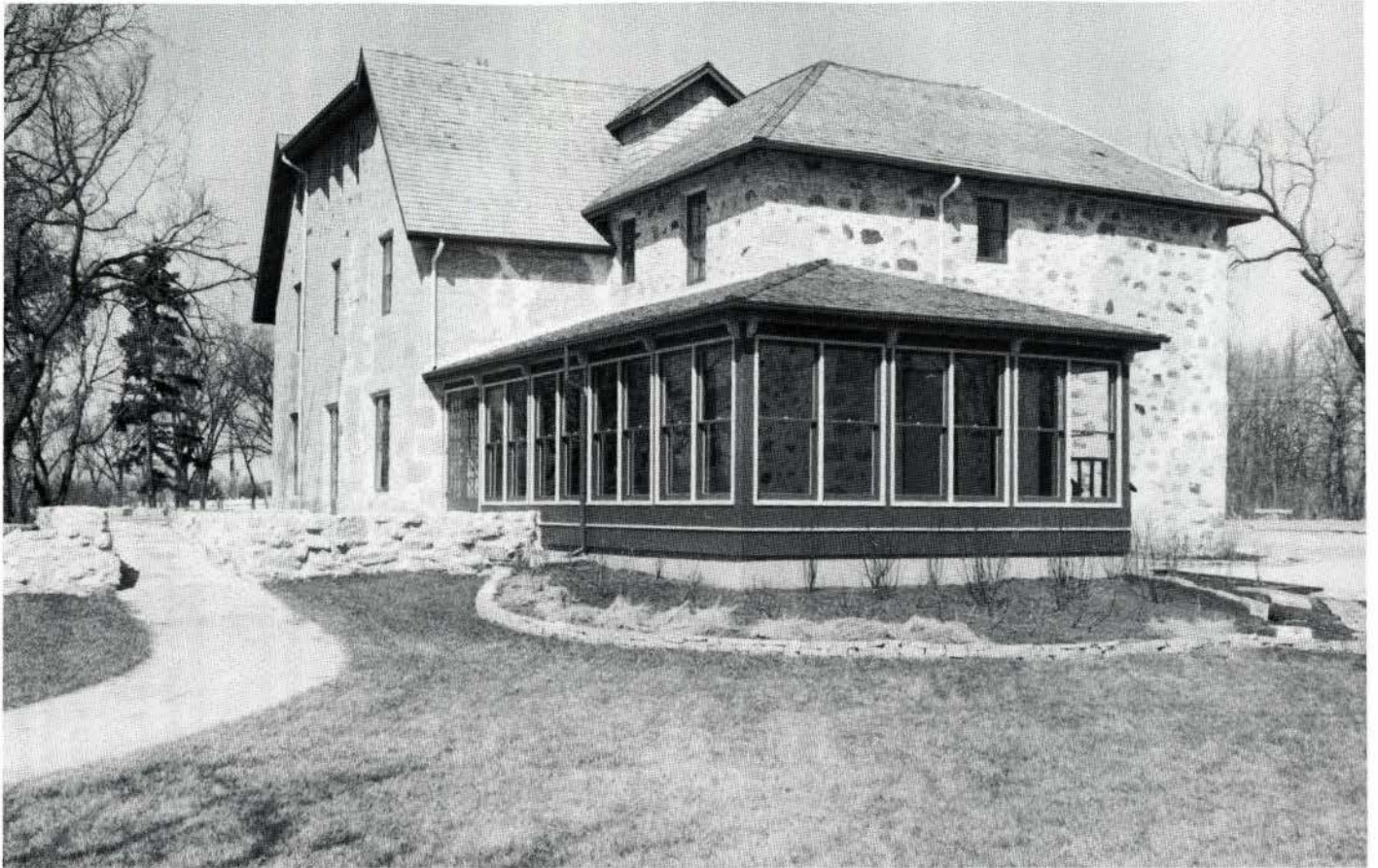
In the Kennedy House interpretive program there has been no attempt to recreate the living rooms of the family. There seemed little purpose in imitating what had been accomplished at Dalnavert, the Manitoba Historical Society's Winnipeg monument to late Victorian domestic splendour. There was no budget for a continuing programme of interpretive activities such as Parks Canada is able to offer at Lower Fort Garry. There were only half a dozen objects which were site specific and less than \$15,000 for furnishing purchases. The house itself had experienced several dramatic alterations, including a raised roof line, two additional wings and a radical re-arrangement of internal space. There were, then, some severe restrictions and what are euphemistically referred to as 'challenges' for the interpretive team.

The ARC Management Committee rejected proposals for a small museum exhibit, and suggested that what was required was a "country house experience" which would attract both the tourist en route to Lower Fort Garry and the repeat visitor from Winnipeg. It was also agreed by all concerned that Kennedy House "must pay its own way." The result of these guidelines was to place emphasis on the magnificent river bank site the house occupies, to recreate the gardens to the 1920's and to use interpretive outdoor plaques to develop additional historical themes. The house was relieved of its 1950's porch addition but no money was available to restore the gabled roofline on the river side. A glassed verandah was added at ground floor level to provide a 'tea house' to be operated on contract by a volunteer group from St. Andrew's Church. The second floor of the house was renovated to provide a modern apartment for the head gardener who presence also provides some security for the building.

The project team continued the "adaptive re-use" approach in the interior. The 1920's restoration and internal re-arrangement of rooms was retained thus offering three spaces for interpretation. Each room is used as a vehicle for the demonstration and explanation of the life and role of family members. There is no intention of representing this as the way in which the house was occupied—a philosophy clearly outlined for the visitor. The largest room, furnished as a drawing room, discusses the economic role of Mrs. Kennedy, and describes her daily activities and those of her children. A second, smaller room, offers clues to the life of William Kennedy, his trading and religious interests as well as his Arctic experience. The dining room, which is potentially usable by the public, offers an entry to the tea room and the opportunity to discuss the daily household routine, diet, and the role of domestic servants. Upstairs, three short videos provide information on fur trade family life, seasonal life at Red River and the 1880's life of a young woman, Mary Kennedy, based on her own diaries.



This map of the houses—and of St. Andrews Church—along River Road excludes Scott house, to the south, and Bunn house and St. Peter's Rectory, to the north.



Kennedy House



Kennedy House



St. Andrews Church, circa 1952.

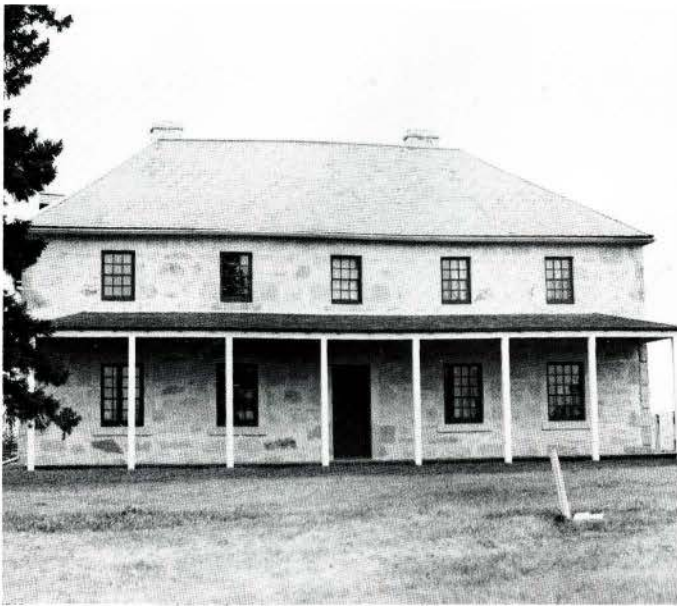
The public reaction has been excellent and the opening hours of Kennedy House have been expanded to meet public demand. Yet from an interpretive perspective there are some disappointments. Kennedy House was to have been a usable environment. Unlike Dalnavert and Lower Fort Garry this was to be a house where the visitor could sit and view the river, take tea in a Victorian setting in the dining room or read religious tracts in Kennedy's study. The furnishings were purchased and restored with this in view. They are sturdy and hard wearing (replicas, in some cases and not of "Museum Quality"). Yet they are now only viewed from behind a barrier. This is because the provincial agency responsible for the house has no resources for repairs or replacements. Their response has been to protect the environment but in so doing to turn the rooms into museum chambers—a role for which they were never intended and for which they are inappropriately appointed.

The training and provision of interpreters is still on a haphazard basis. The house is run on a day-to-day basis by the Church Guild who do an excellent job of catering, provide local continuity, enormous energy and enthusiasm but who acknowledge they have very limited historical training. There are no special interest tours, no winter use of the house, no plans to expand the collection or even to accept donations or develop a reserve collection. Such disappointments represent missed opportunities. They are reversible and with public pressure, a recognition that Kennedy House is a demonstrated, measurable success, and with the

gradual expansion of Heritage park planning in Manitoba, improvements are possible.

The gardens of Kennedy House along the banks of the Red River have been restored to the 1920's and demonstrate the way the parish was changing from farm settlement to country retreat. The original flagstone paths and formal flower beds were still extant. The English design chosen by a former occupant, Mrs. McAllister, a descendant of the Kennedys and Norquays has been reproduced and has proved to be a particular "drawing card" for the whole project.

Elsewhere along the road, the visitors' attention has been drawn to the marsh created by the quarrying of limestone for the private and public buildings of the parish. Behind the marsh stands a large fieldstone house built in 1861 by Thomas Firth of the HBC and occupied after 1900 by E.H.G.G. Hay, a businessman, who had operated a grist mill near St. Andrew's Church and who was later appointed clerk of works for the Lockport Locks. Hay was an active member of St. Andrew's Church who had been elected to Riel's Provisional Government in 1870 and who was later to represent St. Andrew's in Manitoba's first Legislative Assembly. This house is still in private hands but is being sympathetically restored on the exterior. Until relatively recently it was used by descendants of the Hay family, among them Mary Elizabeth Bayer whose energy and interest in the history of Red River society is in part responsible for the Manitoba ARC project.



St. Andrew's Rectory

At the Northern end of the Red River corridor are the huge public works commissioned by Prime Minister Laurier to enable steamboats to use the Lake Winnipeg-Red River system more effectively—a role they were too late to fulfill although they are still used by pleasure boats. The area is well known as a local fishing place and in the spring provides a resting place for thousands of pelicans on their migration path. Here at Lockport, on the east side of the river, is a small but very effective archaeological museum and some continuing fieldwork. 'Kenosowin'—the place of fish for both Indians and newcomers—has also provided significant new evidence of the northern limits of native agriculture. The ARC museum commemorates this and offers the opportunity to inspect archaeological laboratory work and a site dig in process.

A final stop, a few miles north of here, is the stone church of St. Peter's, built in 1852-53 by the Christian Indians of the Red River region and their Church of England missionary. Annual services are still held here and the grave of Chief Peguis has foremost place in the cemetery. ARC was able to make contributions to the restoration of the landscape and to install a small exhibit dealing primarily with Peguis and the Church Missionary Society.

The C.M.S. itself is dealt with more extensively at the Rectory facing St. Andrew's Church. Here Parks Canada have painstakingly rebuilt, at considerable expense, and with much careful research, the mid-19th century residence of the Anglican minister. The present incumbent occupies an apartment on the upper floor and during the summer the ground floor offers a simple didactic written exhibit on the Anglican missionary history of western Canada and the place of St. Andrew's in that world.



Scott House.

Parks Canada has also commemorated with a plaque, *Twin Oaks*, a large 1860's stone building south of the church built as a boarding school by Miss Matilda Davies, to provide an education for the young ladies of the North-West. Here Mary Kennedy received her early education; here her mother taught music and deportment, and from here the daughters of the fur trade aristocracy would walk two-by-two every Sunday in a crocodile to St. Andrew's Church. This striking house remains in responsible private hands.

The final site as one returns south to Winnipeg is Scott House, the oldest of all the stone buildings of River Road. Built in 1855, it replaced the earlier log cabin of William Scott an Orkney labourer and boatman. He married a local woman of Orkney descent, twelve-year-old Ann Setter, and until his death in 1874 he supported his family of twelve by farming, fishing, hunting and day labour. Scott owned three lots in the parish but this site, his main farmstead, included the house, a kitchen, a small residence, five farm buildings, twenty cultivated acres, as well as a two mile hay privilege to the west.

An early photograph of the 1870's shows Scott's house as a simple vernacular cottage with a full length front verandah. A low central door and two deep silled symmetrical windows are still evident. The house itself has been partly demolished and reconstructed, after a fashion, as a building fragment. It is used as a viewing platform and from the top level it does indeed offer a magnificent vista of the Red River, her river lots and historic skyline. The partial demolition of Scott House, though, was a significant error of the ARC project. The construction of the external viewing platform could also have been more sympathetic to the original proportions of the house. But this was done under the auspices of the Manitoba Jobs Fund, an employment programme with strict time guidelines which gave little opportunity for consultation and reconsiderations. In retrospect many would agree that it might have been possible to 'mothball' Scott House and search for reconstruction funds after ARC had finished.

ARC projects are also to be found in landscaped parks, docks and boat launches along the banks of the Red as it passes through downtown Winnipeg and St. Boniface. West along the Assiniboine River at St. Norbert are two further developments commemorating the French Metis and the remains of a Trappist monastery.

The ARC programme has one final site as yet uncompleted at the junction of the Red and the Assiniboine where 8.8 acres have been assembled. In the original plan this was to have been a major development with an interpretive centre and an emphasis upon native history and transport history. It has been scaled down considerably to consist of only a landscaping project, a series of plaques rather like a "stations-of-the-cross", and a bizarre proposal for statues, "community" inspired, professionally executed and consistent with the themes of the Forks site. To the dismay of many, the Federal Government is missing the opportunity to take one of its few urban parks sites, situated amidst a dense and primarily native population, and to create an interpretive centre with all the imaginative professional skill in research, interpretation and design which Parks Canada has shown at Quebec, Louisbourg and most recently at Batoche.

It is an unsatisfactory end to a significant historical and interpretive programme, one unlikely to be repeated in western Canada for many decades. It is short sighted because, situated as it is in downtown Winnipeg, the potential for public visibility and support is large. It is a narrow decision from an agency which has in the past accorded low priority to the history of the first nations.

The River Road and other parts of the ARC project have been a success. ARC has preserved a landscape. It has linked a number of existing historic resources and provided examples of ways heritage can 'pay'. It pooled the financial and professional resources of provincial and federal governments. It gave opportunities to local community groups to become involved in operating various sites. It brought a wider recognition to the work of the provincial historical resources branch and put Lower Fort Garry, the federal flagship, in an appropriate historical context. It accomplished all this, not in Quebec, or the Niagara peninsula where there exists a widespread support for Heritage, but in rural Manitoba where there is no great reverence for the landscape or buildings of the past.

In retrospect we may come to see ARC as part of a transition in Western Canada's sense of itself. Manitoba, which took its pride in its newness, its brashness, its emulation of Chicago, began to visibly acknowledge a past, long before Canada came, when Indian, Scot, French and English created not only a new nation—the Metis, but also a unique society along the Red and Assiniboine and a vast commercial empire upon which they all depended. □

## NOTES

1. These included: a central visitor centre at the Forks, an urban park system on both banks of the Red; a heritage parkway on River Road; archaeological investigations at Lockport; interpretation of local churches; creation of a heritage park in St. Norbert; development of the Trappist Monastery site and interpretation of Fort Garry Gates. For further information see Robert Coultts, **Recreation and Conservation in the Red River Corridor**, paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, 1986, from which the above material was taken.

## Nominations to the SSAC Board of Directors

The following articles of the constitution should be noted:

**4.04 Election and Term.** The Directors shall be elected by the members at the Annual Meeting and serve terms of two years. At the first Annual Meeting one half of the Directors will be elected for a period of two years and one half for a period of one year. A Director may serve two successive terms of office.

**11.01 Nominating Committee.** At the Annual Meeting the Board of Directors shall appoint a Nominating Committee to serve for the following year. The Committee shall be composed of three members appointed from the general membership and one member from the Board of Directors who shall serve as the Chairman. No member of the Nominating Committee shall serve more than one term on succession. The duties of the Nominating Committee are to present nominations for the Board of Directors (Members at Large) and the Officers to be elected at the next Annual Meeting.

**11.02 Nomination by Membership.** Nominations for the Board of Directors and Officers may be made by a petition, signed by the nominee and not less than four members of the Corporation presented to the Chairman of the Nominating Committee not less than forty-eight (48) hours prior to the Annual Meeting.

Positions open for election at the Annual Meeting 1988 in Vancouver are President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Members at Large for Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Nominations should be sent to Diana Kordan, Chairperson Nominations Committee; or telephone (403) 427-2022.

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Negrych farm building, Venlaw Manitoba 1899 - 1986.

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