

Hyland Provincial Park – The Destination of Early Riverboat Excursions

*Stories from “Heritage II – A History of East St. Paul” book
Submitted by Mayor Shelley Hart*



Postcard of the *Winnitoba* near the St. Andrews Lock and Dam, circa 1910. (Manitoba Historical Society)

Hyland Provincial Park is located at 2950 Henderson Highway, directly across the street from the Imperial Oil distribution operation. Today, most East St. Paul residents know it as a riverbank park where you can play tennis, have a BBQ under the picnic shelter and more recently, where you can launch your boat. Step back some 109 years and this site had a very different use.

In the early 1900s, riverboat excursions were becoming fashionable and John Leamond Hyland, president of the Hyland Navigation & Trading Company purchased the property. He wished to create a picnic site and run excursion boats to and from Winnipeg. He bought an elegantly appointed white side-wheeler for this purpose and in July 1909, he christened it the SS WINNITOBA.

The excursion trips for up to 2,000 passengers, between Winnipeg and what is now Hyland Park, were so popular that John Hyland purchased a sister ship, the stern-wheeler SS BONITOBA. Advertised as “floating palaces”, the boats made two or three daily trips to Hyland Park where those aboard as well as the people living along the river

were entertained by a brass band on the top deck. The romantic evening excursions carried dancers to the pavilion and a fine orchestra provided music for these moonlight cruises.

Unfortunately, the glory days of these two Hyland steamships did not last long. In the early morning of September 29, 1912, the SS WINNITOBA burnt at its moorings, in mysterious circumstances, and the hulk sank to the bottom of the harbour. Destroyed at the same time were two barges, the Hyland wharf and pavilion. The following year the SS BONITOBA was crushed in the ice.

It was not until the arrival of the SS KEENORA in 1917 that excursion trips during the day and moonlight cruises at night again reached Hyland Park. The area was renamed Keenora Park and for a time was well patronized. The automobile was within reach of many now and the SS KEENORA, losing money, was purchased by the Selkirk Navigation Company and put into service between that town and Lake Winnipeg.

The Hyland Park lands changed hands three more times until it became the property of Imperial Oil in 1949. The company acquired the property as part of a parcel of land on which to build a refinery.

In 1975, this 11 acre park was donated by Imperial Oil Limited to the Manitoba Government for use as a public park. The park has been leased since 2006 by the R.M. of East St. Paul, which manages the park and maintains the grounds and facilities.