



background

A Brief History of Saskatoon

Cities are constantly evolving. The streets, buildings, neighbourhoods and public spaces that make up the character of a city reflect the values and aspirations of the people who have lived there over time. Saskatoon owes its existence to geographical and climatic factors, 19th century political and social issues, and the sheer will and foresight of its founders. Soon after being settled, it emerged as a hub in the developing economy of Central and Western Canada. Thanks again to its location and the creativity of its citizens, Saskatoon entered the 21st century as an important hub in the global economy.

The values that shape the future of a city are often rooted in its history.



Riversdale looking east from St. Paul's Hospital, St. Mary's Church at Avenue O South and 20th Street West at right. St. George's Ukrainian Greek Catholic Cathedral can be seen on Avenue M South. Photo by Dr. F.E. Wait.

<p>1883 Permanent settlement begins with Temperance Colony in present-day Nutana</p>	<p>1901 Village of Saskatoon incorporated</p>	<p>1906 City of Saskatoon formed</p> <p>1907 Saskatoon selected as site for the University of Saskatchewan</p>	<p>1913 First public transit (streetcar) service begins operation</p>	<p>1929 Saskatoon Airport officially established</p>
<p>1882</p> <p>1890 First railway bridge completed</p>	<p>1902 The Saskatoon "Phoenix" newspaper is published</p>	<p>1907 Traffic bridge completed</p>	<p>1909-1913 Pre-War real estate boom ends with real estate bust</p>	<p>1914-1918 First World War</p> <p>1930s Depression and drought sweep the prairies</p>

Pre- and early settlement

Although people have been living in what is now Saskatoon for at least 8,000 years, permanent European settlement on the Prairies did not substantially begin until 1872 when the Dominion Lands Act was passed, which among other things provided free homestead lands to settlers in the newly-opened territories.

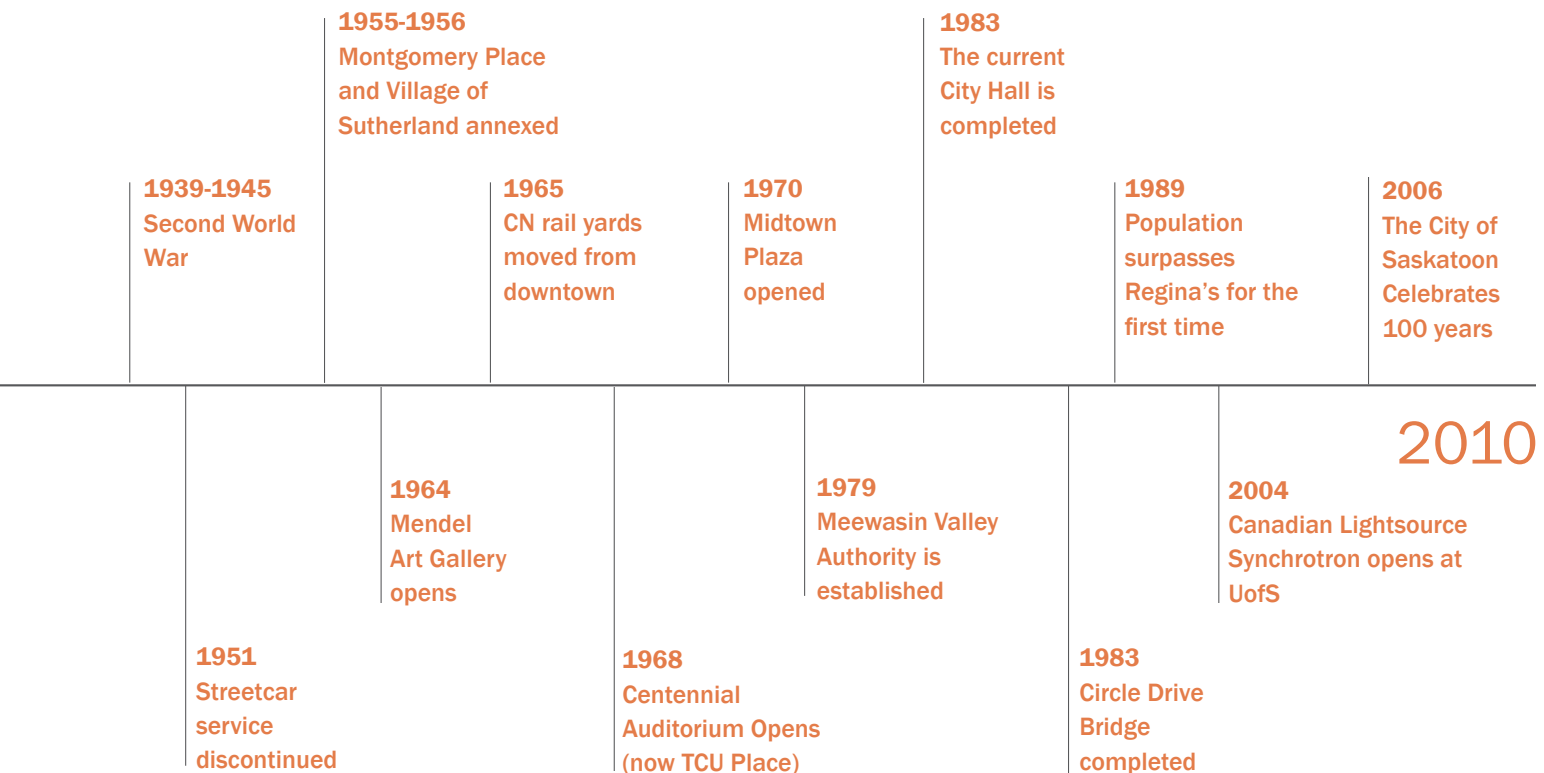
Saskatoon was founded in 1882 as a “temperance colony”, free of alcohol and the evils of the liquor trade. By 1884, the community consisted of six houses, a store, a sawmill and some 80 optimistic souls living in what is now the Nutana area.

The 1885 North West Resistance left the colony largely unscathed. Indeed, it was the source of a much-needed economic boost, providing both employment to the settlers and a lucrative market for their surplus agricultural products. At the same time, many prospective new settlers were scared away by sensationalised newspaper reports back east, and Saskatoon’s future seemed less than assured.



1900 - Image call no. LH85 courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library - Local History Room
Aboriginal encampment including covered wagons. Photo by Ralph Dill.

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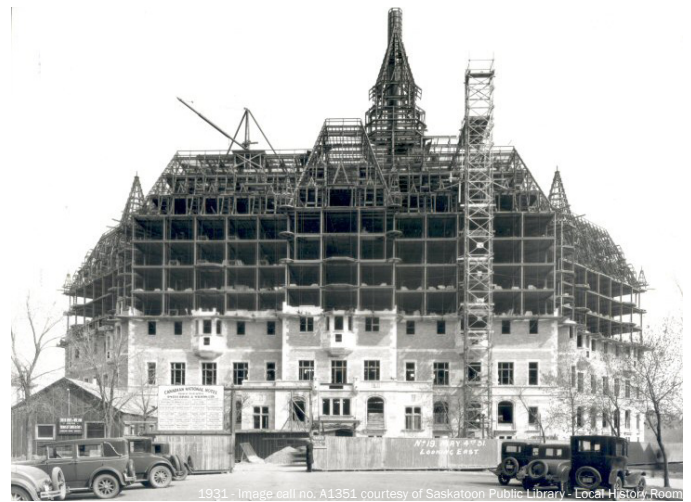
The early city

In 1890, the outlines of the modern city began to take shape. That year, the Qu'appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan railway arrived, connecting Saskatoon to Regina and Prince Albert. The decision to build the railway station and facilities across the river, in what is now the downtown, marked the beginning of development there. This new settlement soon eclipsed the original in importance and, in 1901, was incorporated as the Village of Saskatoon.

By 1905, there were three separate communities here: Riversdale, Saskatoon and Nutana - the original temperance colony settlement. To meet the needs of a rapidly-growing population, the three agreed to combine their resources, and on May 23, 1906, the City of Saskatoon was born.

The years from 1906-1913 were mostly very good to Saskatoon. The population more than quadrupled, making it Canada's fastest-growing city. With the building of the Traffic Bridge and new railway lines connecting it to the rest of the country, Saskatoon rapidly developed into an important transportation hub, agricultural service centre and - with the establishment of the University of Saskatchewan here in 1909 - educational centre. As a city, Saskatoon could now afford to build the infrastructural improvements demanded by its growing population, including a system of sewer and water lines, a power plant, and a city-wide street car system, which opened in 1913. At one time, 90% of the population lived within a 5-minute walk of a streetcar line.

The city's first boom came crashing to a halt in 1913-1914, victim of the drying up of easy credit caused by the rumblings of war in Europe. Although there was a "mini-boom" in the late 1920s, Saskatoon wouldn't fully recover until after the Second World War. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the city's population actually declined. One consequence of the economic troubles both of 1914 and of the 1930s was that the City acquired a great deal of land from real estate speculators and others who could no longer afford to pay taxes on it. This was to prove beneficial later on.



1931 - Image call no. A1351 courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library - Local History Room
Bessborough Hotel under construction. Full frontal view from 21st Street. Leonard A. Hillyard photo, 1931.



1904 - Image call no. LH931 courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library - LHR
G.R. Frazer's harness shop in 1904.



1925 - Image call no. LH4148 courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library - LHR
Chinese businesses in 1925 including Wah Chung Lung Co. and Wing Woo Chung Co. on 19th Street East between 1st and 2nd Avenues.

In its early years, Saskatoon was Canada's fastest growing city. The next great boom came after World War II.



1948 - Image call no. PH96-177-9 courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library - Local History Room

Photographer John W. Gibson setting up his "Cirkut" panoramic camera with the help of his grandson, Don. Gibson photo, 21 July 1948.



late 1930's - Image call no. A1475 courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library - Local History Room

Kong Lee store interior probably at 101 - 2nd Avenue South (it had been at 204 - 2nd Avenue North in the late 1930s. Leonard A. Hillyard photo.



ca.1940 - Image call no. PH96-177-5 courtesy of Saskatoon Public Library - Local History Room

Competitors lined up below the Saskatoon Ski Club ski jump near the weir on the east bank of the river. Photograph by Dr. F.E. Wait.

Post-war city

After the war, Saskatoon experienced a severe housing shortage. The thousands of returning soldiers – many bringing new families with them – all needed somewhere to live in a city where almost no new houses had been built since the early 1930s. By the 1950s, new immigrants were also helping to swell the city's population, which almost doubled over the course of the decade. To help address this problem, the City began to sell off the properties that it had acquired earlier. The revenue was reinvested into what became the Land Bank program, which was established in 1954. Since then, the Land Bank has had a major role in shaping the city.

During the 1950s, Saskatoon's economy became more diversified, and by the 1960s it had acquired the nickname "POW City", for "potash, oil and wheat". In the 1970s, mining developments across the province and new investment in the ag-biotech sector helped to maintain prosperity through most of the latter half of the 20th century.



David A. Wyatt

Saskatoon electric trolley bus which was discontinued in 1974.

In the 1960s, Saskatoon acquired the nickname "POW City" for "potash, oil and wheat".



There are a number of ways to share your vision and help shape Saskatoon's future!
For more information please visit **saskatoonspeaks.com.**

Produced September 2010

Efforts were taken to ensure the accuracy of information. Updates to any of the content will be posted to the website.
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