



TRAINS, **towns** AND **agriculture**

Did you know that some Alberta towns established before 1940 were planned by railway companies? If you look at a map of Alberta, you may notice that many Alberta communities can be found along train tracks and crossroads.

These towns were created so that rural homesteaders and farmers would be close to a centre where they could bring and sell their crops and other agricultural products.

After the Canadian Pacific Railway was finished in 1885, small farms started to spring up all over the Northwest Territories and the Districts of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Assiniboia. The government believed that more settlement in the West would mean more food for all people living in Canada. The government also believed that the people who settled in the West would buy goods made by people who were living in the East.



What evidence can you find of railway routes in your community? How do you think these routes affected the growth of your community?

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"Town Layout." *Atlas of Alberta Railways*. University of Alberta Press, 2005.



Main Street, Alberta



This 1927 photo of the village of Hughenden, Alberta shows Main Street from the view of the railway station.

Photo Credit: Glenbow Archives NA-1534-1



What features can you find in the photos on this and the next page? Talk about them with a classmate.



Railway Avenue



This 1948 photo shows the town of Redwater, Alberta at the corner of Railway Avenue and Main Street.

Photo Credit: Glenbow Archives NA-2497-9

Many of these early Alberta communities had similar features. They were sometimes so similar that people thought they all looked the same. What do you think the author of the quote below meant when he referred to the “repetition of technology?”

“Prairie towns all look alike: identical grain elevators, identical banks, identical railway stations, a main street that is called Main Street and a road along the tracks called Railway Avenue – when you’ve seen one, as they say, you’ve seen ‘em all. . . . The towns do not reflect the people who live in them but rather the repetition of technology.”

H. Roberston. *Grass Roots*. Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1973.



What features do you think are common to prairie villages and towns? How do you think agricultural activities influenced the types of buildings found in communities?



What do you think could happen to a railway town if its railway line is abandoned? What do you think could happen to a town if its grain elevator is gone?