

74 Dr Bird 1913 Boissevain

Welcome to Vantage Points Flashback. We look to local history for stories that inspire and entertain. This story came to us by researching the life of someone who lived among us.

Dr Bird (of Boissevain)

Dr Frederick Valentine Bird arrived in Boissevain in 1913 on the early morning train. Penniless. Having never been to our town. One of Dr Bird's mentors at Medical school suggested Boissevain would be a good place to practice. Within four months he was making a modest living, so settled into serving our community for the next 62 years.

Today, when we get ill, we go to the doctor's clinic. If we're really ill, we stay in the hospital. In the early 1900s, it was different. Folks would call the doctor and he'd come out to see them, sometimes traveling long distances with a team of horses. Even in wintertime! Some nights he had to perform emergency procedures in the dim light of a homesteader's lantern. A particular claim to fame was that over his long career Dr Bird delivered over 2200 babies!

The Thirties were a difficult time for the community, and for Dr Bird specifically. Farmer's crops were worth next to nothing. They had difficulty paying shopkeepers, so business-people also didn't have much extra. Dr Bird continued practicing even though his patients had little cash with which to pay. Some paid with farm produce and baking. If that wasn't bad enough, Boissevain suffered a polio epidemic the summer of '36, claiming 6 lives and leaving two more with physical disabilities.

Perhaps Dr Bird took the struggles of the 1930s depression more personally than most, because he served as Boissevain's Mayor from '29 to '40. During that time he and fellow Councilors launched two relief projects aimed at giving local unemployed men temporary work. We

have Dr Bird to thank for the elm trees that line our streets. And, for the cement sidewalks that replaced wooden boardwalks and mud paths.

Dr Bird fell in love with Irene Bradley, who was a nurse in Boissevain. Together they raised 6 children. They each made wonderful memories growing up here, but none stayed to live.

Dr Bird came from legendary stock. His great-grandfather James Curtis Bird was born in England and came to York Factory, on Hudson's Bay, in 1788 as a 15 year old boy, having been sent to Canada by his disgraced family. While working for the Hudson's Bay, James Curtis romanced Mary OO-MEN-A-HOMISK, his Swampy Cree bride, and rose through the ranks to eventually serve as the head of the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada.

Our Dr Bird had strong Indigenous and managerial roots. He was proud of his heritage. And proud of the southwest Manitoba community that adopted him, gave him a start as a doctor and accepted him as the gifted leader he was. He continued treating patients until his death in 1977, at 92 years of age. Irene, his wife, passed away 8 years earlier at 87.

Two signs of their life here remain. One is the big house at the corner of Stephen and Struthers that we still call The Dr Bird House. And the other is their grandson, Brad Bird, famous in his own right as a writer/adventurer, who lives in the Metigoshe community.

I adapted **Dr Bird** from a story in Vantage Points 4. To hear past radio stories go to discoverwestman.com/community. And, find out about the resources of Turtle Mountain Souris Plains Heritage Assoc. Our website is vantagepoints.ca. Thank you Municipal Councils and Manitoba Heritage for your support.

See 'ya later!