INTER-GENERATIONAL PLAYGROUND DESIGN: AN EXPLORATION INTO PLAY, FAMILIARITY, AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

by

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INTERGENERATIONAL PLAYGROUND DESIGN:
AN EXPLORATION INTO PLAY FAMILIARITY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

A design proposal for the town of Swan River, MB



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ABSTRACT

There continues to be an increased acknowledgement of the need for accessible and inclusive environments which reflect the identity, needs, and desires of our society while positively contributing to our health and wellbeing. With such desires comes conversations regarding the creation of spaces for people of all ages in which the young and the old may independently engage with nature, access facilities that encourage social interaction and physical participation and generally improve our overall wellbeing. Such spaces become increasingly important in rural settings, where older adults face further challenges to remain connected to their communities due to a diverse range of limitations, including functional decline and a lack of health, social and support services and resources within rural communities (Plouffe 1993). As the global population of older adults continues to grow, the interest in age-friendly design has similarly increased, with countries and organizations funding various research projects, design guidelines, and initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life of older adults.

This practicum explores the possibility of creating an intergenerational park in the town of Swan River, Manitoba, a community which, like many in the Parklands Region, continues to have a larger older adult population when compared to the provincial average (Statistics Canada 2017). Like many communities in Manitoba, both rural and urban, Swan River has seen many changes in the last 75 years, largely due to the immense technological and industrial development we've seen since the beginning of the post war period. While these changes have largely improved living conditions in said communities by providing electricity, refrigeration, indoor plumbing, and the like, it has also drastically changed the way we live our day to day lives and created a reality that is unrecognizable and unfamiliar to many older adults. Additionally, with these changes, the communities they call home have also changed and the places, structures, and landscapes that they once felt connected to may no longer exist. This lack of familiarity can lead to a disconnection from the places we call home, which minimizes our sense of belonging within our community and can have a negative impact on our wellbeing, especially as we age.

Creating supportive, understanding, and empathetic communities begins by encouraging discussion, meaningful interaction and connections between different 'groups' of people. By supporting and encouraging connections between community members of all ages through intergenerational design, we can create strong, resilient, and inclusive communities that will continue to support their populations, no matter their age or functional ability.

CONTENTS

Abstract ii
List of Figures v
Acknowledgments vii
Preface ix

SECTION ONE: RESEARCH CONTEXT

Introduction 3
Evolution of Age-Friendly Research: Environment and Design 5
Manitoba and Aging Population: Rural Considerations 7
Place Attachment Theory 9
Place Attachment and Community Design 11
Importance of Place and Familiarity As We Age: A Rural Context 15
The Importance of Play 18

SECTION TWO: CASE STUDIES

Swedish Playgrounds 23
Trädgårdslekplatsen 23
Bondgårdslekplatsen 25
Mary Anderssons lekplats 27

SECTION THREE: INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Method 31
Findings 33
Quotations 35
Important Landscape Features 47

SECTION FOUR: HISTORY & CHARACTER OF THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY

Introduction 51
History of the Valley 54
Landscape Characteristics 56
Topography 58
Ecological Land Classification 62
Vegetation and Agriculture in the Valley 65
Historic Landscapes, Buildings & Structures in the Valley 69
One Room Schoolhouse 71
Houses in the Swan River Valley 75
Barns and Agricultural Structures 77
The Creamery 79
The Grain Elevators 80
A Snapshot of Rural Life in Manitoba 81
Heritage Villages in Manitoba 83

SECTION FIVE: SITE SELECTION & ANALYSIS

Site Selection 87
Site Analysis: Legion Park Site 91
Site Analysis: Surrounding Context 93
Existing Park Features 95
Swan River / Birchwood Cemetery 99
Existing Topography 101

SECTION SIX: DESIGN OF THE SWAN VALLEY HERITAGE PARK

Conceptual Design 105
Master Plan 107
Planting Plan 110
Circulation 113
Entrances 115
Access and Reconnection to the River 121
Historical Inspiration 123
Design of Gathering and Play Areas 125
- The Schoolhouse Cafe 127
- The Barn 129
- The Creamery 131
- The Gathering Place 133
- The Homestead 135
- The Grain Elevators 140

Seasonality of the Swan Valley Heritage Park 143
Wayfinding and Accessibility in the Swan Valley Heritage Park 145

SECTION SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS & REFLECTIONS

Final Thoughts 149

Figure Citations 151
Metadata 155
Appendix 157
Reference List 161

FIGURES

Fig. 1: Let's Play Dress Up 17

Fig. 2: Come Here Collie 20

Fig. 3: Illustrating the Forest & the Creeks Edge 48

Fig. 4: Illustrating the Valley and the Fields 48

Fig. 5: Context Map of the Swan River Valley 53

Fig. 6: Landscape Characteristics of the Swan River Valley 55

Fig. 7: Topographic Map of the Swan River Valley 57

Fig. 8: Manitoba's Terrestrial Ecozones 61

Fig. 9: Remembering the First Class of McVey School 74

Fig. 10: Creamery 79

Fig. 11: Site Selection Map 88

Fig. 12: Site Selection Rankings 90

Fig. 13: Legion Park Site Context 91

Fig. 14: Surrounding Site Context 94

Fig. 15: Map of Existing Site Features 96

Fig. 16: Existing Topography 102

Fig. 17: Conceptual Design 104

Fig. 18: The Valley Past and Present 106

Fig. 19: Master Plan 108

Fig. 20: Landscape Zones 110

Fig. 21: Aspen Parkland Landscape Zone 111

Fig. 22: Mixed Meadow and Open Field Landscape Zone 11

Fig. 23: Circulation Plan 114

Fig. 24: Southwest Schoolhouse Entrance 116

Fig. 25: Eastern Valley Entrance 116

Fig. 26: Western Plaza Entrance 118

Fig. 27: Interpretive Panels 118
Fig. 28: Western Forest Entrance 120
Fig. 29: Riparian Edge of the Swan Valley Heritage Park 121
Fig. 30: Former Grain Elevators Collage 123
Fig. 31: Historic Cotton Barn Collage 123
Fig. 32: Former Crescent Creamery Collage 123
Fig. 33: Former Duncan School Collage 124
Fig. 34: Historic Houses Collage 124
Fig. 35: Swan River Collage 124
Fig. 36: The Memory of Duncan School 126
Fig. 37: Imagining the Swan River Valley Café 128
Fig. 38: The Barn at Night 130
Fig. 39: Reimagining the Creamery 132
Fig. 40: The Gathering Place 134
Fig. 41: The Homestead in Winter 136
Fig. 42: The Act of Play in The Homestead 138
Fig. 43: Remembering the Old Grain Elevators 139
Fig. 44: The Grain Elevators Playground 142
Fig. 45: Seasonality in the Swan Valley Heritage Park 144
Fig. 46: Wayfinding in the Swan Valley Heritage Park 146
Fig. 47: Fields of Canola 149

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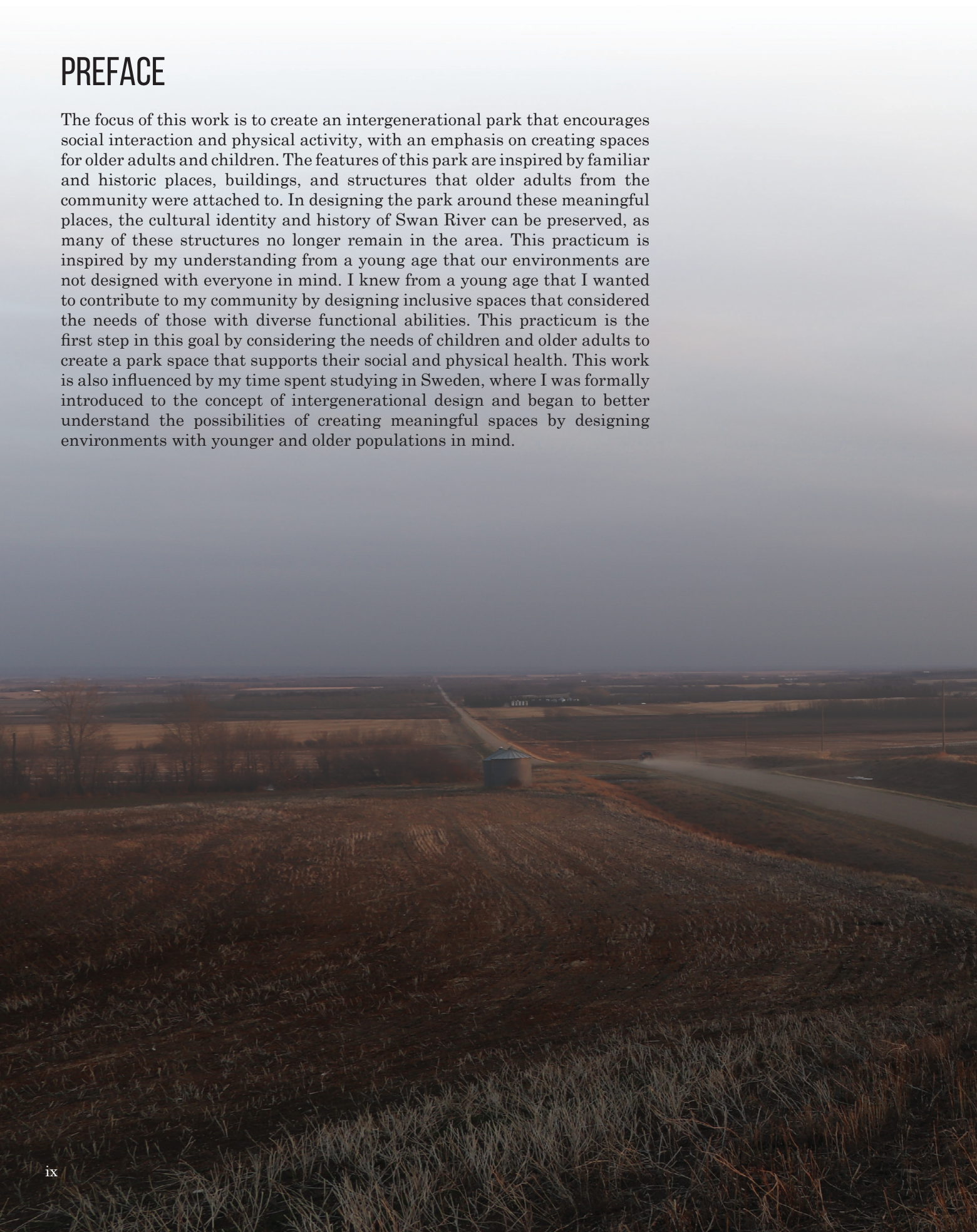
Thank you to my friends and family for supporting me through this work by providing advice and reassurance, without which this practicum would not be complete. Thank you to my mother for sharing countless conversations with me no matter the time of day (or night) and for enabling me to achieve the goals set out in this work to create a project that truly reflects the needs and experiences of older adults. Thank you to the family members who partook in this practicum by sharing your stories, memories, and experiences with me. I hope that you are proud of the role you have played in this work as this practicum would not have happened had you not been willing to share your stories with me.



REMAINING ASPEN PARKLAND AT ROTARY PARK IN SWAN RIVER, JULY 2023

PREFACE

The focus of this work is to create an intergenerational park that encourages social interaction and physical activity, with an emphasis on creating spaces for older adults and children. The features of this park are inspired by familiar and historic places, buildings, and structures that older adults from the community were attached to. In designing the park around these meaningful places, the cultural identity and history of Swan River can be preserved, as many of these structures no longer remain in the area. This practicum is inspired by my understanding from a young age that our environments are not designed with everyone in mind. I knew from a young age that I wanted to contribute to my community by designing inclusive spaces that considered the needs of those with diverse functional abilities. This practicum is the first step in this goal by considering the needs of children and older adults to create a park space that supports their social and physical health. This work is also influenced by my time spent studying in Sweden, where I was formally introduced to the concept of intergenerational design and began to better understand the possibilities of creating meaningful spaces by designing environments with younger and older populations in mind.





SWAN RIVER VALLEY, TAKEN FROM THE BLOCKLINE, APRIL 2025

SECTION ONE:
Research context





REMAINING NATIVE FOREST AT ROTARY PARK IN SWAN RIVER, JULY 2023

INTRODUCTION:

In recent years, many governments, researchers and organizations have been interested in the notion of healthy ageing and age-friendly design strategies. Plenty of this research is specifically interested in limiting healthcare cost and stress, while others are interested in improving the quality of life of individuals as they age. The present practicum focusses on the latter, and seeks to create a park that supports and encourages the active physical and social participation of older adults in a rural Manitoban community, through place making, familiarity and intergenerational design.

The general interest in healthy ageing research is largely due to the fact that our elderly populations are increasing at an unprecedented rate. Globally, it is expected that by 2080, the population of those over the age of 65 will outnumber children under the age of 18 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2024). Canada is particularly impacted by these changing demographics as our country has the largest percentage of 'baby boomers' (individuals born between 1947 and 1966) in the world (Maxwell Hartt et al. 2021). In Canada, it is predicted that older adults will represent 21.4% to 23.4% of the population by 2030 (Statistics Canada 2024). With older adults representing larger percentages of the population, there is an increased need to ensure that our communities are able to meet their changing needs and support their health and wellbeing throughout the aging process. The need for age-friendly communities is further demonstrated by the fact that many Canadian adults over the age of 65 indicate a disinterest in residing in long-term care homes, and instead maintain a desire to continue living in their homes and communities (National Seniors Council Members 2024). This desire can present challenges to aging well, as homes and communities may not be designed to support people as they age. These challenges are due to many factors that include, but are not limited to, individual changing needs and functional ability, aging infrastructure within communities, a limited number of community-based supports, resources, and public transportation options (Keating, Swindle, and Fletcher 2011; Menec et al. 2015; Maxwell Hartt et al. 2021). The creation of age-friendly communities is not just a physical design problem wherein we must ensure that the environments we live in are physically accessible and inclusive, we must also ensure that the social environment of our communities supports continued use and access of ones existing social networks so that individuals remain connected with their community, friends, and family. For these reasons, this practicum seeks to create an intergenerational park space which will act as one component within Swan River's larger goal of achieving age-friendliness.

My interest in the topic of ageing stems from a desire to create communities that are accessible, inclusive, considerate and desirable for people of all ages and abilities. As such, this practicum seeks to improve the quality of life of older adults by creating an intergenerational park space that encourages social interaction between community members of all ages and fosters physical participation through play to improve the social, physical, and emotional health and wellbeing of older adults. In doing so, this work acknowledges the impact our social and physical environments have on health and wellbeing, and the role our wider community plays in our perceived quality of life.

This practicum is inspired by the ideas brought forward in the "Social Aspects of Aging" course offered at the University of Manitoba as well as the unique and successful themed playgrounds that I visited in Malmö Sweden while studying abroad. When in Sweden, I took a course called "People and Environment" which explored the relationship between people and the physical environment to understand the influence the outdoor environment has on wellbeing and health from an environmental psychology perspective. The class focused on designing for the traditionally ignored or forgotten populations such as immigrants, children and older adults. One such class linked the needs and desires of children and older adults, highlighting the beneficial relationship between the two age groups. In yet another class, the importance of place attachment was discussed in relation to the health of older adults. While in this class, I began considering the possibility of designing a playground that was based around elements and features that would be familiar to my grandmother, who grew up in a small community just outside of Swan River. Both communities are rural, agriculturally based communities in Manitoba and share many similarities with others small, agriculturally significant communities across the province. By creating functional play and park spaces inspired by elements that would be familiar and recognizable to older adults who grew up in similar situations, I believe that the overall health and wellbeing of older adults can be improved. Considering familiarity and

place attachments in the design of park spaces can improve the connections between older adults and their communities, and creates the opportunity for storytelling and intergenerational play activities. The transformation of these familiar elements can also help preserve the history of a place for future generations, making the history of such a place easily accessible and fun for many.

Specifically, this practicum seeks to apply the concepts of place attachment and familiarity in a rural setting to create an intergenerational playground that encourages social interaction, community connection and physical activity between people of all ages and abilities. This practicum also showcases the role play has in improving wellbeing across the lifespan. For years, play has been recognised as having a vital role in children's development while its role in improving health and wellbeing into adulthood is less understood or encouraged. By creating play spaces influenced by memory, past experiences, and place attachment of older community members, social interaction and community connections can be fostered and supported between generations while providing fun and informative leisure areas that preserve the history of a community.

The specific questions that will be answered in this practicum are:

How does familiarity and place attachment influence health and wellbeing in older adults?

What are the benefits of engaging in play throughout the lifespan? (What role does play have on the physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing of children and older adults)

How can play for people of all ages be encouraged and supported in a contemporary playground?

How can elements/features of the past be transformed into tangible play elements that encourage storytelling and imaginative and physical play for children and adults alike?

A note on using age-inclusive language

This practicum focuses on the needs and design considerations of persons over 65 years of age, to create an age-inclusive park and playground in a rural community. Throughout this practicum, those over the age of 65 will be referred to as older adults, persons 65 years and older, or the older population rather than terms such as elderly, senior, or the aged. This decision aligns with best practice guidelines from the American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, Associated Press and the Gerontological Society of America (Van Vleck 2022). The aim of these guidelines is to combat negative stereotypes, biases, or othering solely based on age and assumption.

In a world where people are living longer and challenging our perceptions of what it means to be an 'older adult', It is imperative that we, as designers, recognize that the design of our environments can hinder or support older adults and people with disabilities by creating physical and symbolic barriers that restrict the active use and participation of certain community members.

Rather than assuming that older adults are unable to participate and contribute to society due to their age, ability, and perceived vulnerability, we must instead question how the design of our communities limits their ability to maintain social and economic ties to their neighbourhood.

EVOLUTION OF AGE-FRIENDLY RESEARCH: ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN

With the global interest in aging related topics and research, there have been various proposed models and frameworks created to address the challenges of aging. In 2002, the World Heath Organization (WHO) released a policy framework for 'Active Ageing' (World Health Organization 2002). This framework emphasized the importance of remaining physically, socially, culturally, spiritually, economically, and civically connected to one's environment to address the global aging challenge (World Health Organization 2002). This model recognizes that health is not only tied to one's physical health or lack of disease and illness, but it also addresses the mental and social aspects of wellbeing and their influence on the health and quality of life of all people, regardless of age (World Health Organization 2002).

In 2007, the WHO created an age-friendly cities guide that proposed eight domains that when adequately addressed, can minimize the barriers to wellbeing and participation faced by older adults in their communities (World Health Organization, 2007). These eight domains relate to a community's structure, environment, services and policies that influence the health and wellbeing of community members as they age (World Health Organization 2007).

These eight domains are:

- **Outdoor Spaces & Buildings**
- Transportation
- Housing
- **Social Participation**
- **Respect and Social Inclusion**
- **Civic Participation and Employment**
- Communication and Information
- Community Support and Health Services

These domains have been adopted by many age-friendly initiatives across the globe, and they are the basis of the model used to create age-friendly communities in Manitoba (Age Friendly Manitoba).

Four of these eight domains are integral to this practicum: Outdoor Spaces, Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion and Civic Participation and Employment. Several of these domains are related to the physical environments we live in and influence the mobility, independence, social participation, and physical activity of community members (World Health Organization 2007). Other key domains are directly related to our social environment and therefore impact the sense of



belonging and inclusion of individuals, which in turn, can affect their level of participation and interaction within their communities. These domains also influence the way in which our societies view older adults. If our environments are designed to hinder their ability to physically, socially, and civically participate in communities our attitudes, feelings, and respect towards older adults can be negatively impacted.

A key consideration when creating age-friendly, inclusive spaces, is acknowledging the impact of local environments on one's ability to interact with their desired social and physical environments. Many of the domains of age-friendly communities address the relationship between social and physical environments and health and wellbeing. As we age, our likelihood of experiencing physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments and reduced mobility is increased (Maxwell Hartt et al. 2021). With such impairments, it is imperative that we design neighbourhoods and public spaces that support active use by people of all ages, but, most notably for independent use and access by older adults. As the functional abilities of older adults may be impacted throughout the aging process, it is important that our public outdoor spaces support multiple functions and activities which can positively improve the health and well-being of community members. This can be achieved by creating centrally located, accessible and desirable places that allow for connections with nature, provide a diverse range of social, physical and intergenerational activities, and allow community members to feel as though they are meaningful participants in their communities.

In this document, healthy aging, age-friendly design, and intergenerational design are terms which will be used interchangeably throughout the work to refer to design that has a positive impact on the quality of life of older adults.



MANITOBA AND AGING POPULATIONS: RURAL CONSIDERATIONS:

It is no secret that the number of older adults is increasing throughout the world. This is largely due to the 'Baby Boom' experienced after World War II in which birth rates increased at unprecedented rates. As time has progressed, those born during the Baby Boom are now reaching their older adulthood. With declining fertility rates and increases in life expectancy, the proportion of the population of older adults in Canada continues to rise, with 19.5% of the population aged 65 years or older as of July 1, 2025 (Statistics Canada 2025). This increase presents new challenges to existing health related problems and increases stress on the healthcare system. The increase in proportion of older adults across the country also raises questions regarding the suitability of our communities, physical and social environments to support the health and wellbeing of older adults. These questions require alternative solutions depending on the circumstances that older adults are living in, namely whether or not they reside in an urban or rural community, how supportive their physical and social environments are, what their level of functional ability is and their personal preferences and ideas relating to what it means to live well as an older adult.

As of 2023, 17.1% of Manitoba's population was 65 years of age or older, with 24.4% of older adults within Manitoba often feeling isolated from others (Province of Manitoba 2023). In Manitoba, there is an age-friendly initiative that is modelled after the WHO's eight domains of age-friendliness, which provides support for communities that are committed to taking steps to become more age-friendly. As of 2008, there have been over 90 communities within the province that have passed resolutions to become age-friendly (Age Friendly Manitoba). Many of these communities are rural areas which already face challenges relating to accessible health and social services and retention of rural health care providers (Menec et al. 2015). However, although there are limited services available in rural communities, they have also been found to offer strong familial and community connections and health benefits, some of which are associated with being in closer proximity to natural and open green spaces (Menec et al. 2015). Regardless of the associated challenges with aging in a rural community, many rural dwelling older adults wish to remain in the communities they are familiar with, which is why the concepts of place attachment and familiarity are integral in the creation of age-friendly spaces.





FORMER MCVEY SCHOOL NO. 2303, TAKEN AUGUST 24, 2024

PLACE ATTACHMENT:

Over time, we develop connections to the places that are meaningful to us due to the memories, experiences, emotions and personal values we have associated with them (Scannell and Gifford January 2014). This connection to place and the cognitive-emotional bond formed between individuals and the places that are important to them is commonly referred to as 'Place Attachment' (Scannell and Gifford January 2014, August 2017). This is not to say that one cannot have a sense of place attachment that is related to negative experiences, memories, or emotions as not all attachments to place exist for positive reasons. Place attachment has been found to be correlated to certain negative memories and experiences, and people may feel connected to inadequate settings due to nostalgic views of past experiences (Place attachment : advances in theory, methods and applications 2014; Wellbeing and Place 2012). However, the objectives of this work are to create a park that encourages social interaction and physical activity within it by fostering a sense of familiarity and belonging in park users. Therefore, positive memories and experiences are the focus of this work with the aim of designing features that remind older adult park users of their childhood, and the memories made while growing up in the Swan River Valley.

The attachments, connections and experiences we have to place can impact our wellbeing and affects the relationships we have between ourselves, the physical settings or environments we live in and the community members we are surrounded by. Many of the positive memories and emotions that create place attachments centre around childhood experiences, but the attachment is created due to the interactions between people and place (Jack 2012). In having an attachment to a certain place, which can occur at various geographic scales including local (a neighbourhood), regional (a province), or national (a country); we begin to value and identify with specific environments (Zahnow 2024), particularly their physical characteristics and land use. Further, when there is a strong sense of place attachment within neighbourhoods, mental, physical, and social health benefits are felt (Wellbeing and Place 2012; Place attachment : advances in theory, methods and applications 2014; Scannell and Gifford August 2017, January 2014).

Our connections and attachment to places helps us foster connections and a sense of belonging in the communities we live in due to shared experiences, memories and meaning (Tobia 2024). When one feels connected to a place within their community, the shared sense of belonging can improve their sense of security and confidence, thereby improving both their physical and mental health (Zahnow 2024; Lewicka 2011). There are many benefits to place attachment, and the associated sense of familiarity and connection associated with the places that are meaningful to us (Lewicka 2011; Zahnow 2024; Scannell and Gifford August 2017). Specifically, a 2017 study done by Scannell & Gifford found that there are thirteen benefits to psychological well-being associated with place attachment. These thirteen benefits are:

- Memories
- Belonging
- Relaxation
- Positive Emotions
- Activity Support
- Physical & Psychological Comfort
- Self-Growth Process
- Sense of Control
- Entertainment
- Connecting to Nature
- Practical Benefits
- Privacy and,
- Aesthetic Value

Six of these thirteen benefits are directly applicable to the discipline of landscape architecture and the creation of public outdoor spaces and are aligned with the goals and objectives of this practicum. These are: memories, belonging, relaxation, positive emotions, physical and psychological comfort and connection to nature.

In Scannell and Giffords 2017 study, memories were cited most frequently when discussing the benefit of place attachment, as the places they were attached to supported the remembrance of previous experiences, and connected them to the past (Scannell and Gifford August 2017). Similarly, places can connect individuals to their ancestral or community history and heritage, which can help foster a shared community identity and help mitigate the feelings of loneliness and isolation that are so commonly felt as we age.

Additionally, place attachment was found to foster a sense of belonging and connection, so long as the memories and experiences of said place are positive and shared between others (Scannell and Gifford

August 2017). The perceived sense of attachment can reduce isolation and loneliness by fostering connection and communication between community members, which in turn, helps improve ones sense of belonging and connection to the community (Zahnow 2024). This sense of belonging can help residents feel more connected to their wider communities through shared connections between themselves, their ancestors, or their cultures. In the context of this work, the place attachment benefits of memory and sense of belonging are the most essential elements, as this work intends to maintain and strengthen connections between community members and the history and heritage of the town of Swan River.

Relaxation was another benefit associated with place attachment, and is beneficial to creating age-friendly environments as relaxation and restoration, especially in natural environments, can positively impact ones wellbeing (Veitch et al. 2020). The relaxation, comfort, and restoration benefit of place attachment is achieved through the familiarity with the place and is associated with the comfort-security benefit of place attachment. The sense of comfort and security of place provides physical and psychological comfort for individuals as they feel a stronger sense of safety in spaces that they are more familiar with, and therefore secure in (Scannell and Gifford August 2017). These sentiments are connected to another benefit of place attachment, which is positive emotions. Since many place attachments are created due to positive experiences, memories, and emotions, it is predictable that positive emotions would be felt when engaging in meaningful and familiar places.

The final benefit of place attachment that aligns with this practicum is the connection to nature element. Many of the places' people are attached to are related to natural environments, and many benefits were found to be linked to the natural environment in Scannell and Giffords 2017 Study. These included the relaxation benefit of being in a serene environment, or the positive emotions associated with seeing wild animals and different types of vegetation or the physical benefits participants received from partaking in various nature based activities such as hiking or walking (Scannell and Gifford August 2017). This finding highlights the interconnected benefits of maintaining connections with the places that one feels most attached to, particularly the environments of their childhood as these are most commonly recalled when analysing place attachment. With all these potential benefits, as designers we must then ask how can we design places that the community feels attached to, thus positively contributing to their health and wellbeing as they age. The answer lies in fully understanding the meaningful places within a community, and the physical, natural, and spatial qualities of said places through a community-oriented design process.

PLACE ATTACHMENT AND COMMUNITY DESIGN:

Place attachment can be created through both individual and collective attachments (Scannell and Gifford January 2014; Zahnow 2024; Jack 2012). Collective attachments are created when there are shared experiences, memories, or identities associated with a physical place or social environment (Zahnow 2024). This collective attachment creates a sense of community and connects people with their shared histories. Considering collective attachments to place rather than focusing on individual attachments can strengthen the community- oriented design process as a whole (Hester 2014). Therefore, it is important that community-oriented design strategies be implemented early in the design process to create a project that reflects the shared sense of familiarity, place, and identity. Although the design proposal in this document solely considers the place attachment of several older adults from the area, rather than the attachment of the whole community, the findings are still meaningful, and the design solutions can be applied to other settings. It would, however, be best to conduct community wide interviews and mapping processes should one wish to create a park that thoroughly considers and reflects the collective place attachments of a given community. The interview process used to determine the familiar features and the physical, natural, and spatial qualities of places with individual attachment applied to this design proposal will be explored in Section Three of this document. To consider place attachment in design, one must first uncover the places that are valuable to the community, and recognize what it is about these places that is meaningful, since spaces with communal meaning are more than likely to be the places that have a collective attachment (Hester 2014; Zahnow 2024).

Often times, the spaces we are most positively connected to are those that we experienced in childhood, in which we have positive recollections of (Hester 2014). Due to the link between childhood experiences, place attachment and the overarching benefits of place attachment, I propose that parks can better contribute to a community's wellbeing by recreating specific moments, landscapes, structures and features that have been found to be connected to the community's sense of place and identity. Due to the frequency in which childhood places are mentioned when discussing place attachment, it is useful to ask project stakeholders to reflect on their childhood experiences and describe the qualities and characteristics places they hold dearest.

To help foster place attachment in the proposed park, several semi-formal interviews were conducted with family members to determine which structures, features, and landscape characteristics were significant to them during their youth. It is interesting to note that, similar to Zahnow's 2024 findings (Zahnow 2024) , many of the places that participants in this practicum were attached to where those that encouraged socialization and supported meaningful group activities.



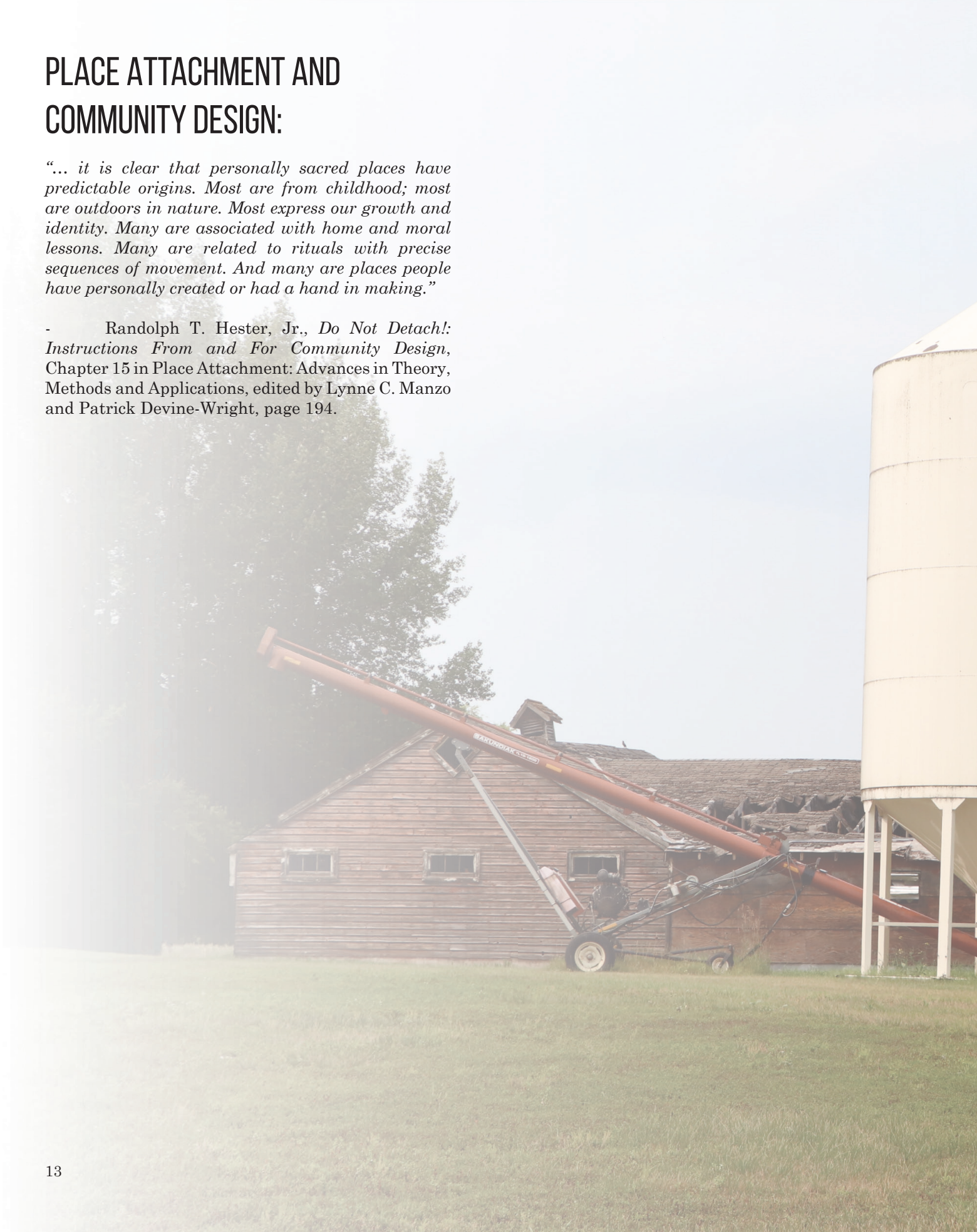


FORMER MCVEY SCHOOL NO. 2303, TAKEN AUGUST 24, 2024

PLACE ATTACHMENT AND COMMUNITY DESIGN:

"… it is clear that personally sacred places have predictable origins. Most are from childhood; most are outdoors in nature. Most express our growth and identity. Many are associated with home and moral lessons. Many are related to rituals with precise sequences of movement. And many are places people have personally created or had a hand in making."

- Randolph T. Hester, Jr., *Do Not Detach!: Instructions From and For Community Design*, Chapter 15 in Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Applications, edited by Lynne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright, page 194.





FORMER PIG RAISING BARN, BIG WOODY MANITOBA, TAKEN JULY 2023

IMPORTANCE OF PLACE AS WE AGE; A RURAL CONTEXT:

The attachment we have to the places we live and have lived in continue to persist in our memories as we age and develop. As we age, the places we are most familiar with become beacons of comfort and fond memories, and reminiscing over the past provides an enjoyable break from one's reality. Continuing to visit the places we are attached to can also provide health and wellbeing benefits, and living in a familiar environment has been found to improve the quality of life of individuals, (Gilmour and Rotermann 2025). However, the ability to recognize place and reap the benefits of place attachment can become more difficult as neighbourhoods expand, develop and adapt to meet the needs of their community members as they may no longer exist as we remember them.

As is common with development, old buildings and structures are torn down and replaced with new, or in the case of rural communities, old, unused buildings are forgotten and lost to time and left to decay and be reclaimed by the earth. The loss of familiar places, structures and landscapes can hinder the shared sense of identity and belonging; never mind the unrecognizable changes that have been made in the span of one or two generations.

Further, as rural depopulation continues, the collective attachment to certain historic places and significant landscape features may be forgotten and lost, as there are fewer and fewer people around to continue to share collective memories that connect community members to past events and traditions. Overall, rural populations in Canada have been experiencing steady decline since the 1850's (Martel and Chagnon February 2012). In 1861, there were 3.2 million people living in Canda, with 2.7 million (84%) of those living in rural areas (Statistics Canada's Demography Division 2011). However, in the years between 1921 and 1931, the proportion of Canadians living in rural communities began to fall below 50%; and as of 2011, less than 1 in 5 Canadians lived in a rural community (Statistics Canada's Demography Division 2011). With this steady population decline, rural communities are at risk of losing valuable natural, cultural, historical and social resources due to a lack of funds and interest to maintain, preserve and adaptively reuse structures, places, and landscapes that previously held intrinsic value for community members. The loss of such resources has a negative affect on place identity, and, in many cases has created a desire to preserve local heritage within these communities (Kaymaz 2013).

In Swan River, many of the places recalled during interviews have changed, and some structures are either in severe states of decay or no longer exist. Therefore, to recreate these landscape features and buildings in a way that supports the recollection of memories and stories of older populations while engaging the interest and interaction of younger audiences, some of the recalled features are reinterpreted as play spaces within the park. In doing so, the benefits of place attachment can be felt while also fostering a sense of enjoyment through play. These play areas will provide benefits to all community members, regardless of their age, and will encourage social interaction and physical activity. The act of play has many benefits which are not just restricted to children, and participation in play has been found to be positively associated with physical and mental health improvement while limiting social isolation and loneliness (Aging Playfully ; M. Hartt, Lee, and Empey-Salisbury 2024).



SWAN RIVER VALLEY, TAKEN FROM THE BLOCKLINE, APRIL 2025



FIG. 1: LET'S PLAY DRESS UP
FAMILY MEMBERS PLAYING DRESS UP, TAKEN FROM FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS & PLACED ON A WHEAT FIELD IN THE VALLEY

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY:

What is Play?

Although play is something that most of us have experienced throughout our lives, it is somewhat hard to define; and many scholars have spent a significant amount of time determining the impact of play on human development. This practicum defines play as an activity done solely to improve one's sense of joy, pleasure or outlook on life; rather than for a functional purpose (Whitaker and Tonkin 2023; Tonkin and Whitaker 2016). Additionally, participating in play is intrinsic to children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development (Nijhof et al. 2018). While play is traditionally seen as an activity done in childhood, participating in play should be prioritized through all stages of life, as it has been found to positively impact the social, mental and physical health and wellbeing of people of all ages (Tonkin and Whitaker 2016). Often times, when we think of play, we are reminded of playing in playgrounds as children. However, play can occur in many different settings. Recreation and leisure time, exercise, reading, and playing card games are all activities which can be considered play, so long as these activities are done for the sole purpose of improving one's state of being. Designing playful environments which encourage people of all ages to participate in play in public spaces is a necessary step to creating resilient, supportive, and healthy communities (Tonkin and Whitaker 2016). Play encourages social interaction between a wide range of user groups, supports physical activity, and brings people together, thus fostering a sense of belonging and community. The importance of play goes far beyond the developmental benefits seen in childhood, therefore play should not solely be regarded as an activity for children.

The Role of Play

Although we are living longer, our levels of happiness and wellbeing are not improving, with rates of depression, social isolation, and loneliness increasing while levels of physical activity are declining. Encouraging play in our everyday environments could offer some solutions to our failing social, mental and physical health.

The importance of play for children has been well researched and analysed, with findings indicating that play helps children develop physically, emotionally, and cognitively (Nijhof et al. 2018) by creating a safe space for children to gain an understanding of the world. In doing so, children are able to develop empathy, communication and problem-solving skills, and begin to understand the role of fairness and cooperation all while developing fine motor skills (Eberle and Brown 2024). However, studies have also found that participating in play positively affects the physical and mental health of everyone, no matter how old they are (M. Hartt, Lee, and Empey-Salisbury 2024; Tonkin and Whitaker 2016). Further, play is what provides enjoyment, pleasure, and distraction in our daily lives, while increasing our sense of belonging within our communities. This, in turn helps us through difficult and unenjoyable times (Tonkin and Whitaker 2016). With these two ideas in mind, we can begin to understand that the benefit of play goes beyond development and physical health, and instead provides pleasure, positively impacts mental wellbeing and self-esteem all while encouraging us to participate and engage with other community members.

Types of Play

There are many types of play that one can engage in. These types of play are based on both solitary and group play activities, with varying levels of participation and interaction between play participants.

For the purposes of this practicum, the design will focus on creating opportunities for physical and imaginative play. These play types were selected due to their ability to encourage physical and social participation and interaction among people of all ages. As discussed previously, social and physical participation are instrumental in ensuring that older adults are able to age successfully and participate in their communities throughout their lives (Maxwell Hartt et al. 2021; Menec et al. 2015; Keating, Swindle, and Fletcher 2011). Physical play offer users the ability to engage physically within the play space, thereby developing and improving their strength, balance, and overall physical health. While imaginative play, which is more spontaneous and creative, can strengthen connections to community while improving social interactions (M. Hartt, Lee, and Empey-Salisbury 2024). Both imaginative and physical play can be engaged with individually or in groups, thereby providing options for users to participate in solitary or group play as they choose.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY:

Play Throughout the Life Span

In the 21st century, physical inactivity levels continue to climb and negatively impact global health and well-being. This has lead to the WHO creating physical activity recommendations for specific age groups (World Health Organization 2010). In Canada, physical inactivity, sedentary behaviours and obesity rates continue to increase, with chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respirator disease and diabetes being responsible for 65% of deaths in Canada each year (Barber et al. 2017).

By encouraging people to play beyond their youth, we can perhaps begin to see an improvement in physical activity levels as people are provided with fun and unique ways to be active. There have been specific benefits to older adults who engage in play, and the findings can be used to encourage people of all ages to take a break and play. The benefits of physical play and activity on older adults include improved cardiorespiratory health and muscular fitness and decreased risk of disease, depression and cognitive deterioration (Tonkin and Whitaker 2016). As we age, it is also imperative that we reduce the risk of falls by participating in low intensity physical activity to improve strength and balance (Tonkin and Whitaker 2016).

Given that our health and wellbeing is influenced by physical activity and social interaction, encouraging and supporting play throughout the lifespan can improve the physical and mental health of all community members. By creating opportunities for people to participate in play no matter their age or functional ability, we can create accessible opportunities for individuals to engage in physical activity and foster social interaction among community members, thus strengthening the sense of community and benefitting the age-friendliness of both urban and rural environments.

Further, providing opportunities to play physically and imaginatively while being surrounded by nature, particularly near natural water environments, increases the positive impact of these activities by combining the benefits of physical activity and social participation with the mental health benefits of engaging with the natural environment (Tonkin and Whitaker 2016).

Playgrounds

Playgrounds are spaces that are dedicated to play and are largely designed for use by children. Playgrounds, as we understand them contemporarily, were first introduced to North America in the 19th century and were largely utilitarian spaces designed to increase physical prowess of children living in cities (Hendricks 2001). Playgrounds have evolved significantly over the years and are now designed to benefit not only the physical health and development of children, but also their creativity, and their social and emotional development.

More recently, playgrounds have become symbols of community identity and can help define neighbourhoods, attract visitors, and reflect the identity and history of a place. These playgrounds are known as 'themed playgrounds' designed around a unique concept with distinct features that support physical and imaginative play.

Although key informants did not have memories of playing on playgrounds in their youth, they did express their interest in the creation of a playground that reflected their memories and fostered a sense of place attachment in older adult visitors during the interview process. Of particular interest was the ability of such a space to support storytelling between themselves and younger generations, particularly family members, so that their memories, experiences, and family history can be past down to others. Another interest was in preserving elements of the town that have since been lost to time to strengthen community identity and belonging.



FIG. 2: COME HERE COLLIE
FAMILY MEMBERS PLAYING WITH COLLIE, THE FAMILY DOG, TAKEN FROM FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS & PLACED ON A FIELD IN THE VALLEY

SECTION TWO:
Case studies





MARY ANDERSSONS LEKPLATS IN MALMÖ SWEDEN, NOVEMBER 2023

SWEDISH PLAYGROUNDS:

The playgrounds discussed in the following section are meant to act as precedents for future playground design in Manitoban communities. These playgrounds are successful through their consideration of familiarity, place attachment, uniqueness and consideration of diverse user groups. These playgrounds support various types of play in one space and provide unique places for users to play and communities to gather. Typically, playgrounds in North America are described as being overly cautious and ready-made, while European playgrounds are often described as being adventurous and unprescribed. It is for these reasons that, while I was in Sweden, I took the time to explore and analyse several themed playgrounds that were designed to reflect and reference familiar and meaningful places. In Malmö specifically, there are people employed by the city to analyse and modify the playgrounds from both a child's and a caregiver's perspective to create desirable and functional play spaces that both children and adults enjoy using. This ensures that playgrounds provide adequate levels of challenge and risk while still being safe and engaging for all users.

Although there are some North American examples of playgrounds that are designed around familiar and meaningful environments, their features still resemble ready-made structures that are not specific to one place. As such, I feel as though more can be learned and appreciated in the functionality, simplicity, and whimsy of the playgrounds I explored in Malmö. The selected playground are all Temalekplats, or themed playgrounds from various neighbourhoods in Malmö, Sweden. These playgrounds are intended to create unique spaces throughout the city that ensure that people from all classes are afforded the luxury of having access to high quality play spaces. These themed playgrounds also act as destinations and attract visitors from different neighbourhoods while providing play opportunities for local community members. Some Temalekplats are designed to reflect the history and character of the neighbourhood they reside in while others depict fantastic and extraordinary realities. Currently, there are twenty themed playgrounds dispersed throughout the city but only three will be explored in this practicum. The three selected playgrounds are Trädgårdslekplatsen (the Garden Playground), Bondgårdslekplatsen (the Farm Playground), and Mary Anderssons lekplats (Mary Anderssons Playground). These playgrounds were selected because their theme had some connection to place attachment, with certain play features being designed around previously existing features and places or activities that were associated with a community identity. In addition, these playgrounds had play features which would be familiar and recognizable to rural-dwelling older adults and therefore provide inspiration for the design of this practicum. Each of these playgrounds provides a diverse array of seating and rest options, play elements, and natural features while successfully translating a specific theme into a functional playscape.

Trädgårdslekplatsen: The Garden Playground

Trädgårdslekplatsen is a playground located in a wooded section of a recent housing development. The area once housed a large market garden, and the playground is meant to preserve and reflect this former use as a plant nursery. Once the nursery was closed, the area became a nature reservearea which provides and ideal and secluded space for the playground. Trädgårdslekplatsen has many features that are reminiscent of the sites previous use, acknowledging the former features of the market garden and thus creating a playground which adequately considers the place attachment of the site. There is a plethora of imaginative play spaces in this playground, from a giant greenhouse themed play structure to oversized plant pots and a giant climbable slug. There are also more passive play areas, with gardening beds and a small orchard on the outskirts of the park and a medium sized sandbox with various types of digging equipment.

Trädgårdslekplatsen provides a variety of play and gathering areas that support the physical, social, and cognitive development of children of all ages. The playground is based around the activity of gardening, of which many people would be familiar. Many rural-dwelling older adults would have grown up caring for a garden and would recognize and appreciate a playground build around this familiar concept. Trädgårdslekplatsen has many areas that encourage social interaction and community connection whether they are designated as play, rest, or gathering areas. Unfortunately, the path materials in Trädgårdslekplatsen are not the most accessible, as some areas in the playground are covered by mulch and sand. Although the physical accessibility of the ground material is limited, the design of the play, gathering, gardening, and rest areas offer flexibility and provide many options for use and interaction. There are several types of seating options available and although the greenhouse themed play structure is accessible solely by climbing a variety of ladders, many of the play areas would be useable by older adults as they provide more passive play opportunities and do not require physical prowess.



ORCHARD, GARDENING AREA, AND PICNIC SHELTER



REST AREA



GREENHOUSE PLAY STRUCTURE



GIANT SLUG, TABLES AND DIGGING TOOLS



GARDEN THEMED PLAY & SEATING

SWEDISH PLAYGROUNDS:

Bondgårdslekplatsen: The Farm Playground
Bondgårdslekplatsen creates a playscape based on the former farm that once existed on this site; directly linking the playground to the area's history. All structures in the playground are easily identifiable as agriculturally significant buildings. There is a large barn play structure that provides various levels of challenge to users thus supporting physical play opportunities, and various animals scattered throughout the play area which provide imaginative play opportunities. The large barn is entered through various climbing apparatuses which help develop physical dexterity and strength in older children. Bondgårdslekplatsen also has a smaller ready-made barn play structure designed for younger children which is more suited to their level of development. A consequence of the multitude of climbable features in the main structure is that using them is quite challenging and there is no alternative means to reach the large slide, a key feature of any playground. This presents a barrier of use for a variety of user groups. Although the nature of the large barn play structure makes it difficult for certain user groups to use the structure, there are other more accessible features in the playground, namely the animals present throughout the play area. People can spend time 'feeding' and 'watering' the animals, with a seasonally accessible water pump in the playground.

Additionally, to increase the overall accessibility of the play area, alternative ground materials should be selected, as sand, dirt, and mulch are relatively inaccessible options. Bondgårdslekplatsen has several types of seating options that provide users of all ages with various rest areas. These seating areas are located near the play areas, allowing users to sit, rest, and still keep an eye on and communicate with the children they are watching. Bondgårdslekplatsen is successful in its consideration of place attachment and in translating recognizable features, structures, and habits of daily farm life into play structures. In doing so, the playground reflects and acknowledges the historic use of a space and connects the wider community to what once was. Although this playground is a more literal and less imaginative translation of a selected 'theme', it is still a functional and desirable play space that offers multiple physical and imaginative play opportunities.


ANIMALS IN BONDGÅRDSLEKPLATSEN


SWINGING BENCH AND CAT



'BARN PLAY STRUCTURE WITH MULTIPLE REST AREAS



PICNIC SHELTER WITH SHEEP



OVERVIEW OF BÖNDGÅRDSLEKPLATSEN

SWEDISH PLAYGROUNDS:

Mary Anderssons lekplats: Mary Anderssons Playground

Mary Anderssons lekplats is based on several literary works of Mary Andersson, while also displaying the history of the housing development that surrounds the playground. Initially, the houses in this area were meant to be temporary structures to serve the needs of lower income individuals while waiting for better housing to be built. However, these houses persisted much longer than anticipated and while they were not very desirable places to live, they did highlight a sense of unity and community as it was common for residents to band together and support one another as needed. To reflect this housing development, Mary Andersson Lekplats has several playhouses which encourage imaginative play, and another playhouse on stilts which supports physical play.

The play spaces in Mary Anderssons Lekplats features both abstract and literal translations of certain themes and locations connected to the idea of place attachment as they reflect the nature of the previous housing development. One of the distinct areas in Mary Anderssons lekplats is an area known as 'Hollywood', an area that connects visitors to their community by considering place attachment. Hollywood was the name of the former housing development and is represented by the bright red playhouses and play structure in the playground. This design decision creates a playful environment for children while allowing for the preservation of historic elements of a neighbourhood that can be understood and shared with children in a tangible and fun way. Mary Anderssons lekplats also has a gathering area with numerous picnic tables and barbeques that support and encourage social interactions among park visitors. Many of the play areas in Mary Anderssons lekplats are functional for both children and adults, and even though the red playhouses are not very tall, they can still be accessed due to having openings of multiple sizes including some that are completely open on one side, allowing adults the ability to play without crouching. Unfortunately, like the other case studies in this document, the ground materials of the park are not considerate of those using mobility devices and as a result sand, mulch and turf are ground materials commonly found in Mary Anderssons lekplats.

To ensure that the park created in this practicum accurately reflects the place attachment and lived experience of the desired user group, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This was done to ensure that community members would feel comfortable and secure in the park which, in turn, would increase the likelihood of engaging physically and socially in the park; further benefiting the health and wellbeing of the community. Several family members from the valley were interviewed to uncover the role of play in their youth and to determine which physical and natural features of the Swan River Valley were most valuable and connected to place attachment.



'HOLLYWOOD' PLAY STRUCTURE



'HOLLYWOOD' PLAYHOUSES



GATHERING AREA



SWINGS, TRAMPOLINES, & ABSTRACT PLAY AREA



'HOLLYWOOD' PLAYHOUSES AND FREE PLAY AREA WITH SANDBOXES



OVERVIEW OF MARY ANDERSSONS LEKPLATS

SECTION THREE:
Interview Findings





HARVEST TIME FROM THE BLOCKLINE, AUGUST 2024

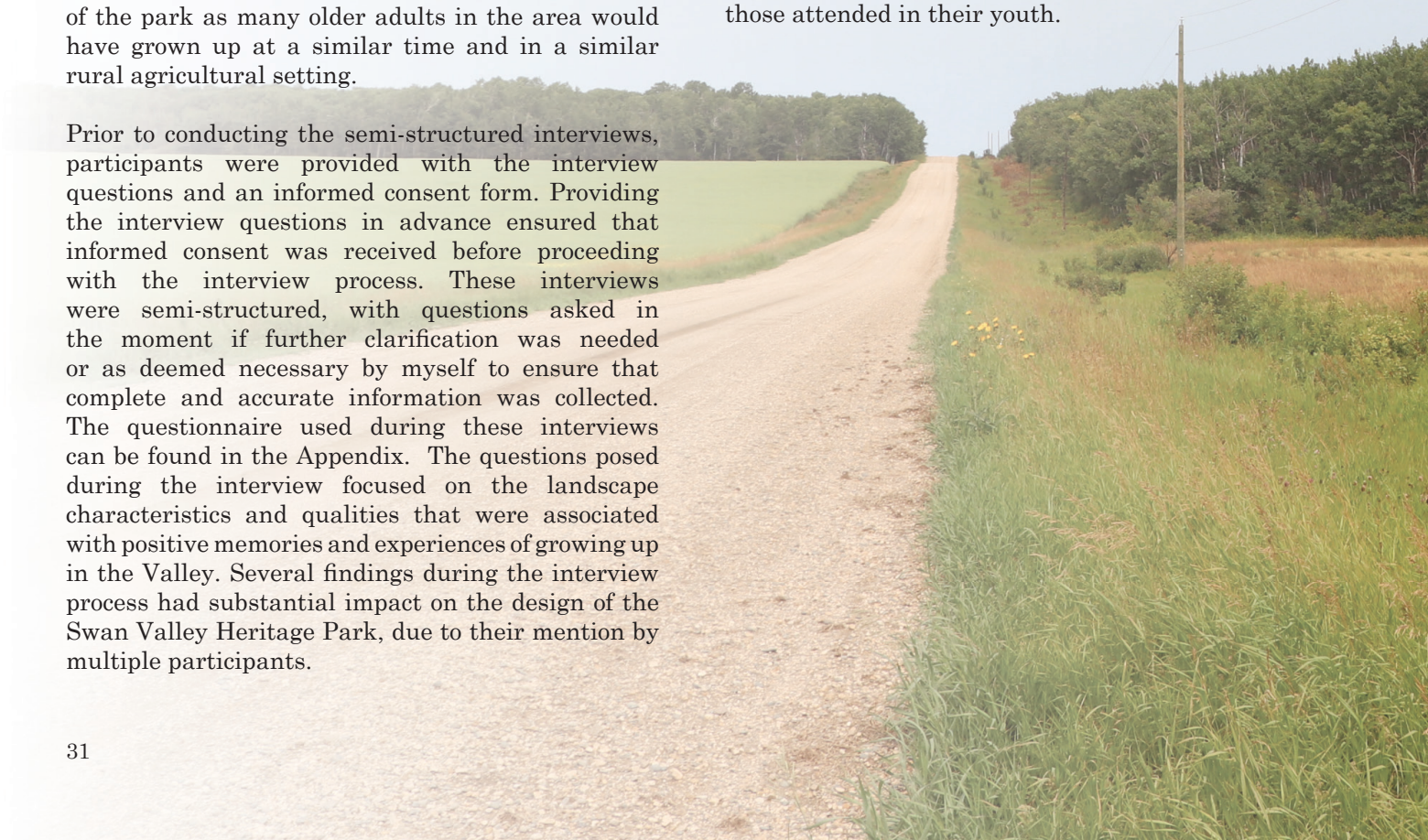
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ethics approval from the University of Manitoba. These interviews were led by myself, and the participants in the study were several family members who grew up in the Swan River Valley in the 1940's and 1950's. Family members were selected as key informants as a way of reconnecting with my family history while also determining the relevant places, structures and activities that were memorable and associated with place attachment that would be applicable to my desired user group . The use of family members as key informants provided a depth of understanding not available through community surveys and provided a more easily accessible pool of study participants. The feasibility for designing and producing a community wide survey was outside the scope of this project. Additionally, community wide survey structures do not allow a similar depth of rich historical information provided through semi-structured qualitative interview structures. One limitation of using family members as key informants is that it does not provide the same breath of knowledge that a community wide survey would provide. However, although the participant group is small and selective, it is hypothesized that community members of similar ages will resonate with the interview findings and therefore the design of the park as many older adults in the area would have grown up at a similar time and in a similar rural agricultural setting.

Prior to conducting the semi-structured interviews, participants were provided with the interview questions and an informed consent form. Providing the interview questions in advance ensured that informed consent was received before proceeding with the interview process. These interviews were semi-structured, with questions asked in the moment if further clarification was needed or as deemed necessary by myself to ensure that complete and accurate information was collected. The questionnaire used during these interviews can be found in the Appendix. The questions posed during the interview focused on the landscape characteristics and qualities that were associated with positive memories and experiences of growing up in the Valley. Several findings during the interview process had substantial impact on the design of the Swan Valley Heritage Park, due to their mention by multiple participants.

Many of the meaningful places that were brought up during the interview process were places that were visited during leisure time during childhood, and many fond memories were recollected of moments spent playing with classmates, family members, neighbours and other members of the wider community. These findings reinforce the previously mentioned importance of childhood memories and experiences in fostering place attachment.

Role of Informants on the Design:
While the informants did not directly provide suggestions for the design of the park and its play spaces, their input, memories, and discussion of attached places did guide the design process. The informants voices were captured in the design of the park and were the main influences for the design of the natural areas, gathering and play spaces. These interviews were conducted to better understand the informants experience of play and the characteristics of the places they are attached to understand the history of the valley and place attachment of older adult residents. Specifically, the interviews highlighted the significance of all season river access, baseball and open fields, forests, and various indoor and outdoor gathering spaces that could accommodate large groups and picnics like those attended in their youth.





ASPEN STAND WITH WHEAT FIELD IN FOREGROUND, JULY 2023

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS:

When initially discussing play and leisure time during the interview process, informants did not think that they played much during childhood, as much of their time was occupied by completing tasks and chores around the house and farm. However, upon further discussion, many play-based activities were found to be the source of happy and memorable moments during their youth. This finding aligns with existing research and assumptions regarding play historically. It is a long held belief that rural residents, especially older adults, feel as though leisure activities are meaningless, and that time is better spent participating in 'productive' activities that result in the creation of something useful, as their childhoods were spent doing physical labour with minimal leisure time (Keating, Swindle, and Fletcher 2011), when, in reality, older adults do have memories of playing in their youth. Not only do rural older adults have memories of playing in their youth, but these memories are some of the most influential of their childhood and reflecting on them during the interview process was found to have a positive influence on their mood.

Some examples of play brought up during the interviews included:

- Playing various card games (King Pedro, Whist, Canasta, Devils Solitaire)
- Community dances in the schoolhouse, legion hall, or in the lofts of neighbour's barns
- Horseback riding, which was often done without a saddle
- Walking, typically while finding a spot to hunt, fish, or swim
- Going to town to watch a movie in the theatre
- Attending the annual agricultural fair and rodeo; participating in the judging competitions
- Playing with the dog and cats
- Riding the pigs or calves
- Reading and Storytelling
- Collecting coins
- Swimming
- Skating
- Picking berries
- Participating in 4H and the related activities (social evenings, card playing, tobogganing, cooking club etc.)
- Watching the stars and the northern lights
- Playing baseball, fastball, or hardball
- Playing soccer
- Yearly picnics and field days
- Pretending to play house in the piles of lumber that were left to dry around the yard
- Camping



Activities like gardening, canning, hunting, and fishing were also done that would not have been considered play at the time. However, to some, these activities can be considered as leisure when they are done for pleasure and not out of necessity. Many of these activities are still done regularly and can be encouraged in a public park. Of key importance are the group-based activities, which acknowledges the need for open spaces that support games of baseball, soccer or catch, and areas for group gatherings for picnics, card tournaments, and lively dances. Due to the positive emotions felt by informants while recollecting memories and telling stories during the interview process, it is important that the park designed in this practicum provides opportunities for older adults to participate in storytelling by assuring that features of the park reflect familiar environments and the places, structures, and activities that they are attached to. This is why many of the features in the park are designed to reflect historic buildings and natural landscapes while supporting various activities conducted by participants in their youth.

As previously stated, many of the memories and places brought up during interviews that were deemed to be associated with place attachment were either outdoor environments, community spaces, or the home and its surrounding structures and landscapes. Specific structures and landscapes that influenced the design of the park will be discussed in the following sections.

Overall, conducting these semi-structured interviews provided a rich and deep understanding of life growing up in the Swan River Valley, consistent with descriptions of the general lived experience of others as found in various historical texts (Swan River Valley Historical Society 1984; Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978; Twilley 1962). The following pages of this document include key quotes taken from the interviews and highlight the importance of place, landscape, and play in the lived experience of the key informants. These quotations are superimposed onto photographs of the valley landscape, which illustrate the familiar setting of the valley and compliment the quotation.



FLOWERING CANOLA FIELD WITH THUNDER HILL IN THE BACKGROUND, JULY 2023

"How beautiful it is to go up to the blockline and look over the valley. That's just one mile north of my dad's farm. The landscape is most striking in the summer, the different colour crops, the blue of the alfalfa, the yellow of the canola, its just a very beautiful expansive view of the valley - We used to take everybody up there."





SWAN RIVER VALLEY, MANITOBA TAKEN FROM THE BLOCKLINE AUGUST 2024

"I love looking out into the valley, you see mountains in every direction you look"





CANOLA FIELDS WITH THUNDER HILL IN THE DISTANCE, SWAN RIVER VALLEY, MANITOBA
JULY 2023

"We had a makeshift ball team, of kids from the schoolhouse and we'd go play fastball at other schools. There would be a boy's team and a girl's teams and you'd play at school at recess all the time. At the end of each school year, each school would have a big picnic with ice cream and the whole community would come together with their lunches, and each school would play the other in baseball. We'd all have a picnic together in the end."





UNDULATING HILLS AND FIELDS SWAN RIVER VALLEY, MANITOBA JULY 2023

"We grew up by the river, it ran through our place, we did a lot of things on the river, fishing, skating, swimming. ... I enjoyed summer when we'd go down to the river to swim."





SWAN RIVER FROM ROTARY PARK, JULY 2023

"The land was opened up and cleared when I was going to school, but it used to all be forest. Dad got two quarters that were in forestry from the government, but it didn't have much bush on it. We'd plow down some of the trees and clear the stones so we could plant on it."





EXPANSIVE FIELDS SWAN RIVER VALLEY, MANITOBA JULY 2023

"I liked harvest time, you seen what you produced. Spring was nice too with the birds singing."





HARVESTED WHEAT FIELD AT THE SWAN VALLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM, AUGUST 2024

IMPORTANT LANDSCAPE FEATURES:

The interviews found that several types of landscapes continued to be remembered fondly and still have a strong sense of place attachment associated with them. These landscape types include:

- **The Forest**
- **The Creeks Edge**
  The Valley
- **The Fields**

These landscape types and the key characteristics of each are illustrated in the images on this page. These features will influence the planting strategies used throughout the park to ensure that a diversity of spaces is created which reflects the valuable places that interview participants established as being connected to their sense of place attachment.

The Forest reminded interview participants of time spent walking through the quiet and secluded stretches of vegetation, largely visited while looking for a creek to swim in. The forest also represents the native vegetation of much of the valley, as interview participants remembered spending countless hours removing trees and stones from arable land to prepare it for cultivation. The collection and removal of stones was largely done by hand and was a task commonly left to the children at the time.

"It was nice walking in the bush, like in the forest; it was peaceful"
- Quote from the semi-structured interviews

The Creeks Edge was a lively spot to play and relax in during youth and young adulthood and was a commonly visited place at all times of the year. In summer, the creeks edge was a place for leisure and relaxation while at other times it was a place of work, as animals would have to be brought to a creek for water throughout the day, a task which became more dangerous in the winter when the creek would be partially frozen. No matter the purpose of the trip, the creeks edge was often viewed positively as the sound of water and the presence of trees was a welcome break.

The Valley and its unique topography were frequently mentioned during the interviews. Typically, it was the first thing noted when asked about the physical nature of the Swan River Valley. The picturesque nature of the valley, with its expansive fields of varied crops, undulating hills, and scattered patches of trees continue to have a lasting impression on visitors and locals of the Swan River Valley.

The Fields were another influential landscape type as the whole family worked together to ensure that there was a successful harvest each year. Informants associate the fields with beauty, hard work, admiration and pride as they knew that farming was a labour-intensive job that paid off in the creation of food for themselves and others.



FIG. 3: ILLUSTRATING THE FOREST & THE CREEKS EDGE

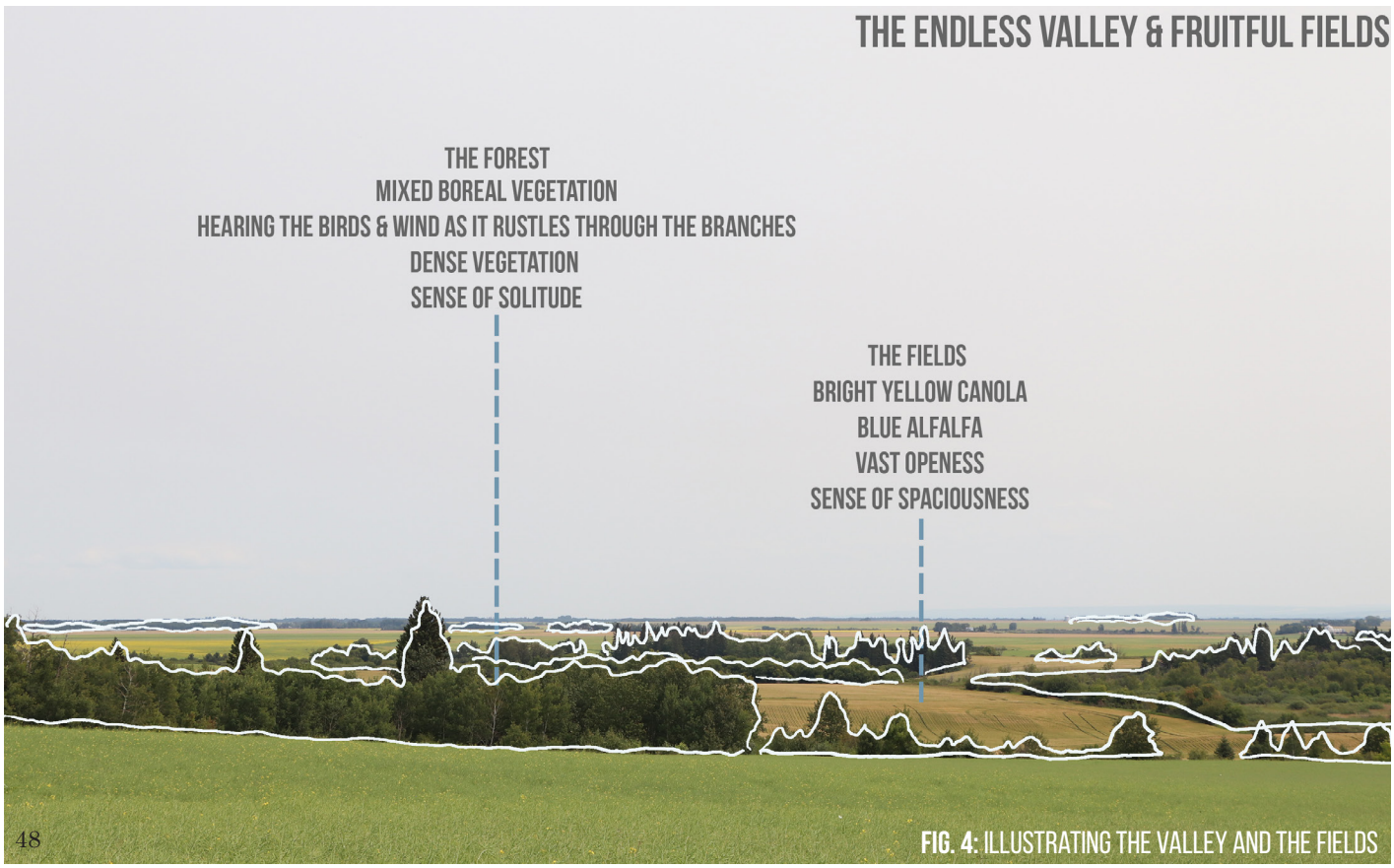


FIG. 4: ILLUSTRATING THE VALLEY AND THE FIELDS

SECTION FOUR:
History and Character of the Swan River Valley





VIEW OF THE SWAN RIVER FROM THE REX LEACH MUSEUM TRAIL, AUGUST 2024

INTRODUCTION:

The town of Swan River was chosen as the location for this practicum for two reasons. The first and most significant reason for selecting this community was done in an attempt to reconnect with portions of my family history, as my maternal ancestors immigrated to the area in the late 1890's. Like many at the time, these family members made lives for themselves as homesteaders; carving out a home and farm that would provide for them for years to come. Secondly, the town acts as a hub for the surrounding valley, and, due to its health centre and various types of older adult living options and services, acts as a suitable place for rural older adults to move to and age in. The town of Swan River thus serves a significant population of older adults living in and around the community. According to the 2021 Census, the town of Swan River had a population of 4,049, 1,030 were 65 years of age or older (Statistics Canada 2023). Therefore, there are many in the community who would benefit from a centrally located, intergenerational park that encourages physical activity and social interaction.

Swan River is a rural community located within the picturesque Swan River Valley; a region known for agricultural heritage, tourism and recreational opportunities. The Swan River Valley is a region in northwestern Manitoba, with portions extending into eastern Saskatchewan. The area is surrounded by small lakes, natural areas and provincial parks which provide many year-round recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing, swimming, downhill and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and ice fishing (Travel Manitoba).

The town of Swan River was officially established in 1908, following a period of settlement from homesteaders and pioneers that largely began in 1898 as rumours swirled that the train line would be extended from Dauphin to Swan River (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). Prior to the extension of the railroad, individuals and families travelled to the valley by foot or in carts pulled by oxen or horses, often beginning their journey by rail up to Dauphin and continuing by foot or cart to the valley. At this time, there were no roads or bridges and travellers would have to travel through varied terrain and across waterways. By 1898, settlers could travel by rail from Winnipeg all the way to Cowan, a small community 50kms southeast of Swan River but had to continue their journey by foot (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). Finally, in 1899, the rail line went all the way to Swan River (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978) and settlers arrived from all over to begin claiming homesteads which had already been surveyed. With the arrival of more settlers, land was cleared for livestock, agriculture and the construction of houses, marking the beginning of the changing landscape of the valley. The land issued for homesteading had previously been occupied by various Indigenous groups and had been taken from said groups through land surrender treaties.





ASPEN PARKLAND BY BIG WOODY CREEK, JULY 2023

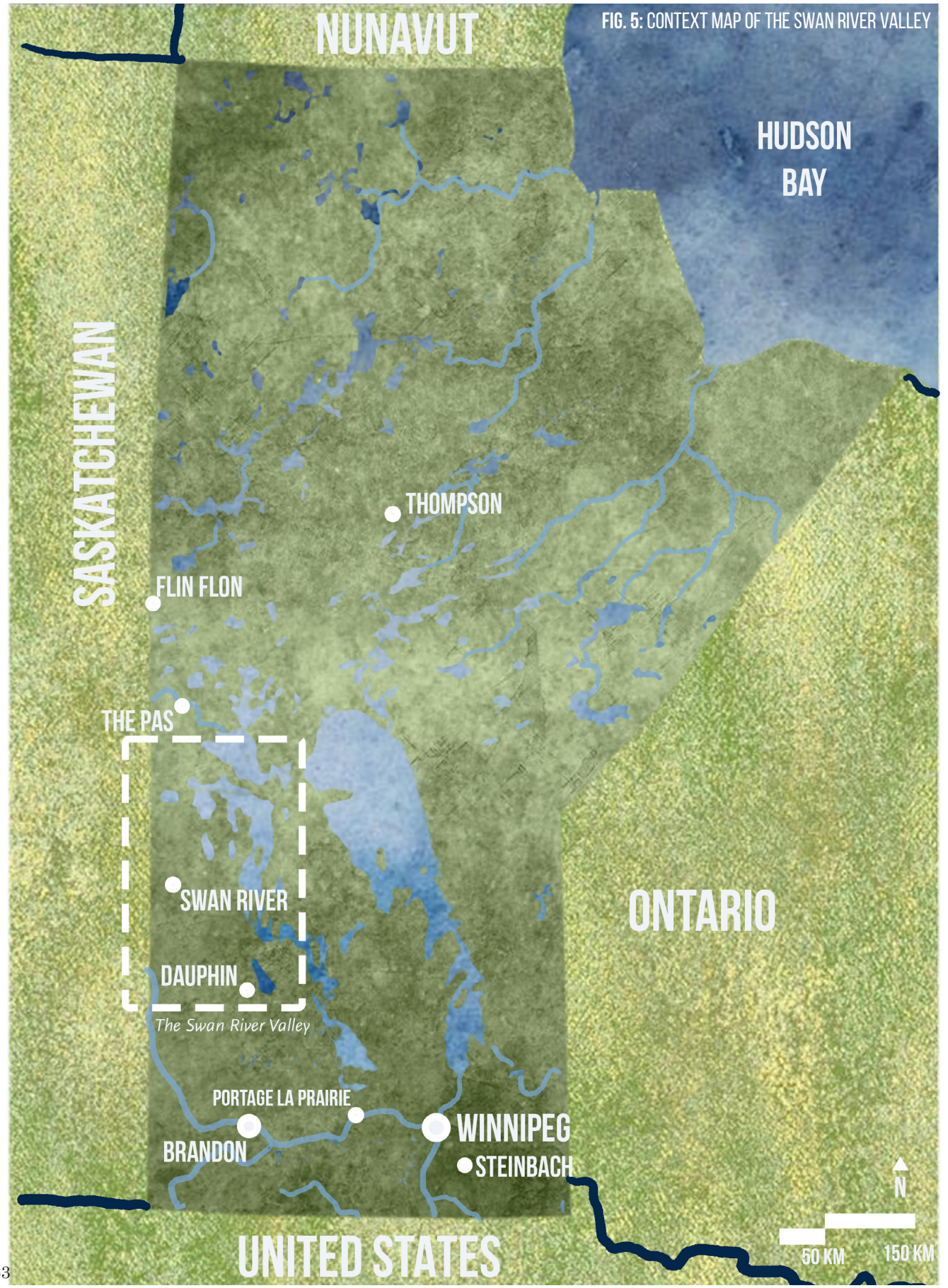


FIG. 5: CONTEXT MAP OF THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY

HISTORY OF THE VALLEY:

Prior to the largely European settlement of the valley, numerous Indigenous groups resided in and around the Swan River Valley for at least 10,000 years before the arrival of French explorers in the early 1730s (Ledohowski 2003; Swan River Valley Historical Society 1984). Some of these groups traditionally occupied land in the east, but were forced to relocate to the west as Europeans increased their 'ownership' and control of eastern territories in the country (Ledohowski 2003). The three main Indigenous groups present during initial European exploration in the general vicinity of the area now known as the Swan River Valley were the Cree, the Assiniboine, and the Sioux (Swan River Valley Historical Society 1984; Ledohowski 2003). The Cree mainly occupied land in the boreal forest while the Assiniboine were present in the parkland areas and the Sioux were found on the plains (Swan River Valley Historical Society 1984; Ledohowski 2003). By the early nineteenth century, another group was found in the area after having been displaced from their traditional lands near Lake of the Woods and Lake Superior (Ledohowski 2003). This Indigenous group was the Saulteaux, and by 1812 groups were found on the western side of Lake Winnipegosis (Swan River Valley Historical Society 1984; Ledohowski 2003). With the expansion of European settlement, many of these Indigenous groups were occupying lands that were not traditionally theirs, in an attempt to separate themselves from the land being claimed by Europeans in the eastern portions of Canada. As more settlers arrived in Canada, Indigenous groups were forced onto dedicated land reserves that allowed the government the ability to monitor and regulate their every move in an attempt to assimilate Indigenous populations and force them to abandon their traditional ways of life (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada 2017). As a result, the lifestyles, culture, and expression of Indigenous identity and community was forever changed and the reserves left for Indigenous groups became smaller and smaller.

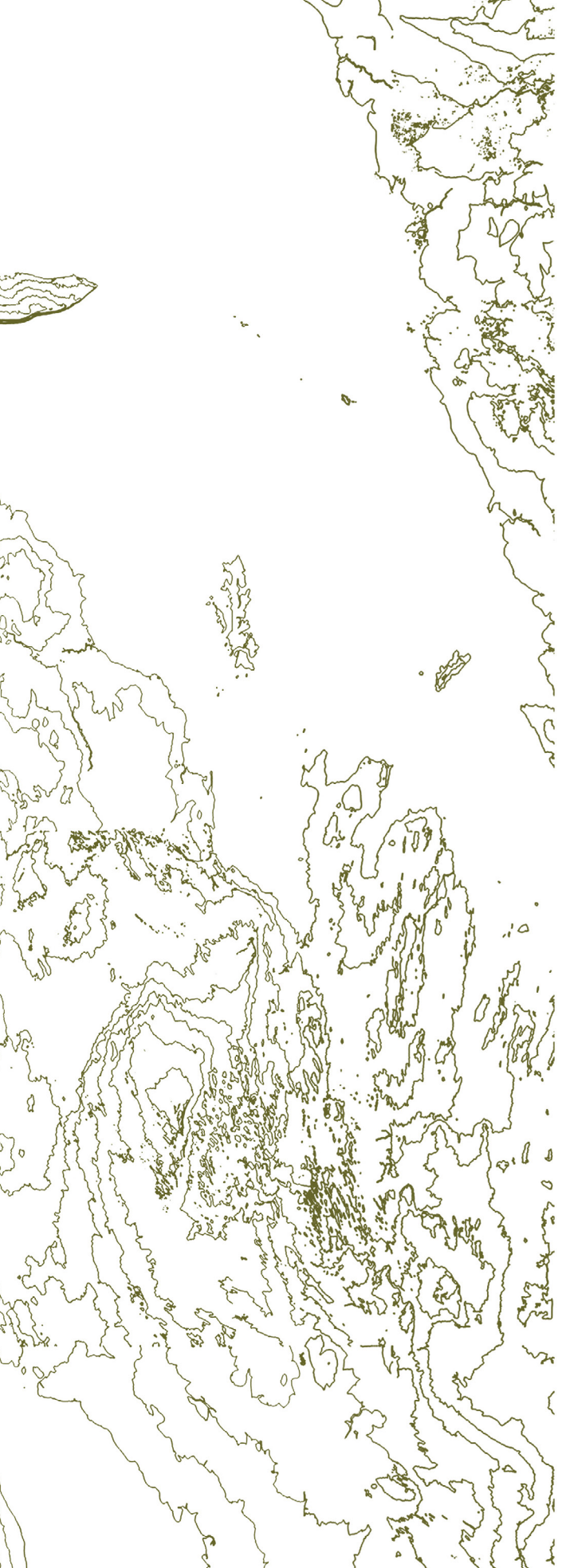
The settler history of the Swan River Valley begins with the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), who sent Henry Kelsey further into the country from York Factory (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978) to 'discover', claim, and profit from the land and its natural resources, namely from the trapping of the many fur-bearing animals in the valley. These animals included beaver, mink, muskrat, weasel, wolf and fox (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). In 1787 the first trading post was built along the Swan River (Historic Resource Branch 1983). By the nineteenth century, both the HBC and the North West Company had established trade in the area, leading to the initial trickle of European settlement.

Further settlement occurred when the Dominion Lands Act was passed, which provided individuals with land grants in Western Canada to encourage settlement (Yarhi and Regehr 2006). These land grants encouraged the establishment of homesteads throughout Western Canada, regardless of the consequences to Indigenous Peoples. To maintain ownership of the homestead, individuals had to increase land value by cultivation and construction, to create profitable and productive land resources for the future (Library and Archives Canada 2021). The Dominion Lands Act had been in place since 1872 (Chamberlin 1872) and as such, by the late 1890's, much of the desirable land in eastern Canada and southern Manitoba had already been claimed by others. As more people began arriving in Canada, they looked to previously unestablished land that offered them the possibility of generating wealth and providing a living to themselves and their families (Yarhi and Regehr 2006; Swan River Valley Historical Society 1984; Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). Based on land surveys, it was determined that the soil in Swan River was suitable for agriculture, and many people began flooding the area in hopes of establishing a successful homestead (Swan River Valley Historical Society 1984; Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). Although the soil in the valley had the potential to yield successful crops, much of the area was bush and would therefore need to be cleared by the settlers before they could begin developing their homestead.

Land in the Swan River Valley was divided into quarter sections, with each quarter section of land containing 160 acres (Library and Archives Canada 2021; Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). Homesteaders were issued one quarter section of land and after meeting the construction and cultivation requirements over a three year period were allowed to purchase additional land, of which the maximum allotment was a full section (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978; Yarhi and Regehr 2006). A full section of land is 640 acres, or one square mile. Gradually, the smaller family operated farms common up until the mid century were replaced by larger, more industrial farming techniques and operations (VanRaes 2011).



FIG. 6: LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY



LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS:

This section explores the characteristics of the wider Swan River Valley, to illustrate the project site and introduce certain historic features and meaningful places in the valley. The natural areas, buildings and other structures mentioned in the following section will inform the design of features within the park. Unfortunately, many of these buildings and structures were not maintained and have therefore been lost to time and solely exist in the memories of certain community members or tucked away in family photograph albums. By using these features as influences in the design of the intergenerational playground, these essential elements can continue to have an impact on future generations of Swan River and help maintain the historical and cultural identity of the Swan River Valley.

The Swan River Valley lies between the Manitoba Escarpment in the Parkland Region. The Manitoba escarpment is a range of hills formed by glaciers. The hills in the Manitoba Escarpment are the Pasquia Hills, Porcupine Hills, Duck Mountain and Riding Mountain (Smith et al. 1998; Nielsen 1988). The Pasquia Hills are in Saskatchewan, and are therefore not shown on the accompanying map of the region. The Swan Valley region is largely characterized by its topography and vegetation. The northern portion of this vegetation is largely dominated by mixed boreal forests, while the southern portion is defined by grasslands scattered with deciduous forests.

These dense forests provide several provincial forest reserves, highlighting the productivity of the valley. The various hard and soft wood species support a very productive forestry industry (Smith et al. 1998). Historically these forests provided settlers with an ample supply of wood to construct their homes with, and where feasible provided additional income opportunities, particularly in the winter months, for residents to plane and sell their excess lumber or get seasonal jobs as labourers at various mills.

In addition to the topographical features, the Swan River Valley is surrounded by three large lakes, Pelican Lake, Swan Lake, and Lake Winnipegosis. Swan Lake and Pelican lake are relatively swallow bodies of water, with a depth of less than three metres and maximum depth of five metres respectively, while Lake Winnipegosis has a maximum depth of 10 metres (Nielsen 1988).

These three major lakes and the many smaller lakes and rivers within the valley are another prominent feature of this region. There are many deep channels and gullies that divide the landscape (Smith et al. 1998), and these waterways provide recreational opportunities for community members and tourists. Many creeks were once used for swimming and fishing and provided homesteaders with an appreciated means of cooling off during the hot summer months.

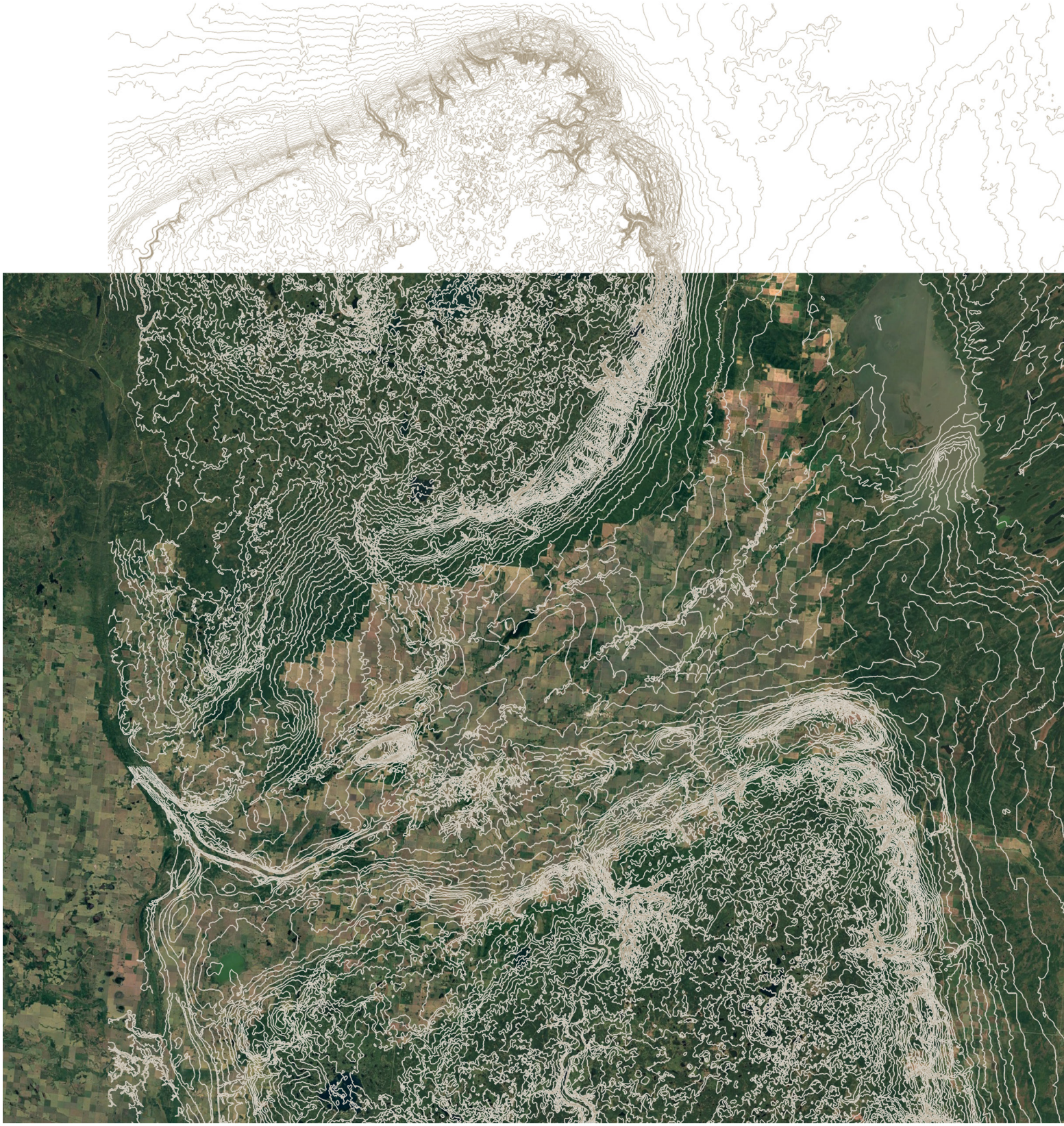
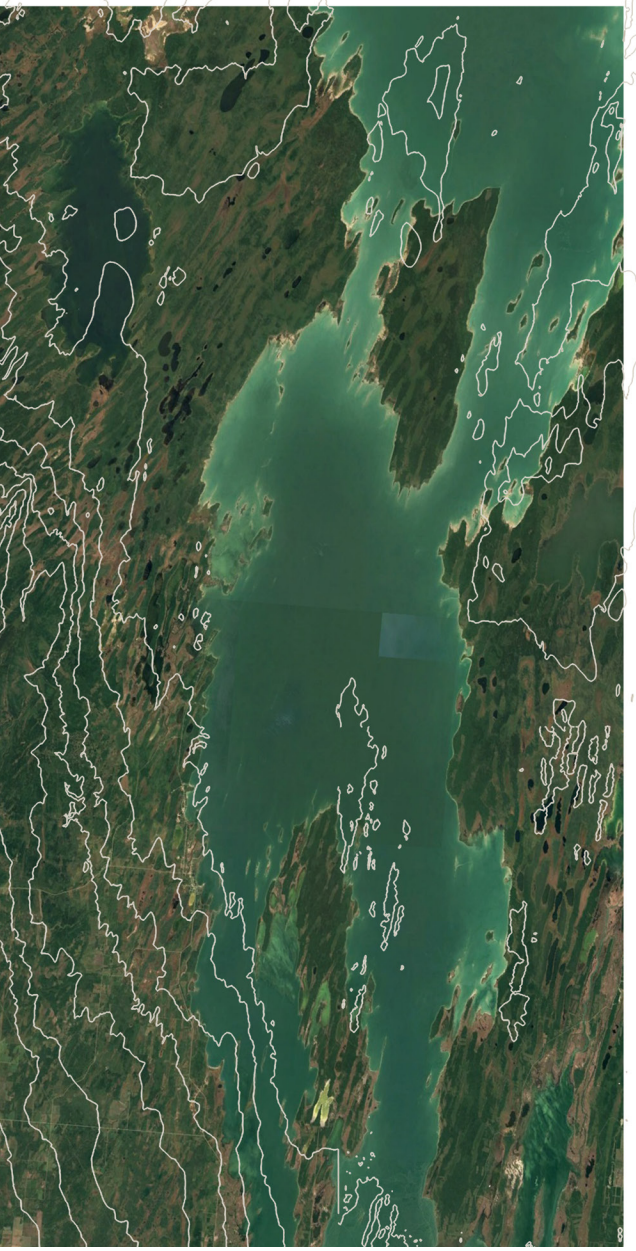


FIG. 7: TOPOGRAPHIC MAP OF THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY



The Swan River, one of the valley's main rivers, sits in the erosional gap between Duck Mountain and the Porcupine Hills (Smith et al. 1998). Like many rivers in the area, the Swan River flows northeast and is a tributary of Swan Lake, which eventually drains into Lake Winnipegosis (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). Historically, the rivers and creeks helped define the many districts within the Swan River Valley and would have been natural barriers to settlers at the turn of the century (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). Nowadays, most of these creeks and rivers are passable and no longer act as barriers between communities.

TOPOGRAPHY:

The wider Swan River Valley is defined by its undulating and rolling hills, which are covered in a mosaic of diverse crops. Dispersed throughout the long stretches of farmland are small towns and communities, many of whom rely on agriculture as their economic base. The largest community within the Swan River Valley is the town of Swan River.

The town of Swan River is surrounded by two key topographical features, the Porcupine Hills and Duck Mountain. These upland areas are separated by the Swan River plain, which is the valley the town of Swan River sits in (Nielsen 1988). There are a few smaller topographical features within the Swan River plain, the most notable of which is Thunder Hill (Nielsen 1988). Thunder Hill is located to the west of the town of Swan River, right on the edge of the border between Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Nestled among farmland, Thunder Hill has been used as a ski area since the late 1960's with down hill ski areas and unmarked cross-country ski and snowshoe trails (Thunder Hill Ski Club 2025).

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY:

The rolling hills of the Swan River Valley are one of the areas most striking features. When travelling at night it is common for a dense fog to settle in the low-lying areas, creating a sense of isolation and mystery as passersby are few and far between. During the day, particularly during the summer months before starting fall harvest, this meandering countryside offers surprises behind every hill or curve in the road, with scenic views from every angle.





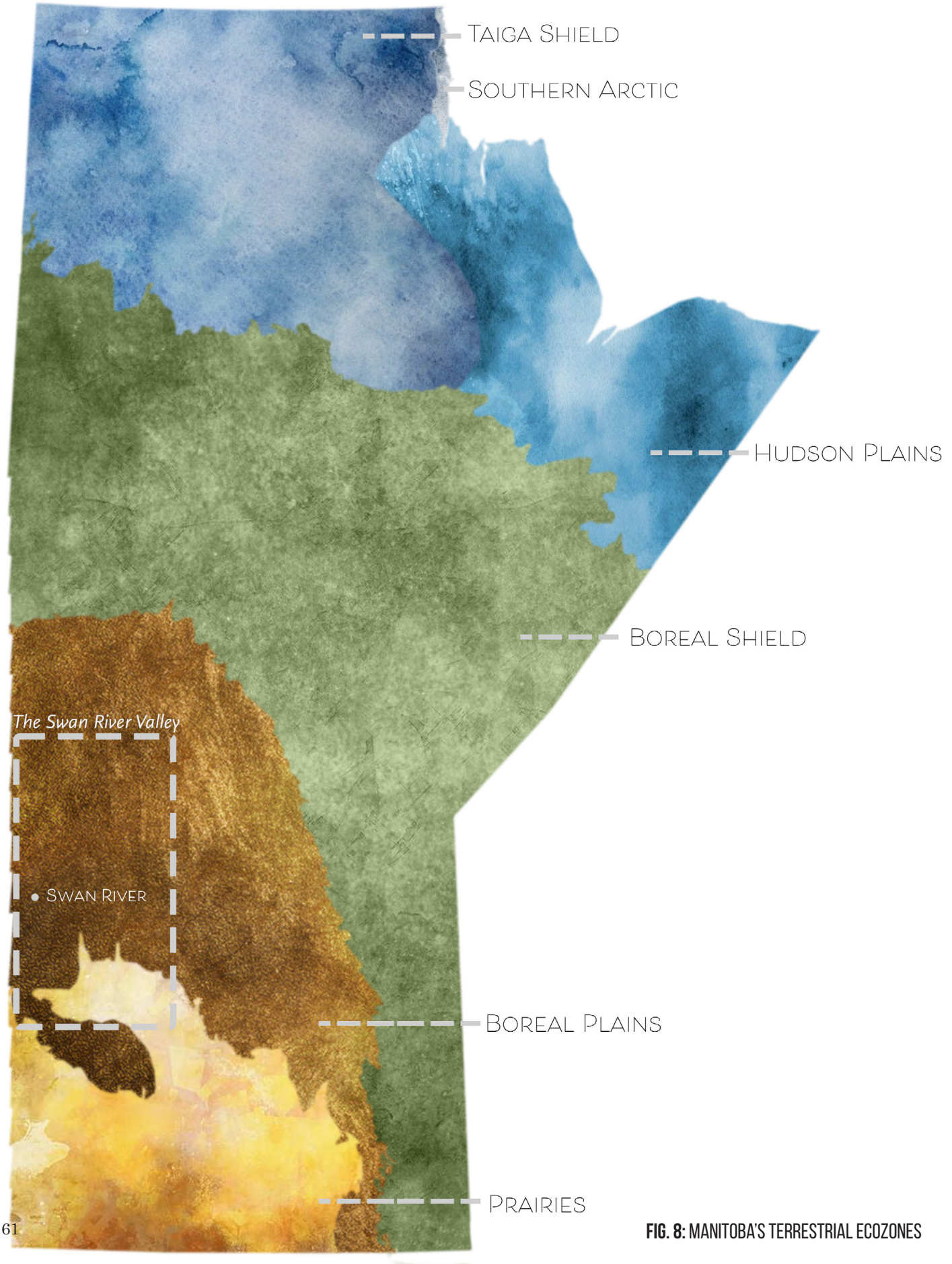


FIG. 8: MANITOBA'S TERRESTRIAL ECOZONES

ECOLOGICAL LAND CLASSIFICATION

Ecozones:
Ecological land classification describes land by classifying regions based on similar vegetation cover, geology, physiography, soil, and climate data; to provide a more detailed and complete portrayal of the landscape (Smith et al. 1998). There are several categories within Canada's Ecological Land Classification, each of which become more descriptive and specific when used to distinguish areas from one another. The most generalized are the ecozones, which broadly characterise land based on physical and biological characteristics. In Canada, there are 15 terrestrial ecozones, 6 of which are found in Manitoba:

- Taiga Shield Ecozone
- Southern Arctic Ecozone
- Hudson Plains Ecozone
- Boreal Shield Ecozone
- Boreal Plains Ecozone
- Prairies Ecozone

The Swan River Valley is located within two of these ecozones, the Prairie Ecozone and the Boreal Plains Ecozone . The landscape of the Boreal Plains Ecozone features rolling plains of hilly terrain, depressions, and undulating till deposits formed by glacial retreat (Smith et al. 1998). These diverse landforms create a unique and picturesque landscape within the Swan River Valley, which in turn, help foster a unique sense of place and pride in community members as determined by the interviews conducted during this practicum . Much of the land within the Boreal Plains Ecozone is used for forestry, with arable land being used for agriculture. Other industries in this zone include hunting and trapping, with some commercial fishing occurring on lakes within the zone. With the diverse landforms and presence of many waterbodies, tourism and recreation industries also continue to grow and provide career and leisure opportunities for community members.

The Boreal Plains Ecozone is further distinguished by certain tree species, the most common of which are coniferous species including white and black spruce, jack pine and tamarack (Smith et al. 1998). Deciduous trees also exist in the region but are most frequently found in the transitional area between the Boreal Plains and Prairies Ecozone. Common deciduous tree species include trembling aspen, white birch, and balsam poplars.

Similar to the Boreal Plains Ecozone, the natural vegetation within the Prairies Ecozone has been altered by agricultural development (Smith et al. 1998). Historically, the Prairie Ecozone consisted of native grassland and tree bluffs, but most have been transformed into fields of wheat, oil seed, hay or other crops.

The Prairie Ecozone is defined by minimal topographic change, tall, mixed, and short grass prairie and groves of trembling aspen, balsam poplar and bur oak (Smith et al. 1998). Historically, the ecozone was defined by stretches of wetlands, marshes, river valleys, and grasslands which have unfortunately been lost in favour of creating desirable conditions for agriculture (Smith et al. 1998). As such, much of the Prairies Ecozone no longer provides a functional wildlife habitat. Additionally, the landscape and composition of the Prairies Ecozone has been changed with the development of water management strategies along many key waterways (Smith et al. 1998).

Ecoregions:
The next category within the Ecological Land Classification are the Ecoregions, which further characterise land based on their distinctive vegetation and soil composition, particularly in regard to presence of permafrost (Smith et al. 1998). In Manitoba, there are 16 ecoregions, four of which are within the Boreal Plains Ecozone and three of which are in the Prairie Ecozone. As the town of Swan River is in the Boreal Plains Ecozone, only the pertinent ecoregions within this ecozone will be discussed in this document.

Ecoregions within the Boreal Plains Ecozone:

- Mid-Boreal Lowland Ecoregion
- Boreal Transition Ecoregion
- Mid-Boreal Uplands Ecoregion
- Interlake Plain Ecoregion

While these ecoregions are located within the Boreal Plains Ecozone, only three of these ecoregions will be described in further detail in this document. These ecozones are the Boreal Transition Ecoregion, as it is the ecoregion that the Swan River Ecodistrict is located within; the Mid-Boreal Uplands Ecoregion, which encompasses the town of Swan River; and the Mid-Boreal Lowland Ecoregion, as this region characterizes the northern section of the Swan River Valley (Smith et al. 1998).



ECOLOGICAL LAND CLASSIFICATION

Boreal Transition Ecoregion:
The Boreal Transition Ecoregion is a thin stretch of wooded upland between Riding Mountain, Duck Mountain, and the Porcupine Hills (Smith et al. 1998). Summers in the region are warm but do not last and are followed by long, cold winters (Smith et al. 1998).

Within the Boreal Transition Ecoregion, trembling aspen and balsam poplar are the most prominent tree species. These trees are typically found with an under-story of mixed herbs and tall shrubs. While white spruce and balsam fir continue to be the dominant species, they are becoming less and less common due to wildfires and logging practices within the valley (Smith et al. 1998).

Due to the quality of the soil, much of the productive land in the area is used for agriculture or grazing. Where there is simple terrain, agricultural fields can be found with wheat, hay crops, canola and other oil seeds being most common while livestock or pasture land is found on steeper slopes (Smith et al. 1998). There are several forest reserves in the area as well, with a sawmill located just south of the town of Swan River. Where land has not yet been transformed into agricultural land or development, the region remains an untouched example of the native boreal plains. The remaining wooded valleys still provide habitat for deer, elk, black bears, moose and other small mammals and songbirds.

Mid-Boreal Uplands Ecoregion:
The Mid-Boreal Uplands Ecoregion is made up of three distinct upland regions namely the Porcupine Hills, Duck Mountain, and Riding Mountain, which are the uplands which make up the Manitoba Escarpment (Smith et al. 1998). Slopes within this ecoregion vary from 10 to 30 percent (Smith et al. 1998), and the varied topography provides scenic views of the distant mountains and hills while travelling in and around the Swan River Valley. The main tree species in the ecoregion are jack pine, balsam poplar, trembling aspen and white spruce with coniferous trees being more prevalent in the northern regions, and deciduous species existing primarily along the Duck and Riding Mountains (Smith et al. 1998). Many of these tree species support the forestry industry; as much of this ecoregion is occupied by either national parks, provincial parks, or forest reserves.

Mid-Boreal Lowland Ecoregion:
In Manitoba, the Mid-Boreal Lowland Ecoregion stretches across the Manitoba Plain from the western edge of Lake Winnipeg to the cluster of smaller individual lakes between The Pas and Flin Flon, occupying a central portion of the province. As the classification suggests, much of the land in the Mid-Boreal Lowland is flat-lying, with topography becoming more pronounced north of The Pas (Smith et al. 1998). Much of the ecoregion is defined by large lakes, bogs, and fens, with large portions of the soil being unsuitable for agriculture. Mixed boreal forest is the dominant forest type, composed mostly of black spruce, trembling aspen, balsam poplar, and jack pine (Smith et al. 1998). Along waterways, one would find groups of black spruce, white spruce, balsam fir and trembling aspen, while swamp birch and tamarack can be found in the fens (Smith et al. 1998).

Ecodistricts:
The final category of the Ecological Land Classification are the Ecodistricts, which subdivide the ecoregions based on differences in climate and physical landscape characteristics. In Manitoba, there are 93 ecodistricts but we will only touch on one in this document.

The Swan River Ecodistrict lies within the Boreal Transition Ecoregion, and therefore has similar characterises asto the ecoregion as a whole. Slopes within the ecodistrict vary between five to 15 percent, creating a mix of gently sloping and very steep hills, which greatly impact the production potential of certain areas. Many communities within the Swan River Ecodistrict are small agricultural-based communities, which form a mosaic of farmland, forest, and wetlands in the district. The presence of agricultural and natural land in the area support both industry and habitat for many mammals, waterfowl, and songbirds (Smith et al. 1998).

VEGETATION AND AGRICULTURE IN THE VALLEY:

Much of the Swan River Valley is known for its agricultural landscape due to the rich soils that help create a profitable economic base for the region. The naturally occurring vegetation in the area are black spruce, jack pine, tamarack, trembling aspen, white birch and balsam poplars (Nielsen 1988; Smith et al. 1998). The presence of spruce, poplar, tamarack and birch in the Duck and Porcupine Mountains continues to support the logging industry in the area, and many early settlers cut the lumber used to build their homes and barns (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978).

Historically, the natural coverage and protection of the boreal and parkland forests in the area protected individuals from snow and wind, and lead to minimal impact on farmers from the dust storms that impacted so many others in the province in the 1930's. Nowadays, blizzards and dust storms have more impact on the area, as much of the land has been cleared for forestry industries or transformed for agricultural purposes (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978). The clearing of land has become much easier with the evolution of industrial farm equipment, which has led to almost 50% of the valley being transformed into agricultural land (Swan Valley Tours 2020).

Many types of grain are planted in the valley, including wheat, oats, rye, and barley, with canola and flax being the primary oilseeds grown in the valley (Swan River Valley History Book Committee 1978).However, the predominant crops within the valley are winter wheat, fall rye, canola and soybeans. Mixed farming has been a common tendency in the area, and it is common to see cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry throughout the valley.

Several of these crops are notable due to the vibrant colour that appears as they mature and become ready for harvest.



WHEAT FIELD IN BIG WOODY, JULY 2023



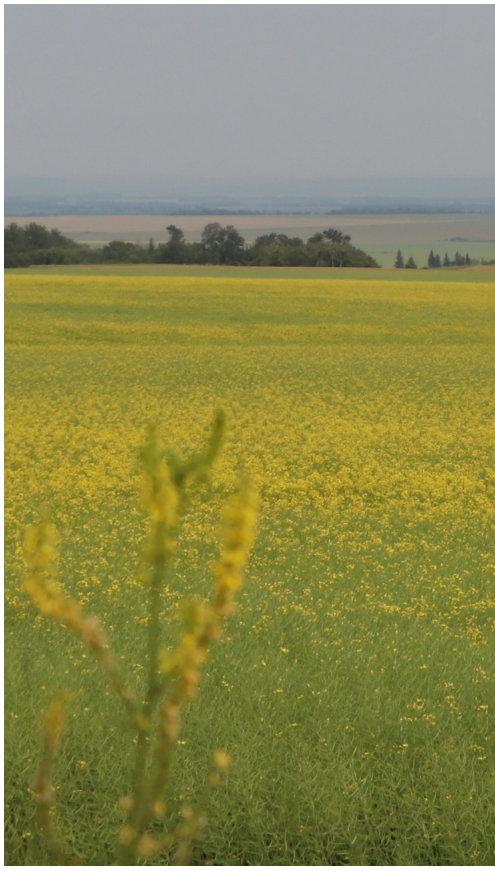
HARVESTED WHEAT FIELD AT THE SWAN VALLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM, MANITOBA AUGUST 2024

AGRICULTURE IN THE VALLEY:

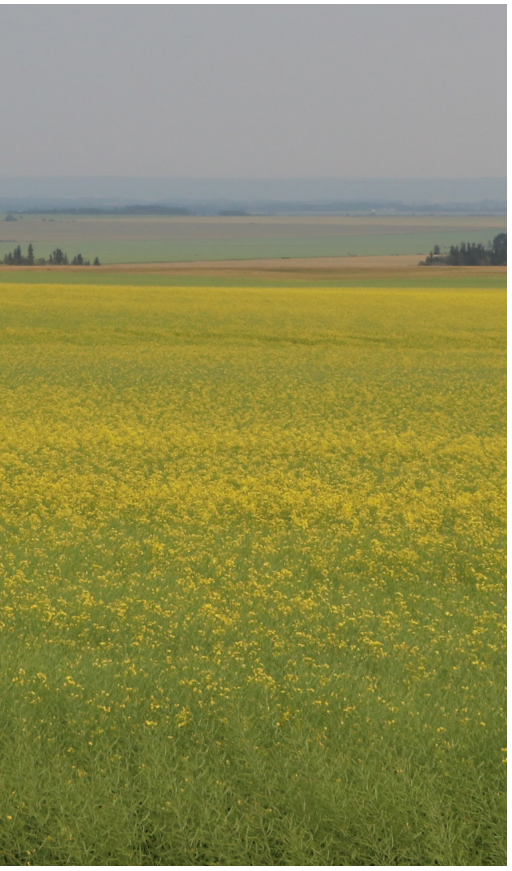
When travelling through the valley, one cannot help but gaze in awe at the vastness of the productive fields and undulating hills, scattered with small farms and the remnants of old, long abandoned homesteads. It is quite striking to look out onto what would have once been a dense parkland forest, and which is now expansive fields of vibrant crops speckled with small thickets of trees. These feelings are most prominent when experiencing the valley during the harvest season, when several of the crops are the most vibrant.



GOLDEN WHEAT FIELD



VIBRANT CANOLA CROP





NATURE AND AGRICULTURE OF THE VALLEY

HISTORIC LANDSCAPES, BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES IN THE VALLEY:

The landscape of the Swan River Valley has become more developed with the mechanisation of agricultural practices making it easier to clear land. What was once vast stretches of forests is now mixed farming and rather than being surrounded by small family farms, the valley is now home to large swaths of productive crops and livestock operations.

When making the drive from Winnipeg to Swan River, one will pass many abandoned homesteads, with crumbling and decaying homes, barns, and other outbuildings left to the elements; abandoned by their owners, builders, and occupants, the memories they once held long forgotten. One will also notice the many small cemeteries which are just feet away from the few roads one can travel on. These cemeteries are reminders of the small communities that once existed and provided opportunities for hopeful settlers; and that have also been abandoned as people move away into urban areas for better opportunities.

Although small pieces of former homesteads and reminders of schoolhouses exist throughout the valley, they no longer illustrate the lives of those who once occupied them. With their abandonment, we risk losing a portion of our history and the stories these buildings once told and the memories they held.

The following section will describe several key features, buildings, and structures that once existed in the area and that are key to understanding the place attachment of the Swan River Valley.



RAIL LINE IN SWAN RIVER LOOKING NORTH, JULY 2023



HISTORIC LANDSCAPES, BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES IN THE VALLEY:

THE ONE ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE

One room schoolhouses played important roles in rural communities. These schoolhouses connected children to one another and created educational opportunities that could not be provided for by hardworking parents who spent most of their days caring for crops, livestock, and the house, to ensure that their families were looked after and provided for throughout the year. Many people who are above the age of 70 and grew up in rural Manitoba likely have memories of attending one-room schoolhouses (Gaudry 2020; Goldsborough 2014).

By 1967, the one room schoolhouses in the Swan River Valley were permanently closed following the consolidation of rural schools. This was largely due to the creation of a bus system which took children from more rural areas into larger towns. As such, children in surrounding communities in the valley were brought to the town of Swan River. Prior to the closure of the one-room schoolhouses, there were more than 2,500 schoolhouses found in the province of Manitoba alone (Gaudry 2020; Goldsborough 2014). Immediately after closure, it was common for the schoolhouses to be used as community centres or churches, and they continued to be an important feature of rural communities. Unfortunately, many of these structures have been lost to time and are only remembered through photographs and the commemorative monuments that mark the former school sites.

Because of the frequency and familiarity of one room schoolhouses in the rural landscape, the schoolhouse is used as a key community gathering place in the design of the Swan Valley Heritage Park. To accommodate community gatherings similar to the dances and bridge tournaments that would occur throughout the year, the former school near the selected site will be used as inspiration for the construction of a café and workshop space, the design considerations of which can be found in the Design Section of this practicum.

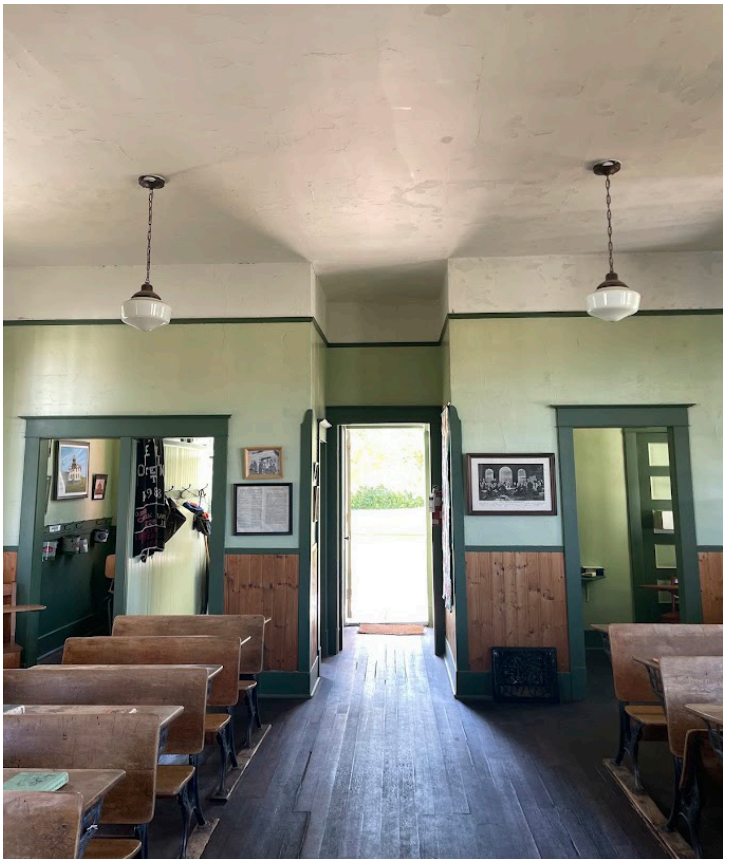
"They used to have dances at the school all the time, you would pay to go to the dance to raise money. The dances were mostly during the off season, not during harvesting or seeding, mostly in the winter when we needed something to do. … Community members would play instruments; they had a fiddle and a guitar and an accordion."
- Quote from the semi-structured interviews

The images included here are: Thunder Hill School and Class, The Commemorative Monument to Thunder Hill School, original photograph of the First Class of McVey School, Interior of Lady Hubble School 1 (moved to the Swan Valley Museum), Interior of Lady Hubble School 2 & Interior of Sebright School No. 1182 (Beausejour Pioneer Village Museum).




SITE OF
THUNDER HILL SCHOOL
DISTRICT No 1156


I ROY
WURPLE













INTERIOR & EXTERIOR OF MCVEY SCHOOL, TAKEN AUGUST 24, 2024



FIG. 9: REMEMBERING THE FIRST CLASS OF MCVEY SCHOOL

FIRST CLASS OF MCVEY SCHOOL NO. 2303, 1942

HISTORIC LANDSCAPES, BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES IN THE VALLEY:

HOUSES IN THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY



HISTORICAL HOUSE, BUILT OF LOCAL UNDRESSED FIELDSTONE

Both the house and the barn were key structures on the homestead. Providing necessary shelter and security for homesteaders, these structures were typically the first built on the farmyard (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). Typically, the first homes constructed by homesteaders were simple and rudimentary and would be improved or reconstructed as the farm became more successful (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). This was due to the fact that farmers would prioritize their earnings and put as much into the farm as possible, buying seed, farm equipment and more land rather than constructing larger homes (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). As people became more accustomed to the lifestyle and felt a sense of stability thanks to better harvests, the architecture of the prairies and parkland became more elaborate (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). Architectural styles in the Swan River Valley reflect common building styles of the era. Most remaining historic homes in town highlight the construction of a simple wood-frame structure, while some provide a unique glimpse at the use of local materials including field stone and river rock. It was common for dwellings to be constructed of locally available materials, which is why settlers in the valley mostly constructed wood homes, thanks to the plentiful forests found in the parkland region. Less common were stone houses constructed of rubble, river, or fieldstone. However uncommon, such examples are represented in the town of Swan River and highlight the uniqueness and creativity of certain community members.

Many homes were of simple construction and layout, and based on my interviews, it was not uncommon for homesteaders to build their homes on their own or with the help of family members. These homes provided the basic comforts and typically had a cellar to store produce and canned goods in but lacked indoor plumbing or much privacy. Due to the abundance of local timber sources, it was easy to mill lumber and some settlers in the valley even had their own planers to process the trees they removed from their land while developing their farms.

Most of the heritage houses that remain in and around Swan River are examples of small rectangular planned houses and a few large square planned houses. However, there is one example of a 1 ½ story Red River frame home, which is one of the oldest houses remaining in town (Canada's Historic Places 2010). Small rectangular planned houses are frequently seen around town, and are modest structures constructed of milled lumber. Typically, small rectangular houses were either symmetrically planned or side hall planned, creating an asymmetrical façade (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). Large square planned houses were usually 2 ½ storeys tall and featured more detailed architectural elements (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). These houses were either square or L shaped and had more ornamentation including porches or verandahs (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983).

Due to the many memories, experiences, and place attachment associated with the home, the Swan Valley Heritage Park will feature a playground designed to reflect the characteristics of several heritage homes in town. This play feature will spark conversation and social interaction between visitors and will promote imaginative and cooperative play.



EARLY PIONEER HOME & BARN



LARGE SQUARE PLANNED HOUSE WITH PORCH



HARLEY HOUSE, RED RIVER FRAME HOME



A LOCAL EXAMPLE OF SIDE HALL PLANNED, SMALL RECTANGULAR HOUSE



A LARGE PLANNED HOUSE CONSTRUCTED ON THE HOMESTEAD, BUILT OF LOCAL MILLED LUMBER



BEATTIE HOUSE, CONSTRUCTED WITH LOCAL STONES IS AN EXAMPLE OF A LARGE PLANNED HOUSE



LARGE SQUARE PLANNED HOUSE BUILT OF LOCALLY CAST CONCRETE BLOCKS

HISTORIC LANDSCAPES, BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES IN THE VALLEY:

BARNS AND AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURES

In the mid to late nineteenth century, Canada's economy was centered around agriculture, and the extraction and processing of natural resources (Statistics Canada's Demography Division 2011). As such, agricultural structures like barns, grain elevators, granaries, and even chicken coops were defining features of the rural landscape.

The construction style of barns in the Swan River Valley bears many similarities to barns constructed throughout Manitoba. Like many agricultural structures throughout Manitoba, few remain in the Valley., Those that do remain can be found in various states of disrepair and deconstruction as they are left neglected over time. As families move away or stop farming to pursue other endeavours, these structures are left to the unforgiving elements.

Barns are important features in rural communities, providing shelter for animals and excess hay. In the early days, these barns would have been simple log structures more recognizable as a shed than a barn (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). As construction methods improved and milled lumber became available, barns also became larger, more appealing, and functional (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). One of the most recognizable barn construction style is a later version of Southern Ontario Style Barns, known as such due to their prominence in southern Ontario (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). This recognizable structure features a gambrel roof, increasing loft capacity and generating a unique and notable appearance (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983).

In addition to being essential structures in rural agricultural landscapes, barns are also an essential component of place attachment among the key informants interviewed for this practicum. During interviews, memories were shared of the fun and unique dances held in the lofts of neighbour's barns, which occurred once families had used all the hay that was held in the loft. These dances marked the start of the spring and the beginning of farming season when fields were prepared, marked by warmer weather and empty loft space as the winters supply of hay had finally been used.

"There used to be dances in lofts, we called them barn dances, we'd have them in the loft of people's barns. There would be posters put up in stores and other public areas to advertise the event … word spreads like wildfire." - Quote from the semi-structured interviews

The following three photographs are examples of gambrel roofed barns located at the Beausejour Pioneer Village Museum, the Fort La Reine Museum in Portage La Prairie and the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach,
















1955


1955

HISTORIC LANDSCAPES, BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES IN THE VALLEY:

THE CREAMERY



Fig. 10: Photographer unknown, *Creamery*, date unknown, photograph, page 56 of *80 years in Swan River Valley*. Swan River Valley History Book Committee (1978). History Book Committee.

Creameries were constructed to process excess cream from farmers and produce dairy products that were then sold to those who did not have their own cows (Nicholson 2002). Historically, it was common for farmers to keep a few cows in order to generate milk for their families, which could be turned into butter at home (Nicholson 2002). However, as settlement and urbanisation increased throughout Canada, a need for more industrialised dairy production arose (Nicholson 2002). Rural farmers would then store excess cream and sell it to their local creamery who would provide the family with a cream cheque (Nicholson 2002). This cream cheque would then be used to buy necessities in town and was often a welcome and reliable source of income for farmers whose success was dependent upon factors beyond their control such a good weather, sufficient rain, and limited interference by pests.

The town of Swan River had its own creamery plant, the Swan River Creamery which was eventually purchased by Crescent Creamery, a Winnipeg based company (Nicholson 2002). The building was located along the rail line to easily receive cream from homesteads around the valley. Like many creameries, the Crescent Creamery in Swan River provided opportunities for families in the valley to sell their extra milk products for a small profit. In some cases, the sale of excess milk allowed families to purchase necessities, particularly when the harvests were not as fruitful. The creamery and the storage and selling of excess cream and eggs was brought up during my interviews, and due to the universal experience and frequency of cream cheques throughout the province, the architectural style of the Crescent Creamery was used as an inspiration for a gathering space in the Swan Valley Heritage Park. My relatives remember their mother storing excess cream in their well as a way of preserving the cream at a colder temperature before they had a refrigerator. They would then be responsible for getting the cream to the railroad so that it could be brought to the creamery in town. This memorable experience is another reason for selecting this building.





HISTORIC LANDSCAPES, BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES IN THE VALLEY:

THE GRAIN ELEVATORS

Another essential agricultural structure is the grain elevator. Historically, there were many grain elevators located across the prairies. Commercial grain elevators in Western Canada were first constructed in Niverville in 1878 (Everitt 1992) and by the 1950s many towns had their own elevator to support their local farmers. At that time, grain elevators were largely constructed of wood and had a receiving area for trucks complete with weights and a pit to receive the grain (Everitt 1992). Grain would then be transported up the leg and sorted into different bins for future transport (Everitt 1992). Due to the nature of grain elevators, most constructed prior to the 1960s had a constituent form (Everitt 1992), increasing their familiarity throughout the province. Traditional wood grain elevators are identified by their tall and narrow form and are finished with either a pyramidal or gable roofed cupola, which is the top-most section of the grain elevator (Ross 2006). Pyramidal forms were more commonly constructed prior to the 1920s, with gable roofed grain elevators being more common in the following years (Ross 2006).

Now, many of the wooden grain elevators have disappeared, largely due to decommissioning or a lack of maintenance. Larger, modern concrete elevators have gradually replaced the smaller, wooden elevators in the province. Currently, there are only 85 functioning grain elevators in Manitoba, and, although there were upwards of 700 grain elevators in the 1950s, only a handful of the original wood grain elevators remain standing (Crabb 2017).

In the town of Swan River, there were once four grain elevators that stood on the edge of town along the railway, and none remain standing today. As these structures were formerly found in abundance throughout the province, their architectural style remains as a familiar defining characteristic of the rural agricultural landscape. It is because of this that one of the key play areas in the design section of this practicum resembles a set of grain elevators, preserving their historic architectural style and function in a town which once relied heavily on their use and maintenance. The design of this play feature reflects the gable roof style of grain elevators as this is the construction style that was present in the town of Swan River at the time my relatives were growing up.

The following images are examples of several remaining wooden grain elevators in the prairies, highlighting the uniformity of their design.







A SNAPSHOT OF RURAL LIFE IN MANITOBA:

Rural life in the Swan River Valley bears many similarities to rural life for many Manitobans who were trying to make something of themselves and their land. For instance, many rural communities did not have electricity until the 1940s and 1950s while the city of Winnipeg was largely electrified by the early 1920s (Bernhardt 2019). In rural areas, many families continued to cook with wood stoves and relied on canning, gardening, and raising and processing their own livestock to ensure that they had enough food to last them through the year.

The advertising of available land allotments for homesteads had attracted many settlers to Canada, most of which were unequipped for the long harsh winters that awaited them (Butterfield and Ledohowski 1983). Further, the quality of land that was available for purchase varied throughout the province and it was harder for some to generate enough surplus crops to support themselves and their communities. Throughout the province, the natural landscape was changed, wetlands were drained, forests and bush land cleared, and native prairie demolished and transformed into agricultural lands for harvest. Rural life throughout the province consisted of similar daily activities and responsibilities, which up until 1945 were largely done by hand or with the help of horses and oxen (Campbell 2017). This changed was marked by the development of modern agricultural machinery including self-propelled combines and improved tractors.

Across North America, farmers benefitted from improved machinery, moving from relying on horses and oxen, to steam engines until finally self-propelled, gasoline-powered equipment became mainstream. With the reliance on animal power mostly eradicated with the adoption of new technologies, farmers were able to seed and harvest at faster rates. The machinery advancements improved production and allowed farmers to cultivate larger portions of land more efficiently.

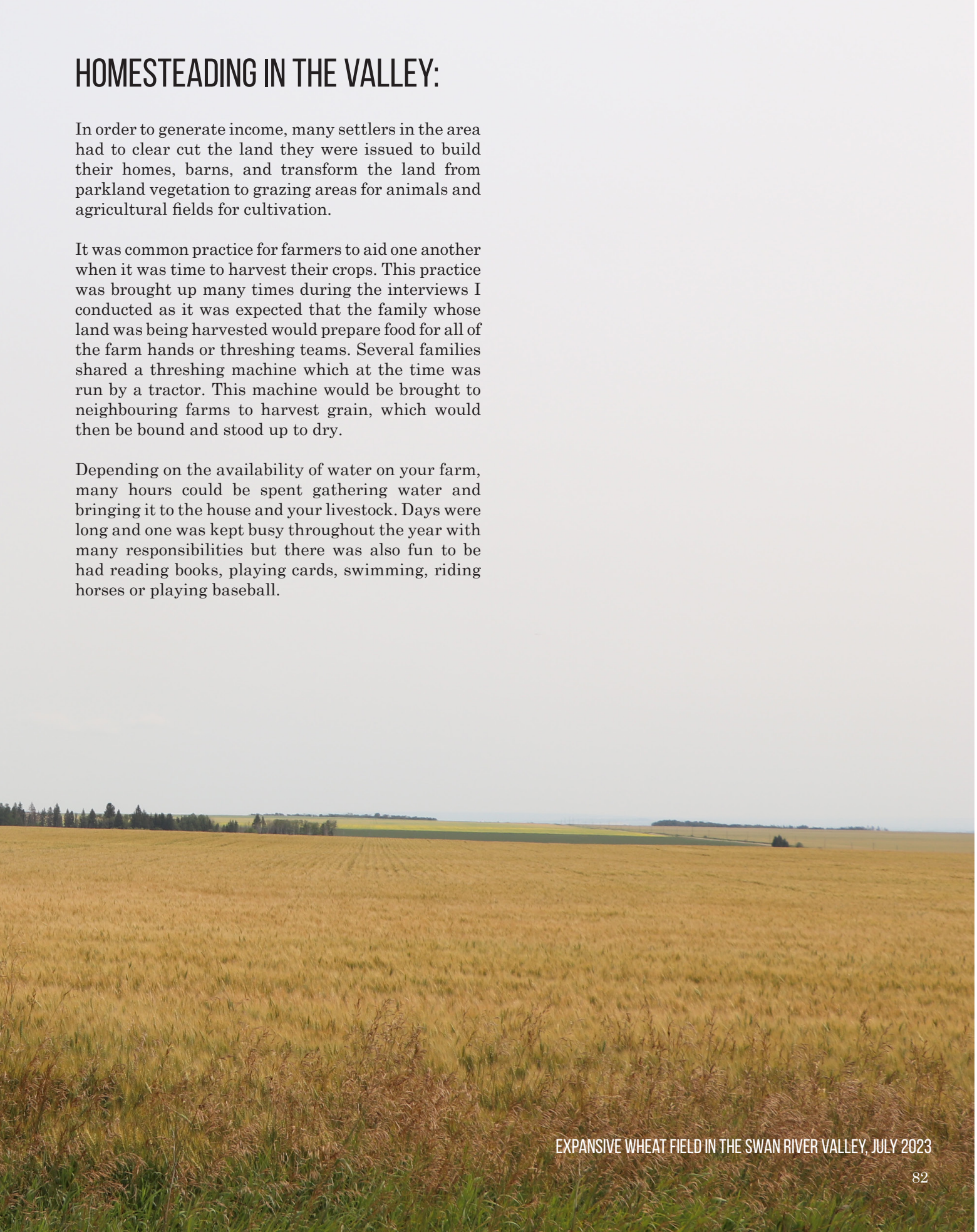


HOMESTEADING IN THE VALLEY:

In order to generate income, many settlers in the area had to clear cut the land they were issued to build their homes, barns, and transform the land from parkland vegetation to grazing areas for animals and agricultural fields for cultivation.

It was common practice for farmers to aid one another when it was time to harvest their crops. This practice was brought up many times during the interviews I conducted as it was expected that the family whose land was being harvested would prepare food for all of the farm hands or threshing teams. Several families shared a threshing machine which at the time was run by a tractor. This machine would be brought to neighbouring farms to harvest grain, which would then be bound and stood up to dry.

Depending on the availability of water on your farm, many hours could be spent gathering water and bringing it to the house and your livestock. Days were long and one was kept busy throughout the year with many responsibilities but there was also fun to be had reading books, playing cards, swimming, riding horses or playing baseball.



EXPANSIVE WHEAT FIELD IN THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY, JULY 2023

HERITAGE VILLAGES IN MANITOBA:

Examples of rural life on the prairies at the turn of the century and continuing until the mid 1900's are showcased in the many heritage villages located throughout the province of Manitoba. These heritage villages highlight local examples of one room school houses, farm houses, barns train stations, and other important structures to illustrate the history of the town and provide a snapshot into the lives people lived at the time. While working on my practicum, I visited several heritage villages in the province and noticed several similarities between them. These similarities reminded me of the universal experience of settlement in Manitoba. The accompanying images illustrate the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, the Fort La Reine Museum in Portage La Prairie and the Beausejour Pioneer Village Museum. Swan River also has its own heritage village, the Swan Valley Historical Museum that portrays the history of the Swan River Valley with a focus on pioneer life.

Although located in separate rural communities, all of these heritage villages have similar features, architectural styles, building types and machinery, which indicates that rural residents would have had similar experiences. These similarities suggest that although individuals would have had different experiences of preparing the land and constructing a homestead, the general experience of being a homesteader in Manitoba was relatively common/ indistinguishable. Thus, it is fair to say that although the design choices made in this practicum were a result of semi-formal interviews with a small number of key informants, the findings and design choices are applicable to wider audiences and rural agriculturally based communities in Manitoba.









MENNONITE HERITAGE VILLAGE - STEINBACH



FORT LA REINE MUSEUM - PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE



PIONEER VILLAGE MUSEUM - BEAUSEJOUR

SECTION FIVE:
Site Selection & Analysis





LEGION PARK LOOKING SOUTH TOWARDS MAIN STREET, APRIL 2024

SITE SELECTION:

Originally, three sites were selected as potential areas for the development of a park which considers place attachment while creating play opportunities for people of all ages. These sites were the Swan Valley Museum, Legion Park, and Ecole Swan River South School. Two of the selected sites are within town boundaries, but the Swan Valley Museum site is located along the northeast boundaries of Swan River. The Museum site is just off a major highway and is therefore more accessible by car. The Legion Park and Ecole Swan River South School sites are more centrally located within the town, making them more accessible by active modes of transportation.

Swan Valley Museum (Site 1 on the map) is an outdoor museum that is arranged as a heritage village, with historic buildings either being relocated or reconstructed on museum grounds. This site was selected due to its strong sense of place and familiarity. Many of the structures on site reflect the reality of growing up in the surrounding area and participating in activities that would be very common and familiar to older adults in the community. The Harvest Festival is a yearly event held at the Swan Valley Historical Museum that reflects the agricultural history and heritage of the Swan River Valley. During the event, bread and other baked items are prepared using traditional clay ovens and wheat from the surrounding fields is threshed using an old threshing machine. There are also demonstrations of traditional crafts including weaving, rug making and spinning. During the event, the museums 20 buildings are open to the public, which illustrate pioneer life in the valley.

Legion Park (Site 2 on the map) is an existing park in the town of Swan River. Legion Park is currently the largest park in Swan River and has many amenities which provide residents with multiple options for engaging in physical activity. Legion Park is surrounded by several key facilities and community spaces, including the arena and curling club. To the north, Legion Park is bounded by the Swan River and is surrounded by single family residences on its eastern and northwestern sides. The southeastern boundary of the park is defined by 9th Avenue North, across from which are the Northwest Round Up & Exhibition Grounds. The Northwest Round Up has been occurring yearly since 1902 (Northwest Round Up). It was originally meant to be an agricultural exhibition and educational event, where representatives from the agricultural industry would come to showcase their new products and machinery (Northwest Round Up). This event provided a means for farmers from far and wide to share their knowledge on farming practices. Nowadays, the event has evolved to host an outdoor fair and rodeo with a popular midway, horse shows, food stands, and concerts, while maintaining the horticultural and craft exhibitions that have been occurring for many years.

Ecole Swan River South School (Site 3) is a secondary English and Immersion school in the town of Swan River. The school is also home to a Daycare, which has a private play area within the school grounds. The school is located 600m south of the Swan Valley Health Centre on Main Street and is bounded by residential properties. Ecole Swan River South School is within proximity of several buildings that are designated as housing for older adults, including personal care homes, retirement homes, and independent and assisted living facilities. Ecole Swan River South School is a block south of the Swan Valley Health Centre and the Swan Valley Lodge Personal Care Home. The school grounds have a lot of open field space for children to use during breaks, as well as a small baseball field, playground, swings, and hardscaping for various semi structured games.

To determine which of these three sites were best suited for the creation of an intergenerational park, all three sites were analysed for several essential characteristics. These characteristics can be separated into four categories:

- Location and Accessibility
- Neighbourhood Context
- Attachment to Place
- Natural Landscape Features

These categories were selected due to their influence on creating a desirable green space, the perceived attachment to place, and their location within the town; as it is preferable that the park be easily accessible by children and older adults specifically. Each of the four categories where further separated into relevant subcategories that break down the key aspects of each main category. The three selected sites were then ranked from 1 to 5 in each subcategory, and each ranking was then tallied to determine the final score of each selected site. Whichever site had the highest score was then selected as the site for the park.

FIG. 11: SITE SELECTION MAP



LOCATIONS OF POTENTIAL SITES WITHIN THE TOWN OF SWAN RIVER, MANITOBA.



SITE 1: SWAN VALLEY MUSEUM



SITE 2: LEGION PARK



SITE 3: ECOLE SWAN RIVER SOUTH SCHOOL

SITE SELECTION:

As the previously mentioned categories are broad in their application to site selection criteria, the four categories were further broken down into several subcategories. The subcategories were:

Location and Accessibility
- Proximity to Health Centre + older adult care Homes
- Proximity to schools
- Proximity to existing recreational areas
- Proximity to existing community resources
- Ease of access for pedestrians
- Ability to act as a destination

Neighbourhood Context
- Separation from major roadways
- Adequate distance from undesirable surroundings
- Desirable site views
- Functionality of current land use

Attachment to Place
- Proximity to significant historical buildings or features
- Significance of site to the community

Natural Landscape Features
- Proximity to water
- Existing vegetation
- Unique topographical features

The subcategories were selected for several reasons. Most reasons relate to the desirability and accessibility of the existing natural features, surrounding neighbourhood, and the perceived attachment to place. The Location and Accessibility category was broken down into six subcategories, most of which are related to the ease of access for pedestrians, older adults and children. The proximity to existing community spaces was also considered, so that park visitors could access multiple community resources and facilities in one trip. For the Neighbourhood Context category, the sites were ranked based on the desirability, safety of the surrounding site context, and the ability of the site to function as a park space. The Attachment to Place of each site was ranked based on their relation to remaining historical buildings or features and the significance of the site to the community. The Natural Resource category was further broken down into three subcategories, with higher score awarded to the sites that had access to the Swan River, existing vegetation, and topographical features.

Overall, the Legion Park site was ranked the highest out of the three sites and selected as the location for the park design in this practicum. The Swan Valley Museum Site received the second highest score, and the Ecole Swan River South School site was the lowest ranked site. Although the Ecole Swan River South School Site received the lowest score, it was the site that was the closest to the Health Centre and is located nearest to several older adult living facilities. However, there are limited natural resources surrounding the park, and the school site does not have access to the Swan River. This is a negative feature of the park as rivers and creeks in the area were found to have a high level of place attachment due to their constant mention in the semi-structured interviews with family members. The Swan Valley Museum site was determined to have a high level of place attachment, however, there is limited space available within the museum grounds to create a multi-purpose park without taking away from the existing features such as the field of wheat which is an essential component of the Harvest Festival and its historical demonstrations. Moreover, the site is located off a busy highway, and residents have a limited ability of accessing the site safely without relying on a motor vehicle.

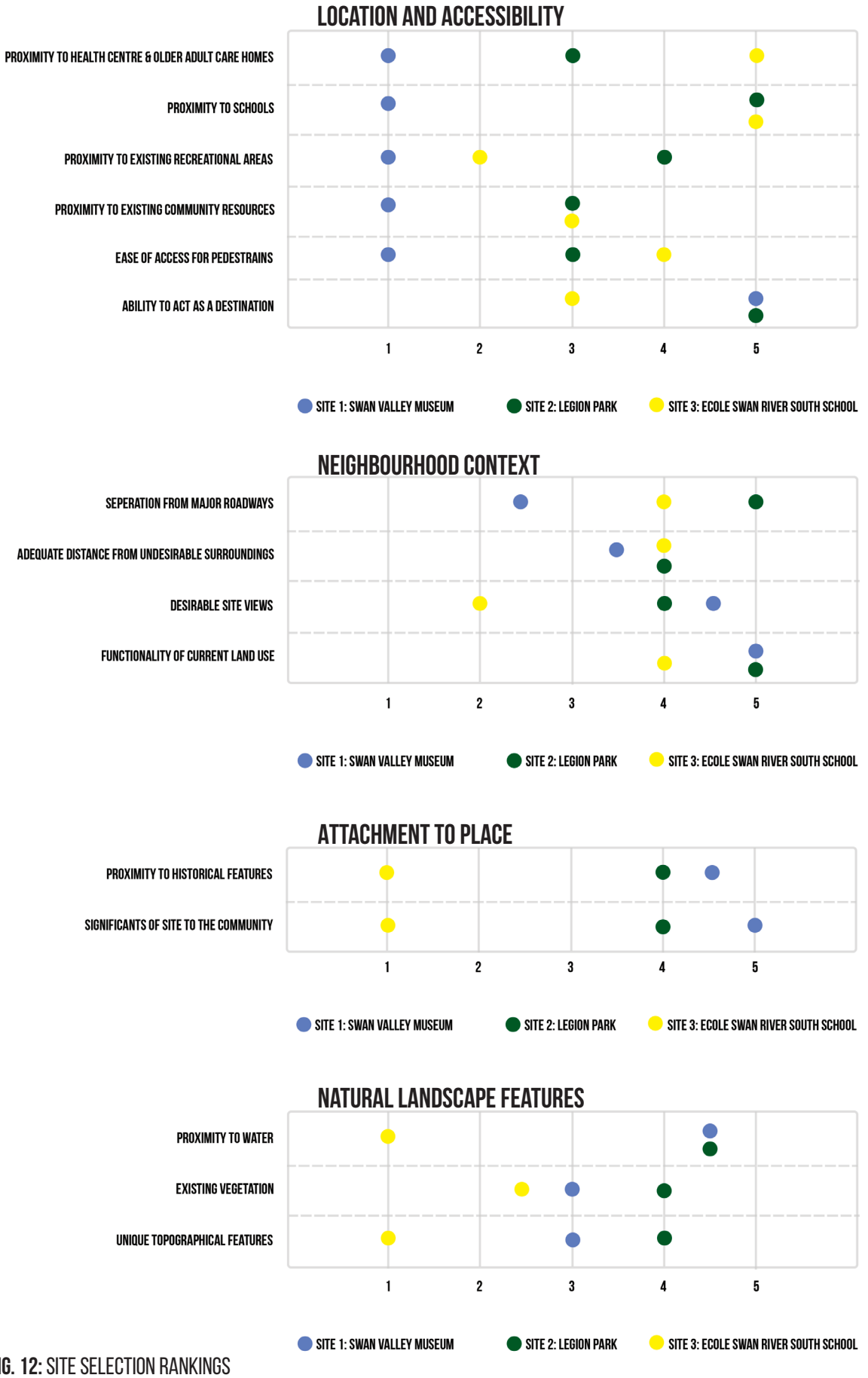


FIG. 12: SITE SELECTION RANKINGS

SITE ANALYSIS: LEGION PARK SITE

The selected location for the proposed Swan Valley Heritage Park is on land which is currently occupied by the largest park in the town of Swan River. This park is currently called 'Legion Park' and is located in the northwestern side of town along the Swan River. Legion Park is well connected to the town of Swan River by several key secondary streets. These streets include Second Street North, which connects people coming from the surrounding recreational facilities, while Ninth Avenue North is the most direct route from the Health Centre.

The Legion Park site provides many opportunities for redevelopment. This includes its large size, relatively central location, proximity to the Swan River and interesting topography. This topography is a key feature of this park and provides the opportunity for creating connections between the topography of the wider valley, thus strengthening the place attachment of the park.

Legion Park is located across the river from the Swan River or Birchwood Cemetery, and the municipal land which currently houses the equipment used to maintain the Cemetery. This area, which is bounded by the Swan River on three sides, is currently restricted to use by employees. Due to the location of the Cemetery, residents are very disconnected from this land, and it is difficult to get to through active modes of transportation. For this reason, it was decided that the site boundaries for this practicum be expanded to include the municipal land and Cemetery and that a bridge would be proposed that would link Legion Park to the Cemetery. This addition of the municipal land would provide more access to the Swan River for residents, and provide a secluded, natural area for residents to use as either a walking trail or gathering areas where they could reflect on the lives of those buried in the Cemetery before or after services.

The southern boundary of Legion Park is defined by Taylor Elementary School. On the school grounds, there is a baseball field, soccer nets, two play structures, and a hardscape for semi-formal team games. There is also a monument for the former schools that existed on this plot of land and previously served the community. Lastly, there is a War Memorial along Second Street North, that commemorates those who served in World War I, II, and the Vietnam War. This practicum proposes that a portion of the western school grounds be used to create a café that will be built to reflect the design of the former Duncan School building that was on this site until it was destroyed by a fire in 1976. In return, land will be given to the school grounds along the eastern side of the park along Ninth Avenue North. The western portion of the school grounds were selected as the location for the café as this is where the monument and memorial are located, and these will be used to create a meaningful entrance into the newly created Swan Valley Heritage Park. This entrance will provide an entry point for residents arriving to the park from Main Street.

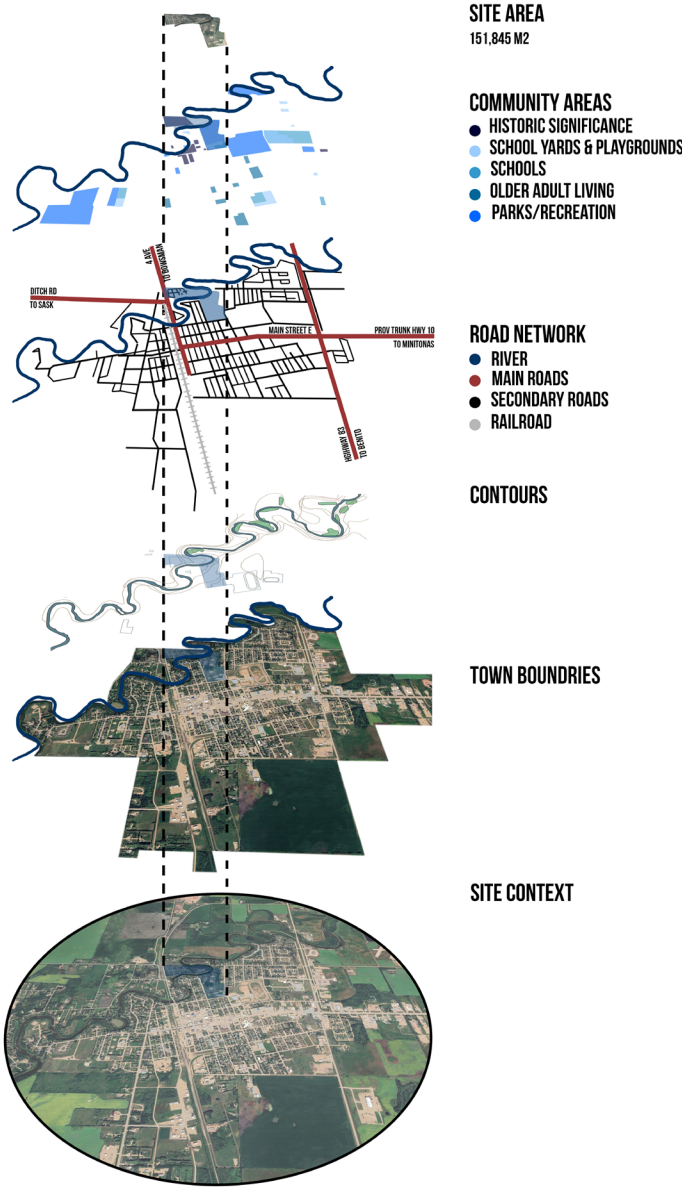


FIG. 13: LEGION PARK SITE CONTEXT



SWAN RIVER / BIRCHWOOD CEMETERY, APRIL 2024



MUNICIPAL LAND ACROSS FROM LEGION PARK, APRIL 2024



LEGION PARK LOOKING NORTHWEST TOWARDS THE SWAN RIVER, APRIL 2024

SITE ANALYSIS: SURROUNDING CONTEXT

Legion Park is surrounded by single family homes on its eastern and western sides. It is bordered by Taylor Elementary School to the south, and the Swan River to the north. Legion Park is a 600m walk north from the Swan Valley Health Centre on Main Street. Main Street is the main commercial street in Swan River and has many essential services, businesses, and restaurants. The Swan Valley Health Centre and the Swan Valley Lodge Personal Care Home are centrally located along Main Street, and within a block of the main grocery stores in town, The Co-op Food Store, No Frills, and Giant Tiger.

There are also several essential community spaces located near Legion Park, which help encourage visitation to the park by people who are already engaging with the surrounding facilities. The nearest facilities are the Swan River Centennial Area and the Swan River Curling Club. These facilities share the same plot of land used to house the yearly Northwest Round Up & Exhibition. Just east of this large plot of land is the Swan Valley Regional Secondary School, which provides secondary education to the wider Swan River Valley, and has students coming from the surrounding municipalities.

Other community facilities include the Northwest Regional Library and the Swan River Seniors Centre, both of which are located southwest of Legion Park, along First Street North. The Swan River Seniors Centre aims to decrease loneliness to the area's older adults through weekly scheduled games of bingo, crib, cards, and other games.

Additionally, there are many notable historic homes in the neighbourhoods that surround the Legion Park site, particularly along Second Street North, and Fifth and Sixth Avenue North. Many of these homes were built near the turn of the century and are examples of traditional farmhouses, with some utilizing local fieldstones.





FIG. 14: SURROUNDING SITE CONTEXT

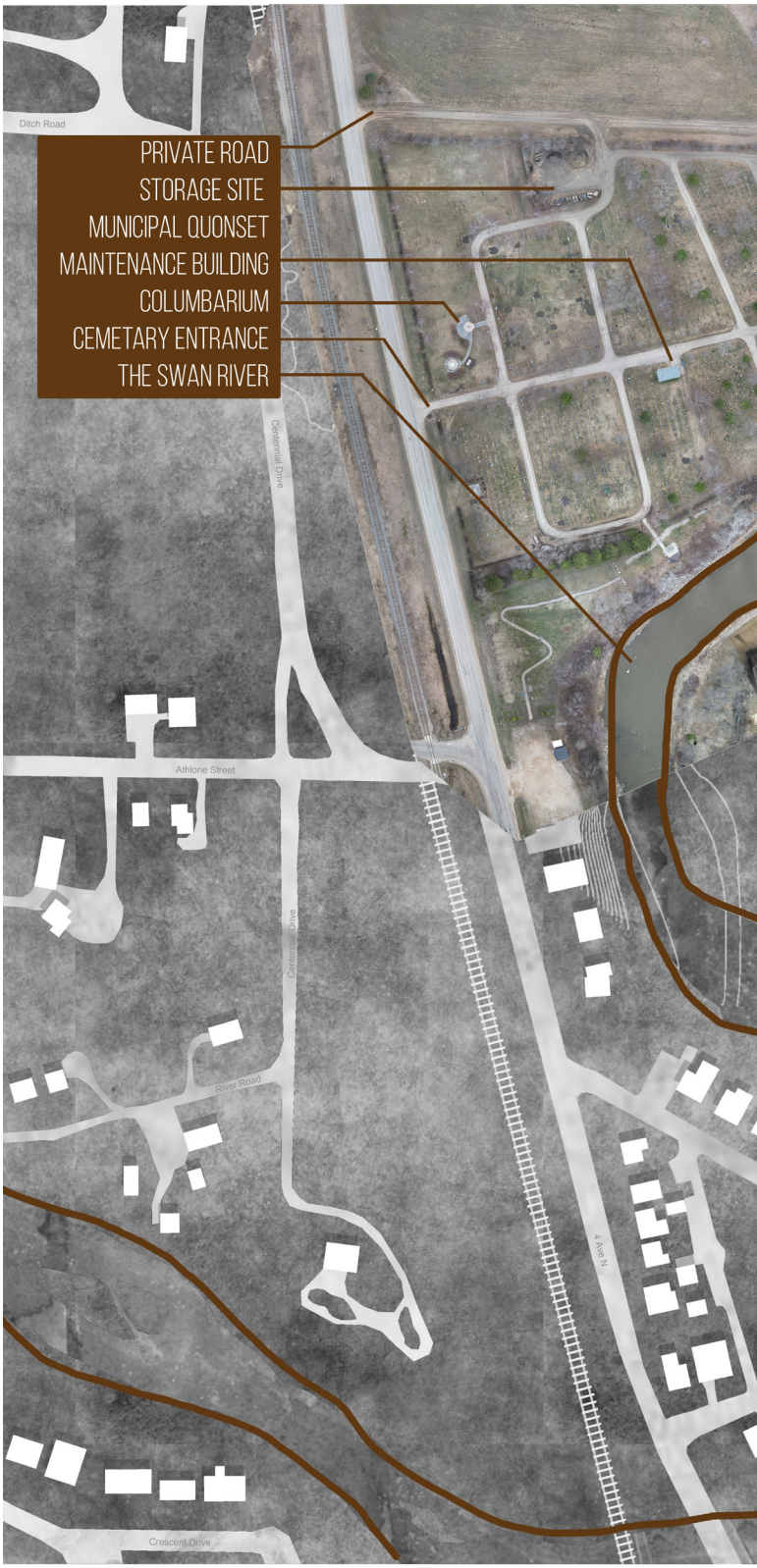
EXISTING PARK FEATURES:

Legion Park already has many desirable existing features and amenities; however, not all will remain in the redesign of the park. For instance, the park has an existing playground along the northwest corner of the park near the river. Unfortunately, this playground is very lacklustre, and only has three play features, a swing set, slide, and a climbing apparatus. This playground will not remain in the redesign.

Another amenity that will be removed is the northernmost baseball field. Currently, there are three baseball fields in the park. The main field in the park is the Jack Brown Field, which is suitable for fastball, well the two others can be used for minor baseball and slow pitch. The northernmost field will be removed as there are many other baseball diamonds that exist throughout the community, including in school yards and in the Rotary Sports Fields. In removing this baseball diamond, space will be created for an open field that will support unstructured recreational play. This field will also reflect the open fields of the surrounding valley, which are one of the many landscapes that have a strong place attachment, as determined during the interview process.

The concession stand located just north of the Jack Brown Field will also be removed and replaced with a picnic shelter. This stand is slated for removal as it is only used seasonally. Furthermore, the café that will be built on the southern edge of the park will provide access to food and beverages thorough the year and can meet the need of any baseball tournaments that may occur in the park.

There is currently plenty of parking along Seventh Avenue North, most of which will remain however a few spots will be removed to create more notable and distinct entrances into the park. Both the bocce courts and the horseshoe will stay in their current location, as this area will be transformed into a passive recreational zone. The existing walking trails in the park will be modified to suit the newly created spaces in the park and link park users to the bridge that will bring them across the Swan River and towards the Cemetery.



LEGION PARK EXISTING FEATURES
1:1,000
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0 25 M 75 M 175 M



FIG. 15: MAP OF EXISTING SITE FEATURES

EXISTING PARK FEATURES:

The Cemetery will maintain its current configuration and additional paths will be created to provide users with multiple ways of accessing the Cemetery. The existing vegetation on the municipal land will remain and the dense planting strategy will be maintained to recreate the natural riparian edge of the river. Within Legion Park, there are plantings of varying density which border the park and act as separations between the parking area and the surrounding residences, creating privacy for the dwellings and creating a sense of enclosure within the park. These are to remain but the density of planting in the park will vary to reflect specific landscape types that were determined to have a strong sense of place attachment associated with them during the interview process. The new planting strategy of the Swan Valley Heritage Park will be discussed on page 109 of this practicum.



EXISTING PARKING LOT



EXERCISE AREA



PICNIC SHELTER



WAR MEMORIAL



SWAN RIVER SCHOOL COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENT



JACK BROWN MEMORIAL FIELD



PLAYGROUND



STAGE

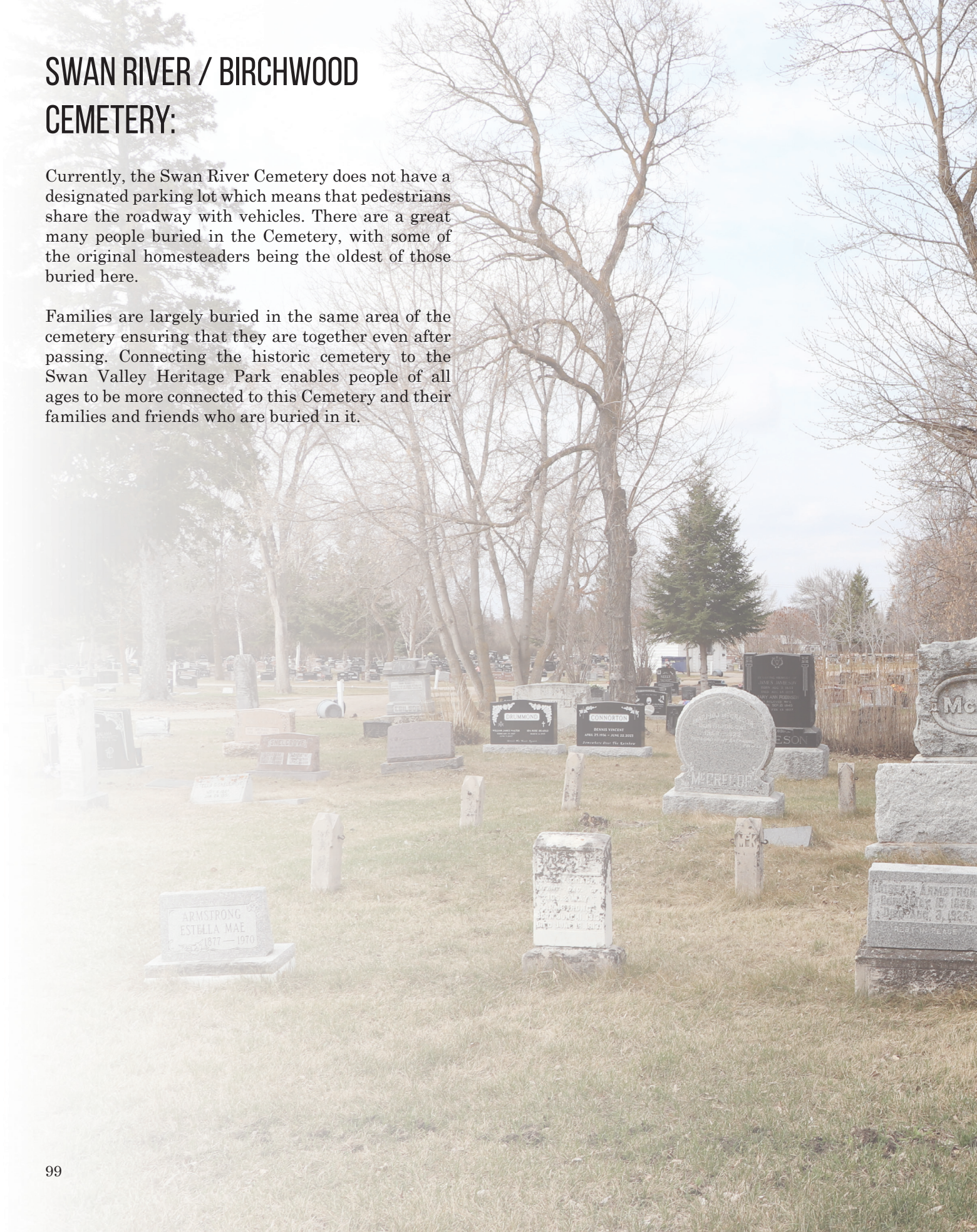


BATTING CAGE

SWAN RIVER / BIRCHWOOD CEMETERY:

Currently, the Swan River Cemetery does not have a designated parking lot which means that pedestrians share the roadway with vehicles. There are a great many people buried in the Cemetery, with some of the original homesteaders being the oldest of those buried here.

Families are largely buried in the same area of the cemetery ensuring that they are together even after passing. Connecting the historic cemetery to the Swan Valley Heritage Park enables people of all ages to be more connected to this Cemetery and their families and friends who are buried in it.





BURIAL PLOTS IN THE SWAN RIVER / BIRCHWOOD CEMETERY, APRIL 2024

EXISTING TOPOGRAPHY:

There are several existing features within Legion Park that create a sense of place and importance within the town of Swan River. Most of said features are natural, namely the Swan River and the various topographic elements in the park.

Most notable of the topographical features in the park is the ridge created along the southern edge of the park, and the elevated land mass in the centre of the park, which currently houses the two secondary baseball diamonds. These topographical features are reminders of the fact that the Legion Park is the site of a former oxbow of the Swan River, giving the park unique topographic features that are reminiscent of the many hills and valleys that the region is known for. Although the topographic changes are mild in comparison to the changes seen in the wider valley, they offer a unique opportunity to foster place attachment by accentuating the existing features through selective views, planting strategies, and locating paths along distinct features.

These topographic elements increase the legibility of the park, as they can help users orient themselves with once in the park. They also act as meeting places which is why the café is located along the southwest ridge of the park, providing a view from above and creating a key entrance into the park.



SWAN VALLEY HERITAGE PARK MASTERPLAN
1 : 1,000

0 25 M 75 M 175 M



FIG. 16: EXISTING TOPOGRAPHY

SECTION SIX:
Design of the Swan Valley Heritage Park





FIG. 17: CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN :

The main objective of the Swan Valley Heritage Park is to create an intergenerational park space that maintains or improves the mental, physical, and social health and wellbeing of all community members, however, the focus is on the improved health of older adults in particular. Considerations were made in relation to the slopes, pathway materials and width, building and washroom access, play and gathering areas and other park structures. For instance, the newly created paths in the park are accessible and wide enough to accommodate two wheelchairs, with main paths having additional width to accommodate companions as well. Additionally, when there is a change in elevation the paths created have a slope of less than 5%, ensuring that park visitors can independently travel through the park without worrying about steep slopes. At times, this consideration leads to longer paths that every park user must take, ensuring that the same experience is provided for all visitors, no matter their functional ability. The work in this practicum was informed by barrier-free and universal design strategies, and the draft Accessible Design of Outdoor Public Spaces Standard Regulation. This regulation is currently under review by the provincial government and attempts to adhere to universal design practices by applying such principles to the design of public outdoor spaces in Manitoba.

Further, care was taken to consider the familiar places, landscapes, and physical features of the Valley that have been found to be associated with place attachment during the interview process. Said features were explored, and their physical, natural, and spatial qualities are replicated in the park. For certain spaces and buildings, this includes their influence in the creation of play spaces within the Swan Valley Heritage Park. For others, their architectural style was replicated to create gathering spaces including picnic areas, covered seating, and café space; or their landscape qualities and characteristics were accentuated to create meaningful entrances, gathering or recreational places.

The objective of the play spaces in the park was to create imaginative and physical play opportunities for people of all ages. These play areas provide the opportunity for park users to engage in conversation with others, share stories of their youth, and help maintain the history of the development of the Swan River Valley. This is done by translating positive memories, experiences and historical buildings and landscape features into multi functional park spaces, all of which strengthen the sense of place, belonging and community within the park.









FIG. 18: THE VALLEY PAST AND PRESENT

MASTER PLAN:

The design of the Swan Valley Heritage Park is influenced by the historical riparian landscape of the park, as well as the findings from interviews and the previously mentioned historical structures and landscape features that continue to have a strong connection to place and community within the Swan River Valley. As this park is meant to reflect a moment in time which community members and older adults from similar rural communities will remember from their youth, the various gathering areas, vegetated walkways, trails, entrances, play and activity areas are designed to portray familiar features and imbue a sense of attachment. In turn, this sense of attachment will encourage use, social interaction, and physical activity within the Heritage Park. To further strengthen the sense of place attachment, the character and planting scheme within different areas of the Heritage Park are determined by the naturally occurring plant associations of the surrounding ecoregions. These areas will be referred to as landscape zones in the subsequent paragraphs. Each of these landscape zones have unique plant species and planting densities to appropriately reflect the landscapes they are meant to represent. Further, the density of these planting strategies indicates the level of activity that is considered in each zone. The areas that are intended to have the most active recreational activities have less vegetation, and the areas that are used for more passive forms of recreation are more heavily planted.



SWAN VALLEY HERITAGE PARK MASTERPLAN
1 : 1,000

0 25 M 75 M 175 M



FIG. 19: MASTER PLAN

PLANTING PLAN:

Landscape zones within the park are designated based on their recreational use and the landscape types they represent. There are three landscape zones within the park. Each of these zones represent a specific landscape type that exists within the wider Swan River Valley, and are familiar and meaningful to community members as determined during the interview process. The first of these landscape zones is the Mixed Forest Zone, the second is the Aspen Parkland Zone and the third is the Mixed Meadow and Open Field Zone. The Mixed Forest Landscape Zone represents the boreal plains ecozone and will feature a mix of coniferous and deciduous trees. The Aspen Parkland Landscape Zone represents the transitional biome between the Boreal Plains Ecozone and the Prairie Ecozone. Finally, the Mixed Meadow and Open Field Landscape Zone represents the Prairie Ecozone with the mixed meadow representing the naturally occurring vegetation and the Open Field Zones representing the agricultural fields which have taken over large portions of the naturally occurring prairie.

Mixed Forest Landscape Zone:
The Mixed Forest Zone serves several functions within the park. Its first function is to act as a barrier between the park and the surrounding residential areas, thus providing privacy to residences and promoting a peaceful environment for park users. Its second function is to recall the vast mixed hardwood and coniferous forests that were once found throughout the valley prior to European settlement and the promotion of agriculture. Although portions of this mixed forest remain, there are limited examples of it within the town of Swan River. Further, most of the untouched forest in the surrounding valley is inaccessible as it is part of forest reserves that are actively being logged. Portions of this landscape type are also designed to replicate the riparian forests that once existed along the many creeks and waterways throughout the valley. This is done to increase the ecological integrity of the park by restoring portions of the riparian edge along the Swan River. As many residences have been built along the river, there are few examples of the untouched nature that would have once acted as a barrier between the land and the rising water levels of the river in the spring. This riparian edge would have once provided important habitats for various animal and plant species within the valley and was found to have been a meaningful spot during the interview process. There were many recollections of travelling through the riparian edge while looking for a secluded spot to hunt or fish, and



MIXED FOREST ZONE / RIPARIAN EDGE



ASPEN PARKLAND ZONE



MIXED MEADOW ZONE



OPEN FIELD ZONE WITH CLUSTERS OF MIXED FOREST ZONE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT



FIG. 20: LANDSCAPE ZONES

many more fond memories were had while walking through this wild vegetation to find a nice spot to swim in the spring and summer or skate in the winter. With these memories, it is evident that this landscape zone is meaningful and that its place attachment is both collective and individual, as both individual and group activities would take place while travelling through this zone. Hunting was both a solitary and group activity, while swimming and skating were always done with a group of people, namely other children, siblings, and cousins from neighbouring homesteads as the group would need to look after one another.

As this zone is heavily planted, the main activities taking place in these areas within the park would be more passive. Such activities include walking, fishing, resting or reflecting, with seating provided at key viewpoints throughout the trails and several gathering areas created across the water in the land before the Cemetery, henceforth referred to in this practicum as 'The Gathering Place'. The Mixed Forest Zone is represented by 'The Forest' areas in the accompanying Landscape Zones Plan.



FIGURE 21: THE ASPEN PARKLAND LANDSCAPE ZONE

The Aspen Parkland Landscape Zone:
The second planting type within the park is the Aspen Parkland Zone, which represents the dominant forest type within the parkland region, and marks the transition from Prairie Ecozone to Boreal Plains Ecozone. This forest type is significant as it not only reflects a predominant forest type within the Swan River Valley, but it was brought up fondly many times during the interviews I conducted. During my interviews, participants frequently recalled walking through the aspen stands and hearing the wind blowing through the leaves or admiring the brilliant yellow colours in the fall. This zone is less densely planted when compared to the Mixed Forest Zone, and the characteristics of the aspen trees ensure that although somewhat densely planted, the Aspen Forest Zone appears open and airy in comparison to the Mixed Forest Zone. This is due to the narrow and often straight white trunk, and the self-pruning nature of trembling aspens, which ensures that lower portions of trunks are left barren and free of branches when planted in stands (Remphrey & Ronald).

The activity within this zone is mostly passive, with picnic areas, tables for card games, and low intensity games like bocce and horseshoe taking place. There are, however, some areas where more active recreation takes place, specifically the grain elevator themed play area and the already existing exercise area, which would be located in a clearing in the northwest corner of the park. The Aspen Parkland Zone is represented by 'The Parkland' areas in the accompanying Landscape Zones Plan.



FIGURE 20: MIXED MEADOW AND OPEN FIELD LANDSCAPE ZONE

Mixed Meadow and Open Field Landscape Zone:
The last planting type is the Open Field or Mixed Meadow Zones within the park. These areas represent the vast fields in the Swan River Valley, as much of the previously existing forested areas have been transformed into bountiful agricultural land. Due to the fact that these open areas are meant to be reminiscent of the surrounding agricultural and pastural land, portions of these open areas are less maintained and planted with native plants and grasses, providing pops of colour and interest throughout the park while other areas are simply mowed grass. As such, the meadow areas represent both the native prairie landscape and the unharvested crops in the valley while the mowed areas represent land that has already been harvested. The mowed areas are the open field areas within the park, which are left open for games of tag, soccer, football and the like, with two of the baseball diamonds existing within these zones. The less maintained and diverse meadow areas act as separation between zones and provide visual interest for park users, while also providing layering, as is seen in the valley with crops being at different stages of growth or cultivation throughout the seasons. These meadow areas also serve to recreate the wheat, canola, and blue alfalfa fields of the surrounding valley. These specific fields were brought up during my interviews as participants reminisced on the exceptional colours created by these specific crops. The golden colour of the wheat, brilliant yellow of the canola, and dusty blue of the alfalfa created striking patches of colour throughout the valley during harvest season. This diverse colour range was well appreciated and anticipated every year, as it brought both beauty and pride to families who had spent so many long days tending to crops in the hopes of having a good harvest that would support them through the winter and into the next season. The Mixed Meadow Zone is represented by 'The Meadow' while the Open Field Zone is referred to as 'The Field' in the accompanying Landscape Zones Plan.

CIRCULATION:

The paths within the Swan Valley Heritage Park accentuate the existing topography of the area. In particular, the former oxbow is emphasized with the main walking loop of the park following the contour along its upland region. Secondary paths exist which meander through the lowland and connect users to several gathering and activity areas within the park. The secondary path that connects 'The Barn' to the passive recreational spaces on the western side of the park further emphasizes the former bank of the oxbow, strengthening the presence of the changing topography. Tertiary paths are created throughout the park which aim to mitigate the creation of desire lines and offer shorter connections between the key gathering and play areas in the park.

The paths created in 'The Gathering Place' follow similar principles, with main and secondary paths created within the space. The paths on this side of the river are meant to act as reflective walking trails interspersed with small gathering areas. As such, there is a main walking loop that follows the shape of the riverbank while also providing a direct path to the bridge should users wish to travel quickly between the two spaces. There is another main path that connects the Cemetery to The Gathering Place'. This placement of this path was created to ensure that the trail is done at a 1:21 slope, as the edge of the Cemetery is defined by a steep decline towards the rivers edge. Secondary trails within 'The Gathering Place' connect the various seating areas to one another and to the main trail system. These secondary trails loosely follow the existing contour lines and meander between gathering spaces, much like the Swan River meanders through the Valley.

New entrances have been created for the park to create more permeability and accessibility for community members coming from various neighbourhoods within the town. Most entrances to the park are universally accessible, and, where necessary are created with a slope of less than 5%. The Swan Valley Heritage Park now has a total of six entrances, four of which are considered main entrance points while the other two are secondary entrance points.



SWAN VALLEY HERITAGE PARK MASTERPLAN
CIRCULATION PLAN
1 : 1,000

0 25 M 75 M 175 M



FIG. 23: CIRCULATION PLAN

ENTRANCES:

Southwest Schoolhouse Entrance:
The first of the main entrances is located on the southwestern side of the park, at the corner of Second Street North (also known as Veterans Way) and Seventh Avenue North. This entrance is located on the corner of the Taylor Elementary School grounds, and the existing monument to the former schoolhouses of the town defines the southwest entrance. The pathway first leads users through an aspen grove to the newly built café building, which operates as a social hub and community space for the town. The design reflects the former Duncan school that once served the town of Swan River. Park users can choose to either enter the café, and have a coffee and dessert prepared by older residents in the community with the use of tried-and-true family recipes, or continue to the park without entering the café. To enter the park, users will travel down a 1:21 path that takes them down the 'ridge'. This ridge is named for the steep topography along the southwest edge of the park, the naming of which will aid park users with wayfinding. Once down the path, visitors enter near the Jack Brown Memorial Field and are surrounded by vegetation from the Mixed Forest, Open Field and Meadow Landscape Zones.

This entrance provides a scenic point for community members coming from the south by foot. Visitors coming from this direction would likely be travelling from the southern residences, main street, or one of thee many community facilities that are located in this direction including the Senior Centre, Library, or Health Centre.

Eastern Valley Entrance:
The next key entrance is the eastern entrance across from the Northwest Round Up Exhibition Grounds. Visitors entering the park through this point are likely coming from the eastern neighbourhoods, or visiting the park after using the curling rink or arena in the winter, or the Exhibition Grounds in the summer. High school students from the nearby Swan Valley Regional Secondary School would also be expected to enter via the eastern 'valley' entrance. Similar to the southern entrance, the eastern entry point also includes a scenic walk down the parks existing topography, except here, users travel down the 'valley' to enter the park. The existing topography along the eastern edge is more gradual than the topography down the ridge. The valley path is connected to an existing route that joins the main walking path that follows the former oxbow of the river. The experience of traveling down the valley is heightened by the creation of two mounds which mimic the topography of the wider Swan River Valley created by the surrounding Duck Mountain and Porcupine Hills. The height and distance between these mounds was established by scaling down the topography created by the Duck Mountain and Porcupine Hills to create a 1:30 ratio of the valley in which the town of Swan River sits, thus reflecting the character of the region. The path into the park begins at the existing crosswalk which connects the park to the Exhibition Grounds and the eastern neighbourhoods. Once visitors have crossed the street, they are guided along the first mound with the path opening up to the park below. Existing trees within the park have been thoughtfully removed to provide views into the park, and specifically of the playhouses modelled after several historic houses in town. The design of these playhouses will be discussed later in the document, but their construction highlights buildings styles that were commonly found in rural agricultural communities during the post war period. This view is intended to recreate views commonly found in the surrounding valley, which can be seen when driving along streets that cut through the farmland and weave through the undulating hills creating picturesque views of the diverse crops, never ending sky and remaining native trees and forest stands that dot the valley landscape.

Not only do the mounds created for the valley entrance replicate the conditions of the wider valley landscape, but they symbolize one of the most meaningful and memorable features of the Swan River Valley found during my interviews, the 'Block Line'. The Block Line is a road in the Big Woody area which was created by cutting through an existing hill within the valley. It is referred to colloquially as the 'block line' by family members and is a highpoint within the valley, providing impressive views of the surrounding landscape. Once visitors have walked between the two hills, and admired the view of the park from above, the pathway leads them to the main path of the park, and they have the option of continuing towards the river or heading to the café or picnic shelter. By choosing to follow this path towards the river, users will be led along the top of the former oxbow towards the bridge which will take them to the forested 'Gathering Area' beside the Cemetery.



FIG. 24: SOUTHWEST SCHOOLHOUSE ENTRANCE
SECOND STREET NORTH AND SEVENTH AVENUE NORTH

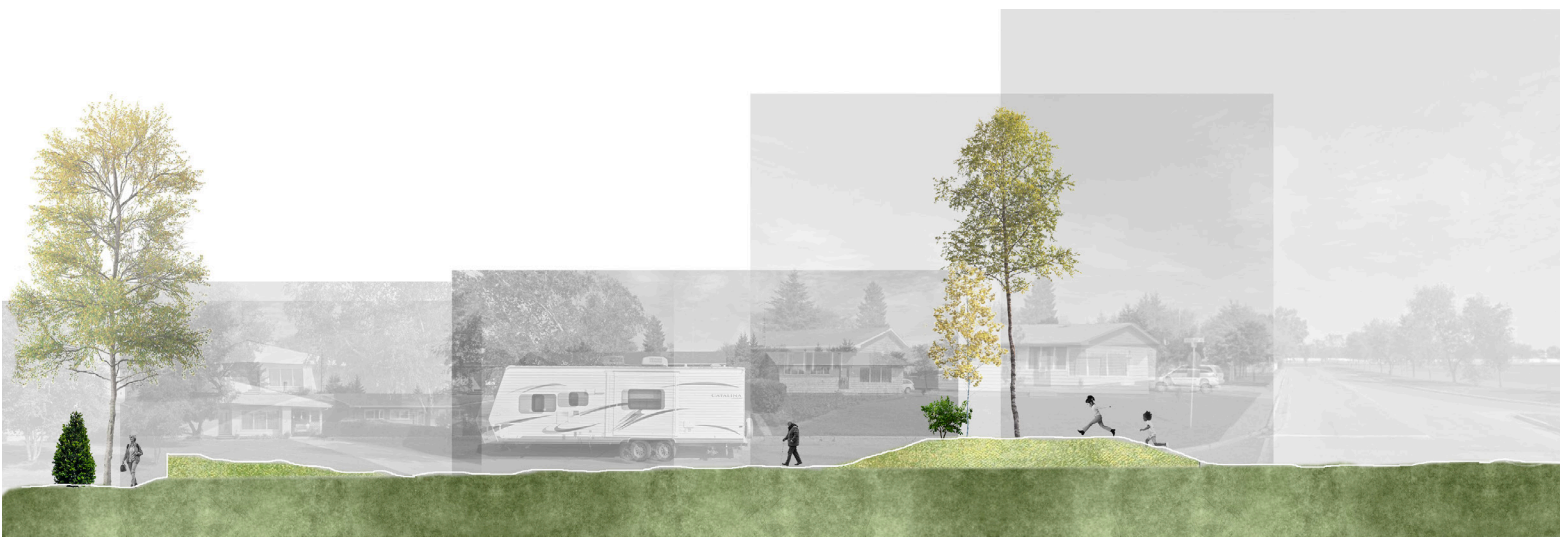


FIG. 25: EASTERN VALLEY ENTRANCE
NINTH AVENUE NORTH



ENTRANCES:

Western Plaza Entrance:
The remaining two main entrances are on the western side of the park, and are connected to each end of the parking lot. Most visitors entering the park through these entrances will likely be arriving by car or walking from the western neighbourhoods. The primary western entrance is across Third Street North and is known as the Western Plaza Entrance. This western entrance to the park is marked by a simple brick sign and the path takes visitors to a plaza which terminates in a covered picnic shelter. This covered picnic shelter is designed to recreate the construction of a gambrel-roofed barn, which was a common construction style across the prairies, and continues to be a familiar archetype in the rural landscape. This picnic shelter utilizes the existing washrooms that were constructed to support the Jack Brown Memorial Field that is directly south of this plaza. Due to its design, the picnic shelter will be called 'The Barn' to aid in wayfinding. Portions of The Barn are covered to provide seating through all types of weather, while the eastern portion of The Barn is partially covered to allow sun to peak through. The Barn has ample seating, washrooms, and a small stage to support local musicians and foster community gatherings and events. The stage is meant to reflect a moment of the past, specifically of the barn dances that would occur in the lofts of neighbour's barns in the spring,; once all the hay had been consumed over the winter. These dances brought neighbours together and provided a welcome break to the mundane and repetitive nature of daily life as a homesteader.

Other features in the plaza include several interpretive panels that display images that reflect the agricultural and logging history of the valley, as well as several historical buildings, structures and landscapes. The design of these panels is loosely inspired by the many plaques in the valley which identify the location of former schoolhouses in the Swan River Valley. Typically, these plaques are constructed of locally available river or field stones and are rectangular or pyramidal in shape, with an interpretive panel displayed on the front that illustrates the history of the schoolhouse in question.



FIG. 26: WESTERN PLAZA ENTRANCE



FIG. 27: INTERPRETIVE PANELS
HISTORIC GRAIN ELEVATORS IN SWAN RIVER, ORIGINAL IMAGE OF PLANNING WOOD IN THE VALLEY, ORIGINAL IMAGE OF FARMING IN SWAN RIVER.

ENTRANCES:

Western Forest Entrance:
The secondary western entrance to the park is located at the corner of Seventh Avenue North and River Park Drive, just north of the plaza and at the edge of the parking lot. This entrance offers users the opportunity to enter the park through a more secluded entrance and takes visitors directly into the mixed boreal forest that defines the edge of the park near the Swan River. This entrance is marked by a simple metal sign, the design of which is influenced by the metal signs which mark the cemeteries and occasional schoolhouse monuments in the surrounding area. By taking this path, users have a more direct route to the rivers edge, the dock and the bridge that connects the park to the Swan River Cemetery. The density of the Mixed Forest Landscape Zone ensures that this entrance is quiet and reflective as it provides an adequate separation between the paths and the nearby active areas.

There is another secondary entrance along the parking lot that breaks up the elongated strip and provides users with a more direct entry to the passive recreational area near the bocce courts and horse shoe. This path can either be continued to the baseball field or users have the option of taking the path along the lower edge of the oxbow to The Barn or going north towards the river.





FIG. 28: WESTERN FOREST ENTRANCE



FIG. 29: RIPARIAN EDGE OF THE SWAN VALLEY HERITAGE PARK

ACCESS AND RECONNECTION TO THE RIVER:

As swimming in the creeks and rivers was frequently brought up during the interview process, it was important that the park provide meaningful access to the Swan River. Currently, there are several seating areas in the park that offer picturesque views of the river but there is no direct way to access the rivers edge. As time passes, people are no longer using the rivers and creeks as swimming spots. This is partially due to the towns newly renovated Aquatic Centre, as residents are more likely to swim there than in the many creeks and rivers surrounding the town. Additionally, there are many lakes that are just a short drive away. As homesteading has decreased in the valley and with farming becoming more industrialised, people have more leisure time on their hands and are able to take the time to travel to more desirable swimming areas. Nonetheless, the river is still used for fishing and paddling, and the creation of a dock would allow more people to engage in these activities conveniently within town limits. The location of the dock is near a known fishing hole currently used by community members. Having a dock would make this location more accessible for people of all ages and abilities. Further, having a dock makes it easier for people to access the water, and actively engage with the river by wading in or hanging their toes over the dock if they wish.

The construction of a bridge that connects the Swan Valley Heritage Park to the Gathering Place provides further access to the waters edge as the Gathering Place is surrounding by the Swan River on three of its edges. This connection also provides residents the ability to walk through and restore themselves in the dense natural landscape of the riparian edge, whether that be done by taking a solitary walk or joining a group of people in one of the gathering nooks. Both the dock and bridge would be designed by others, but their location is indicated on the preceding plans.



HISTORICAL INSPIRATION:

Various historic buildings and structures influenced the design of the play and gathering areas in the park. In the following images, these structures and landscape features are superimposed onto contemporary photographs of the Swan River Valley to reflect the landscape zone they are surrounded by in the Swan Valley Heritage Park.



FIG. 30: FORMER GRAIN ELEVATORS COLLAGE HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH IS SUPERIMPOSED ON A CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPH OF AGRICULTURAL FIELDS IN THE SURROUNDING VALLEY.



FIG. 31: HISTORIC COTTON BARN COLLAGE HISTORIC GAMBREL-ROOFED BARN IN THE VALLEY, SUPERIMPOSED ON A WHEAT FIELD



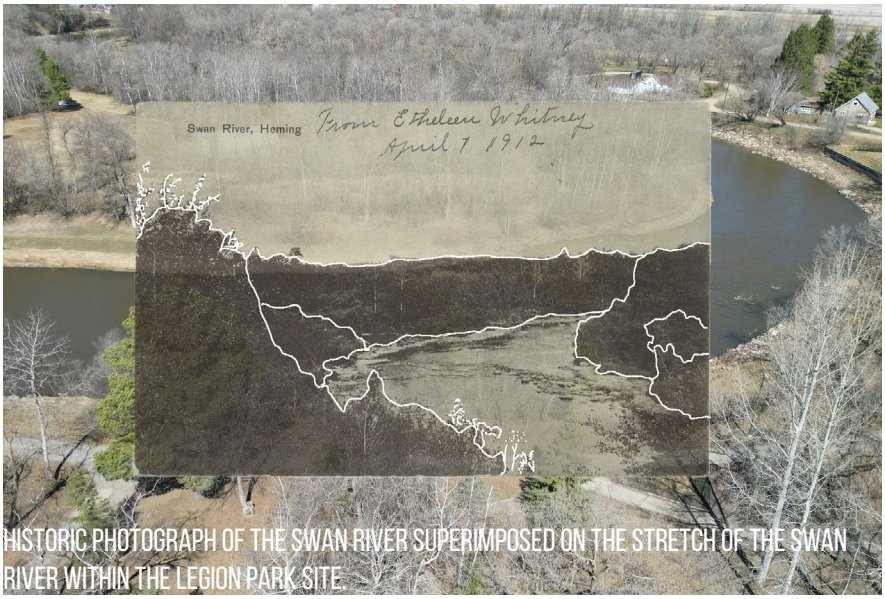
FIG. 32: FORMER CRESCENT CREAMERY COLLAGE HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH SUPERIMPOSED ON A CANOLA FIELD IN THE WIDER VALLEY



FIG. 33: FORMER DUNCAN SCHOOL COLLAGE HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH SUPERIMPOSED ON REMNANTS OF THE PARKLAND ASPEN FOREST



FIG. 34: HISTORIC HOUSES COLLAGE SUPERIMPOSED ON A FIELD OF CANOLA



HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SWAN RIVER SUPERIMPOSED ON THE STRETCH OF THE SWAN RIVER WITHIN THE LEGION PARK SITE.

FIG. 35: SWAN RIVER COLLAGE HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SWAN RIVER SUPERIMPOSED ON THE STRETCH OF THE SWAN RIVER WITHIN THE LEGION PARK SITE.

DESIGN OF GATHERING AND PLAY AREAS WITHIN THE SWAN RIVER HERITAGE PARK:

To create a sense of place attachment and familiarity, the social, active, and play areas within the Swan Valley Heritage Park are designed to represent historic features of the community. These features were selected based on insight gained when researching the site history and analysis, in addition to the inspiration drawn from semi-structured family interviews.

There are several types of spaces created within the Swan Valley Heritage Park. These spaces provide recreational, restorative, social, and physical opportunities and benefits for community members. In doing so, the Swan Valley Heritage Parks helps create a desirable community space in town which strengthens the age-friendliness of the town of Swan River. The many gathering spaces in the park provide opportunities for community members to engage with others, either in a large or small group, whichever is preferable to them in the moment. The play areas encourage social interaction and physical activity of people of all ages, and their familiar design ensures that older community members feel a sense of comfort and belonging while engaging with these spaces. The diverse natural areas within the park provide community members with multiple spaces to engage with nature and restore their mental wellbeing.



FIG. 36: THE MEMORY OF DUNCAN SCHOOL


SWAN RIVER

GATHERING AREAS:

THE SCHOOLHOUSE

There are three gathering areas in the Swan Valley Heritage Park, the first of which is the café located on the southern ridge of the park. This café is modelled after a café called Vollpension in Vienna. Vollpension is an intergenerational café that creates job opportunities for older adults who cannot rely on their small pensions and continue to work casually to support themselves. Vollpension provides meaningful work opportunities for said older adults while also diminishing sentiments of isolation and loneliness, as workers are able to have meaningful social interactions throughout their day. Vollpension employs both the young and the old to foster connection between people of all ages. A notable feature of Vollpension which will be replicated in the Swan Valley Café is the bakery counter. This counter is staffed by a designated Oma or Opa, who answers questions about the baked goods and the grandma or grandpa who made them. In addition to baked goods, there would be a small offering of simple, home cooked meals from family recipes.

Similarly to Vollpension, the Swan Valley Café acts as a gathering place for community members while offering career opportunities for older adults in the community. By providing job opportunities for older adults in the community, this café enhances the age-friendliness of the town of Swan River. One of the domains of age-friendliness in Manitoba communities is 'Civic Participation and Employment Opportunities'. By providing meaningful employment opportunities to older adults in the community, they can remain active in their community, and feel personally fulfilled through the contribution of their knowledge and skills.

The interior of the Swan Valley Café is designed to reflect the interior of family kitchens in the 1940s and 1950s, as seen in many home recreations in the various heritage villages throughout the province. This design choice creates a warm, welcoming, and familiar atmosphere within the café space. In addition to the café space, the building can also be used to host workshops throughout the year, with a focus on teaching and sharing traditional crafts such as needlework, weaving, spinning and teaching practical skills by providing cooking and baking classes. This space would also host card tournaments, as many card games were recalled during my interviews with family members. It was common for whist and bridge tournaments to occur at the schoolhouses during the winter to provide leisure and social opportunities for the many homesteaders in the area. In doing so, the café provides a means for community members to remain connected to one another, and maintain or improve relationships between young and old community members throughout the year. The workshop space also ensures that traditional hobbies, pastimes and crafts are not lost to time, and that knowledge bases can be transferred to younger generations.



VOLLPENSION, VIENNA: COZY SEATING



VOLLPENSION, VIENNA: BAKERY COUNTER



FIG. 37: IMAGINING THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY CAFE: PROPOSED DESIGN LAYOUT



VOLLPENSION, VIENNA: KITSCH DESIGN



VOLLPENSION, VIENNA: LIVELY ATMOSPHERE

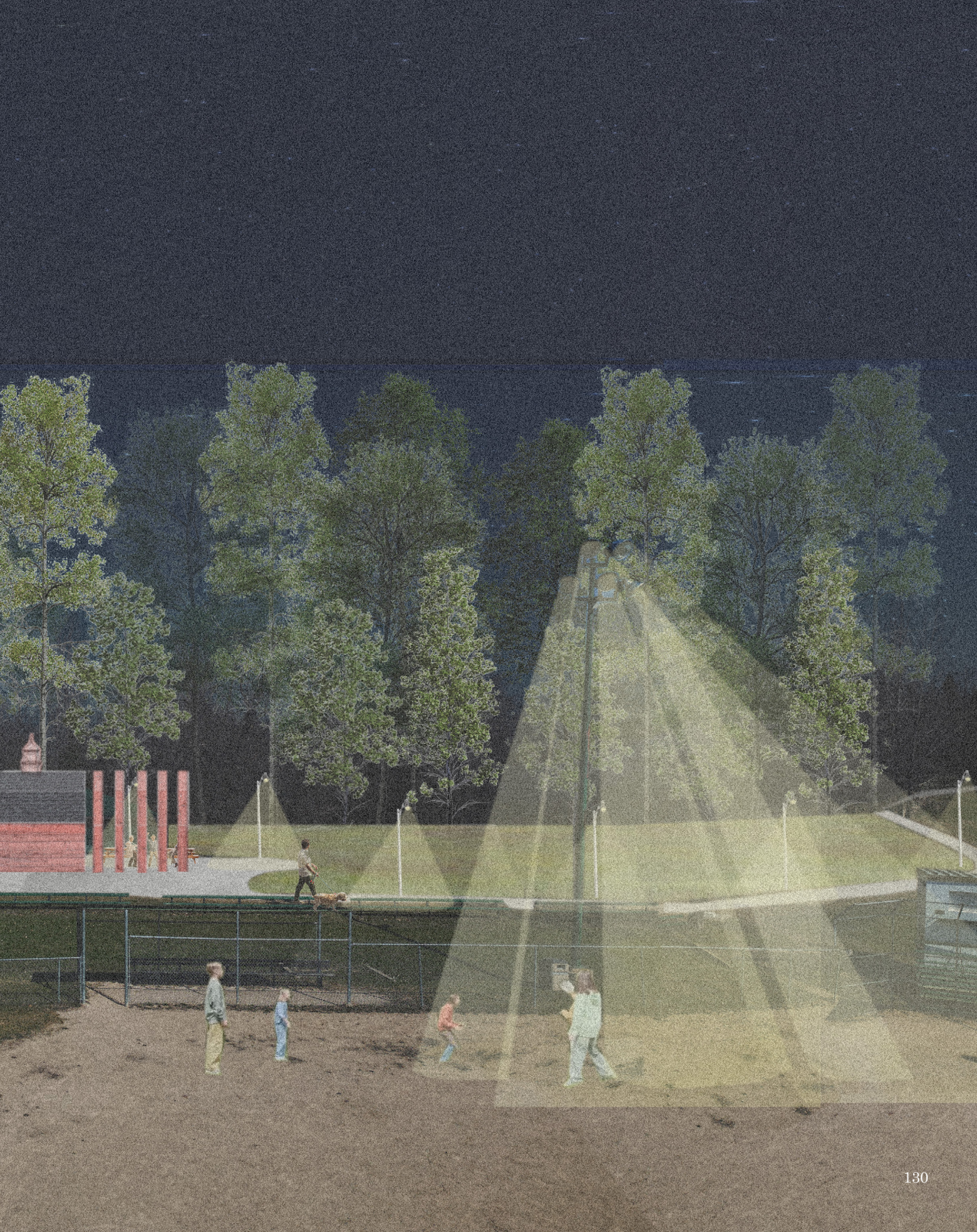
GATHERING AREAS:

THE BARN

The next gathering area is The Barn picnic shelter, which provides ample seating for groups of various sizes. This picnic shelter would be a significant meeting place during baseball tournaments held in the park, offering room for teams to debrief, reset, and refuel. The Barn would be a key social area in the evenings and weekends, particularly in the spring, summer, and fall before the weather gets too cold as the structure is partially open to the elements. The stage in The Barn reflects the memories of older adult community members and provides younger community members the ability to play music and dance among their peers.

FIG. 38: THE BARN AT NIGHT





GATHERING AREAS:

THE CREAMERY

The final gathering space within the Swan Valley Heritage Park is The Creamery, a covered structure designed to reflect the former creamery building in town. The purpose of this structure is to extend the seasonality of several passive recreation activities along the park's lowland. The Creamery protects the horse shoe area and has tables for various card and strategy board games. These tables provide opportunities for community members to engage in pastimes that are reminiscent of those engaged in during their youth. The Creamery is near the bocce courts, and the tables provide space for people to watch the game while they wait for their turn to play. This creates a livelier space that will ideally encourage park visitors to stay longer, visit more frequently and hopefully engage in other activities. The Creamery space provides recreational opportunities for people who are looking to engage in lighter activity while still engaging in activities which have a high level of social engagement and interaction.

FIG. 39: REIMAGINING THE CREAMERY





GATHERING AREAS:

THE GATHERING PLACE:

In addition to the three previously mentioned gathering spaces, there are also several meeting areas of various sizes located across the park, in the 'Gathering Space'. This space is designed to create intimate gathering areas for groups of several sizes. The smaller spaces provide seating space for 6-8 people, while the larger spaces create seating for 10 or more. These gathering places are designed to provide sheltered, quiet spaces for people to meet and share a moment of reflection, discussion, or storytelling with one another. Their circular design ensures that everyone is included in any conversations and are able to voice their thoughts. These spaces further support the operations of the Swan River or Birchwood Cemetery by providing secluded and private spaces for family members and friends to gather and mourn. The Gathering Place provides peaceful, enclosed spaces that are surrounded by the native vegetation of the valley.

FIG. 40: THE GATHERING PLACE





PLAY AREAS:

The Swan Valley Heritage Park provides two unique play spaces which reflect the history and character of the communities in the Swan River Valley. Both of these play spaces offer imaginative and physical play opportunities for people of all ages to engage in by transforming familial features and experiences into play features. While the play spaces can be used by people of all ages, they are designed with certain age groups in mind to ensure that appropriate play opportunities are created to help develop the motor skills, physical and social abilities of the children using the play areas. These two play structures are 'The Homestead' and 'The Grain Elevators'.

THE HOMESTEAD

The Homestead play area is designed to reflect the many hours spent maintaining and caring for the home. Many hours would have been spent around the home, tending to and harvesting gardens, feeding and caring for animals, and preparing and canning food to last the winter. The home was a central feature during my interviews, and the meals shared among friends and family were central to many happy memories of gathering in groups to celebrate the harvest, the end of school, and various holidays. The Homestead focuses on creating imaginative play opportunities where park visitors can put themselves in the life of a homesteader and carry out various imaginative activities while playing in the space.

'The Homestead' play area is designed with younger children in mind, and climbing structures, slides, and other play features are considerate of their physical abilities and social and physical developmental needs. For this reason, The Homestead emphasizes imaginative play opportunities that are supported and enhanced by moderate physical play opportunities.

The Homestead features three playhouses that are designed to reflect the architectural styles of the historic farmhouses that still remain in the town. These buildings are small replicas of the original structures and have windows and openings of various sizes to create a whimsical and dreamy play area. Two of the playhouses sit atop small mounds that are reminiscent of the topography in the wider valley, as there were once a great many homesteads spread out through the area. Additionally, there are abstract 'trees' scattered throughout the play area that symbolize the aspen parkland in the valley and double as free-standing climbers.



FIG. 41: THE HOMESTEAD IN WINTER



THE HOMESTEAD:

In The Homestead there is a play structure created out of two playhouses which sit on stilts. This play structure creates physical play opportunities in the play area and features slides, climbing walls and panel climbers. There are several ways to enter this play structure each of which provide varying levels of challenge to help children develop strength and courage without neglecting the needs of older adults and children by providing simpler entry points. The objective of this play area is to create a play space that will encourage connection between grandparents and grandchildren, and in some cases great-grandchildren, as the older adults in the community can exchange stories and memories of what it was like to grow up on and care for a homestead when they were children

A AGE GROUP CONSIDERATIONS

The climbing features of the play structure were selected with younger children in mind, therefore the options align with physical developmental stages of kids of the selected age group.

B PHYSICAL PLAY

Multiple entrances are created in the play structure each of which have varying levels of challenge to support the physical development of children and strengthen the balance, agility and coordination of adults and older adults.

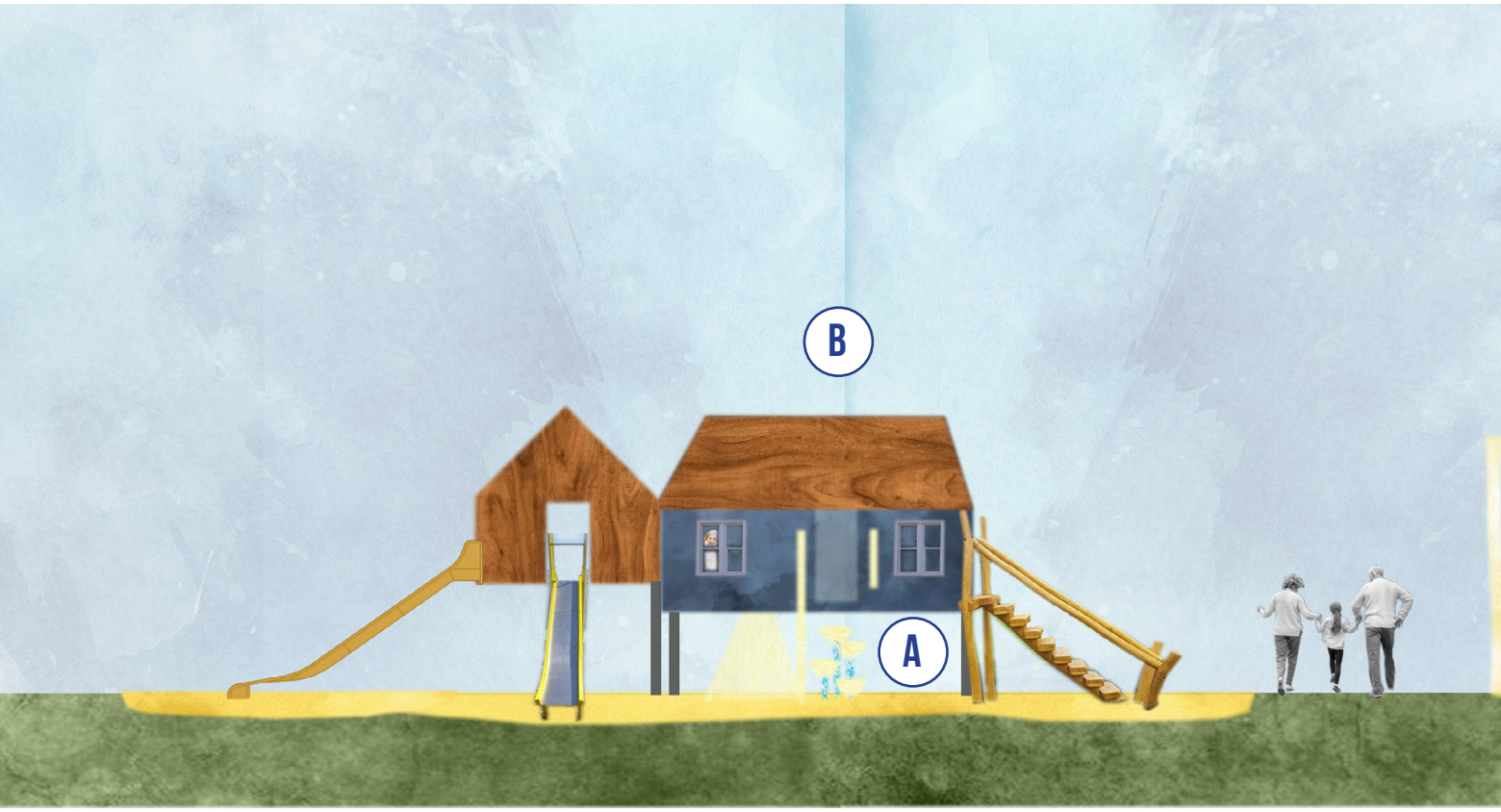


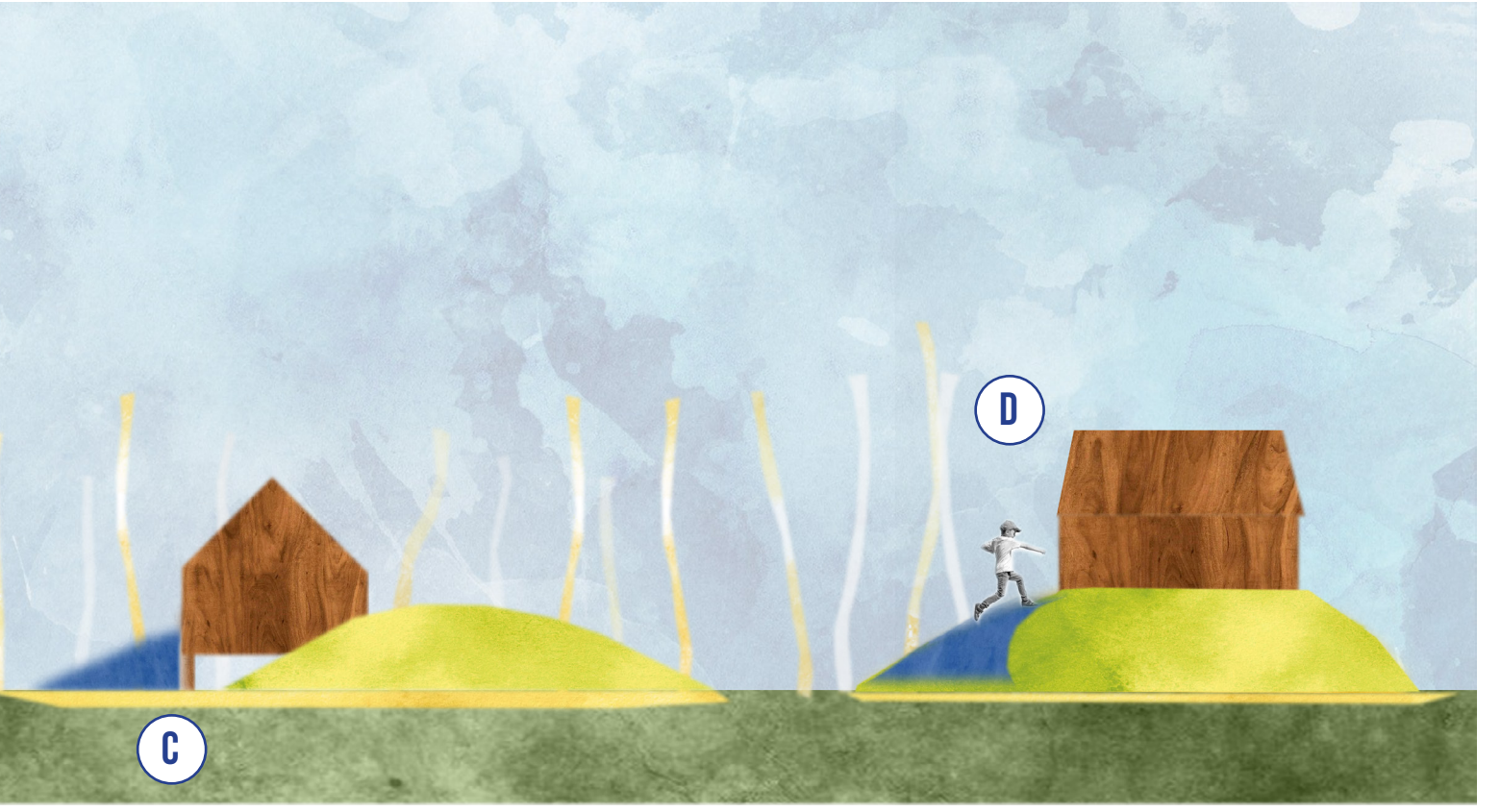
FIG. 42: THE ACT OF PLAY IN THE HOMESTEAD

C ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Bright yellow is used to highlight the ground surface of the play areas while reminding users of the vibrant yellow of the canola fields. Blue is used to indicate ramps into playhouses.

D IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Visitors can reenact life as homesteaders, playing independently or cooperatively.




NATIONAL
PIONEER
PIONEER
GRAIN CO.

PLAY AREAS:

THE GRAIN ELEVATORS

The next play feature in the Swan Valley Heritage Park is influenced by several agricultural structures that used to exist within the community but are no longer present. These structures are the former grain elevators that once existed along the railway in town. Like many grain elevators throughout the prairies, these have long since been demolished. These structures once played an important role within the community and were intrinsic to the rural agricultural lifestyle of many community members. As more grain elevators are lost to time, their dominant presence and influence on the prairie landscape is also lost. These structures are a key symbol of the agricultural power of prairie communities, and because their form is intrinsically tied to the identity of many rural communities, their demolition brings a potential loss of place attachment. It is for these reasons that the second play area is designed to reflect the architecture and function of the grain elevator.

The second play area within the Swan Valley Heritage Park is designed with older children in mind, particularly 7 to 12 year olds, however, people of all ages are welcome to use the play space. This place space is reminiscent of the grain elevators which previously existed along the railway in town. At one point, there were four grain elevators operating at this site, and their tall, vertical forms had an imposing influence on the landscape, reflecting the agricultural importance of the Swan River Valley. Unfortunately, the earlier wood grain elevators have since been demolished, and although newer elevators took their place, they too have been demolished after ceasing operations in 2015. The Grain Elevator Playground consists of three grain elevator structures that reintroduce the grain elevator into the landscape.

The grain elevator play structure provides physical play opportunities with some imaginary play opportunities available. The Grain Elevator play area also provides educational opportunities for users to discover how grain elevators function in agricultural settings. This is achieved by creating opportunities for users to travel through the grain elevators as if they were the grain being removed from the grain truck and siphoned up into the elevator for storage or transport.



FIG. 43: REMEMBERING THE OLD GRAIN ELEVATORS

PLAY AREAS:

THE GRAIN ELEVATORS

To provide an educational element to the Grain Elevator Playground, users can enter the play structure through a grain truck, and take a tunnel into the first grain elevator. The grain truck is equipped with tactile and audio play features, so users can pretend to be a grain truck operator. Once in the first grain elevator, users are directed to climb up the structure to travel up the 'leg' to the top of the structure. Once at the top, users have several 'distribution' options. There are several tunnels they can take to travel through and between structures and eventually reach a slide which acts as the various spouts in the elevator that would direct the grain to either a bin for storage or a car spout that would place the grain in a truck or train car for transportation.

A IMAGINATIVE / FANTASY PLAY

Visitors can engage in imaginative play by pretending to be farmers hauling grain to the elevators, or fantasy play based on the unrealistic scenario of being the grain moving through the elevators.

B PHYSICAL PLAY

Visitors can climb, crawl, step up, slide, walk or run through the play structures while accurately travelling through the elevators, beginning in the driveway (1), travelling down to the pit (2), up the leg (3), to the distributor (4), and down the spouts (5).

C AGE GROUP CONSIDERATIONS

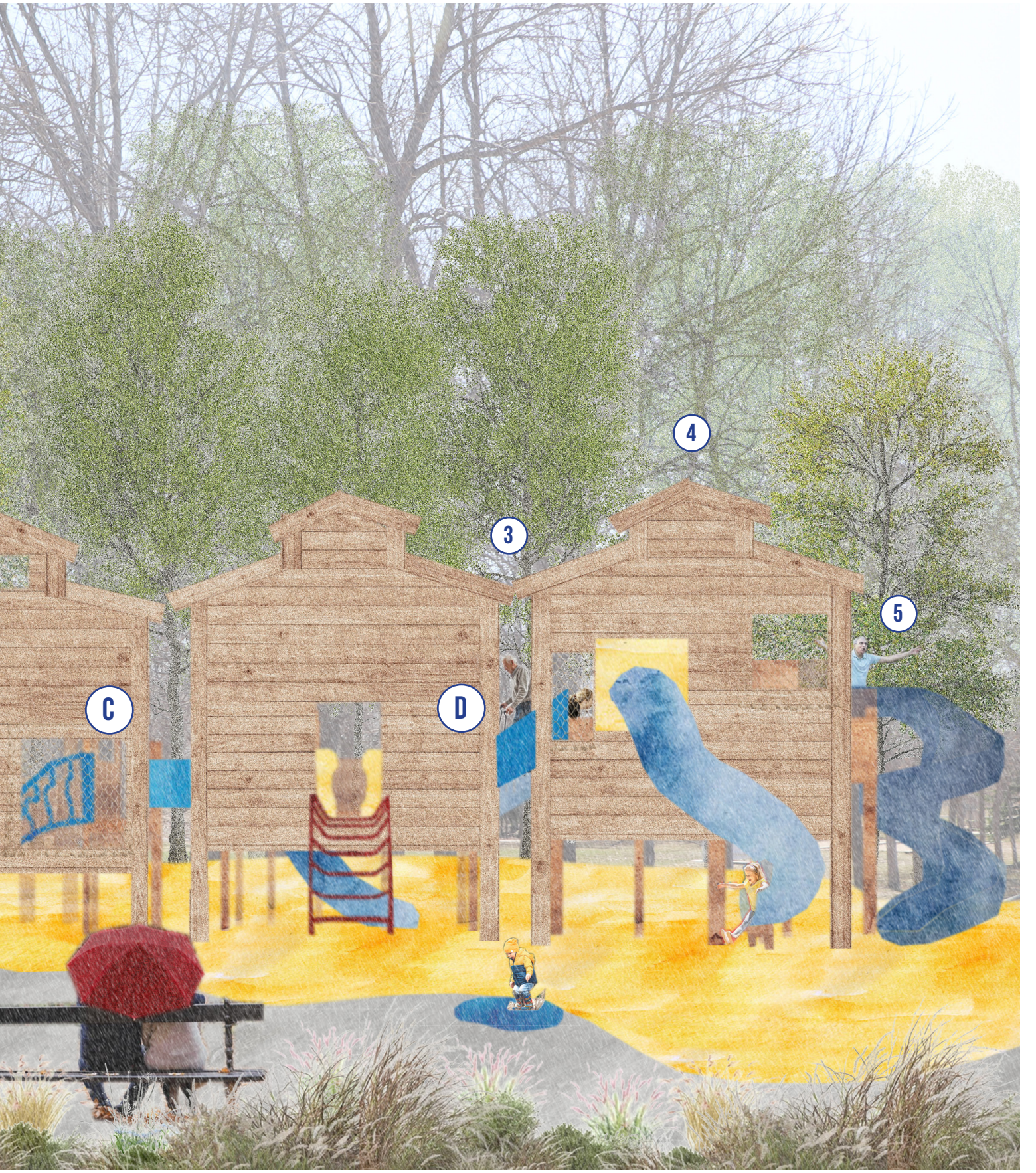
More challenging climbing apparatuses are selected for The Grain Elevators to provide desirable and engaging play opportunities for older children.

D ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Stairs and simpler climbing apparatuses are also provided in The Grain Elevators to ensure that older adults can also feel comfortable playing on this playground. Additionally, the grain truck is built at ground level, allowing people using mobility devices the chance to enter the truck and engage in the act of play.



FIG. 44: THE GRAIN ELEVATORS PLAYGROUND


C
D
3
4
5

SEASONALITY OF THE SWAN VALLEY HERITAGE PARK:

The Swan Valley Heritage Park is designed to be a functional and desirable public outdoor space throughout the year. Community members can access the park and its features year-round, with considerations being made to ensure that passive and active recreational activities can be done no matter the season. The café will be open year round, and will provide necessary protection and warmth during periods of heavy snow or rain.

During the winter, the pathways and trails in the park will be cleared, and portions of the Swan River will be cleared and used as an ice rink,; provided that the ice is thick enough. The valley entrance will also be used as a sliding hill in the winter, and the play areas will remain open year-round.

FIG. 45: KEEPING BUSY IN THE VALLEY





WAYFINDING AND ACCESSIBILITY IN THE SWAN VALLEY HERITAGE PARK:

To help with wayfinding, there is signage in the park which directs visitors to key areas within the Swan Valley Heritage Park. This signage is designed as 'road signs' that indicate the direction of key spaces within the park, including The Barn, The Homestead, The Creamery, The Town, The Grain Elevators, and The Schoolhouse. These signs are placed at significant intersections to ensure that visitors are able to easily find their way through the park.

Further, ground materials within the park help users understand the function of specific spaces in the park. Paths, play areas, and gathering areas are all constructed using different ground materials. Within the Swan Valley Heritage Park, paths are made of concrete, while those in The Gathering Place are crushed gravel; both of which are accessible path materials for pedestrians, cyclists, and those using wheeled mobility devices and strollers. The ground surface of the play areas is bright yellow or blue poured rubber, a safe and accessible ground material for playgrounds. The colour yellow was chosen to reflect the vibrant yellows of the valley during harvest, and is reminiscent of fields of canola, or the leaves of aspen trees in the fall. The colour blue was chosen to highlight the dusty blue of the alfalfa fields found throughout the valley. Lastly, the gathering areas in the park are constructed using paving stones.

Main paths are 2 metres wide while secondary paths are 1.5 metres. Both widths ensure that there is ample room for pedestrians to pass each other safety and is considerate of the space required for those using mobility devices. To accommodate the width of two wheelchairs, paths must be 1.5 metres wide. The two-metre width ensures that there is a comfortable space allotment for people using mobility devices to continue walking side by side with the people they have come to visit the park with. Within the park, there are no pathways dedicated specifically to active transportation modes. Instead, all pathways are shared by park users, and it is expected that cyclists dismount their bicycles and walk through the park.



FIG. 46: WAYFINDING IN THE SWAN VALLEY HERITAGE PARK



SECTION SEVEN:
Conclusions & Reflections





EXPANSIVE FIELDS IN THE SWAN RIVER VALLEY LOOKING TOWARDS THUNDER HILL, JULY 2023

CONCLUSIONS & REFLECTIONS:

The design of the Swan Valley Heritage Park considers place attachment, memory, familiarity, and lived experiences of older community members, and it transforms familiar places, vegetation, and structures into functional, age appropriate, accessible and desirable park spaces. To do so, its design relied on key informant interviews as well as research into the history of the post-settler agricultural development of the Swan River Valley, prominent architectural styles and construction methods of key buildings commonly found in rural settings within Manitoba, as well as ecoregions and native vegetation covering the time period from the late 1890's to the mid-1900s. Research into the importance of place attachment, components of age-friendly communities, accessibility within the built and outdoor public space environments, as well as social, mental, physical and health benefits of age-appropriate play informed the design decisions made in this practicum. Thus, the Swan Valley Heritage Park considers the functional needs and abilities of older adults and children, aiming to encourage physical participation and social interaction of all community members throughout the park, thereby benefiting the mental, social and physical health of the community. In addition, the park helps preserve a portion of the history of the development of the Swan River Valley while encouraging storytelling and the transfer of values, memories, and family history.

The design of the Swan Valley Heritage Park is influenced by research into the history of the Swan River Valley as well as the lived experience of older family members who grew up during this time period thereby ensuring that the park considers both a deep reflection into the lived experience of some community members and also reflects the broader homestead experience. Wider community involvement would provide a broader perspective and reflect the needs and experience of all community members. Also, considering the Indigenous relationship with the land, their experiences and place attachment as interview participants would provide a more reflective lens that includes Indigenous ancestry, experiences and place attachment. Although unfeasible for the work done in this practicum, due to more stringent ethics considerations, should this work be explored in the real world, a wider net could be cast when applying community-oriented design strategies to ensure that the memories, experiences, and place attachment of all community members is reflected in the design of the park.

The spaces created in the park are influenced by heritage villages and museums in Manitoba which depict rural settler life, thus bear many similarities to these heritage villages and life during this time in history. The similarities of heritage villages throughout the province highlight the fact that



although conditions varied across the province, lifestyles, architectural styles, construction methods and familiar features were very similar. In recognising this, it is clear that although the park design proposed in this practicum is designed to reflect the lived experience and memories of a handful of residents, the design does reflect experiences that are applicable to a wider audience.

FIG. 47: FIELDS OF CANOLA



FIGURE CITATIONS

All photographs by author or taken from their personal collection unless otherwise noted

Fig. 1: Let's Play Dress Up
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Fig. 2: Come Here Collie
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Fig. 3: Illustrating the Forest & the Creeks Edge
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Fig. 4: Illustrating the Valley and the Fields
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Fig. 5: Context Map of the Swan River Valley
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Fig. 6: Landscape Characteristics of the Swan River Valley
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Fig. 9: Remembering the First Class of McVey School
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Fig. 10: Photographer unknown, *Creamery*, date unknown, photograph, page 56 of *80 years in Swan River Valley*. *Swan River Valley*. Swan River Valley History Book Committee. (1978). History Book Committee.

Fig. 11: Site Selection Map
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Fig. 12: Site Selection Rankings
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Fig. 13: Legion Park Site Context
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Fig. 14: Surrounding Site Context
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Fig. 15: Map of Existing Site Features
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Fig. 16: Existing Topography
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Fig. 18: The Valley Past and Present
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Fig. 19: Master Plan
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Fig. 20: Landscape Zones
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Fig. 21: Aspen Parkland Landscape Zone
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Fig. 22: Mixed Meadow and Open Field Landscape Zone
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Fig. 24: Southwest Schoolhouse Entrance
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Fig. 25: Eastern Valley Entrance
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Fig. 26: Western Plaza Entrance
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Fig. 27: Interpretive Panels
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Fig. 28: Western Forest Entrance
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Fig. 29: Riparian Edge of the Swan Valley Heritage Park
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Fig. 30: Former Grain Elevators Collage
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Fig. 35: Swan River Collage
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Fig. 37: Imagining the Swan River Valley Café: Proposed Design Layout
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Fig. 39: Reimagining the Creamery
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Fig. 40: The Gathering Place
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Fig. 41: The Homestead in Winter
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Fig. 42: The Act of Play in The Homestead
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Fig. 43: Remembering the Old Grain Elevators
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Fig. 44: The Grain Elevators Playground
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Fig. 45: Keeping Busy in the Valley
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Fig. 46: Wayfinding in the Swan Valley Heritage Park
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Fig. 47: Fields of Canola
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METADATA

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ESRI Aerial Imagery
Originator: ESRI Maxar (DigitalGlobe)
Title: Aerial Imagery
Geospatial Data Presentation Form: Raster Satellite Imagery
Description: Commercial earth imaging of high-resolution, electro-optical imagery with satellite and aerial data.

Manitoba Digital Topographic Mapping
Originator: Manitoba Land Initiative
Title: 1:50,000 Digital Topographic Mapping
Geospatial Data Presentation Form: Vector Digital Data
Description: Topographical Data for the Province of Manitoba

Transport Networks
Originator: Government of Canada; Natural Resources Canada;Strategic Policy and Innovation Sector
Title: Transport Networks
Geospatial Data Presentation Form: Vector Digital Data
Description: Road Network

APPENDIX

University of Manitoba | Faculty of Architecture

Department of Landscape Architecture

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS, INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Title of Study

Design of an intergenerational playground representing rural life in Manitoba of children who grew up in the mid 1900's

Student Principal Investigator
Laurel Cowley, Master's Student, University of Manitoba, Department of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture

Student Advisor
Jean Trottier, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba, Department of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture

Interview Questionnaire

Your response to each question is voluntary, and you can choose to answer only the questions you are comfortable answering. The questions may be left unanswered, and you can end the interview at any time, without need for explanation.

As background, these questions are intended to inform my design project and are meant to specifically aid in the creation of play structures that are based on physical structures and landscapes characteristics, features, objects, farm equipment or other artifacts of the time used in recreation, leisure and daily agricultural life in the mid 1900's. As such, these questions are mainly about growing up in the Swan River Valley. You only need to speak to memories you wish to speak of, and this interview is not meant to discuss any negative experiences or memories.

1. When you think of physical nature of Swan River, what's the first thing that comes to mind?
    a. Do you have any different views of Big Woody as compares to the wider valley?
2. What's your favourite thing you remember about the area?
    a. Do you think that child you would have the same response?

3. What did your day to day look like as a child (sunrise to sunset, what animals did you have to take care of, or chores did you have to do)?
    a. How/did this differ on weekends?
    b. What different jobs or activities did your parents or siblings take on?
    c. What was the living situation or condition like?
    d. What was your favourite part of your day or week?
    e. What was your favourite time of year?
4. How would you describe your experience of homesteading and breaking land?
5. What kind of crops were grown or animals raised by your family?
6. What is your fondest memory of growing up in the Swan River Valley?
7. Are there any plants or animals that remind you of your childhood?
8. What key building, gardens, plants, crops and animals were most important to you as a child?
9. Are there any buildings, places, plants or animals that are less common or no longer exist now that were common and important to you as a child?
10. What were common activities you did or places you visited in your childhood?
11. Do you remember playing as a child? What did this look like?
12. Were there any recreational activities that you did throughout the year?
13. What was your relationship with neighbours and other community members like?
    a. Were there many community gatherings?
14. Can you talk about the places you gathered with family, friends and neighbours?
15. What are the most memorable places or buildings from your childhood?
16. What activities do you remember most fondly?
17. What role did gardening, farming, harvesting and food preparation and processing play in your life?
18. In terms of your rural location and built environment, where there any challenges you faced as an individual or as a family living in rural Manitoba at the time? How were these dealt with?
19. What was life like growing up in the valley at the time?
    a. To your knowledge, was this similar to other families in the area?
20. How did you feel living in an area with so few neighbours and lots of open space, animals and nature?

APPENDIX

Data Storage Information and Data Management Plan: Design of an intergenerational playground representing rural life in Manitoba of children who grew up in the mid 1900's

21. Can you speak to your relationship to the land as a source of not just food but financial security?
22. What do you miss most from childhood or growing up?
23. Could you describe and/or draw what the interior of your house and the farmyard was like? Do you remember how the house was constructed?
    a. What are you reminded of when you think of home?
24. How did your family come to own the land you lived on?
25. What was involved with settling in the Swan River Valley?
    a. Do you remember your parents or grandparents speaking about moving to and settling in the area? Or your family's history of leaving Iceland?
26. What was the interior of the schoolhouse like?
    a. What are reminded of when you think of school?

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