

White Mud River Settlement, Rat Creek, and Totogan

The 1870 census of these communities counted 150 Metis residents. Westbourne was first named “White Mud River Settlement”, later changed to “Wahputunestee Seepee,” then named for the area’s first missionary, Reverend John West. The Whitemud River is a small winding river in southwest Manitoba. It begins at the junction of Stony Creek and Boggy Creek in and flows east to Arden, Gladstone, Westbourne and enters Lake Manitoba at Lynchs Point. Its total drainage area is about 2,500 square miles (6,500 km²). Other major streams feeding the river include the Big Grass River, Pine Creek, Squirrel Creek, Westbourne Drain and Rat Creek.

Alexander Henry (1799) referred to it as Rivière Terre Blanche meaning White Earth or Mud River. Geographic Board of Canada correspondence from a Mr. Garrioch of Portage la Prairie in 1905 indicates that White Mud River got its name from the colour of the clay and soil along its banks.

In the 1870s, Totogan was a community at the junction of the Whitemud River and Willow Bend Creek (formerly Rat Creek and before that Musk Rat Creek), approximately 25 kilometres northwest of Portage la Prairie and some six kilometres west of Lake Manitoba.

Totogan met the need for the establishment of a suitable depot on the southern shore of the lake to process the fall fishery in bulk by either drying, smoking or salting. It also provided opportunity for the shipment of salt from the salt springs on Lake Winnipegosis to Totogan and onward to Winnipeg, as well as the movement of limestone building material from the north shore to the south shore of Lake Manitoba.

The site was first frequented by Indian and Metis hunters and their families. The Metis once occupied a small village with a church and burial ground on the banks of Rat Creek near Totogan. It was once touted by developers as the future “New Chicago,” a title that was later pinned upon Winnipeg by equally enthusiastic civic boosters. An appreciation of one of the drawbacks of the community comes from the translation of its name. First Nations people originally called the place near where the Whitemud enters Lake Manitoba at the extreme west side of Delta Marsh, *Totoganung*, which in English means “low, swampy land.” This was later Anglicized as Totogan. In 1881, 1882 and 1883, flood-waters rose on Lake Manitoba and northerly winds drove water over the banks of the Whitemud at Totogan. The flooding inundated some buildings and caused others to float away. It was at this time that the lumber mill was abandoned and many settlers decided to pull up stakes and leave while they could.

MacDougall’s Illustrated Guide reported in 1882 that Totogan’s population was just 30, though it still possessed a saw mill, a church, a store, a hotel and a post office. Further blows to Totogan came when a bridge was built over the Whitemud River at Westbourne in 1878, followed by the arrival of the Westbourne and Northwestern Railway, now the CPR, in Westbourne in the early 1880s. More importantly an even bigger blow to Totogan was when the steamboat builder Peter McArthur established a

landing on the Whitemud upstream from the village near Westbourne for his vessels. The new steamboat port gained a further advantage when the Manitoba and North Western Railway built a spur to McArthur's Landing. Steamers such as the 125-foot *Saskatchewan* built by McArthur in 1883, made their home at McArthur's Landing and by travelling down the Whitemud to Lake Manitoba bypassed Totogan.



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