

# July 1914 –Hearst Wiped out by Fire

By Ernie Bies, July 15, 2014

Research Assistance & Layout by Frank Pellow



Hearst Evacuation July 1914

The headline of a story posted on the front page of the New York Times, on July 17, 1914 announced: **“CANADIAN TOWN BURNS - Hearst Destroyed in Three-Day Fire and 400 or 500 Homeless”**.

The story read as follows:

*“COCHRANE Ont., July 16. – Fire yesterday destroyed the town of Hearst, at the junction of the Algoma Central & Hudson Bay Railroad and the Transcontinental Railway. Between 400 and 500 persons lost their homes.*

*A relief train arrived here today with about 300 refugees. They tell of a three-day fight with the flames. The futile battle was abandoned yesterday afternoon and the inhabitants took refuge on the Trans-Continental tracks until the relief train arrived. Those remaining in Hearst are being taken care of in a construction camp. Most of the refugees are destitute.”*

### **CANADIAN TOWN BURNS.**

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**COCHRANE, Ont., July 16.—Fire** yesterday destroyed the town of Hearst, at the junction of the Algoma Central & Hudson Bay Railroad and the Trans-Continental Railway. Between 400 and 500 persons lost their homes. A relief train arrived here today with about 300 refugees. They tell of a three day fight with the flames. The futile battle was abandoned yesterday afternoon and the inhabitants took refuge on the Trans-Continental tracks until the relief train arrived. Those remaining at Hearst are being taken care of in a construction camp. Most of the refugees are destitute.

**The New York Times**

Published: July 17, 1914

One hundred years later, this story provides details of the birth, near death and resurrection of the town of Hearst Ontario.

The First Nations were the original settlers of Northern Ontario. They learned to survive in the harsh climate by recognizing and respecting the power of Mother Earth. They developed traditional methods of hunting and shelter and used the rivers as their transportation corridors causing minimal damage to the forests that provided for their needs. Some forest fires, predominantly caused by lightning strikes, did occur resulting in renewal of the timberland. In his book, “Killer in the Bush”, which was originally published in 1987, Michael Barnes states that there were seventeen huge fires recorded in Ontario between 1788 and 1974.

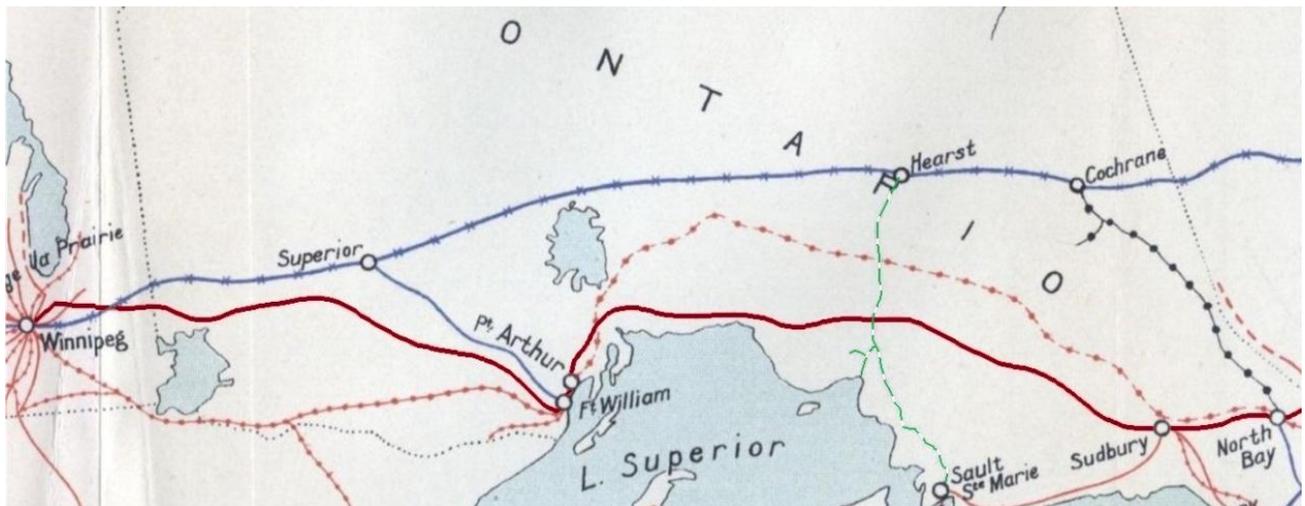
The arrival of the newcomers from Europe created different pressures, as priorities shifted to the harvesting of Canadian furs for European gentry. Beginning in the late 1600s, the Hudson’s Bay Company, The Northwest Company and The Revillon Brothers established trading posts along the waterways which led to permanent settlements.

Three transcontinental railways were built between 1871 and 1914, linking the land from sea to sea and new towns soon developed along the routes. Early in the 1900s, the Ontario government built the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway north from North Bay to encourage settlement of the Great Clay Belt. This led to the discovery of silver and gold along the route and boom towns sprang up overnight. The Algoma Central & Hudson’s Bay Railway was being built north from Sault Ste. Marie to reach the softwood forests of Northern Ontario that supplied pulpwood for southern industries. The Algoma Central & Hudson’s Bay Railway provided a link with the National Transcontinental Railway.

The following has been extracted from a map of the Railways of Canada in 1914:

## Railways of Northern Ontario, 1914

<i>Canadian Pacific Ry.</i>	
<i>National Transcontinental Ry.</i>	
<i>Canadian Northern Ry.</i>	
<i>Temiscaming &amp; Nor. Ont. Ry.</i>	
<i>Algoma Cenral &amp; Hudson Bay Ry.</i>	
<i>other railways</i>	



Extracted from Gutenberg.org

In May of 1911, the steel of the National Transcontinental Railway (NTR), precursor to Canadian National Railway (CNR), was two weeks away from reaching the Mattawishquia River (note the QU in the spelling rather than rather than the KW that is used today. Also, sometimes it was spelled with a GU).



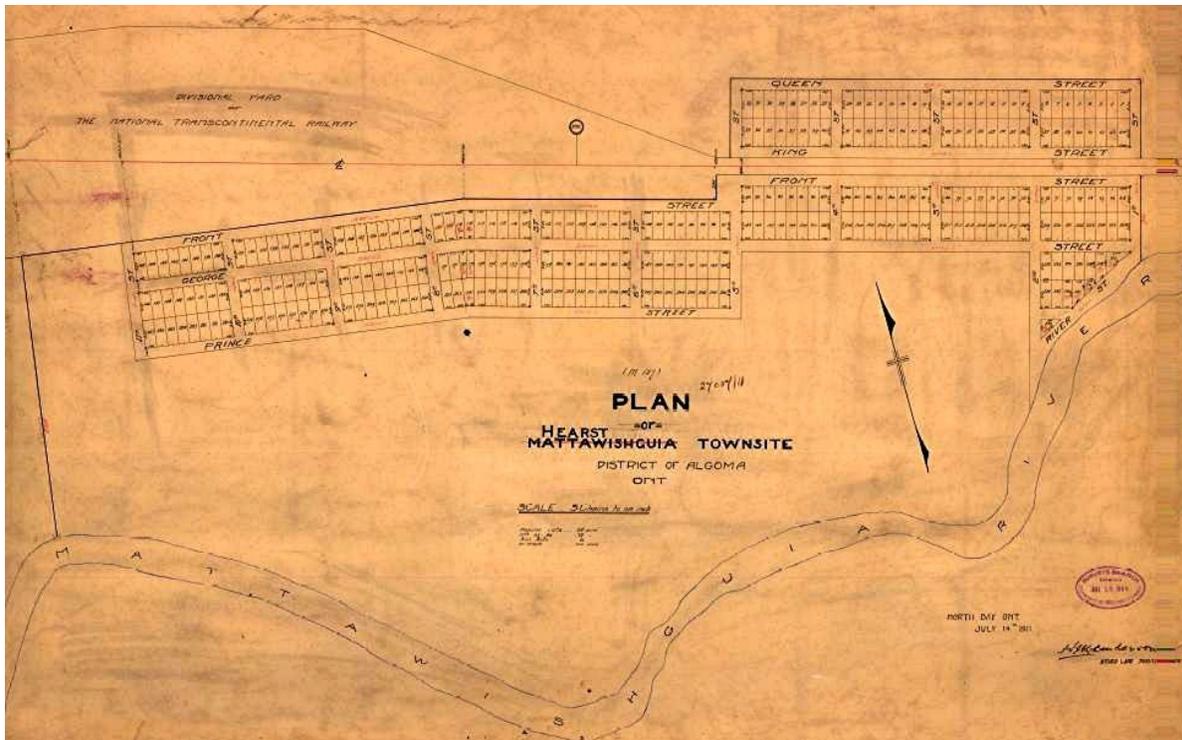
Railway right of way looking west, circa 1909  
(Albert Kinsey collection – Courtesy Michael Kinsey)

The NTR was developing a Divisional Point 132 miles west of Cochrane at this river crossing and had named it Grant after their Chief Engineer Gordon Grant. Several acres of bush had been cleared for their operations and a station was near completion.



National Transcontinental Train Station under construction, Grant Subdivision, circa 1910  
(Albert Kinsey collection – Courtesy Michael Kinsey)

Railway workers and entrepreneurs saw the potential of the land between the railway and the river to the south and began building squatters' cabins and boarding houses. To avoid unorganized development of this potential town site, A.J. McDonald, Crown Timber Agent in Cochrane, wrote to Aubrey White, Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1911 asking about the Departments' intentions regarding a town site. White responded two days later that the Department would take steps to have a survey carried out as soon as the snow disappeared. Discussions with the railway determined their requirements for the divisional point and a town plot was quickly sketched. A proposal for the survey was sent to H.M. Anderson, of McAuslon and Anderson, Engineers and Surveyors at his office in North Bay on May 18, 1911. Two days later Ontario Land Surveyor Herbert McEwen Anderson accepted the work and survey instructions were issued on May 22, 1911. Anderson and his seven crewmen travelled from North Bay to Cochrane on May 30 aboard the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway. The next day they travelled by work train and crossed the 100 mile Fauquier Brothers contract. A second stopover was required at the Crow Creek Stopping Place. (Arranged with an employee named Charles Joanis, a family name well known in Hearst in later years). Now they had to switch to the O'Brien, McDougall and O'Gorman work train for the last leg of their journey bringing them to the Mattawishguia River and longer term accommodation at the Cloutier Brothers Boarding House. They set to work immediately and by June 23 had laid out 287 quarter acre lots. Two hundred and twenty three lots were located south of the tracks between 1<sup>st</sup> Street at the River and west to 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Lots were laid along the South side of Front Street, both sides of George, which became the business district, and the North side of Prince. The remaining 64 lots were set out north of the tracks between 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets and bordered by Queen Street on the North and King Street on the south. (Most of these lots across the tracks were eliminated years later when the current curved highway alignment was built at the town's east entrance. King Street disappeared but Queen Street remains as the present day Rue Tremblay Street).



Mattawishguia Hearst Town Site Plan 1911 (Archives of Ontario, York University)

Anderson was completing his survey returns in North Bay at the same time as bush fires were ravaging the North Country. The front pages of the newspapers of the day were filled with stories of devastation and tragedy. The Toronto Globe headline on July 11, 1911 shouted "**NORTHERN ONTARIO SWEEP BY WALL OF FIRE - The Towns of Cochrane, South Porcupine and Pottsville Have Been Wiped Off the Map - Flames Extend for Hundreds of Miles.**" The story attributed the disaster to the terrible heat, lack of rain and gales of wind. This was the second fire to devastate Cochrane in as many years leaving two thousand people homeless. The Porcupine area met the same fate in 1911 with more than 70 deaths recorded and loss of a half million acres of forest. Though blame was first attributed to the railways it was later determined that the fires were the result of careless burning of slash during land clearing operations.



Grant Siding, October 1911 (Wilf Bourré Collection, Courtesy J.P. Lajeunesse)

Anderson submitted his survey returns and expenses on July 17, 1911 along with a plan dated July 14<sup>th</sup> 1911, initially titling it Mattawishguia Townsite. Correspondence of the day also referred to the new town as Mattawishquia or Mattawishkwia and more often as Grant reflecting the name of the NTR Divisional Point.



Mattawishquia River Bridge, N.T.R circa 1911  
(Wilf Bourré Collection, Courtesy J.P. Lajeunesse)



The same bridge in 2014  
(photo by Ernie Bies)

On August 23<sup>th</sup> 1911, the Minister of Lands, Forests and Mines received approval of an Order in Council from the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario to sell the 287 building lots at Mattawishguia River to the public. The established valuation was \$150.00 for corner lots fronting on Front and King Streets while other lots on these streets were valued at \$100.00. Lots fronting on Queen, George, and Prince would sell for \$100 for corner lots and \$75.00 for others. Local entrepreneurs and new residents bought property for their own use but the majority of the lots went to non-resident land speculators like John Ferguson of North Bay and Cyril T. Young, of Haileybury. They were also buying lots from the original owners. Cochrane residents Gus McManus, their former Police Chief, Peter (Pit) Turgeon, Dr. Albert Kinsey and businessman Dimitri Chalykoff, all experienced the devastating fires of Cochrane in 1911 before relocating to the new town of Hearst.



Gus McManus



Dr. Albert Kinsey



Dimitri Chalykoff



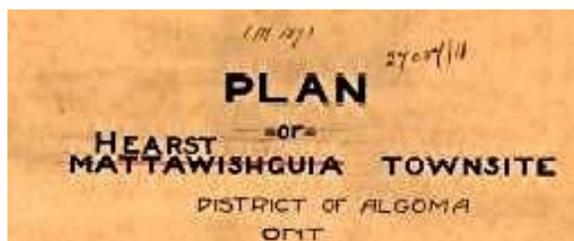
Smith Ballantyne

The fall of 1911 and spring of 1912 saw a flurry of activity in the new town as the land was being cleared as quickly as possible and wooden buildings were springing up amongst the slash. Many were dangerously close to the standing bush. Concerns were soon raised about the dangers of bush fires. Cyril

T. Young, from Haileybury Ontario, whose letterhead read “Mines and Real Estate, and Financial Broker”, wrote to Minister Hearst, Department of Lands, Forests and Mines on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1912 advising that he had been purchasing a large amount of Real Estate at Grant, and was concerned about the danger of bush fires. He suggested that the survey of the town be extended south to the river, the lots cleared and costs added to the sale price. He also suggested that at least four townships near Grant should be sub-divided into farm lands this winter and thrown open to settlement in the spring. The Deputy Minister responded on January 24<sup>th</sup> that they would look into his suggestions but it was almost impossible to survey town sites and townships in winter when there was a great depth of snow on the ground. The ever helpful Young wrote back on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1912, referring to the “Hearst Townsite” and suggesting that future lots be provided with twenty foot lanes. He also humbly suggested that the new lots on the river be situated facing the river and even provided a sketch to assist future surveyors.

In the early part of February, 1912, the Department of Lands and Forests still referred to the Town Site as Mattawishkwia, Mattawishguia, or Mattawishquia, near Grant Station. Shortly thereafter the Post Office at Grant was renamed Hearst with Smith Ballantyne as the first Post Master. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1912, R.W. Leonard, of the Transcontinental Railway, wrote to Minister Hearst noting the name change by the Post Office and said he would take up the question of having the NTR Divisional Point of Grant changed to Hearst. The Deputy Minister responded on March 8<sup>th</sup>, “that there has been no municipality formed at this point as yet”. The NTR did in fact change the name of their Divisional Point from Grant to Hearst and assigned the name Grant to the next Divisional Point 132 miles west of Hearst.

Meanwhile, the new name of Hearst was gaining traction. The crown timber agent wrote to Aubrey White, Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests, also on March 5<sup>th</sup>, relative to clearing land at Hearst for fire prevention. He suggested that the land be cleared from 4<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Streets and south to the river. Minister Hearst approved McDonald’s recommendation and he was asked to proceed with the work. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1912, Aubrey White, Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests issued a directive to his sales branch, stating, “*In all patents issued hereafter of the lots in the town plot of Mattawishquia, you will give the town plot the name “Hearst.”*” The name Mattawishguia (even though it had a G, not a Q) was stroked off Anderson’s 1911 town plans and the name Hearst superimposed.



The Department of Lands, Forests and Mines was responsible for the creation of new town sites and took the liberty to name them after the current Minister. In 1909 the new town of Cochrane was named after then Minister Silent Frank Cochrane. His successor William Howard Hearst (1864-1941) received that honour in 1912, forging another link between the towns of Cochrane and Hearst.

Sensing an opportunity, a citizen’s committee met in the offices of railway contractors O’Brien, McDougall and O’Gorman on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1912. Their purpose was to organize a representative body to take care of the affairs of the town. They decided to express their concerns in a petition which was submitted to Minister Hearst by the secretary of the Citizen’s Committee, H.A. DeBrey, an accountant with the railway company. In his covering letter DeBrey stressed the importance of the town of Hearst in northern New Ontario and the hope “*that the town which has the honour to be named after yourself will meet with a ready and generous response.*” A petition by eighty residents dated March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1912, Hearst Ontario, was sent to the Honourable W.H. Hearst, seeking his assistance for improvements to the town.

It read:

“Sir:

*Whereas the new town of Hearst has had a most gratifying growth, and is rapidly becoming a place of importance in the North Country, and a still larger growth is assured in the immediate future, and*

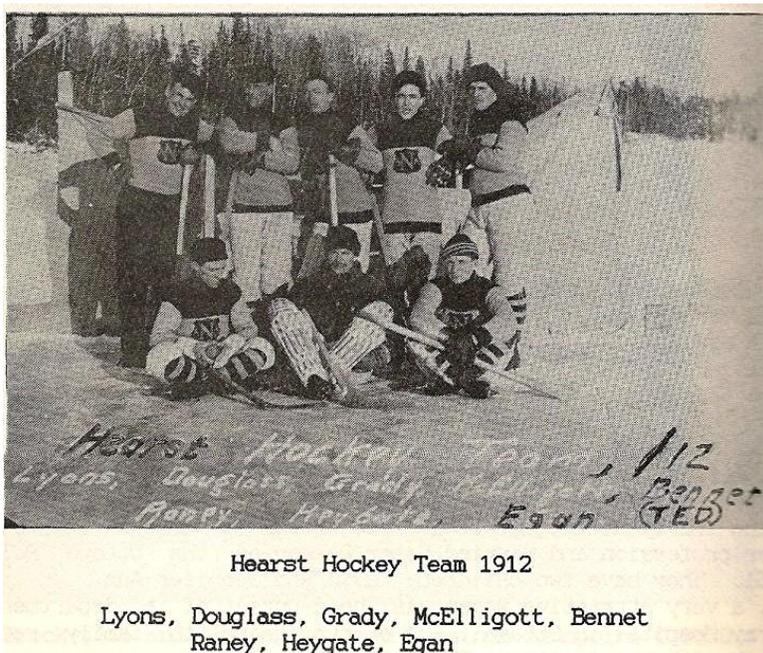
*Whereas the townsite is surrounded by a heavy growth of bush, which, owing to the almost certain danger of fire in the early summer on account of the numerous construction camps in the immediate vicinity, is a constant menace to the safety of life and property, and*

*Whereas a system of drainage is required to insure the sanitary condition and to promote the more rapid development of the Town,*

*Therefore, we, the undersigned citizens of the said town of Hearst, pray that you will use your influence with the Government to obtain the following assistance:-*

- I. To have the streets cleared, close cut and grubbed.*
- II. To have the tract of land lying between the boundary south of the present townsite and the Mattawishquia River cleared.*
- III. To give substantial financial assistance to properly drain the Townsite.*
- IV. To require non resident property owners to clear their property*  
*All of which we, your petitioners respectfully submit.”*

While some of the names on the petition were those of contractors and workers on the railway, many names are recognizable as the original settlers of Hearst. Some of these were Gus McManus, Smith Ballantyne, Chalykoff, Drajkoff and Petkoff, A. Belanger, Cloutier, and members of the Hearst Hockey team of 1912, Ted Egan, L. McElligott, and B.C. Raney. One interesting name was Jung Ming, occupation – Laundry.



(Courtesy Jim Appleby, from "The Timothy Egan's of Osceola")

After an inspection trip to Hearst, A.J. McDonald reported to Deputy Minister Aubrey White, on March 19, 1912, that the area to be cleared consisted of a lot of heavy poplar and very dense growth of spruce up to 8 inches in diameter. He recommended a local contractor be hired to do the work before the ground dried up at an estimated cost of \$50.00 an acre. He also noted that Messrs Ferguson and Young had a portion of George Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Street chopped down but not trimmed and burned, which would prove to be a fire trap if not properly burned immediately.

Albert Johnson wrote to Minister Hearst on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1912, offering his services to clear the bush west and south of the townsite of Hearst.

Cyril T. Young, now President of the Haileybury Silver Mining Company, wrote a very blunt letter to Minister Hearst on April 22, 1912, accusing him of not doing his duty in providing for public rights and safety of human life by not having taken any action relative to clearing of the land at Hearst. Pulling no punches he stated –

*“Your action is unquestionably holding back the Townsite which is unfair to the parties who bought the lots at your sale for the reason that a man who would put up an expensive building in Hearst with the woods standing behind and knowing what happened in Cochrane and Porcupine would be fit for a lunatic asylum.*

*Your delayed action, unless you put about twenty-five men on the job now, and clear the land between the present survey and the river, will in my opinion be the cause of a consignment of coffins shipped into Hearst this summer because the people will be caught like rats in a trap. The rivers are too small and there are no lakes – fire has run for miles and hundreds of miles in Northern Ontario...”*

Hearst responded immediately that if Mr. Young had taken the trouble to enquire into the facts he would have found how unnecessary his letter was.

Ontario Land Surveyor, J.F. Whitson, employed by the Department of Lands, Forests and Mines, was sent to Hearst in April, 1912 to inspect the 1911 survey by Anderson, to supervise the clearing of the streets and to determine if an extension to the survey was warranted. He prepared a hand written contract paying Peter Turgeon \$35.00 an acre to clear the streets as follows: 2nd to 11<sup>th</sup>, Prince, George, and Front Streets, also the continuation of 9<sup>th</sup> Street South to the Mattawishguia River. Said streets having a width of 66 feet. Also town lots 142 to 149, north and south of George Street and east of 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Timber and debris were to be removed or burned. Completion date was on or before June 1, 1912. The contract was signed by Whitson and Turgeon and witnessed by Rev. T. Lafortune on April 26, 1912. Turgeon and his men completed the work on schedule, clearing 33.78 acres with a total payment of \$1,182.30. In his report to White, Whitson erroneously referred to Turgeon as Peter Treudo, but the name on the cheque was correct.

On May 6, 1912, Captain Albert Johnson presented another petition to Minister Hearst signed by fifty seven residents asking that the Department compel private landowners to clear and burn their lots. He had brought in a large quantity of lumber and was about to build a large building but feared for its safety. Aubrey White immediately advised non-resident owner John Ferguson, of the danger and asked what action he planned to take. Ferguson replied on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1912 expressing concern that he had spent considerable money in the way of clearing in Hearst and hoped that his agents had done more than slash timber in the streets. Ferguson passed the letter on to Cyril Young. Part of the problem was that the land speculators were selling quarter lots to business people along George Street and usually the backs of the lots were not properly cleared. Apparently this is why Young had suggested 20 foot lanes be included in order to provide access to the back of the lots so that they could be sold.

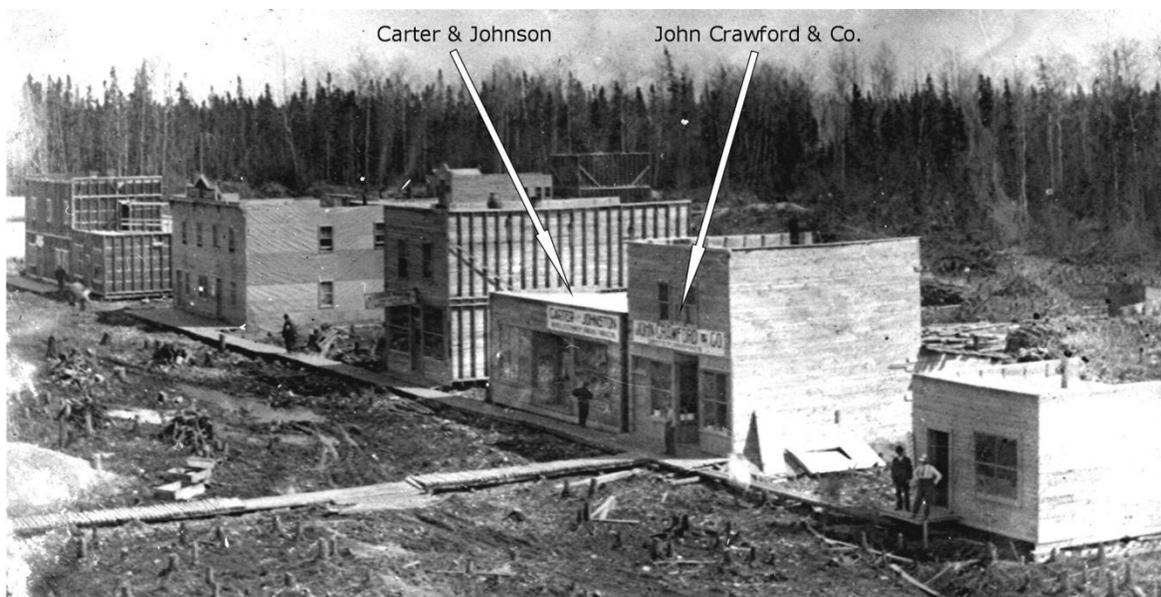
The Department responded to Captain Johnson’s petition saying that, while they had no authority to compel the owners of the lots to clear the brush and debris, they would undertake some limited cleaning and burning of debris on private lots. He expressed concern with the lack of precaution being taken by some citizens who had constructed buildings and were taking little or no precaution in the way of burning off their lots. The Department stated it would also consider the advisability of clearing a 250 foot fire strip south of the surveyed lots. Bids were received from Peter Turgeon and Gus McManus and some of the work was given to Turgeon as he already had a crew in place.

Cyril T. Young reappears on the scene brimming with sarcasm, this time as President of the Cobalt Nugget Silver Company from Haileybury. In a letter to John Ferguson dated May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1912 he says that the government is looking for someone *“to shelf the responsibility on if the Town of Hearst does burn*

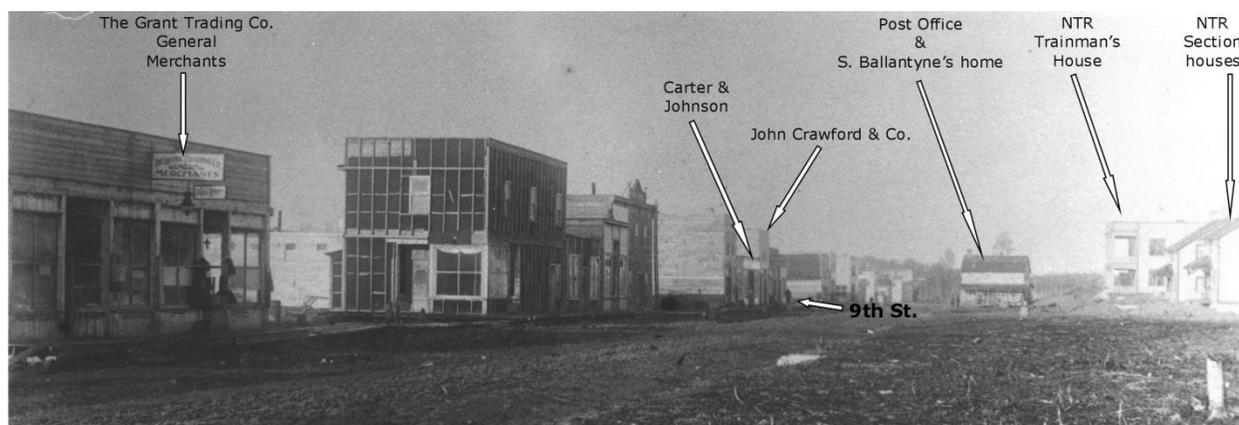
up.” He said he would not clear his lots till the government had cleared the timber off the lots behind his and stated that there is too much “*hum bugging*” going on with the T & N. O. Commission and the Department in the matter of selling townsites in Northern Ontario and not removing the fire danger risks. He said that they should use the money from the sale of lots to do the clearing and implied blame for the burning down of the Town of Cochrane the previous year to this lack of clearing by the government. Ferguson then wrote to Aubrey White again, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1912, enclosing Young’s sarcastic letter and apologized for not being up to date on the state of the clearing he had paid for. He said that if the government decided to take up the matter in a businesslike fashion he would do his part of the clearing.



NTR Trainman’s House circa 1912



South side of Front Street circa 1912 (Wilf Bourré Collection, Courtesy J.P. Lajeunesse)

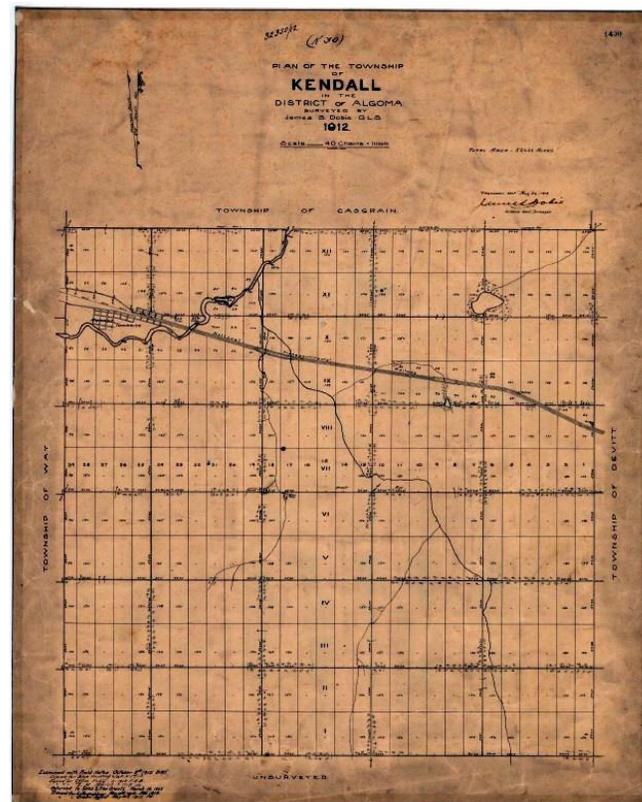
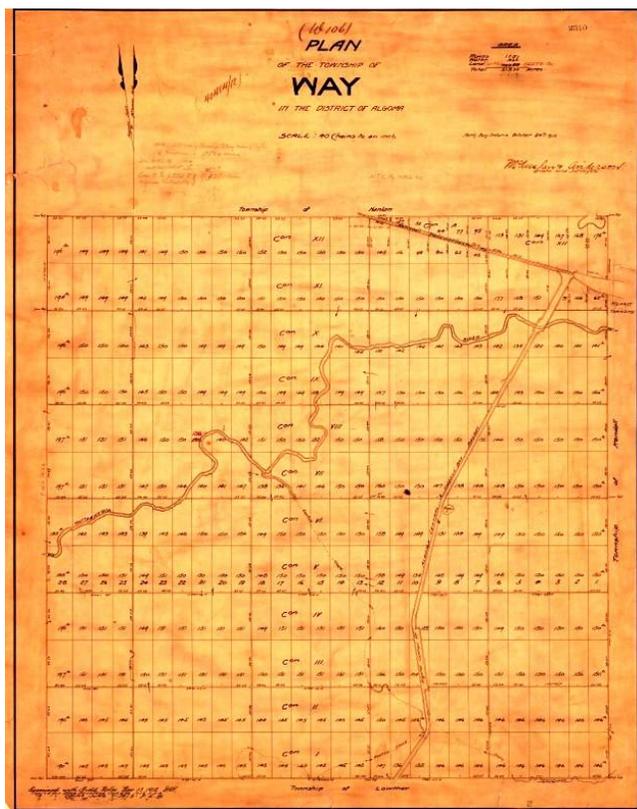
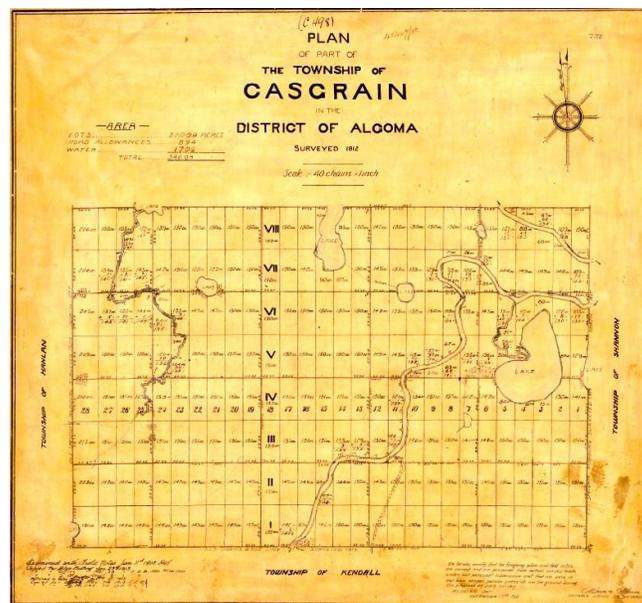
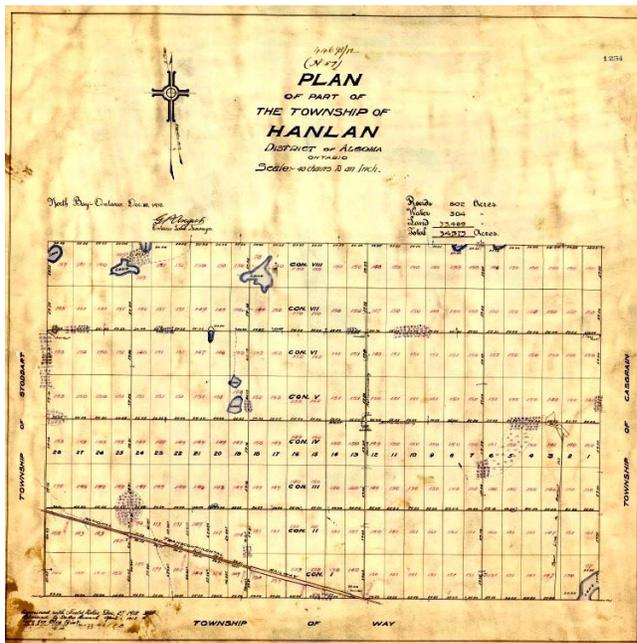


Front Street looking west circa 1912 (Town of Hearst Collection)

The buildings in the three above photos, except for the section houses on the right, were all destroyed in the fires of 1914. The building housing Smith Ballantyne’s home and the Post Office was located partly on

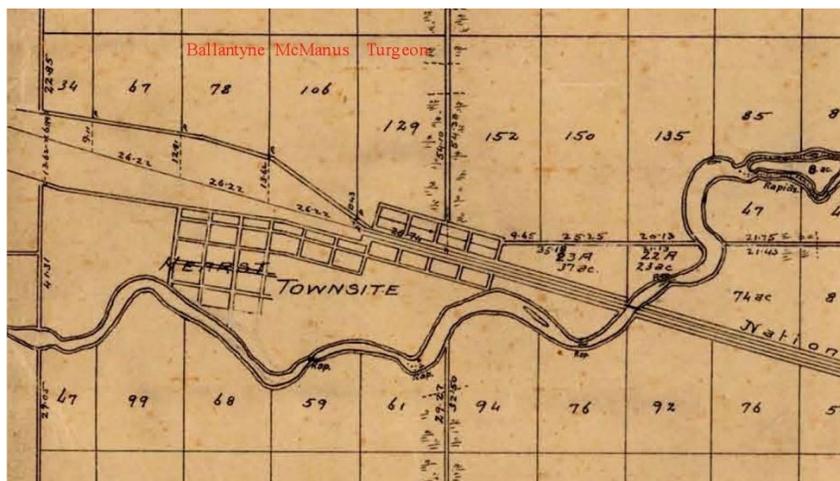
Front Street and partly on National Transcontinental Railway property, west of 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Negotiations had begun to have it relocated when the fires solved the problem.

Surveyor J. F. Whitson marked out the proposed area to be surveyed south of Prince Street and had the timber cleared in the summer of 1912. He deferred the survey to late fall of 1912 as there was no immediate demand for new lots in Hearst at that time. Several survey crews were busy in the Hearst area in 1912 surveying the four surrounding townships of Way, Hanlan, Casgrain and Kendall and homestead lots were sold in 1913.



(Ministry of Natural Resources Archives, Peterborough)

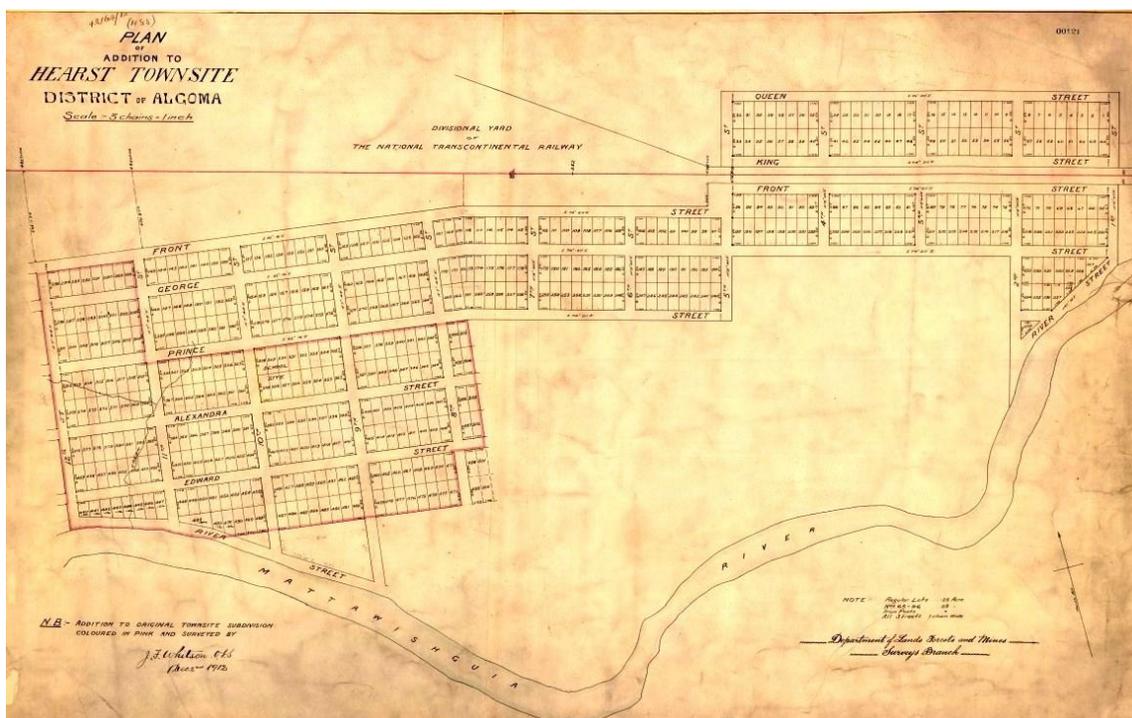
Extraction of the Hearst Town Site portion of the 1912 Kendall map:



(Ministry of Natural Resources Archives, Peterborough)

Post Master Smith Ballantyne, future Mayor Gus McManus and Hotel owner Peter Turgeon were among the first to purchase settlement lots on Concession 11, Kendall Township, just north of the Transcontinental yards as shown above. A few notable names on the early years of the tax rolls were A. Belanger (Central Hotel), Drajanoff, McDougall (railway contractor), O'Donnell, Heygate, Davitsky, Topaloff, Chalykoff, Egan, Irwin, Leo Giroux, Henri Cantin, Fred Lawson (Larstone), Harry Powell, Hubert Sprickeroff, Cloutier Brothers, Vandette, Bryant.

In November 1912 Surveyor J.F. Whitson, with a crew of seven, extended the town survey between 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets south of Prince to Edward Street. An additional 215 lots were now available along the South side of Prince and on both sides of new Streets named Alexandra and Edward.



Homesteaders were enticed by governments and rail companies to try their hand at developing this vast untamed region along the newly opened rail lines. These hardy souls did not have the benefit of modern day logging equipment and cleared their land with axes and buck saws. Larger logs were salvaged for house building and sale but there was a tremendous amount of debris from the clearing process. Fire was the most efficient way of disposing of this slash and fulfilling the terms of their homesteading agreements which required that at least two acres of their land be cleared and cultivated each year. Thousands of semi-controlled fires were burning day and night all through the North Country. Perhaps Mother Nature resented the undisciplined intrusion of these colonists and the fire-breathing steam engines that brought them, so occasionally, she would hold back her rains and send strong winds to demonstrate her power.

The fires of 1911 in Cochrane and the Porcupine were followed by another near catastrophe in 1913. The Toronto Daily Mail and Empire had a front page story on July 2, 1913 headlined "**COCHRANE WAS DOOMED, BUT RAIN CAME IN TIME**". Earleton was in ashes but Cochrane, Matheson, South Porcupine, Thornloe, Elk Lake, Heaslip, Charlton and Hearst were threatened by flames but saved by rains and cessation of winds. Hearst had a narrow escape. Surrounded by bush with not a brick building in the town it was in grave danger as several bush fires broke out around it. Fortunately there was no wind and the fires were confined to the bush.

Less than a year later their luck finally ran out. The newspaper articles of the day are transcribed below giving a sense of the urgency and terror faced by the desperate citizens of Hearst in 1914.

The Toronto Globe dated June 16, 1914, reported a serious fire in Hearst the night before. "*Hearst, on the National Transcontinental Railway, west of Cochrane, had a serious fire last night. Ten stores and nine residences were destroyed. A light rain, which started during the progress of the fire, helped materially to check the spread of the flames. Details are not to hand, as there is no telegraphic connection, and only an indifferent contractors' telephone service. Hearst is one of the new towns springing up along the G.T.P., and is the most northern outpost of organized communication in Ontario.*"

On July 16, 1914 a Canadian Press story reported- "**TOWN OF HEARST WIPED OUT BY FIRE - All That Is Left Are the Buildings of Grand Trunk Railway. BUSH FIRES THE CAUSE - Residents Are Homeless, and a special Relief Train is Rushed. Sault Ste. Marie. Ont., July 16,**

*Word was received at the offices of the Algoma Central railway this morning that the town of Hearst at the junction of the Algoma Central and the Grand Trunk Pacific (The National Transcontinental section) has been practically wiped out by fire, about the only things left being the Grand Trunk station and round house.*

*So far as is known none of the Algoma Central property in that section has been damaged up to the present.*

#### *Special Train Being Rushed*

*The residents of the town are homeless and a special train is being rushed in to carry them out to Cochrane. The origin of the fire is not known here, but it is surmised that bush fires are responsible for the destruction of the town. Hearst suffered considerably from another bush fire only a few weeks ago.*

#### *Algoma Central is Safe.*

*A wire from Mr. J.A. Dresser, manager of the A.C.R. Lands Department, who is in Cochrane, states that the Algoma Central settlement, which is located a short distance away from the town, is safe. There are between two hundred and three hundred people at Hearst. Most of the business section was burned in the previous fire. There is a lot of muskeg in the country around Hearst, which makes fires hard to control. Frequently when it is thought that the blaze is out it is still smouldering in some corner and breaks out again."*



Hearst Evacuation July 1914 (from the Town of Hearst collection, Courtesy Dianne Bouchard)

The Toronto Daily Star, Friday, July 17, 1914 reported – **“HAD ONLY BUCKETS TO FIGHT FIRE AT HEARST – Three Hundred Homeless and Hungry – Refugees Arrive in Cochrane – FOUR BUILDINGS LEFT – Spent Night and Day Huddled on Track with Fire All Around**

*Cochrane, July 17 – Their Homes, even their town, destroyed by fire, three hundred refugees from Hearst, 134 miles west of Cochrane, on the N.T. Railway, reached here yesterday afternoon in their flight for food and safety.*

*The residents have been fighting bush fires for the past two or three days, with the very scanty appliances at hand. Fanned by a strong wind, the flames gradually ate their way towards the town yesterday until the fight became hopeless, and the inhabitants fled for their lives to the nearest place of safety, which was the track. Here they found refuge, and no one was hurt. About four hundred or five hundred people have been rendered homeless, and most of them are quite destitute.*

#### *Losing the Fight With Buckets*

*On the relief train which arrived here there were from two to three hundred homeless people, and they are being taken care of. They all tell stories of a two or three days' and nights' fight with fire, nothing but a bucket brigade being available. Several times they thought that the fire had been conquered, but each time it sprang up again, and the weary fight was resumed. On Wednesday the wind almost blew a cyclone, and men who had been through the Porcupine fire began to make for the tracks fearing for their lives. At 3 o'clock it got beyond control, and everyone took refuge on the Transcontinental Railway tracks. Mr. M. J. O'Brien of the firm of O'Brien, McDougall & O'Gorman, who have their headquarters at Hearst, took all the homeless people to his camps at Pit 7, where they were all fed, and the women and children housed.*

*They passed the night and the next day till the train arrived in the middle of smoke and flame and torrid heat.*

#### *Only Four Buildings Saved*

*About a month ago a bush fire invaded the town and destroyed nineteen houses. Yesterday it finished its work. All the houses were of wood with the exception of the roundhouse and station of the*

*Transcontinental, which are both saved. The only other buildings saved are Jamieson's meat store and Heyworth's store. Bush fires have encircled the little town, 134 miles west of Cochrane for some time. It*



*is largely a railway construction town, as O'Brien, McDougall & O'Gorman make it their headquarters, and when the Transcontinental Railway construction was busiest, this was the base for several thousand men. There must be a thousand men working on the line now, but they were away from the town. All the buildings of the O'Brien, McDougall & O'Gorman Company are gone, and most of the buildings erected by the Government railway for this divisional point."*

An eye-witness account can be found in the book, "Gens de Chez Nous" in the story of Léocadie Turgeon. She and her husband Peter (Pit) Turgeon arrived in Hearst in 1912. She found employment in Belanger's Central Hotel, which was actually a boarding house for railway workers. Pit supplemented his income with contract work around town while building a three storey hotel on Front Street near 10<sup>th</sup> Street. Naming it the Windsor Hotel Léocadie and Pit Turgeon benefited from the business provided by the National Transcontinental Railway whose log buildings housing their cookery, dining room, warehouse and hospital were situated across the street.



Photo on right: Central and Windsor Hotels, Front Street, Hearst, circa 1912  
(Albert Kinsey collection – Courtesy Michael Kinsey)

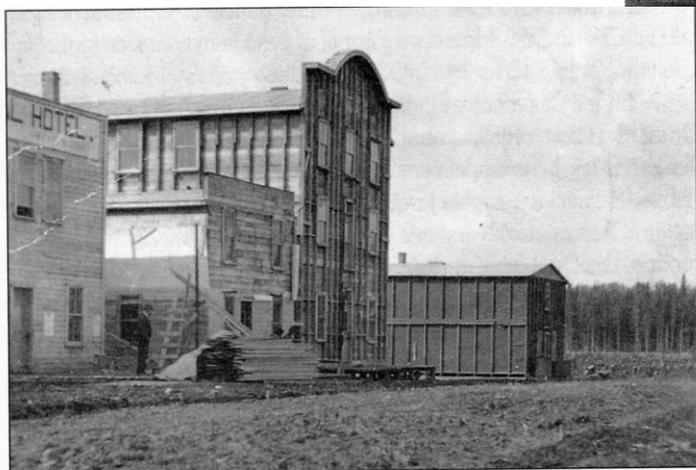


Photo on left: Central and Windsor Hotels, Front Street, Hearst, circa 1912  
(Courtesy Les Gens de Chez Nous, Léocadie Turgeon Story, 1997)

À gauche, une partie de l'hôtel de Bélanger. L'édifice à trois étages, c'était la maison de pension de Pit Turgeon, l'Hôtel Windsor.



National Transcontinental Log Buildings, Grant Subdivision, circa 1912  
 (Note Central Hotel in background on right)  
 (Albert Kinsey collection – Courtesy Michael Kinsey)

The Turgeons obtained a homestead lot across the tracks in 1913 and built a log cabin domicile. When the fire of July 1914 threatened the town, Léocadie and one of her boarders stayed at the cabin hauling water from a low swampy area and managed to save it. Her husband had futilely tried to save the hotel but had to flee down the tracks with the other townspeople. When they returned they were surprised to find Léocadie had survived. Gus McManus told her that if all the women had fought the flames like she did, they would have saved the town. She was able to provide shelter to many of the homeless refugees that night but both she and her boarder suffered from smoke blindness for the next three days.



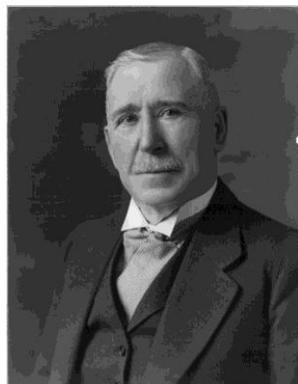
Marie Vitaline Léocadie Beaudoin



*Le shack de M. et Mme Turgeon sur leur ferme. Pit Turgeon est au centre du jeu de croquet. À remarquer, le bois tout près à l'arrière du shack.*

Although almost all of the buildings in the town succumbed to the flames, no lives were lost. Most of the residents rebuilt and the town started over, only to be threatened by fire again in August 1916 when flames came within 100 feet of the Ontario Government offices. A third destruction of the town was avoided when the wind suddenly stopped.

Appropriately, the Phoenix arising from the flames is the focal point of the coat of arms of the town of Hearst, symbolic of the towns' perseverance after surviving two disastrous fires. (Coat of arms photo below by Frank Pellow)



William Howard Hearst, pictured on left, served as the Premier of Ontario from 1914 to 1919 and received a knighthood in 1917. He is best remembered for bringing prohibition and women's vote to Ontario.

Many years after the fires, the town of Hearst was incorporated on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1922 by the Ontario Railway and Municipal Board after submitting the required petition signed by not less than seventy-five male inhabitants of the locality. Harry E. Powell and Henri Perrault had enumerated the inhabitants which totalled five

hundred and seventy three. The boundaries of the new town did not include the subdivision north of the tracks, then known as McManusville. The town was bounded by the mid-point of the Mattawishkwia River on the south and east, the northerly limit of the one chain (66 foot) road allowance bordering the north side of the Canadian National Railway Divisional Yard, and the mid-point of the road allowance between the Townships of Kendall and Way.

The first election took place on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1922 and Augustine (Gus) McManus was elected as the town's first mayor, making another link with Cochrane where his brother Tom McManus was their first mayor in 1909. The six councillors elected were: Louis Boucher, Dimitri Chalykoff, Thomas Dickinson, Henri Perrault, Robert Cross (R.C.) Reid and Edmond Brushey

Apparently not all rate-payers were in agreement with the new charter and they enlisted Solicitor A.V. Waters, of Cochrane, Ontario, to write to the Municipal Board on September 9, 1925, to see if there was a provision to revoke the charter. A swift negative response came from Secretary H.C. Small dated September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1925 advising that there was no mechanism to authorize the surrender of the Town's Charter.

The Town of Hearst had survived yet again.

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Early pioneers and Mayors of Hearst in the first decade (Courtesy GoHearst.com)



Gus McManus

1922-23

Louis Boucher

1924-25

Philius Houle

1926-29

Harry Powell

1930

Harvey West

1931-32

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Bill Bies, Orillia, Daily Mail and Empire Newspaper

Michael Kinsey, Toronto, Albert Kinsey Photos

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Margaret Pellow & Frank Pellow, Toronto, Editing

Sandy Bies, Ottawa, Editing.

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