

Donalda Heritage

Walking Tour

Donalda was incorporated in 1912 at the height of the development of many small towns across Alberta as railways were built across the countryside. It was originally suggested to call the community **Eideswold**, after a place in Norway. The name **Wallace** was also proposed, after the first homesteader where the townsite was planned. Finally, the decision was to name it after Donalda Crosthwait, the niece of Sir Donald Mann, the vice-president of the Canadian Northern Railway. Donalda was a typical “central place” that served the local mixed farming region.

The first settlers to the Donalda area arrived in the 1890s. The first inhabitant in what is now the Village of Donalda was a 24 year-old from the U.S.A. named Lew Wallace who arrived some time before 1906. By 1908 there was a lumber yard, hardware store, and a pool hall. Max Damberger’s livery barn stood on what is now Foster Street, as well as Mr. Hopper’s lumber yard about where the creamery is now located.

The original Canadian Northern Railway train station was erected in 1911 but was removed and replaced by the 1909 Standard 4th class Canadian Northern Railway Station brought from Vandura, Saskatchewan by the Canadian Northern Society in 1992. The interior of the station can be viewed by contacting the museum. It exists now exactly as it was when it closed its doors. It was the railway company that surveyed the townsite and initially sold lots in Donalda.

Gillespie Grain Company Limited, Donalda’s first grain elevator, was built in 1911. By 1931 four grain elevators – Alberta Wheat Pool, Searle Grain Company Ltd., United Grain Growers, and Gillespie -- stood along the tracks. With the demise of the railway, they were all torn down by 1999.

The Buildings of Main Street

Main Street, Donalda, is typical of the business district of many boomtowns established during this period of rapid development. "Boomtown architecture," as it is called, is most commonly associated with the early 1900s but continued to be a popular style until the middle of 20th century. The style was characterized by a decorative false front covering a humble, gabled building behind it, typical of many buildings in the North American west at the turn of the 20th century. The false front increased the building's presence on the street and provided a large surface area for signage. The business district of Donalda is one long street with a variety of brick and wood-frame buildings on either side.

The **Village Office/Museum/Library** complex on Main Street was originally the site of a large hotel built in 1912. It had twenty rooms and seating capacity for 100 patrons in the bar. Carbide lamps hung from the ceiling, later replaced by gas lamps, then electric. Running water was installed in 1934. The hotel burned down in March 1970. The **Village Office/Museum/Library** complex was built in 1980 to house the privately donated lamp collection. The **Donalda Municipal Library**, in this complex, was located at a later date in what used to be the council chambers.

On the north side of Main Street is the impressive **Imperial Bank of Canada** dating from 1928. It was previously the Bank of Montreal which replaced an earlier building, the Merchants Bank of Canada which was built in 1913 but destroyed by fire in 1918. The Bank of Montreal took over the business and was itself destroyed by fire in 1926.

In 1932 the Imperial Bank of Canada assumed banking operations. It merged with the **Canadian Bank of Commerce** in 1961 to become the **Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce**. The branch was held up by three armed men in August 1975 -- all three were caught and charged. During the robbery, staff were locked in the vault where the remaining staff found them when they returned from lunch. The bank closed in 1996 and was sold to the Donalda Museum Society for \$1.00. Funds for restoration work were obtained. The building is now a public art gallery, "Donalda Gallery for the Arts." It is an Alberta Heritage Registered Resource.

The building is one of the largest in Donalda and is architecturally significant. The style of the building is neo-classical, with a symmetrical front façade and portico-style entrance intended to give a sense of permanence and pride.

What is now the **Antique Market** was built about 1916 as a store and garage. It was purchased by Clement Brothers in 1939 and operated as a hardware store. It also housed the Massey Harris dealership. The shop on the west side of Clement's hardware was built in 1925 and operated as a butcher shop until 1948. Chris Lauson ran the shop from 1929 to 1948 when he moved his business to the new locker plant across the street. After 1948 the building became part of Clement hardware.

The building housing the **Train Emporium** dates from 1925. An addition similar in design was added in 1953. Ole Anderson constructed this building to replace the hardware store he and his brother Vic owned since 1918 when they arrived in Donalda. Ole supplied gas to the village as the North Star dealer, then the Shell agent. There were two pumps in front of the hardware store. Ole was also the local undertaker and the original director of the **Donalda Locker Plant**.

The present hotel (**Donalda Inn and Tavern**) was moved from Meeting Creek (northwest of Donalda) in the early 1970s after the original Donalda Hotel burned down. The two-storey Meeting Creek hotel was built about 1910. The single-storey addition was added after it was moved.

The building to the west of the hotel was built in 1949 by Don Lawson. It operated as a sign shop until 1968.

The **former Donalda Youth Centre** was originally the Independent Order of Foresters (IOOF) Hall built in 1939. It also operated as a movie theatre and community hall until a larger new hall was built in 1955 (corner of Main St and Alberta Ave).

The first **post office** and a telegraph exchange operated across from the train station from 1915 to 1948. In 1954 a new post office was built where the hotel is now until the present brick structure was constructed in 1961 (corner of Main St and Alberta Ave).

The **Community Hall**, the site of many activities from concerts to funerals to pancake breakfasts, was built in 1954 for \$18,000. It boasts hardwood floors and a full basement with kitchen facilities (corner Main St and Alberta Ave).

The **Donalda Coulee Friendship Club Drop-In Centre** on the south side of the street was built in 1948 as the town fire hall and village office until the present museum and village office complex was opened in 1980. The fire truck from the 1940s is parked year round at the south end of the lamp park on Railway Ave.

The log-faced building with a tin cornice next door was known as the Country Convenience Store for many years. It was originally constructed for use as a hardware store and tinsmithy. Beth and Don Lawson bought the building in 1948 to serve as a telephone exchange in the front. The rear was their residence. When an operator was no longer required the Lawsons turned the former telephone space into their mini-museum for their lamp collection begun in the 1930s. The collection was donated to the Village for a proper museum in 1979.

The Nordahl building west of Teresa's Catering features the Norman Family Mural commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Norman homestead (painted by Lorreen Norman Chambers, 2006). It was constructed in 1920 and used as an insurance office for many years.

Teresa's Catering is the newest building on the block. Teresa Kneeland has had three businesses on Main Street, including a grocery store in what was the Red and White store and a restaurant in the Donalda Locker Plant two doors east.

The **Alberta Treasury Branch building** was built in 1922 and operated as Thynes Drug Store until 1924-25, then as a John Deere dealership from the 1940s until 1968. It was also the Don Lawson woodshop.

The two-storey stucco covered building east of the ATB bank was a store constructed in 1918 to accommodate a hardware store. The owner lived upstairs until 1924. The building later became a **Red and White Store** from 1955 to 1970, operated by Don and Beth Lawson. The building later became the Donalda Grocery.

The **Donalda Locker Plant**, a co-operative freezer facility (across the street) was built in 1948. The exterior is covered with Insul-Bric siding. It operated until 1978 as a locker plant and butcher shop to fill a need for the storage of frozen foods. By then most people had freezers.

The one-storey building with a large false front, known as **The Nutcracker Sweet**, dates from 1912. It was originally a general store and in 1916 was sold to the Viske Brothers, a long-time family in the area. Ole Viske was born in South Dakota and moved to the Donalda area in 1903. With his brother August, they had a prosperous business, accepting fresh produce, including eggs and butter, in exchange for other goods. The Viske Brothers sold their business in 1954 and it was renamed A&E Grocery. The Viske Brothers store is a good example of boomtown architecture. Notice the cornice made of pressed tin. The Nutcracker Sweet has operated as a restaurant, an ice cream shoppe and is now Bookersville Café.

Other sites around the Village

Around the corner from the Museum on Railway Avenue is the **Coulee Trading Company**, formerly the “Gallery With a View,” and before that the Donalda Garage. By the 1950s it was called Central Garage with a car dealership and BA (British American) service station.

The **original school** in Donalda was located on Bond Street on the south side of the village. Fire destroyed it in 1937 and in 1938 a new school was built on the same location in the Art Deco style. This building was replaced by a new school in 1980 (K to 9) on the corner of Haviland St and Alberta Ave.

There have been a few **churches** in Donalda. The first Lutheran church congregation was established in 1903 before the village was incorporated. The Sharon Lutheran congregation was established in 1906. The Bethany Lutheran Church was built in 1913. The Methodist Mission was established in 1915 and in the 1920s became the United Church. It was given to the Sharon Lutheran Church when the United Church congregation became too small; the building was moved and attached to the Sharon church (corner of Olson St and Lee Ave).

The original **Donalda Creamery** (Woodland Dairy) was opened on Foster Street, a block north of Main Street, in 1924. In 1937 it became the **Donalda Co-operative Creamery**. When business grew in Donalda, the Massey Harris implement building across the street was moved and converted into a new creamery building in 1955. (The garage originally came from a spot between Edberg and Ferintosh and was moved to Donalda in 1954 by W. E. Clement.) “Donalda Maid” butter was shown across Canada at different exhibitions. Peak production was in 1965 when 714,466 pounds was produced. The Donalda Co-operative Creamery also ran an egg-grading station until government regulations forced the closure of small operators. The creamery operation closed in May 1987. It was the last farmer-owned creamery in Central Alberta. The egg-grading building is now at the home of the Dinsmores who worked at the creamery.

The creamery building is an Alberta Registered Historic Resource. This building exists now exactly as it did when it closed its doors in 1987. Tours of the Creamery can be arranged through the Museum. The Museum has been actively fundraising to complete the Creamery building. This building is one of only two surviving Co-op creameries in all of Alberta.

In 1931 Henry Peage who owned and operated the Donalda Creamery decided to install a power plant to supply electricity to the town. By that time there were 175 residents. It was run in conjunction with the creamery. In 1932, that power supplied electricity between 7 a.m. and 1 a.m. daily. Fuel oil was transported from Wainwright. Power to the village was supplied from the creamery until 1942.

Also on Foster St. is what used to operate as **Dino's Tavern**, but is now **Heather's Yarn Haven**. Besides her own products Heather has about **a dozen other vendors** : **Watkins, Lane's Woodworking, Tupperware, Blacksheep Designs, Usborne Books, Norwex**, many different crafts, handmade items .

No description of Donalda is complete without telling the story of the Big Lamp. The Village was looking for ideas to promote tourism when the train was still in service from Stettler. In the year 2000, a number of community-minded individuals got together to discuss the building of a lamp replica. They fundraised \$140,000 and built this landmark which is 42 feet (12 metres) tall. It is powered by a 400-watt streetlamp. Inside are several murals depicting Donalda's history and many plaques recognizing people who donated funds to the building of the lamp.

Today, Donalda has a population of about 225 people. Although there are fewer services, the Village continues to modernize its infrastructure including a new water system, street signs, a reconditioned water tower and upgrading the sewer system.

For those visitors interested in nature, the Meeting Creek Coulee, below Donalda, is a fascinating area. It is called Meeting Creek for the fact that the Cree to the north and the Blackfoot from the south frequently met here when on their buffalo hunts. The coulee (another name for valley) is the northern extension of the badlands which are more pronounced south around Drumheller and beyond, revealing unusual rock formations and fossils of dinosaurs. The coulee is a meltwater channel formed when the glaciers of the last Ice Age receded 15,000 years ago. The Village of Donalda overlooks the **Badlands** to the east of the village. The glaciers also eroded the landscape west of Donalda forming a hummocky "knob and kettle" landscape.

There are many century residential homes located in the Village. More information can be obtained from the Donalda Museum.

For more information please visit The Donalda & District Museum.