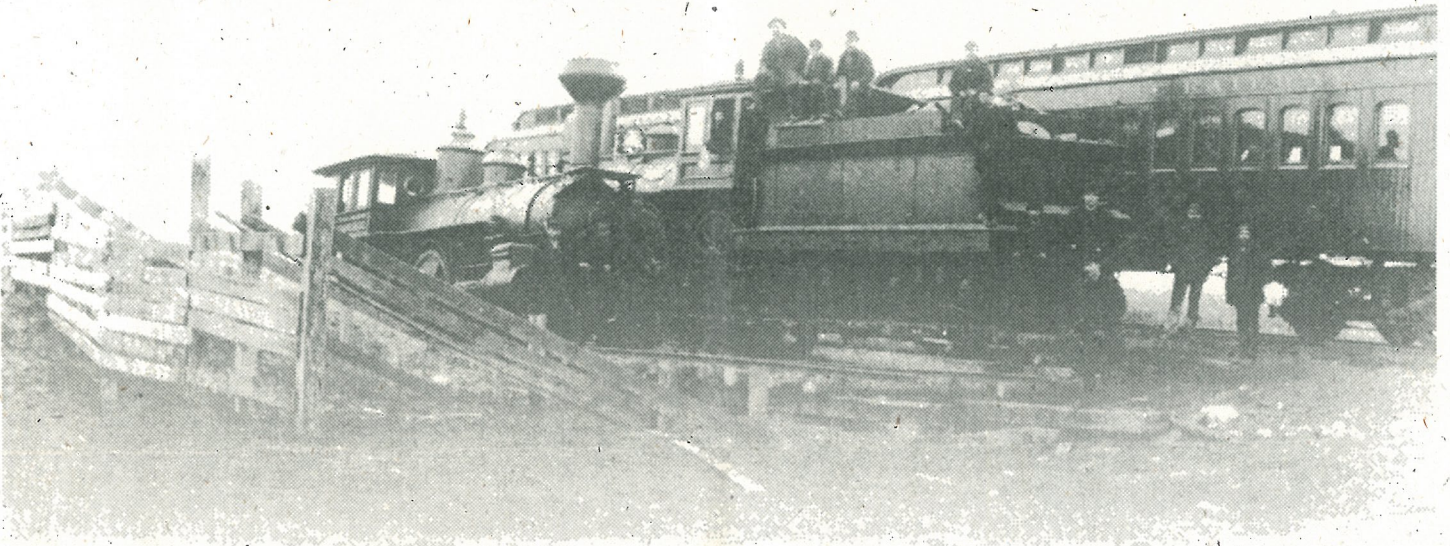


## The History of Fort Whyte Centre



### The Battle of Fort Whyte

In 1888 the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) had a monopoly that gave it control over all railway construction south of their main line. However, a new competing Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railway (NPMR) proposed to cross the main line, resulting in an armed standoff with CPR.

William Whyte, a top CPR official in the West, was sent to the disputed spot (10 km south of Winnipeg) to take control. This spot was quickly dubbed by newspapers as *Fort Whyte*. On October 22, 1888, at the request of the provincial government, three hundred Winnipeggers led by the provincial police chief arrived at *Fort Whyte* to protest, only to find that NPMR track

layers had not yet arrived. They returned two days later to find the area fenced in and the path blocked by a CPR engine.

Still determined, part of the CPR track was torn up by NPMR attackers, who installed a "diamond" allowing for crossing of the CPR line. Tension and tempers flared with arguments, threats and fist fights. Whyte's crew arrived, removed the

"diamond" and proclaimed victory. CPR installed 200 men to guard *Fort Whyte* and the military was rushed in to prevent further standoff. Eventually, a truce was declared and the Supreme Court ruled that the government had the right to "pursue alternatives to the CPR". In the end, the "Battle of Fort Whyte" was resolved without a single shot fired.



# The History of Fort Whyte Centre

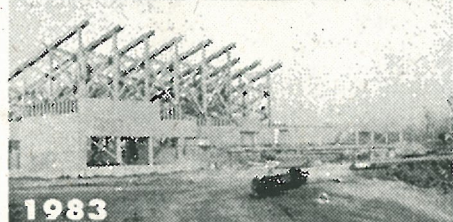
## Time Line



c.1970



1974



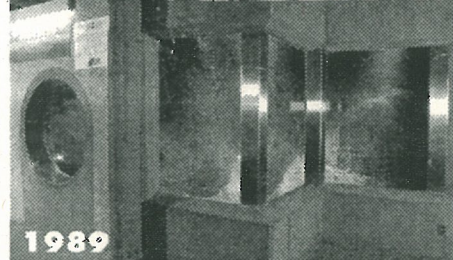
1983



1984



1987



1989



1990

**1888**  
Battle of Fort Whyte

**1912**  
Canada Cement Company begins excavating and mining the land for clay used in manufacturing Portland cement. Residents of Greater Winnipeg use the area for picnicing and swimming until the area is fenced in by the cement company in the early 1950s.

**1955**  
Canada Cement employees form the "Lucky 13 Rod & Gun Club" to develop a waterfowl sanctuary on the land called the Fort Whyte Waterfowl Sanctuary.

**1957**  
Canada Cement employees release 3 pairs of Canada Geese (purchased for \$75), who are soon joined by 50 pairs of Mallard Ducks. In their spare time, employees begin construction on winter and summer pens for 40 Canada Geese, using company materials.

**By 1966**  
The waterfowl flock includes Canada Geese, Mallards, Pintails, Gadwalls, Blue Wing Teals, Shovelers and Wood Ducks. Due to increasing public interest, the property is developed, resulting in the first nature trail in Manitoba directly related to school curriculum. The "Lucky 13 Rod & Gun Club" also prepares displays, fairs, exhibits, aids research projects, plants trees, treats injured birds, and stocks fish. A financial constraint on the Canada Cement Company prompts employee Don Muir and Winnipeg lawyer Alan Scarth to begin organizing the Wildlife Foundation of Manitoba in 1966, composed of prominent community members, who set up trust funds via private donations.



1992

**1970's**  
The beginning of the Wood Duck Nest Box Program along the Red & Assiniboine Rivers. Wood Ducks respond immediately and the population recovers dramatically.

**1974**  
The Foundation develops the Fort Whyte Sanctuary into a full-scale Fort Whyte Nature Centre (FWNC), consisting of the Kiwanis Reception Building; and a waterfowl building with an incubator room. The FWNC is still in use today as the Fort Whyte Centre Adventure Site at 2505 McGillvray Blvd.

**1983**  
The new Fort Whyte Centre for Environmental Education opens on an expanded 200-acre site at 1961 McCreary Rd.

**1984**  
Floating boardwalks are added to provide a close-up view of the wetlands and their inhabitants.

**1985**  
Trumpeter Swans join the waterfowl flock.

**1986**  
Kiwanis Touch Museum and beehive interpretive exhibits are added.

**1987**  
"Coming of Age": in its 21st year, Fort Whyte Centre surpasses target attendance goals. A remote CBC radio show "Breakfast with the Birds" takes place with George Knight (CBC), Bill Elliott (FWC) and entertainer Fred Penner.

**1989**  
Aquarium of the Prairies interpretive exhibit is built.

**1990**  
Royal visit by Prince Edward.



1992

1999



**1992**

Energy Encounters & Prairie Soil Diorama exhibits are added.

**1998**

Fort Whyte Centre joins with Domtar Inc., Manitoba Conservation and the residents of Transcona in the transformation of a 110 acre degraded industrial site to an ecological preserve known as the Transcona Community Bioreserve. Transcona residents enthusiastically endorse the development of a Bioreserve by Fort Whyte Centre recognizing that access to nature, close to home, is a first step towards building a healthier more sustainable community.

**Earth Day 1999**

Marks the announcement of the Reaching New Horizons campaign. Expansion plans include 400 new acres of forest, field and lake, a new reception centre, café, bison prairie, tree top boardwalk and tree houses, aboriginal tipi encampment, and development of trails to Assiniboine Forest.

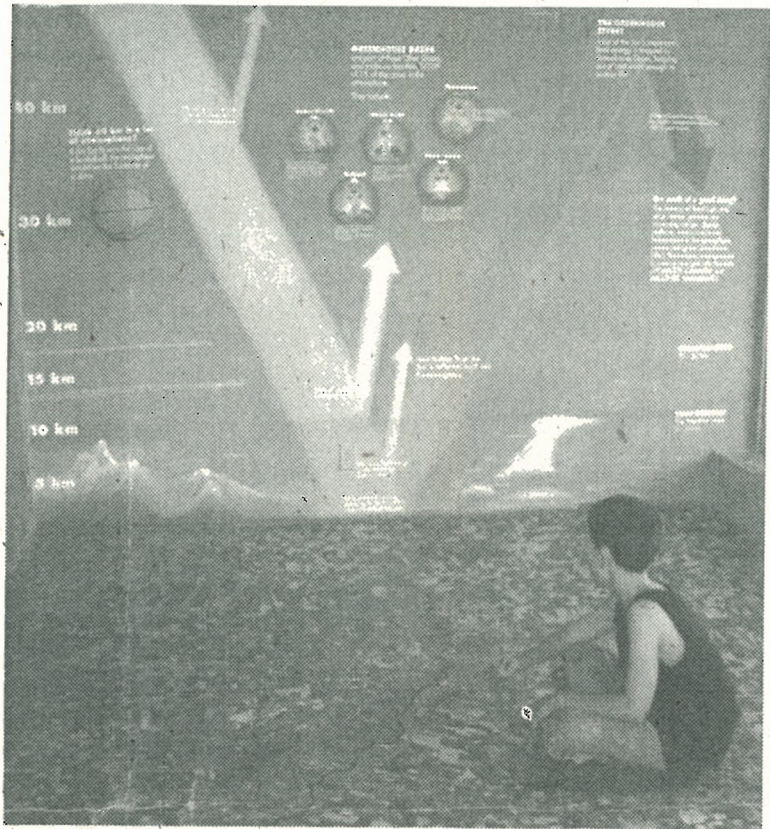
**2000**

The Alloway Reception Centre and Buffalo Stone Café open to welcome an abundance of visitors. The Carolyn Sifton trail is developed into the new property with a living prairie exhibit, complete with bison and Saturn Family Treehouse.

**2001**

Children's squeals of joy are heard as the new toboggan slide, Richardson rrrrun opens. The Climate Change Greenhouse exhibit opens in the interpretive centre and a new weather station provides up to the minute weather reports at the front entrance. Fort Whyte Centre's volunteer base has grown to include 350 diverse individuals, all helping Fort Whyte to accomplish its mission.

**An Evolving Fort Whyte Centre**



The original focus of the Fort Whyte Nature Centre in the 1970s was the provision of "facilities and financing for education in the science and art of conservation of wildlife and its habitat". Scientists were accumulating more and more evidence that the human race is capable of irreversible habitat damage. The Wildlife Foundation of Manitoba, now the Fort Whyte Foundation, responded by making a commitment to education – the first Fort Whyte Nature Centre. Major program achievements included the establishment of Wood Ducks on the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, while

5,000 school students were reached with conservation messages each year. The Nature Centre greeted a total of 10,000 visitors annually.

By 1980, world scientists were beginning to perceive environmental damage as a threat to human survival. Fort Whyte evolved from a nature centre into a more conservation-based centre. As a base of operations for such a critical decade, a new Fort Whyte Centre for Environmental Education was built to carry the message of interdependence to 50,000 students and adults annually. In 1987

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# The History of Fort Whyte Centre

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the centre passed this target capacity with 53,600 visitors, 20,000 of whom were students immersing themselves in hands on environmental educational programs. The new centre was accommodating for a new 1989 mission statement, "providing funding and facilities for education in the art and science of keeping this Planet habitable for all forms of life".

In the new millenium, the concept of sustainable development has increasingly been adapted by the scientific and business community. Sustainable development describes how the economy, the environment and societal health are all connected

when it comes to making decisions about our natural resources. *Fort Whyte Centre's* mandate has once again evolved to meet these new realizations. *"The Fort Whyte Centre is dedicated to providing programming, natural settings and facilities for environmental education and outdoor recreation. In so doing, the Centre promotes awareness and understanding of the natural world and actions leading to sustainable living."* Over 100,000 visitors annually now enjoy the sights and sounds of *Fort Whyte Centre*, of which 40,000 students learn messages of sustainable living.



## Present Day Fort Whyte

At Fort Whyte Centre, wildlife (and people) now enjoy over 400 acres of diverse habitats including, forests, lakes and wetlands, with future expansion plans of 200 acres. The five lakes on the property were originally dug by the Canada Cement Company (now Lafarge Canada) for the high quality clay. The lakes have since filled in with rainwater and spring snowmelt that now provide ideal habitat for many species of fish, waterfowl and shorebirds. Water from the lakes circulates through the indoor waterfowl exhibit and fish aquaria, creating natural habitat for the Centre's living exhibits.

The land surrounding the lakes has been reclaimed and newly formed wetlands are home to several species of amphibians, reptiles, aquatic invertebrates and waterfowl. The expanse of Fort Whyte Centre's forests is filled with squirrels, chipmunks, song birds, and white-tail deer. Out in the grassland ground squirrels and bison make their home while insects are busy pollinating wildflowers.

What began in the early 1900s as one of Winnipeg's first industrial areas has become one of Canada's premiere environmental centres. Fort Whyte Centre's partnership with Lafarge Canada has been a story of one hundred years of sustainable development.

