

# Tells of North Bay's fascinating history from days of Brule

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BY GERALD WAYNE OLSEN

"Not to know what took place before you were born is to remain forever a child."  
CICERO.

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The original inhabitants of this area were the Paleo-Indians who came here some time after the ice age ended about 10,000 years ago; they were succeeded by the Nipissings, the Algonquin "people of the little water" who still live near the lake which gave them their name. The Nipissings, who already had an extensive trading network with other native peoples, began in the early 17th Century to welcome the French explorers who navigated the important water routes of this region, as they travelled south and west to chart much of this continent. From 1610 to 1615, an adolescent, Etienne Brule, the Recollet, Joseph le Caron and Samuel de Champlain enjoyed their hospitality, as did later visitors, such as Jean Nicolet who established the first French fur trading post in 1622 and Jean de Brebeuf and other Catholic missionaries. No visit by an Englishman was recorded until Alexander Henry came here in 1761.

For about 200 years, the Nipissings and their Huron and French allies engaged in a bitter and sometimes bloody contest with the Iroquois who were often allied with the British. In the later 17th Century, the Nipissings were even forced to migrate temporarily to distant Lake Nipigon and intermittently the trade routes of this area were closed to the French and their native allies. Even after the British conquest of Canada in 1763, the Nipissings favored the French Canadians.

Trade between the two became better organized with the founding of the Northwest Company in 1779 which for over 40 years competed for furs with the English Hudson's Bay Company. The merger of the two companies, in 1821, increased the importance of Hudson's Bay, as Nipissing became a minor post in the expanded fur trading empire. Only recently has North Bay become again a world centre for the fur trade.

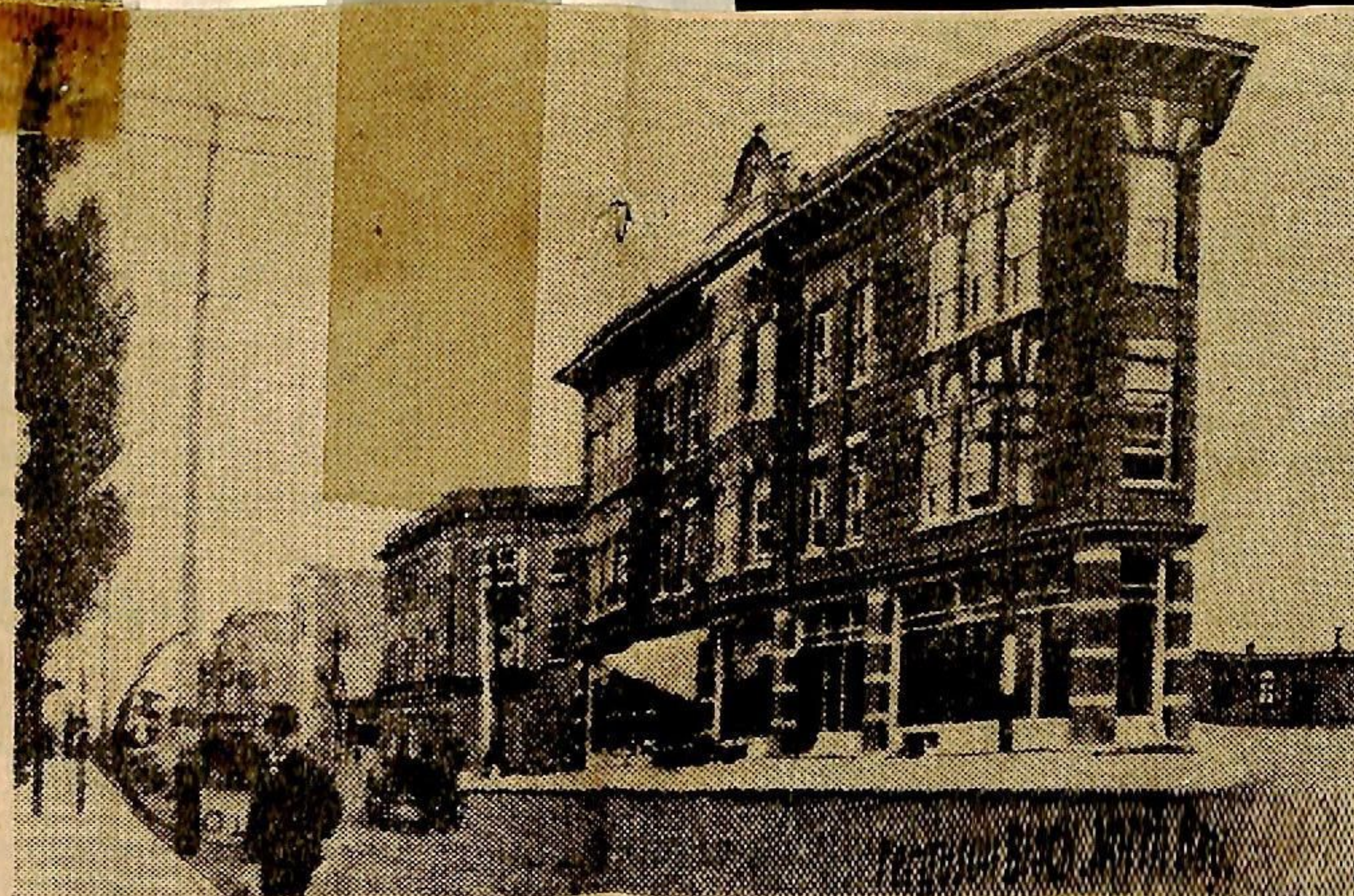
For over a generation, the Nipissings saw few Europeans until later in the 19th Century when the English migrated to this region in search of lumber. By the mid 1870s, colonization roads linked local communities, Mattawa, Nipissing Village, Callander and Sturgeon Falls with settlements on the eastern Ottawa River. At a time when the future North Bay had only one cabin, Nipissing Village was an important shipping centre. As the rush for lumber quickened, led

by the Ottawa entrepreneur R. J. Booth, general shipping on Lake Nipissing was displaced by the great volume of lumber boats; and soon all shipping declined as railways took over — first Booth's logging lines and, soon after, the major lines which still serve this region.

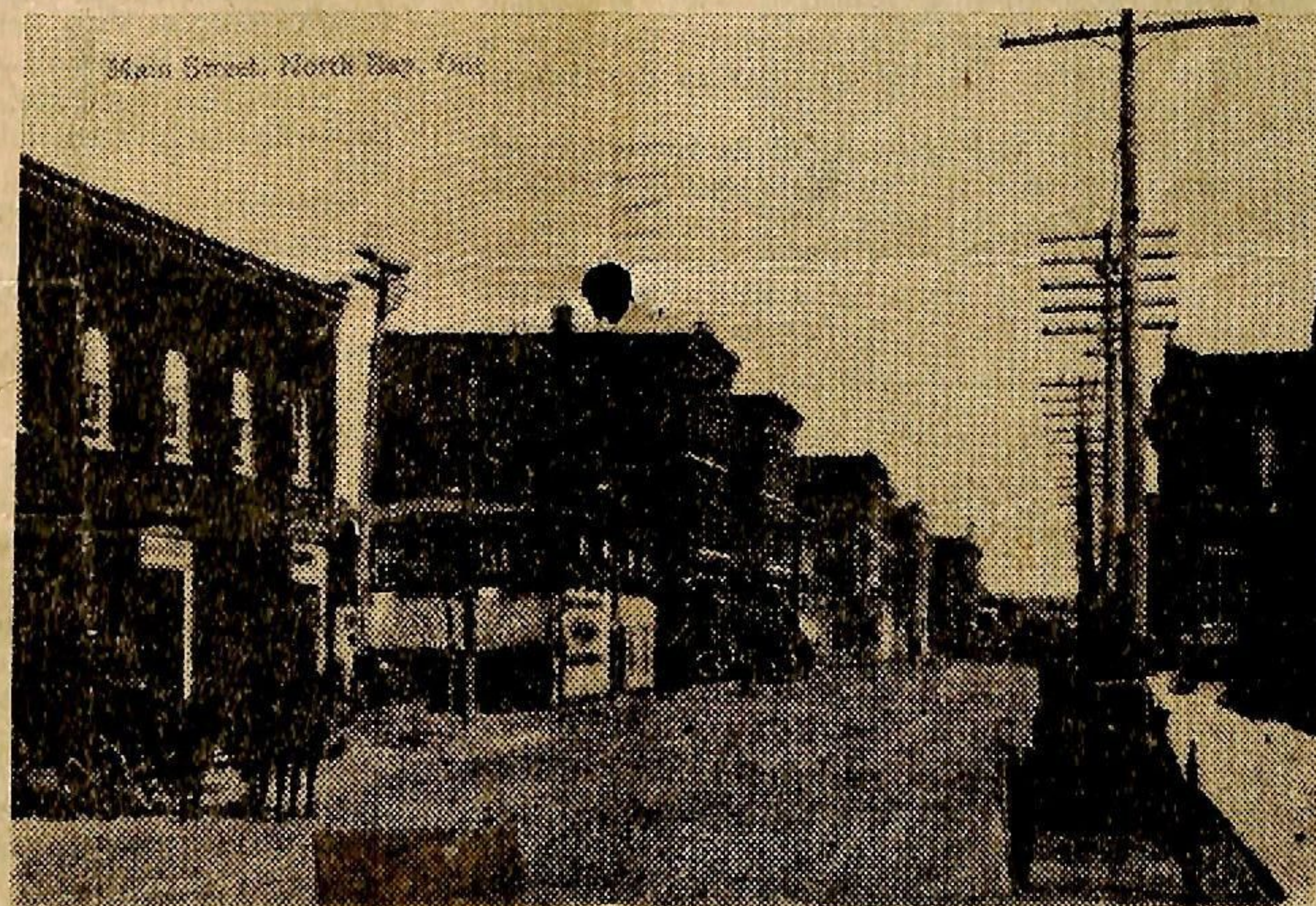
Modern North Bay was created by the railways. The CPR on its way from Montreal to the West reached the north shore of Lake Nipissing in 1882. Through foresight and patronage, a future mayor of North Bay, John Ferguson, a young Scottish nephew of the CPR vice-president, had acquired much of the land in this area and the "north bay" of Lake Nipissing became a leading railway centre. The Grand Trunk (later the CNR), was extended here from Muskoka in 1899; and from its North Bay headquarters, the Timiskaming and Northern Ontario (now the ONR) was constructed in 1902 to transport settlers north and lumber and minerals south. The importance of Lake Nipissing as a commercial shipping route was never renewed despite the vigorous support of local citizens, often led by John Ferguson, for the Georgian Bay Canal project which was abandoned in favor of the St. Lawrence Seaway, advocated by more powerful southern interests.

Soon after the coming of the railway, North Bay's early citizens laid many of the foundations for our present city. The first school, a log cabin, was built in 1883 with separate rooms for public and Catholic education. The next year, Methodists, Roman Catholics and Anglicans all built churches in North Bay. A Presbyterian church was erected in 1883 and a Baptist church in 1893. North Bay was incorporated as a town in 1891. The same year, high school classes began meeting in the "belfry" of a public school on Worthington Street. A permanent high school was built in 1903 at the present site of Ecole Secondaire Algonquin. Before World War I, North Bay also had a public library, Normal School, hotels, theatre, a newspaper and a town hall, as well as electrical, telephone and water services. In 1921, The Nugget moved from Cobalt to its present home, attracted by the growth of North Bay, which was formally given city status four years later.

Since incorporation as a city in 1925, North Bay has progressed with modest confidence. Elementary and secondary education have expanded and post-secondary education has



North Bay's Ferguson Block, later known as the Transportation Building, as it was in 1908. The building was destroyed by fire in the early 1960s.



This is a view of North Bay's Main Street in 1909 when horse-drawn buggies and wagons were the chief means of transportation.

been introduced. There are now 15 public and 10 separate elementary schools and four public high schools; Scollard Hall and St. Joseph's College have provided Roman Catholic boys and girls with secondary education since the "thirties." Nipissing University College, which can be traced to the North Bay Normal School (1909) and North Eastern University (1959), grants University degrees; and Canadore College, (1972) which grew from the St. Joseph's School of Nursing (1931) and Cambrian College (1967), awards diplomas in applied arts and technology. Local radio was introduced to North Bay by Roy Thomson in 1931 and the first television station opened in 1955.

Long an important transportation and educational centre, North Bay after World War II became for a time the site for Bomarc missiles and is now the primary Canadian

base for NORAD. North Bay has also attracted secondary industries, such as Canadian Longyear (1931), Dupont (1957), the international headquarters of Jarvis-Clark (1962) and most recently the Canadian head-office of Lee Jeans (1974) and the locally-owned Nordfibre (1978). Tourists, who have been coming to North Bay in greater numbers since the birth of the Dionne Quintuplets at nearby Corbeil in 1934, are still as enthralled by the largely unspoiled natural splendor of the area as were our first visitors over 350 years ago.

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