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Ken Liddell's Column

DIAMOND CITY—A couple of stories are told about this place, which is seven miles north of Lethbridge as No. 23 highway goes (there is no other way to go) and to them may be added a third, the mystery of the station marker.

One of the stories is Diamond City failed to prosper because it was built on an old Indian burial ground.

Another is that coal in one mine was too far back to be retrieved economically and that a second mine incurred management problems which caused closure.

As for the mystery of the station marker, it is an open book that can be read by anyone who cares for walking along railway lines in the quiet of the evening.

JEANETTE L. Court, a newspaper correspondent, once wrote of Diamond City that it had a "growth that resembled that of a meteor—a tiny speck of light, the great flash, then the tranquil resettling back into oblivion."

The Indians, more prophetic than poetic, said the mines would not keep working because they impinged upon what to them was sacred ground.

It was in 1905 that the Consolidated Coal Company opened the first mine. Soon came a brickyard which made bricks for the stores, bank, barbershop, what was described by one writer as a "beer club" (with library), the fire hall, hospital, church, two-storey school, and homes.

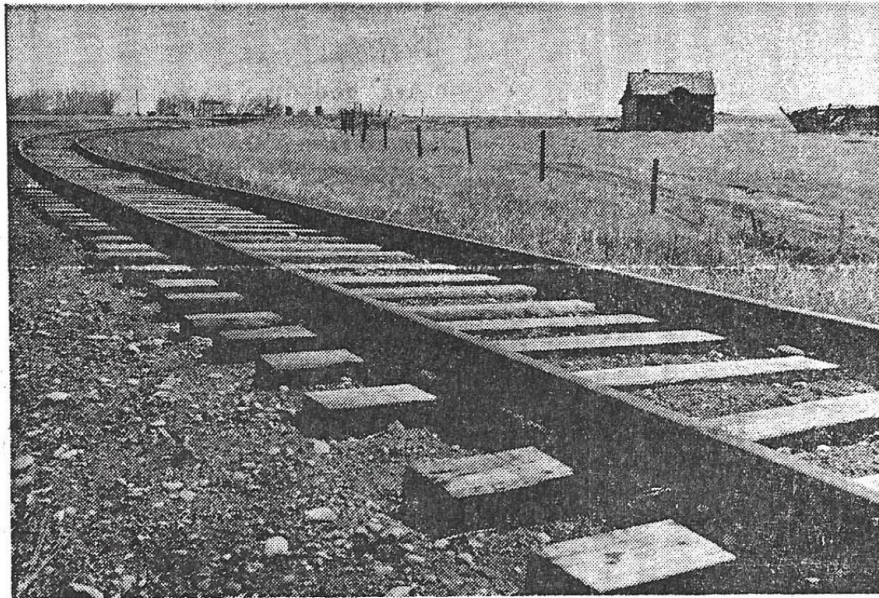
The bricks also went to build a livery stable, the proprietor of which advertised a "drive yourself" service without even trying.

Today a great pile of reddish slag and some buildings mark the site of the brick plant.

THERE WAS TALK in Diamond City in its heyday of spanning the valley with a trestle to reach Lethbridge, which lies within sighting distance.

But the merchants were against the proposal. They said it would take business to Lethbridge.

The broad valley was a problem for commerce of Diamond City in those days. The coal was freighted by wagon to Granum, about 25 miles to the west, and then



DIAMOND CITY IS BEYOND YON TREES
... Indians said mines were on sacred ground

shipped to Lethbridge. A long trip to reach a point that could be seen with the naked eye.

At one time, too, there was talk of connecting Diamond City with Lethbridge by a street car system, but nothing came of that.

BY 1921 DIAMOND City industry had all but disappeared.

The Indians, of course, said the whole deal was in the wrong place to begin with.

The mines closed about the time settlers began arriving. They bought mine dwellings and moved them to their land for numerous uses.

But the settlers had their problems, too. The area was so dry that it was said potatoes planted in May came up in July. Not new potatoes, but the old ones.

In the early 1920s the Lethbridge Northern Irrigation District was formed, bringing armistice to the war with wind and drought.

WITH IRRIGATION came busier times, in crop season, anyway, for the railway line that ambles beyond Diamond City to serve such communities as Turin, Iron Springs and Picture Butte, known today for sugar beet production.

Picture Butte is a

descriptive term. Iron Springs was named in 1908 after some mineral springs in Blackspring Ridge.

Turin was named in 1910 and by nomenclature will be a one-horse town for ever. It was named after an imported Percheron stallion owned by a syndicate of farmers of the district.

As for the naming of Diamond City, it was a problem from the beginning.

The first coal mine at the point was called Black Diamond Mine. When a post office was to be opened and given that name, it was found the name had been used elsewhere. Like in the Turner Valley area near Calgary, for instance.

So Diamond City was chosen.

THE BRICK SCHOOL was torn down two years ago. Schools in Picture Butte and Monarch serve the children. The Diamond City school had employed seven teachers. Five lived in Lethbridge and commuted to work and two were wives of farmers. Of the few people who lived in Diamond City, their work was in Lethbridge and they commuted.

The Indians, apparently, had their day, for it does seem strange that for an area generally so rich in coal the mines could not keep

operating in the 1920s when coal was a necessity.

The attractions in Diamond City today are the views of the valley and of what there is of the Lethbridge skyline in the distance.

THIS PASTORAL quality of the place is enjoyed best by walking. As highways can be busy, Diamond City is ideal for the old pastime of going for a walk along the tracks. In the course of doing just that, I noticed another peculiarity of the place.

Railways identify towns, for the benefit of train crews that may be confused as to their whereabouts, by placing a sign a mile from the depot, with the name of the community.

As I walked toward Diamond City I read that name on the marker, which figured.

But having passed the marker I happened to turn around to admire the view and noticed painted on the other side the name Sandstone.

The wording was faded. Obviously the sign had once seen service at a place by that name about five miles south of Okotoks.

And the only conclusion I could come to was there is nothing like saving a buck, even for a railway.

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