

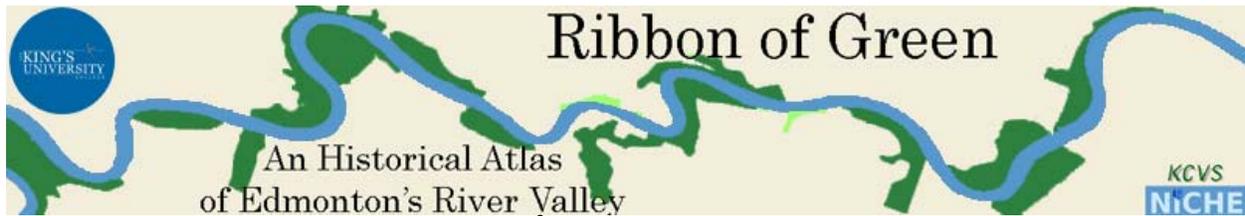
Swimmers Need Not Apply...

Written by Katie Wallbaum

When one moves to a new place they often wonder what type of recreational activities are available. This is true of newcomers to Edmonton and often they will ask, especially if they are moving from a place near to water, if one can swim in the North Saskatchewan River. This question, sadly, has many answers and most of them are not positive. The river around which Edmonton functions has a grave history when it comes to swimming. Saskatchewan is a Cree word meaning “swift-flowing.”¹ These people lived off the river and named it according to their experience. Many Edmontonians would agree as numerous drownings occurred throughout the years of the city’s existence. Whether strong swimmers or beginners, the Saskatchewan has claimed many victims. In July 1904, a young boy was swept away by the current while wading. As the *Bulletin* reported: “it appears that the deceased, who is not a good swimmer, was bathing in the river at the sand bar below Fraser’s mill when the force of the current swept him from his feet and carried him into deep water... It is supposed that the man stepping suddenly in the deep water was caught in the force of the current before he could recover his feet.”² In this case, the boy was not a strong swimmer and the mighty Saskatchewan had no mercy on him. This was not the river’s only victim. In September 1907, J. Donyhik, a Galician hired to work on the Clover Bar Bridge, fell accidentally into the river and despite efforts to rescue him, was swept

¹ <http://www.creedictionary.com/>

² “Bather Drowned,” in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, July 7, 1904.



away by the current to an untimely death.³ Another life was claimed by the river in 1908 when two men, 21 and 15, were swimming in Mill Creek. Once again the mighty current of the North Saskatchewan played an integral role in the victims' deaths.⁴ So, when newcomers to the city ask about whether or not the North Saskatchewan is swimmable, the answer is a resounding no. People of Edmonton instead flock to the outdoor pools and splash zones located throughout the city to beat the heat of the dry prairie summer. Sadly this means that although the river valley provides a seemingly perfect location for triathlons, the swim portion of the event must take place in a man-made lake in Hawrelak Park rather than in the North Saskatchewan itself. Luckily the river does balance its menacing current with scenic ravines and riverbanks which make it a great place for canoers, kayakers, scull-crews, jet-skiers and the like. Perhaps there is a softer side to the, so aptly named, North Saskatchewan River.

³ "Galician Fell off the Bridge Being Constructed There, at an Early Hour This Morning," in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, September 16, 1907.

⁴ "Double Drowning at Mouth of Mill Creek," in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, July 4, 1908.