

"Connie" Riddell

Sports Ambassador for the Southwest Corner

Every town has its leaders; civic leaders, business leaders, spiritual leaders, and sporting leaders.

The railway station was a vital hub in a pioneer prairie community and the railway agent would be well-known, well-connected, and would be a potential leader.

Alton Wilfred Riddell was one of those people.

Because he worked for the CPR, and was subject to job transfers, he was instrumental in the sporting lives of three communities.

Pierson 1895 – 1905

Riddell came to Pierson from Ontario in 1895 as the first CPR station agent at the age of twenty-three. Until 1897 when the first CPR station was built, the temporary station was two box cars put end to end. One car had an office at one

end and a bedroom at the other with the waiting room in the centre. The second car was used for baggage and freight.

He was instrumental in the sporting lives of three communities.

He was given the nickname "Connie" by some of the boarders at Breakey's boarding house where he ate his meals, and the name stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Connie was a multi talented guy. He played soccer, baseball and hockey and was the bandmaster, coronet player and secretary-treasurer of the Pierson Brass Band.

In the fall of 1901 he married Laura Smiley of Lauder and they went east for their honeymoon. Two weeks later, he was in an Ontario hospital critically ill with typhoid fever. Three months of hospitalization and a long recovery followed. Pierson citizens were out in full force the following spring to

meet them at the station when they finally arrived home.

Hartney 1905 – 1913

In 1905 Connie was transferred to Hartney where his family moved into the living quarters in the CPR station. His reputation as a sports organizer would have preceded him. During the ten years that he was in charge of the Hartney station he managed and coached the baseball and hockey teams.

The year that he arrived, the interest formerly shown to lacrosse was transferred to the newly organized baseball team. Under Connie's management the team in 1906 won first place in the South Western baseball league with Connie himself as a player.

He also managed the hockey team and played in the Hartney Band.

Deloraine 1913 – 1922

By the time Connie was transferred to Deloraine in 1913 he was a well-known sportsman in this part of the province. He was active in Deloraine as the manager of the ball club. The team toured many fairs and tournaments in surrounding towns as well as Bottineau, Cando, and other places in North Dakota. He was associated with the Band and other community groups, a member of the tenor section of the church choir and active in other church work.

In 1922 the Riddells moved to Keewatin, Ontario.

Sources:

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◀ The Pierson football team, 1897. Connie is in the back row, third from the left.