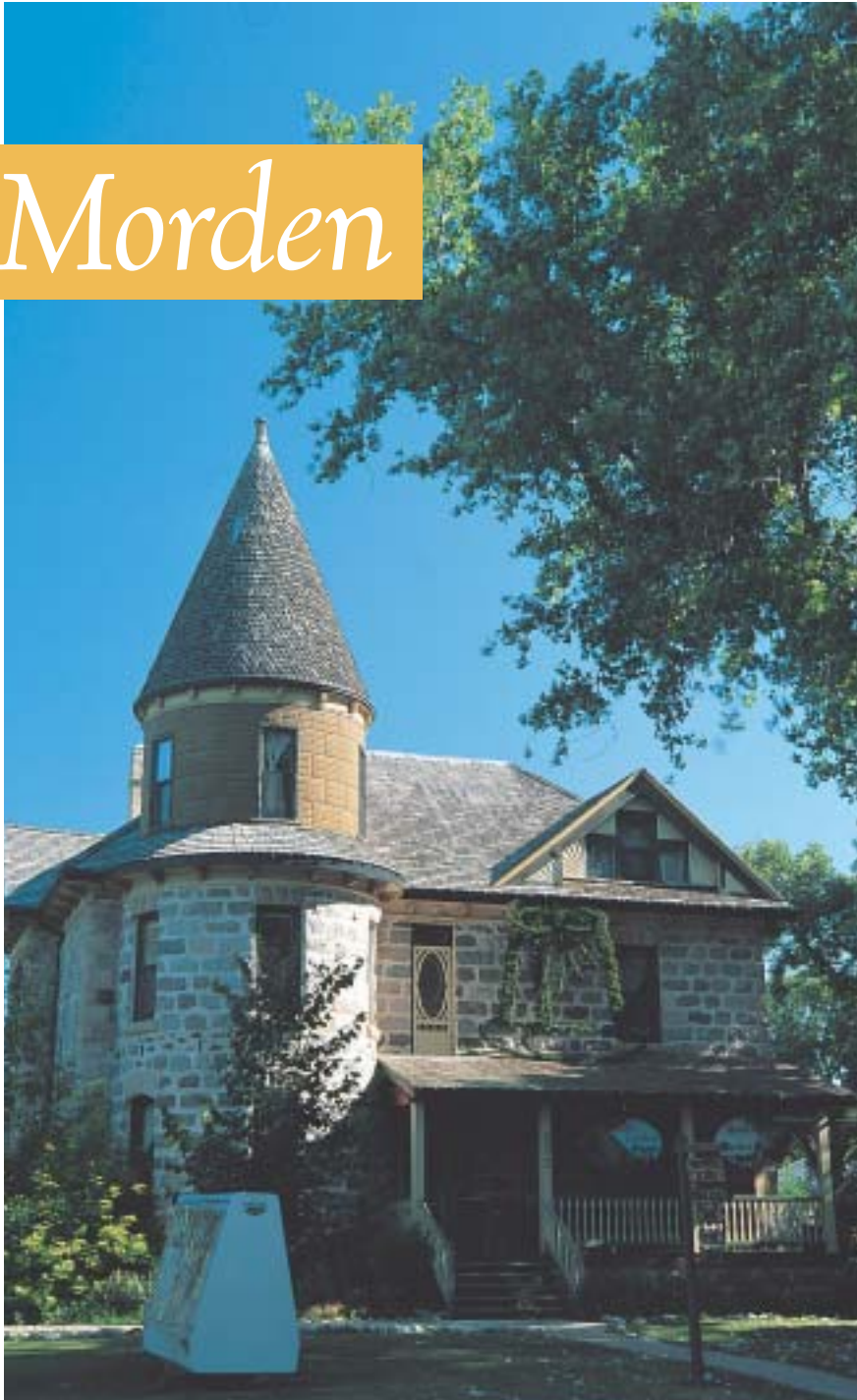


Morden



MIKE GRANDMAISON

“The countryside around Morden is your typical Prairie landscape, and yet it isn’t,” says a homesick boomer who made for the big city years ago, but is currently reconsidering her move. The terrain is flat all right, but off in the distance, as if to defy the notion that all of Manitoba is unbroken plains, the horizon is broken by a ridge of hills. And likewise, “Morden is your typical Prairie town, and yet it isn’t either.” Thanks to a couple of local industries and the contin-

ued presence of Agriculture Canada’s famed research station, its economy is more diversified than some, which lends the area a certain cachet sometimes missing in other locales.

Morden also has history and ambience on its side. Indeed, if that homesick boomer were to move back tomorrow, she’d find that little has changed. Remarkably well preserved, the town’s Victorian character has not been forgotten. Its grain elevators still stand beside the CPR and

the old post office, typical of small-town Canada, has been converted into an art gallery. But Morden’s most attractive asset is its old houses, many just past the century mark, whose verandahs and Victorian charm are still intact. Oddly enough for the Prairies, many are built of stone.

If it were near Toronto, Morden would be overrun with boutiques and summer theatres, its quaintness spawning a whole industry. But in rural Manitoba, a little remote from the Winnipeg commuter belt, it remains the quintessential rural town and a service centre for local farmers. “I like to think of it as ordinary in an extraordinary way,” the boomer continues, referring to the mom-and-pop shops that still line the main drag and the little Baptist church that nestles into downtown. “Every town used to look like this, but with malls and commuting, so many have suffered. Morden soldiers on.” A visitor, taking the scenic route from Ontario to the Rockies, put it more succinctly. “It’s like a scene out of *Leave It to Beaver*,” he said, “and y’know, that’s rare these days.”

ERIC GIFFORD

Founded 1882, as the CPR headed west.

Access Due southwest of Winnipeg, along Highway 3.

Principal Towns Morden, population 6,500, 50 per cent of whom claim Mennonite German ancestry.

Urban Escape Winnipeg 100 km.

Climate Typically Prairie, although marginally drier than points east. Only 15 inches of rain a year.

Garden Zone 3B, the hot spot of Manitoba.

Farmland Some of the best agricultural land in Manitoba. Most of it is in big parcels and still worked, so small hobby farms are hard to come by.

Real Estate In town, a new 2,500 square foot house is apt to run about \$175,000 tops.

Health Services Seven dentists, nine doctors and a smattering of other health professionals. Nearest hospital is shared with Winkler, the next town east.

Business Directory Quite a diversified economy, especially considering the fate of some other Prairie locales. 3M and Décor Cabinets are the largest employers in town. Agriculture still rules beyond the town limits.

Shopping Three strip plazas have made their mark, but the downtown remains remarkably healthy. Ample shade trees on Stephen Street make shopping a pleasure.

Claims to Fame The Explorer roses, which single-handedly made Canadians enthusiastic about roses again, were developed here.

Last Word The Prairie town that could... and still does.