# The Prairie Story

Newfolden lies in a landscape region called the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands. It stretches from northwestern Minnesota and extends northwestward into Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. The region forms a transitional zone or *ecotone* between the western prairies and the eastern forests and peat bogs.



*Wild rose.*

## Vegetation, Land Use and Fire

Agriculture dominates the southern half of the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands landscape, but remnants of pre-settlement vegetation still exist in small areas throughout the region. Prairie species like prairie rose and big bluestem are common. Forests consisting of silver maple, elm, cottonwood, and ash line the rivers and streams where they receive sufficient moisture and are protected from fires.


Tallgrass Aspen Parklands

Little precipitation and drying winds support frequent spring and autumn fires that are caused by lightning or human activity. Fire represses the growth of shrubs and trees; the resulting vegetation consists of prairie and fire dependent species. Many prairie species have deep root systems that are unaffected by fire, and some seeds require heat to break dormancy.

Recent efforts to manage the area with prescribed burning has encouraged the balance between the forest and the prairie species. Tornadoes and floods also impact the landscape and vegetation.



*Wetlands provide habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds, species like sandhill cranes.*

## Climate

Newfolden lies in the central part of the North American continent and is subject to extreme minimum temperatures that can dip to -45°F (-43°C). Many plant species are unable to thrive in these extreme temperatures. The area is also dry, with annual precipitation of about 20 to 22 inches (51 cm to 56 cm); 40% of this moisture arrives during the warmest four months; only 11 to 14 percent of precipitation falls as snow between November and February (Date from the Midwestern Climate Center 1992).


## Glacial Lake Agassiz and The Red River of the North

Over 10,000 years ago a massive continental glacier covered northern Minnesota and Canada. The flat, barren landscape that surrounds Newfolden is result of glaciation. As the climate warmed, the melt waters flowed northward. A large lake, Glacial Lake Agassiz, formed behind the glacial ice dam. At one time the ice dam held waters that rose 320 feet above present-day New Folden Township. As the lake slowly drained, lake sediments were deposited creating the fertile prairie soils of the Red River Valley. The low relief of the ancient lake basin is due to wave action of Glacial Lake Agassiz.

Today the Red River of the North drains numerous river systems, including the Middle River. All of the Red River tributaries eventually flow northward to Hudson Bay. Ditches were constructed to drain the wetlands, but tree-lined rivers and streams still meander where drainage has not been altered. Flooding can be widespread due to the level topography of the extensive glacial lake bed.

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