

Cornwall Township Historical Society

Newsletter June 2008

Bi-Centennial Year for Explorer Simon Fraser

2008 marks 200 years since reaching the Pacific



The year 2008 marks the bi-centennial of explorer Simon Fraser's passage down the river that now bears his name. For the Cornwall Township Historical Society, this is a milestone year

because Fraser is one of St. Andrews' favorite sons; married in the present day parish hall and buried in our historic pioneer cemetery. The CTHS is celebrating this occasion with two events: the May 1 talk by historian David Anderson and the June 8 commemoration event that took place in the Pioneer Cemetery.

We are going to focus this newsletter on Simon Fraser beginning with Anderson's talk given in the St. Andrews Parish Hall to a combined group from the Cornwall Township and Glengarry Historical Societies. In the community it seems little is known about Simon Fraser, except that he was an explorer. For this reason we feel it is important that we document David Anderson's well researched and animated talk for CTHS posterity and also for the many members who were unable to attend this great meeting. David wishes to pay tribute to Barbara Rogers of Vancouver who spent a good deal of her life researching Simon Fraser. Much of the material for David's talk is linked to Barbara's research. Rather than confuse the audience with dates to mark significant events in Fraser's life, David ties them to Fraser's age. One feels more connected to Fraser with this approach.

First, a little about David Anderson. David was born in Thunder Bay but grew up in Saskatchewan not far from Weyburn near the U.S. border. His work in sales took him to Montreal where as a side interest, he translated North West Co. historic documents from French to English. His interest in the early fur trade evolved from there. Anderson has always had a keen interest in David Thompson, another North West Co. partner who was an astronomer and map maker. It is this interest that led to Anderson and his wife being chosen in 1990 from over 200 applicants to be Ontario Heritage Trust licensed tenants in the historic Bethune Thompson House in Williamstown.

Currently, Anderson works from home selling and editing books and is immediate past president of the Glengarry Historical Society.

In 1990, he published in the name of Lawrence Lande the book "*The Development of the Voyageur Contract*". He and his wife Delande open their house every Sunday afternoon to interested visitors.

The story of Simon Fraser begins in 1774 with the ship *The Pearl* leaving Scotland for North America, carrying the antecedents of Glengarry County. Simon Fraser was born in 1776, the youngest of eight children, on a farm in Vermont not far from the New Hampshire border. Being a British loyalist, his father was arrested during the Battle of Bennington. He was placed in prison where he eventually died. Being loyal to the British Crown, his mother, a Grant, moved her family of eight children to Coteau du Lac, which at the time was a strategic military garrison.

Fraser entered the service of the North West Co. because of the booming fur trade and at the young age of 25 years was made a full partner. The company had only 100 shares and since Fraser is given one share, he is a 1% owner of the company that controls half the commerce in North America. Indeed, a very rapid rise in wealth. At age 29 he was chosen to inaugurate the company's operations beyond the Rocky Mts. to the Pacific and perhaps establish a route to China. China was a lucrative trade market and a route there from Europe other than around the Horn of Africa would prove to be a boon for the North West Co. With enhanced trade with China, Anderson says that the North West Co. would be like today's Wal-Mart. After exploring and establishing trading posts on the upper reaches of the Fraser River in what was called New Caledonia (now B.C.), on May 28, 1808, seven men in two canoes set out from Fort George to explore a river they thought was the Columbia. Fraser is 32 years old.

One can only imagine the zeal that these men had, unaware of where the river went, unaware of the native's language or the extent of their hostility toward Europeans. An interesting fact that Anderson points out is that an ancestor of General Romeo Dallaire, the author of *Shake Hands with the Devil*, is one of Fraser's canoeist on the trek.

Aboriginal inhabitants warned Fraser that the river would be impossible to pass and portages extremely

difficult. Fraser proved adept at establishing friendly relations with the tribes he met and they treated these never seen Europeans to salmon and the 'delicacy' of boiled dog meat, something they only fed to honored guests. After 36 days and 500 miles of difficult portages and running extremely dangerous rapids, Fraser reached the mouth of the Fraser River in the Strait of Georgia. Fraser never made it completely to the Pacific. He was warned of the Cowichan tribe of Indians being more hostile so he decided to turn back. The journey culminated in disappointment when Fraser discovered through his readings that the river was not the Columbia as he thought. He returned home disappointed, the return trek taking 35 days. The river that bears his name was not actually named by Fraser; rather, it was named by David Thompson in commemoration of Fraser's efforts. It would be a few years later before Thompson was able to chart the true Columbia River.

At the age of 41 in 1817 Fraser and his partners began to retire from the North West Co. due to declining trade as a result of the year with no summer- 1816. Fraser pursued various enterprises none with much success. His primary occupation was a miller but he also served in the Stormont militia. At the age of 62 during the Rebellion of 1837, Fraser was stationed at a garrison building close to what's now known as Fort Covington along the Quebec N.Y. state border. While on night patrol he fell down a flight of unlit stairs twisting his knee. The injury became permanent. So from that point on, Fraser is known as the "Crippled Miller."

Fraser died at the age of 84 years; his wife surviving him by just one day. In 1887, their daughter Harriet applied to the Canadian government for a survivor's pension but was denied. She re-applied in 1890 and the pension was granted just two days before her death. Though the pension was no monetary victory, it was a great moral victory for Harriet knowing for the two days before her death that her father finally got the recognition that he so much deserved.



Simon Fraser had never seen a mike, so David Anderson (R) helped him out.

Fraser greeted the audience to the sounds of Don Blackadder's bag pipes. The apparition gave audience members personal recollections of his life and embellished some of Fraser's journal entries as read by Anderson.

Toward the end of Anderson's talk, an apparition appeared in the hall; that being the ghost of Simon Fraser. In true Scottish tradition,

CTHS is proud to call explorer Simon Fraser one of our own early pioneers. That is why we have taken steps to honor him for his sacrifices and perseverance in this bicentennial year.

Simon Fraser Memorial Trophy Awarded



On April 20 after the Raisin River Canoe Race ended in Williamstown, President Ranald McDonell awarded the Simon Fraser Memorial Trophy to four deserving recipients. The trophy was donated by Jim Brownell's office and will be awarded annually to those who show great persistence in making the event a success. L to R, Maurice Sauv , Bruno Major, Ranald McDonell, Corey Van Loon and Garry Atchison.

June 8, Bi-Centennial Commemoration Celebrations a Success



Approximately 100 people showed up to watch the commemoration event in the Pioneer Cemetery on Sunday June 8 in honor of Simon Fraser's 200th anniversary reaching the Pacific. On hand for the celebrations were distinguished guests, Jim Brownell MPP, Guy Lauzon MP, and Mayor Brain McGillis along with township councilors. Special guests were Mr. & Mrs. Clint Smith, direct descendants of Simon Fraser, who traveled from New Jersey to attend this special event.

In the photo above L to R: two of Simon Fraser's voyageurs, Simon Fraser the Explorer, his wife Catherine, a soldier from the British Fenced Garrison, Mr. & Mrs. Smith from New Jersey. Mr. Mike Mallowney from Zellers was present, representing the Hudson's Bay History Foundation who donated 5,000 toward the restoration of Simon Fraser's gravesite.



Last year we started a plot plan of the headstones in the old cemetery. We have a list of names of the burials, so now we have to match those names to the names on the headstones. This is an outdoor activity, not too laborious and we'll be out there on pleasant days only. If you are up

to the challenge and like being outdoors in the summer, give Don McIntosh a call at 613-534-2075.

We also need volunteers through the months of July and August to act as hosts at the Heritage Centre from 1:00 until 3:00 on Sundays afternoons. To fulfill our mandate as a non-profit heritage group, the Heritage Centre museum *must* be open to the public. So if you can spare just one Sunday afternoon shift during this two month period, it would be greatly appreciated. Give Dale Duncan a call at 613-534-2463 and she will schedule you.

Award for Outstanding Dedication

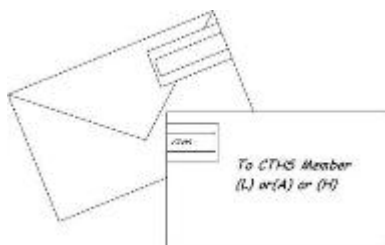


At the May 27 AGM, member Bernie MacDonald was presented with an honorary life time membership to the CTHS.

Bernie has been

our building committee chair for a number of years. In presenting the award, Dale Duncan (left) says that Bernie's tireless efforts to keep the Heritage Centre in good condition are appreciated by all the membership. She also thanked Bernie's wife Sylvia for the consideration she's shown for the countless hours that Bernie spends away from home working at the Heritage Centre.

The membership chair Margaret MacDonald is bringing the members' list up to date and we need your help to verify the information that's on file. We have three categories of members: life, annual dues paying and honorary (no dues). The address label on the envelope that this newsletter was mailed in has a letter code beside the name on the address: (L) Life or (A) Annual or (H) Honorary. We assigned these letter codes based on the type of membership we believe you have. Check your label. It is possible that we have you in the wrong category. If so, give Margaret a call at 613-933-2263 and we'll correct it.



Simon Fraser Bi-Centennial Scholarship Announced

The executive of CTHS has decided to offer a Simon Fraser Bi-Centennial scholarship in commemoration of Simon Fraser's reaching the Pacific 200 year ago. Three scholarships will be offered: one to a student at St. Andrews Elementary School, one to a Tawgi student and one to a St. Joseph's High School student. The scholarship will be awarded to students excelling in history.



We extend a warm welcome to our newest members, Norman and Diane McDonald; Gay Young; Harold and Helen MacDonald; Hilary Beaty; Gisele Leblanc; Keith &

Nancy Harris; Charles & Elizabeth Cameron.

We're Online!

CTHS now has a presence on the World Wide Web. Our address is www.cornwalltwphistorical.ca. Check it out. If you have any material that you would like to post or comments about our site, send them to info@cornwalltwphistorical.ca.

President's Pen



So Far this year, the CTHS has focused much attention on Simon Fraser. On Sunday June 1st, Bernie MacDonald, David Anderson a noted historian and tenant in the Bethune-Thompson House in Williamstown and I met at the intersection of County

Rd. 18 and Valade Rd. near the plaque erected by the Archeological and Historic Sites Board, Department of Public Records and Archives Ontario, which marks the area where Simon Fraser last worked and lived.

Bernie proved to be a wealth of information as so much has changed over the last century. The course of the Raisin River has been altered, as well as the road and much fill has been trucked in. The plaque itself originally was on the north side of the Valade Rd. beside County Rd. 18 but was moved to its present location due to safety concerns over vehicles pulling to the side of the road so that occupants could get a better look.

Simon Fraser's grist mill stood on the north side of the Valade Rd. where a growth of brush now flourishes directly in line with the Valade house and County Rd. 18 while his residence was on the highest point between Civic numbers 16955 and 16997 adjacent to the same road.

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During the months of July and August the Heritage Centre is open to the public between the hours of 2pm and 4 pm every Sunday. Ideally, two individuals make the task a breeze. One sits inside the door and the other keeps an eye on the museum on the second floor especially when youngsters visit. Telephone me at 613-937- 3177 if you can donate some time.

Dale Duncan has done a superb job the last several years informing the public of upcoming meetings and events. She has agreed to do the job another year but would like to groom someone during 2008/9 and have that individual assume the publicist position for the CTHS in June 2009. Please give it some thought.

President Ranald McDonell

Upcoming Pot-Luck Meeting

Don't forget about our next meeting Saturday June 28 which is our Pot-Luck luncheon. It starts at 12:00 noon and held downstairs in the Heritage Centre. Bring your favorite dish. Our guest speaker is Mayor Brain McGillis.



Cornwall Township Historical Society wishes everyone a safe and happy summer. After our

pot luck lunch on June 28, regular meetings will resume in the fall, starting September 23.

**From hard work they never recoiled.
Necessity required that they be innovative,
Land was cleared of trees from which farmsteads were created.
They laboured and persevered to survive,
Driven to keep their livelihood and their dreams alive.
Despite hard times and increasing debt,
Their progress wasn't finished yet.
A variety of crops and livestock evolved,
So that the growing needs of city folks could be resolved.
As families grew and farms were mechanized,
A need for knowledge and education was recognized.
The future generation needs technical and management skills,
In order to feed increasing cities still.
With expanding production and determined mind-set
Our progress isn't finished yet.**

Rita Smits Dessaint

Forging the Future

Proud and determined our forefathers toiled,

Do you know someone who may be interested in joining our Historical Society?

Please pass along this membership application.

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

_____ *Postal Code* _____

Tel: _____

Membership Type: Individual \$5.00; Family \$8.00; Life \$35.00

Mail to: Membership Chair Marg MacDonald, 17109 Valade Rd, St. Andrews ON K0C 2A0