

Cornwall Township Historical Society

Newsletter September 2008

www.cornwalltwphistorical.ca

Bi-Centennial Year for Explorer Simon Fraser

2008 marks 200 years since reaching the Pacific

So Far this year, the CTHS has focused much attention on Simon Fraser and the bicentennial of his reaching the Pacific Ocean. Since Simon Fraser is such a big part of Canadian history, we are going to continue on this theme, highlighting some more about life and some possessions that are with the CTHS.

In July, your fearless editor had the privilege of taking a two day train trip through the Rocky Mountains from Calgary to Vancouver. This once in a life time experience was something I yearned to do since studying Canadian history in elementary school and would recommend highly to anyone who wants to learn more about Canada. I am going to recount some of the interesting sights along the journey, particularly those encountered by Simon Fraser 200 years before me.

We boarded Rocky Mountain Rail Line at the Calgary station on July 22 and traveled the CP line crossing the Rockies through the Kicking Horse Pass Route. The scenery is every bit as spectacular as seen on post card pictures. William Van Horne, president of CP Rail from 1888 to 1899 (see Marland & Pearl Murray's Newsletter Minister's Island Sept 1996 in *Historical Memories*) was a strong believer in tourism and loved the Canadian Rockies. He is often quoted as saying "If we can't export the scenery, we'll import the tourists." Van Horne must have been a visionary for his statement still rings true today. On our train I met people from Germany, Scotland, England and the U.S. from as far as Texas.

The train ride is an adventure in evolving panoramic vistas and terrain. As our train traveled along the track, the rolling foothills soon gave way to majestic mountain peaks. I marvel at the engineering feat of building a railway over 100 years ago through such rugged territory. The Connaught Tunnel cuts through Mount Macdonald climbing 3,794 feet and curving through an arc of 120 degrees. We are told that two construction crews each started from different sides of the mountain. When they met in the middle of the mountain, the tracks were a mere 2" out of alignment! And this was long before the days of GPS.

While searching for a navigable route to the Pacific Ocean, Fraser found the junction of the "muddy waters" and "clear waters" known today as the Fraser and Thompson Rivers. Near Lytton, at the confluence of these two great rivers, one can clearly see a line in the waters with a distinct colour shift marking the merging waters. The reason is that as

the Fraser flows south, it picks up silt and sand along the way giving it a milky colour. Unlike the Thompson River, there are no lakes or sediment basins along the Fraser that allow the silt to settle. For this reason the Fraser River is known here as the "Mighty Muddy Fraser."



You can clearly see the two colours of water where the Thompson and Fraser Rivers merge.

Further south towards in the Fraser Valley, the river widens, slowing the speed of the waters. This allows the silt and sediment to deposit along the shores creating some of the most fertile farm land in the province. Chilliwack in the Fraser Valley is noted for its bumper fruit crops.

Fraser's expedition traveled mostly overland, inching their way along the wall now known as Fraser Canyon using rope ladders made by their aboriginal guides. About 25 miles downstream from Lytton, Simon Fraser first encountered Hell's Gate. It is said that he so named this gorge because it reminded him of the "Gates of Hell." Fraser wrote in his diary: "I have been for a long time among the Rocky Mountains, but I have never seen anything to equal this country, for I cannot find words to describe our situations at times. We had to pass where no human should venture". Today, Hell's Gate is B.C.'s most popular tourist attraction. But the intimidating whitewater rapids and steep gorges were hardly considered beautiful scenery to explorer Simon Fraser. In the narrows of the Fraser Canyon, the water level can vary as much as 80 feet throughout the year. From our train, we were able to see the debris deposits of this year's high water mark which occurred in early June.

To build the railway, men were lowered on ropes and makeshift ladders down the steep canyon walls where

they would drill holes to pack full of dynamite before scurrying back up to safety. The blasting often caused rocks (and people) to fall into the raging waters below. In 1914 a severe blast caused a rock slide that throttled the waters at Hell's Gate so much that the salmon were not able to swim upstream to their spawning grounds. In 1945 fishways were completed along the side of the river allowing the salmon to pass through on their journey upstream.

Another historic site is at Craigellachie B.C., site of the "last spike". CP Rail completed Canada's first transcontinental railway in 54 months, almost six years ahead of the original schedule. The final spike was driven by major shareholder Donald Smith at the site named by Van Horne after a legendary landmark in Scotland: a large rock in Banffshire, Scotland. At the site a plaque reads: "Here was driven the last spike completing Canadian Pacific Railway from ocean to ocean November 7, 1885."

In keeping with our Simon Fraser theme, we will focus on some artifacts that are in our possession that perhaps deserve more prominent display. After his years as an explorer, Simon Fraser operated a grist mill and a saw mill on what's now known as Valade Road in South Stormont. These mills were powered by the water flow of the Raisin River. Bernie MacDonald grew up on the farm directly south of Fraser's original mill and he proved invaluable in sighting the mill location. The mill pond was in a hollow basin to the west of the Valade house with the mill just below. The lay of the land has changed since Fraser's time and the mill pond basin no longer exists. The mill stone used by Fraser is still on site lying informally near a machine shed not far from



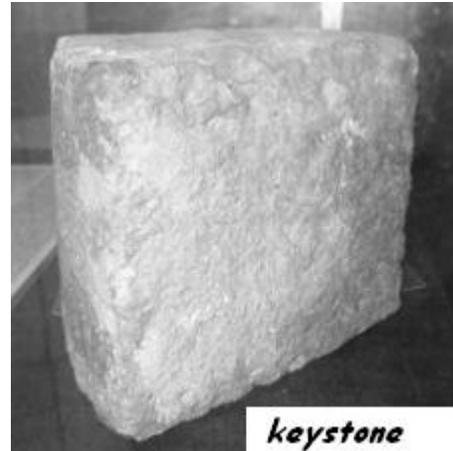
where the grist mill stood. The mill stone is about 48" in diameter and 11" thick.

We are not sure if the grist and saw mills operated concurrently or if they were separate ventures of Fraser; however, we do know that the saw mill eventually burned. Years later, Bernie's father, Bernard MacDonald Sr., happened to be rummaging through the ruins and found the key to the door lock.

Further searches by the senior Bernard unearthed the keystone from the fireplace in the Fraser homestead, located a short distance east on Valade Rd. This place was also ravaged by fire.



key to Fraser's sawmill



keystone

Both these priceless artifacts stayed in the safe keeping of the MacDonald family until 1999. At that time, Bernie's brother Leonard had an auction sale on the family farm, selling house artifacts and antiques. The key and keystone went up for auction and mercifully were purchased by Jim Brownell. Jim in turn donated them to the CTHS for safekeeping and the enjoyment for all. Thanks again Jim for your kindness and dedication to local history and heritage. The rightful home for these priceless items is right here in St. Andrews.

The key and keystone are currently on display in our museum in a locked show case donated by Art Buckland. Wouldn't it be nice if we could display the grist mill stone in a more dignified manner? Perhaps the Valade family would agree to have the mill stone moved to a more visual place with an appropriate plaque.

Contact Us

We enjoy getting your comments as well as any information that you may wish to submit for future newsletters. You can email them to info@cornwalltwphistorical.ca or call Don McIntosh at 613-534-2075.

Don't forget! Our next regular meeting is Tuesday September 23 at 7:30 pm at the Heritage Center. Invite a friend to come along with you to see what CTHS is all about.



In our last newsletter, we reported that Art Buckland initiated Simon Fraser Scholarships for various schools in the area. These scholarships are funded by Jim Brownell and the two local school boards. We are pleased to announce the following scholarship recipients: Jazz Cook, St. Andrews School and Michelle Lefebvre, Tagwi. A St. Joseph's High School student received a scholarship too but no name was available at press time. Compliments of Guy Lauzon, each recipient also received a copy of Kaye Lamb's book *Letters and Journals of Simon Fraser 1806 to 1808*.

Welcome New Member: We are pleased to have B.C. as our newest member. is currently doing research on Simon Fraser and is looking for information, particularly on his life after his exploration years. If you have any anecdotes to share, would be glad to hear from you. To reach her: info@cornwalltwphistorical.ca

Our Sympathies On June 20, 2008 Mr. Len Lawson died in Saint John N.B. Len was a native of St. Andrews and the grandfather of Wendy Fox. A while back, Marland & Pearl Murray wrote a newsletter about Len in his early years and the forming of Lawson Transport in Cornwall. If you have a copy of *Historical Memories*, turn to page 36 and read about Len's life in St. Andrews and area.

President's Pen



are still wanting.

As we move forward, it is with pride and pleasure we can look back on the activities which marked the bicentennial of Simon Fraser reaching the Pacific Ocean in 1808. Thanks to all who contributed in any way.

In the summer of 2006 and 2007 much restoration work was done on the stone fence surrounding the original cemetery in St. Andrews West. It is unfortunate that so much money and volunteer time has been put into this project and certain sections

On September 6th (Saturday) and September 7th the heritage Center in St. Andrews will be open both days from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm for the annual Doors Open.

Later on this month on September 27th and 28th the annual Apples and Art will take place at the same location. Local members of the Cornwall Township Historical Society are asked to assist with this event.

The next regular meeting of the CTHS will take place on Tuesday September 23rd. The guest speaker will be Charles Cameron speaking about his antique farm implements.

Ranald McDonell, president CTHS

Add a Little Humour to Your Life

Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in his shoes. That way, if he gets angry, he'll be a mile away and barefoot.



For every action, there is an equal and opposite government program.

If you look like your passport photo, you probably need the vacation.

A clear conscience is usually a sign of a bad memory.

Age is a very high price to pay for maturity.

My idea of housework is to sweep the room with a glance.

Junk is something you throw away three weeks before you need it.

Sidewalk Repairs: On their April 30 roads tour, Township Council approved repairs to the sidewalk at the Heritage Center. As of early Sept. repairs have yet to be made. If you happen to meet a member of council this fall, perhaps you can remind them of the poor condition of the sidewalk and ask when we might see action there.

Hometown Heroes

If we were to list our heroes today in this community where
we work and play,

We'd fill many pages of a book because we'd find them in
every nook.

Our ancestors came and tilled the land, built bridges so
strong and railways by hand.

Unending work they had to endure; so much was done to
make us secure.

Brave souls went to war to save us all. Freedom is ours
because they answered the call.

Many paid the price and some wars did cease; surely one
day there will be eternal peace.

Police, firemen and doctors on whom we depend, are joined
by nurses who try to mend.

Teachers and volunteers are also there; compassion is shown
by all who care.

The friendly folk we daily greet are in the store and on the
street.

They're in the churches where we pray. They're in the park
where children play.

Hometown heroes are *the salt of the earth*. Try to remember
how much they are worth.

They are the special volunteers. We've known many down
through the years.

By Helen Burns

Helen won first prize in the Home Craft Division of the 2006 Navan Fair for this poem. It is reprinted with the kind permission of the author and the Cumberland Township Historical Society.

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