

The Caboose

Newsletter of the Cumberland Township Historical Society
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NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 6, at 7:00 p.m., at the Cumberland Public Library on Tenth Line Road. The guest speaker will be Sharon Wright, an active member of the committee that is preparing a book to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Trinity Anglican Church in Bearbrook (1901-2001). This will be a public lecture, and everyone is welcome!

FEATURE ARTICLE

The Heyday of Steam Navigation on the Ottawa River

by Bob Serré

When Alexander Muir, of Aberdeen (Scotland), visited his sister Margaret (Mrs. Alexander Findlay) in Cumberland Township in 1845, he travelled from Montreal to Lachine by stage, and boarded a steamer that took him to Carillon on the Ottawa River, where another stage was used to reach Grenville above the Long Sault rapids; at Grenville another steamer was waiting to take the passengers to Bytown; Muir landed at Dunning's Wharf below Buckingham, taking a canoe to reach Cumberland on the opposite shore of the river. When his stay in Cumberland came to an end, he made his way back to Dunning's Wharf, and boarded the steam boat *Porcupine* to reach his destination, Bytown.

Early settlers in Cumberland Township could well remember the days when canoes were the principal means of travel. The Montreal canoe or "canot du maître," measuring over 36 feet in length with a crew of sixteen men, had for many years been used in the fur trade, carrying up to three tons of goods and supplies from Lachine on the island of Montreal, up the mighty Ottawa River and through more than thirty portages, to Georgian Bay on Lake Huron.

Not long after Philemon Wright founded Hull in 1800, he and Thomas Mears of Hawkesbury began operating a Durham boat service between the two settlements. Durham boats were flat-bottomed, long and narrow, and they had a rounded bow and a square stern. Unlike canoes, they were not designed for portages, but were meant to carry goods, supplies and people over shorter distances.

The first steamer ever to reach Hull was built in Hawkesbury. Construction began late in 1822, and the *Union of the Ottawa*, as she was called, was put into service in the summer of 1823. Thomas

Mears, Philemon Wright and others were involved in this bold new effort to move supplies and people up and down the river more quickly and more efficiently.

Between 1819 and 1834, major canal works were completed on the Ottawa and Rideau rivers, as a military strategy, and the resulting improvements to river navigation opened up large tracts of land to timbering operations and to settlement.

Millions of trees were felled, and thousands of immigrants settled in the Valley. It was the heyday of steam navigation on the Ottawa, with ever more powerful and luxurious steamboats plying ever busier waterways. Many companies launched numerous steamers and barges, and built warehouses and other facilities. There were monopolies at times, and fierce competition at other times, with mergers and reorganizing now and then.

The opening of enlarged canals on the St. Lawrence River in the 1840s and the construction of railway lines into Ottawa took their toll on steam navigation on the Ottawa River. As the century wore on, the initial paddleboats were replaced by steamboats with screw propellers, and steamers survived well into the 20th century.

It is generally agreed that the largest steamboat ever to ply the Ottawa was the *Peerless*. As the freight trade dwindled, tourist travel remained a popular activity, and luxurious steamers like the *Peerless* were veritable floating palaces. After being damaged by fire in 1885, the *Peerless* was rebuilt and put back into service. She was renamed the *Empress*, and continued to operate on the Ottawa-Grenville run. It is interesting to note that the bell of the *Empress* found its way into the belfry of St. Andrew's United Church in Cumberland in 1946.

Readers who would like to know more about the days of steam navigation on the Ottawa River will find much of interest in a beautifully illustrated book entitled *A Foregone Fleet*, published in 1982 in Cobalt, Ontario (a copy can be found at the Ottawa Public Library).

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

It's official! Our Society has published a book entitled *Navan of Yesteryear*. This 46-page book describes Navan's present and past buildings and landmarks, and lists the names of people connected with them, going back in some cases to the 1860s. This is the first book published by our Society. It has a table of contents, 64 descriptions of buildings and landmarks, a centre-fold map, an index, and an illustrated cover showing the Navan Station. Copies may be purchased (\$10.00 each) directly from the author, Verna Cotton (tel. 835-2490). Mail orders should be addressed to Bob Serré, 1057 Riviera Drive, Ottawa ON K1K 0N7 (tel. (613) 749-0607) with a cheque for \$12.00 payable to **CTHS** to cover postage and handling.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The following quotation is taken from an article entitled "Free Lunch in Cyberspace: Who Pays?," published in *Ottawa Branch News*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2000, pages 17 to 21.

"(...) the Internet is not a source of information; the information originated someplace else. You still need to go behind the Internet to verify the information. You still need to consult the source."

OLD OBITUARIES

The following obituary was published in the issue of *The Canada Christian Advocate* dated November 2, 1859, on page 2 [Source: D.A. McKenzie, *Death Notices from The Canada Christian Advocate 1858-1872*, 1992]

O'TOOL, Thomas, of Cumberland, who had brought grain to the New Edinburgh Grist Mills last Wednesday, was drawn into the machinery when some of his clothes caught. He died the same evening.

BACK IN SEPTEMBER 1900

One hundred years ago, on September 5th, 1900 to be precise, the following item on Cumberland appeared on page 2 of *The Ottawa Evening Journal* [microfilm version held at the Ottawa Public Library].

CUMBERLAND

Sept. 1.—The last two weeks have been perfect harvest weather and a great number of farmers have got their grain saved.

A troop representing the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Co. visited our town last week and attracted a large crowd every night with their performance.

Mr. John Cameron succeeded in winning the silver cup in the bicycle race. The trophy is a very pretty cup and one of which the winner may be proud.

Miss Nellie Robb is the guest of Miss E. B. McCallum.

Mr. Geo. D. McCallum, H. D. Cameron, E. Dunning and W. H. Russell have gone off for a couple of weeks camping. Everybody wishes them a very enjoyable time.

Morgan O'Brien a boy of this place, met with a serious accident while working in Kelley's mill at Buckingham. The little fellow was pulling a car when his foot got caught and the wheels passed over it crushing it badly.

Mr. A. N. Dunning has returned home from Guardipen's Island, where he was spending a few days for his health.

WEB MASTER'S CORNER

Since the Web site was launched on April 21, 1999, the number of hits has risen steadily. The current total is 1617 hits less 455 for the Web master = 1162 visitors. Since last February, 687 more people have visited our page. The statistics on the number of visitors to our site varies between 1 and 16 a day. There is a steady stream of people learning about the existence and goals of our Society. The Web site is being upgraded continuously with new information about activities and events. The Web master has been adding graphics, e.g. buttons and a banner, as well as some new links and a new Web page on our latest publication (*Navan of Yesteryear*). Any ideas, suggestions or requests for Web links should be sent directly to the Web master.

Jean-François Beaulieu
August 12, 2000

VIEUX REGISTRES

L'abbé François Michel a desservi la Mission de Cumberland de 1855 à 1858. Voici un extrait du registre de cette mission catholique [bobine de microfilm FHC-474 conservée au Family History Centre (Mormons) à Ottawa].

« Le vingt sept du mois de juin de l'an mil huit cent cinquante sept nous soussigné prêtre avons baptisé Sarah Capron âgée de vingt six ans un mois et quatre jours, enfant légitime de Nathan Capron et de Sarah Bears parrain Amable Foubert marraine Pauline Maurin
Michel prêtre »

A noter que, le 31 décembre 1856, Sarah Capron avait épousé Amable Foubert, petit-fils d'Amable Foubert et de Matilda Dunning, établis à Cumberland vers 1807.

VISAGES DU PASSÉ

Luc Major est né en 1815 à Saint-Martin de l'île Jésus au nord de Montréal. Il était le fils de Michel Major et de Charlotte Hotte. Michel Major était l'arrière-petit-fils d'Étienne Boutron dit Major, originaire de la Franche-Comté en France, qui avait épousé Angélique Proteau à Québec en 1706.

Luc Major avait 27 ans lorsqu'il a épousé Emilie Masson, fille de François Masson et de Françoise Poirier dit Desloges, à Bytown, le 7 novembre 1842.

Dans le beau livre du 125^e anniversaire de la Paroisse Saint-Joseph d'Orléans (1860-1985), on apprend que Luc Major a travaillé à la construction de la cathédrale à Bytown, et qu'en 1856, il a acheté le lot 37 de la concession 1 dans le canton de Cumberland; Luc y avait une taverne, du côté sud du chemin de Montréal. Ce secteur nord-ouest du canton de Cumberland s'appelait St. Leonard's Ward, et par la suite on l'a appelé le rang Saint-Joseph de la paroisse d'Orléans.

Les données du recensement de 1861 indiquent que Luc et Emilie ont eu plusieurs enfants : Joseph est né dans le Bas-Canada vers 1845, et six autres enfants sont nés dans le Haut-Canada : Alfred, François, Arthur, Dora, Sylvanie et Jacques. Luc Major est mort à l'âge de 44 ans à peine le 27 mars 1859.

Sylvanie, l'avant-dernier des enfants de Luc et d'Émilie, a ouvert une épicerie à Orléans vers 1879. Il a épousé Corinne Lebel à Ottawa le 25 janvier 1883. Comme l'explique Georgette Lamoureux dans le tome IV de son *Histoire d'Ottawa*, publié en 1984, Sylvanie J. Major a déménagé son commerce dans la Basse-Ville d'Ottawa vers 1890, d'abord à l'angle des rues Murray et Dalhousie, puis au 18 de la rue York.

S.J. Major est décédé, comme son père, à l'âge de 44 ans; il a été enterré dans le cimetière Notre-Dame à Ottawa en juin 1903. Puisque son fils unique était alors adolescent, c'est son épouse Corinne qui a continué de faire prospérer le commerce jusqu'à ce que son fils puisse en assumer la direction. Mme S.J. Major a été l'une des rares femmes d'affaires du Canada à cette époque où les possibilités de carrière étaient très limitées pour les femmes, et elle y a réussi fort bien.

Le superbe mausolée Major est bien visible, dans le cimetière Notre-Dame, pour les gens qui se promènent le long du chemin de Montréal, près de l'angle du boulevard Saint-Laurent, à Ottawa.

Robert Serré