

The Caboose

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NEXT MEETING

Our annual meeting will be held in the new Public Library at 1599 Tenth Line Road, with its "local history room," which is our new home. The meeting will take place between 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, May 8th. Come along and bring a friend. New members are always welcome!

LAST MEETING

For our last meeting, we visited the City of Ottawa Archives at the new location on Sussex Drive in Ottawa. Serge Barbe was there on behalf of the Archives, at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday March 10th, to greet 15 of us and explain the rich collection of documents kept in Whitton Hall on the second floor. In addition to the archives of the city, there are genealogical collections of three societies, including the Ottawa Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society, as well as holdings on railroad history. Included in the visit was a tour of the vault, where documents are stored under controlled conditions. Our host answered many questions and made our two-hour visit most stimulating.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Jos Montferrand – the Man and the Legend by Bob Serré

Back in the days of the pioneers, men in the Township of Cumberland found work in the lumber camps of the Ottawa Valley. Right across the river, in the Township of Buckingham, Baxter Bowman set up a sawmill as early as 1825, less than a year after his arrival. Eventually he would own four sawmills, the ancestors of the MacLaren business complex.

For a number of years, Baxter Bowman had a raftsmen working for him by the name of Jos Montferrand, who was to become a legendary figure renowned for his physical strength, his great agility and his jovial disposition.

Joseph Montferrand was born in Montreal in October 1802. His grandfather, François Favre dit Montferrand, a native of Gascony in southwestern France, had established himself in Canada, where he married Marie-Anne Éthier in 1760. François and Marie-Anne had a son named François-Joseph who married Marie-Louise Couvret, in Montreal, in 1802. Joseph and Marie-Louise were the parents of our hero.

Jos Montferrand was only six years old when his father died. He later became a voyageur, a carter and a shantyman, living a free and adventurous life in the bush for a good many years.

There was no shortage of strong, tough men in the Ottawa Valley in those days. With few exceptions, pioneers and lumbermen alike had to endure physical hardships that stretched their endurance to the limit. Jos Montferrand lived through the worst years of intolerance and violence between Catholics and Protestants, French *Canadiens* and Irish *Shiners*, in the Valley's history. At a time when five and a half feet was a decent height for a man, Jos measured close to six feet four inches. His long arms were fearful weapons, but his adversaries dreaded his lower limbs most of all, for he had learned the art of the savate (French boxing or kickboxing), and his legs could whip out with deadly force.

Three feats in particular have helped build up the legend of Jos Montferrand. First, there is the story of how he routed a large group of Irish bullies off the bridge between Hull and Bytown, swinging one of them by the ankles, tossing others over the sides, tearing his way through to the other shore. Second, he is said to have left his "calling card" in a Valley tavern by making a startling flip, head over heels, leaving the imprint of the sole of his lumberjack boot on the ceiling. Third, he is reputed to have raised his plow at arm's length with one hand. Closer to home, local tradition has it that he once emptied a dance hall in Buckingham when some Irish lads decided to prevent his compatriots from enjoying the festivities.

Young Montferrand must indeed have been an impressive sight, but years of roughing it in the bush and countless physical encounters with assorted toughs and adversaries and strong men took their toll, and Jos left the Valley for good in the early 1840s, suffering from rheumatism. In 1852, he married Marie-Anne Trépanier. When Marie-Anne died, he married Esther Bertrand. That was in March 1864, in Montreal. Jos died a few months later, in October 1864, before reaching his 62nd birthday. Esther gave birth to their son shortly afterwards.

The legend grew bigger than life with the passing years. André-Napoléon Montpetit published a book in 1884 about Quebec's strong men. Benjamin Sulte wrote eloquently about the life of Jos Montferrand in 1899. Wilfrid Laurier himself, in his student days, wrote a biography of him. Bernie Bedore wrote *Tall Tales of Joe Mufferaw* from an Upper Ottawa Valley perspective. La Bolduc and Gilles Vigneault sang about his exploits, as did Stompin' Tom Connors.

Today the legend lives on as a powerful symbol of a turbulent past, glorifying the days when physical strength ruled supreme in the Ottawa Valley.

FEATURE OBITUARY

Readers are invited to send in obituaries that reflect the life and times of Cumberland Township pioneers. Researchers can be fussy about where their information comes from, so please indicate the source of the obituary. The following obituary was found in the microfilm version of The Evening Journal for Thursday, January 8, 1891.

CUMBERLAND

The funeral of the late Mr. Joseph McClelland took place yesterday from the residence of his son-in-law, J. Stevenson, to Dale's cemetery. Nearly all the relatives were present. Mr. McClelland was the oldest pioneer settler of Cumberland and was 91 years old. He was married over sixty years ago, and lived here for more than fifty years. He leaves behind him a loving widow, two sons who live in Verdon, Man., one son and daughter at Duluth, Min., and two daughters in Cumberland, beside grandchildren and great grandchildren. His demise was sudden and unexpected, but to depart and to be with Christ was far better.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

The first issue of volume eleven of *The Caboose* was sent to 20 members back in July 1998. This month's issue, the sixth and last for 1998-99, is being sent to 36 members. Our newsletter has also been sent to some 20 individuals, societies and libraries on a courtesy or exchange basis.

The ISSN number displayed under the title of each issue of our Society's newsletter is the International Standard Serial Number that identifies *The Caboose* uniquely and permanently for researchers and libraries throughout the world. The ISSN makes it possible for large and small periodicals to be part of an international network; the National Library of Canada acts as our country's coordinator.

BY THE WAY...

Well, it's not totally prepared, but our "Local History Room" will be open during regular library hours by the time you read this message. I am meeting with library staff to familiarize them with the basics in what kinds of holdings we have, and hope to have an opportunity to do the same with each of you. Come on in and browse.. It's your room too.

We sincerely hope that once people realize what we are missing in the collection, they (this means you too) will come forward and offer what they have "tucked away" to make our collection one we can be even more proud of. I have had a great learning experience of some of the things we do have, as a result of some of the re-filing I have done. We still have a drawer of items to sort and file.

I would really like to have volunteers in the room occasionally. Please think about when you could make yourself available (any and all offers are welcome); just mark the calendar in the room, or call me to make your commitment. Thank you.

We had great exposure at the Gene-O-Rama; deepest thanks to Diane Young for dedicating the day to our cause.

Jean-François Beaulieu has been hard at work with both the preparation for the Cumberland Village walk (and all the other villages) and the creation of a beautiful Web site about our Historical Society and village histories.

There are so many thank you notes... Bob Serré continues to put out a quality "Caboose." Joan Lancaster and Verna Cotton are Cumberland and Navan historians who I am sure will continue helping us to fill in many blanks in the collection, not to mention the time they have spent on clippings and room preparation (a very pleasant surprise has been the recent loan of Annie Barnett's scrapbooks by her daughter Joan Lancaster). Greta Scharfe-Hill has spent hours clipping from duplicate back issues

of the Courier and Communiqué. I am sure I have run way over the space set aside for me so if I have not mentioned you by name--know all assistance is appreciated... What a team!!!

Mark May 8, 1999 at 1:30 p.m. on your calendar for our annual meeting at the Library.

Ruth Parsons, President

QUOI DE NEUF?

La collection de la Société historique du canton de Cumberland se trouve maintenant dans la salle d'histoire locale de la nouvelle Bibliothèque publique du canton de Cumberland, au 1599 du chemin Tenth Line. La cérémonie d'ouverture officielle a eu lieu vendredi 9 avril, en soirée.

VISAGES DU PASSÉ

François Michel est né en France le 28 septembre 1828. Il était le fils de Jean-Jacques Michel et de Marguerite Dou. Il a complété ses études en France et il a été ordonné prêtre à Ottawa par Mgr Guigues en juin 1854.

L'abbé Michel avait 25 ans lorsqu'il a commencé son ministère comme prêtre séculier. Dès 1854, il a été vicaire du curé John Brady, de la paroisse Saint-Grégoire-de-Naziance à Buckingham. Cette paroisse desservait les missions de Thurso (Lochaber) et de Cumberland.

À l'été de 1855, Mgr Guigues a chargé l'abbé Michel d'établir à Cumberland les bases d'une paroisse pour les catholiques de la région. Dans son *Histoire de la province ecclésiastique d'Ottawa* publiée en 1897, Alexis de Barbezieux a raconté qu'un monsieur Foubert avait offert «un terrain de quatre arpents dans le village de Cumberland pour la construction d'un presbytère et d'une chapelle». Pendant près d'un an, le Père Michel a demeuré chez les Foubert, le temps de faire construire son presbytère.

À cette époque, il y avait déjà une chapelle située à cinq kilomètres environ au sud du village de Cumberland, mais beaucoup de gens la trouvaient trop éloignée. En 1859, les gens de Clarence Creek ont terminé la construction de leur chapelle, et c'est l'abbé Michel qui est allé la bénir.

Le Père Michel avait un immense territoire à parcourir. Il se rendait à L'Ange-Gardien et à Thurso du côté nord de la rivière et, du côté sud, à Clarence Creek, à Saint-Joseph d'Orléans et même à Rivière-au-Castor, dans le canton de Russell; c'est lui qui a décidé de nommer ce petit village Embrun, le nom d'une commune de son pays d'origine, la France.

En 1858, l'abbé Michel a été nommé curé à Aylmer. Il a été remplacé à Cumberland par l'abbé Louis Alméras, qui arrivait de Curran. Le Père Michel a été curé d'Aylmer jusqu'en 1873. Il est alors retourné à Buckingham, où il avait été vicaire à compter de 1854; il a été curé de la paroisse Saint-Grégoire-de-Naziance à Buckingham jusqu'en 1901.

Cette année-là, le Père Michel s'est retiré à l'hospice Saint-Charles d'Ottawa. Il a été nommé chanoine de la cathédrale d'Ottawa. Il est mort en 1910, âgé de plus de 80 ans. Il avait été missionnaire puis curé pendant plus de 45 ans, laissant le souvenir d'un prêtre dévoué et généreux.

Robert Serré