

The Caboose

Newsletter of the Cumberland Township Historical Society
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LAST MEETING

Some 22 participants attended our last meeting on September 6 at the Cumberland Public Library on Tenth Line Road. The speaker was Sharon Wright, who described the work of the committee (of which she is a member) that is preparing a book to mark the 100th anniversary of the present Trinity Anglican Church in Bearbrook (1901-2001). The book will be published in December of this year, and copies can be ordered directly from Sharon at 835-4004.

NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 1, at 7:00 p.m., at the Cumberland Public Library on Tenth Line Road. The guest speaker will be Jean-François Beaulieu, a Director of our Society, who will describe the Wilson mills and wharves dating back to the 1860s. The talk will include a slide presentation. Come along and bring a friend!

FEATURE ARTICLE

The 1832 Cholera Epidemic in the Lower Ottawa Valley

by Bob Serré

When ships from the British Isles began making their way up the St. Lawrence River in the spring of 1832, they brought many immigrants to a promising new land. They also brought fresh news about a disturbing scourge that had reached Great Britain the previous year, known as the cholera.

The mysterious disease had appeared in India, and after 1817 it had spread through Asia and Russia into Western Europe. Asiatic Cholera was a terrible disease; within a few hours it inflicted a gruesome death on roughly half of its victims. Besides, there was no agreement on what caused it.

And so people in Canada saw it coming. They talked about it, and argued about what should be done. Yet, little was done in preparation against the dreaded cholera, for medical knowledge was still primitive at best, and public health measures were practically non-existent. Fears reached a high pitch that spring: people expected a horrible disease to arrive with the ships, and it did.

Within days of each other, Quebec City and Montreal experienced an epidemic of explosive proportions as the second week of June rolled in. The daily death toll in Quebec City peaked at more than 100 on June 15; in Montreal, it peaked at 149 four days later. Panic brought almost everything to a standstill. Boatmen fled from the rivers, and people in the cities took refuge in the countryside, spreading the disease to every village and settlement.

In Upper Canada, Prescott was hit on June 16. The cholera had no set pattern: it seemed to strike its victims at random. The disease took hold in Bytown around June 20th. A Board of Health was established there; an isolation hospital was built to treat the victims, and a special wharf, located on the east side of the canal locks, was erected to divert the sick to the hospital.

The Catholic parish registers of the Lower Ottawa Valley provide a striking picture of the effects of the epidemic. The register of Saint-Michel parish in Vaudreuil records 13 deaths for May-June 1832 (6 for the same months in 1831), and then 22 deaths in July, 22 in August, and 16 in September (5 for the rest of the year). The register of Sainte-Madeleine parish in Rigaud shows 15 deaths for May-June 1832 (and the same number for May-June 1831), but then the epidemic reached explosive proportions with 57 deaths in July of 1832, 57 in August, 18 in September, and then 7 in October and 7 in November.

A poignant indication of the ruthlessness of the cholera is the fact that in August of 1832, contrary to established custom, 30 of the 57 people whose death was recorded in the Rigaud register were buried the day they died. The register of the parish of Notre-Dame de Bonsecours in Montebello contains an interesting entry for July 15th, recording the "interment of Daniel O'Hara, deceased on board the steamer Shannon on the Ottawa River on the 27th of the previous month of a contagious disease and buried the same day in the Catholic cemetery at Grenville aged approximately 30" (translated from French). Surprisingly, few deaths were recorded in the Montebello register in the spring and summer of 1832, but at the end of the year, Father Michael Power, then parish priest (and later the first bishop of the Catholic diocese of Toronto), wrote: "During the month of November, 1832, I pronounced the prayers of the Church on the graves of many people who died at the time of the cholera and were buried in the Grenville cemetery without my being able to discover either their names or their ages. Witnesses Louis Forgette and Michel Baudria were unable to sign" (also translated from French).

No comparable data have come down to us for Cumberland Township, but there as elsewhere, settlers were undoubtedly visited by the dreaded cholera during that fateful summer of 1832. Readers who would like to know more about the cholera epidemic will find much of interest in Geoffrey Bilson's 1980 book entitled "A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Canada," and in Linda A. Tresham's 14-page account entitled "Bytown and the Cholera Epidemic of 1832." Both books may be found at the Ottawa Public Library.

Next Feature Article: **Some Early Recycling Activities: 1930 to 1950**, by Elizabeth Alexander

GUEST ARTICLE

Louis Riel's Mysterious Stopover in Cumberland Village by Elizabeth Alexander

Hattie Dunning gave the following account of Louis Riel in her story of the early days in Cumberland, which she wrote in 1947:

"Louis Riel was once brought into the Dunning house when he was being taken through the place. He had dinner there; Mother said they were warned to keep away from the dining room and not let on they knew he was there. This was done and no

one knew he was in the place until quite a while after the constables had left with their prisoner."

Where was Louis Riel being taken? When did he pass through Cumberland, during his relatively short life (1844 to 1885)?

I have read Maggie Siggins's book *Riel: A Life of Revolution* published by Harper Collins in 1994 - all 507 pages - in an attempt to find the answers.

He did not stop in Cumberland in 1876 when he was on his way to a mental hospital in Montreal. On that occasion he was brought north from the Lake Champlain region of upper New York State. They crossed the ice on the St. Lawrence River from St. Lambert, Quebec to Montreal, where he was secretly committed to hospital under the name "Mr. David."

It could have been in the fall of 1873 that he passed through Cumberland. Riel had been elected to the House of Commons in a by-election called in Provencher, Manitoba. He came East, but then was afraid to take his seat because of the \$5,000 reward, still being offered for his capture, by his enemies in Ontario. This reward had been posted following the Red River Rebellion in 1870, and the execution of Thomas Scott, from Ontario, by the "provisional government" in Manitoba.

Riel and two friends stayed overnight, in trepidation, in Hull, Quebec (see page 224 of Siggins's very detailed biography). The next day they set off for the tranquil Retreat of the Oblate Fathers in Plattsburg, N. Y. Riel was emotionally and physically exhausted. Since the road through Cumberland had been built in 1850, it seems logical to me that they would pass this way on their secretive trip. In his distraught state, he could have appeared to the Dunning family to be a prisoner of the "constables" accompanying him, rather than a sick man being helped by friends to escape from a perilous situation.

What do you think of my solution to the case of the mysterious appearance of Louis Riel in Cumberland?

EARLY PIONEERS

The following profile of an early Cumberland pioneer was written by Bob Serré, but others, for example descendants of early settlers, may wish to send in their own contributions for future issues of *The Caboose*.

John Baikie was first assessed for lot 24, concession 1, in Cumberland Township in 1847, but he had been in the Township for some years before that. He was born in Orkney, Scotland, and was already established in Cumberland Township in 1838. In July of that year, he sent James Cummings of Kendall, New York, a letter in which he wrote: "... I have commenced my fourth year with Mr. Petrie and I like the country very well..." On March 29, 1839, John Baikie married Marion Wilson; Reverend John Cruickshank of Bytown officiated. Marion, born in Scotland around 1819, was the eldest daughter of Allan Wilson, a merchant. Her brothers John and Alexander had also settled in Cumberland Township; John D. Wilson became Township Clerk, and Alexander Wilson was a farmer.

When the Municipal Act was implemented in 1850, John "Beckie" was appointed fence viewer for Division 1, Wards 1-2, later called St. Leonard's Ward. John Baikie was ordained an elder of the Auld Kirk in Cumberland on July 7, 1856. An 1862 by-law appointed John "Backie" pathmaster in St. Leonard's Ward. John and Marion had at least nine children: George, Marion, Margaret, Jane, Ann, John, William, Jennie and Isabella. John died at Cumberland on April 18, 1893, aged 87. Marion died in her 90th year at Cumberland on February 12, 1908.

VIEUX JOURNAUX

Un journal intitulé *Le Progrès* a été publié à Ottawa de mai à décembre 1858. Dans le numéro du 27 juillet 1858 se trouve une lettre adressée au rédacteur et signée Un Canadien errant qui mentionne Cumberland : « ... Vous parlerai-je de Gloucester et de Cumberland [possédant] un grand nombre de catholiques canadiens et une charmante église de campagne, qui rappelle si bien nos vieilles paroisses du Bas-Canada... ». [Plusieurs numéros de ce journal sont conservés sur microfilm dans une salle de consultation au rez-de-chaussée de la Bibliothèque Morisset de l'Université d'Ottawa sous la cote AP21.P69.]

UNE PAGE D'HISTOIRE

Dès 1816, les pionniers catholiques des cantons de Cumberland et de Buckingham ont été visités par l'abbé Jean-Baptiste Roupe, missionnaire sulpicien dont la résidence se trouvait à Montebello. Lorsque la mission de Buckingham est elle-même devenue la paroisse Saint-Grégoire-de-Naziance en 1840, son curé, l'abbé John Brady, prêtre séculier, a été chargé de la mission de Cumberland. C'est ainsi qu'une chapelle a été construite dans le canton de Cumberland en 1848. Dans son *Histoire des comtés unis de Prescott et de Russell*, Lucien Brault explique que cette chapelle était située à trois milles au sud du village, sur la terre d'un nommé Robitaille.

En 1855, l'abbé François-Joseph Michel, vicaire à Buckingham, a été envoyé à Cumberland par Monseigneur Guigues pour organiser les catholiques de la région. D'après l'*Histoire de la province ecclésiastique d'Ottawa*, publiée en 1897, l'abbé Michel a demeuré pendant un an chez les Foubert dans le village de Cumberland. Monsieur Foubert avait offert un terrain de quatre acres dans le village pour un cimetière, une église et un presbytère.

L'abbé Michel a commencé par faire construire un presbytère. Le territoire qu'il devait parcourir comprenait Saint-Joseph (Orléans), Le Castor (Embrun) et Clarence (Creek). L'abbé Michel a été remplacé en 1858 par l'abbé Louis Alméras et, en 1859, par l'abbé Gustave Ebrard. En 1861, c'est l'abbé Boucher qui a été nommé curé de Cumberland. Ses trois prédécesseurs étaient tous Français. Onésime Boucher est né à Lotbinière, sur la rive sud du Saint-Laurent, en 1833. Il a été ordonné prêtre séculier à Ottawa en juin 1860, et il est arrivé à Foubertville en mars 1861. Il a commencé par remettre le presbytère à neuf, puis il a fait construire dans le village une église mesurant 75 pieds sur 36. D'après l'histoire du diocèse d'Ottawa qui a été publiée en 1949, cette église a été bénite par l'Évêque le 15 octobre 1862 sous le titre de Saint-Antoine-de-Padoue.

Malheureusement, cette église, qui se trouvait presque directement en face du restaurant *Héritage* actuel juste à l'est du chemin Dunning, a été détruite par un incendie vers 1866. Toutefois, l'abbé Boucher a réussi à sauver des flammes le registre paroissial, qu'il a apporté avec lui pour aller poursuivre son ministère à Clarence Creek comme curé de la paroisse Sainte-Félicité.

Au 20^e siècle, l'Église des mormons a fait microfilmer les registres paroissiaux du Québec et de l'Est de l'Ontario. Le registre de la mission de Cumberland est donc conservé sur microfilm [bobine FHC-474] au Family History Centre, au 1017 de la promenade Prince of Wales à Ottawa.

L'abbé Michel, né en France en 1828, est décédé à Ottawa en 1910. L'abbé Boucher, lui, avait à peine 56 ans lorsqu'il est mort, en 1890, dans le monastère chartreux de Parkminster, en Angleterre, où il s'était retiré en 1885 après vingt-cinq ans de ministère à Cumberland, à Clarence Creek, à Fournier et à Lefaiivre.

Robert Serré