



THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE GATINEAU LA SOCIÉTÉ HISTORIQUE DE LA GATINEAU

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Newsletter

No. 99-2: April - May 1999

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." - George Santayana

Coming Events

Monday, April 19

Welcome Spring with an illustrated talk by

Eileen Woodhead, Kemptville
on

"EARLY CANADIAN GARDENING"

Copies of Mrs. Woodhead's book of the same title will be available for sale at the meeting (\$45).

Monday, May 17

Annual Dinner Meeting
Dunnderosa Golf Club
Notch Road, Old Chelsea

6:00 p.m.
ROAST BEEF BUFFET
\$20 / person

Speaker: **Russ Jackson**
"EARLY BURNETT"

Those wishing to attend **MUST reserve in advance**, by **Friday, May 14**. Please call our Secretary, Eileen Castleman, at 827-4432.

MEMBERSHIP EXPIRY WARNING

If the expiry date on your mailing label for this newsletter reads **98/12/31** or **1998/12**, your membership in the Historical Society has **expired**. This will be the **last Newsletter** that you receive (and you will not receive this year's *Up the Gatineau!*), unless you renew your membership by sending a cheque for \$15 (one year) or \$25 (two years) to the address on our masthead.

INQUIRIES

- Shirley Beaton of Iroquois Falls, Ontario, is searching for information on her great-grandfather, **Robert Purdy**, born 1829-1830 in Ireland, married **Jane Bigelow** in St. Mungo's Church, Cushing, Québec in 1850, buried at The Gore Cemetery near Thurso, Québec. Also Robert's brother, **Henry Purdy**, and sister, **Nancy Purdy**, who married **James Campbell**, Hawkesbury, 1862. (Shirley Beaton, R.R.#1, Black River Rd., Iroquois Falls, ON P0K 1G0).

- Doug Ryan, a local member, would like information on Mr. **Blanchet** of Meech Lake (after whom Blanchet Beach is named), in particular his rumoured interest in the planting of walnut trees at Meech Lake in the 1930s or 1940s (call Doug Ryan at 828-7875).

BOOK REVIEW

Mary Soderstrom, *The Words on the Wall: Robert Nelson and the Rebellion of 1937* (Oberon Press)
(reviewed by Gunda Lambton)

Fictional biographies, combining painstaking research with lively personal information, make absorbing reading. The English participation in the 1837 rebellion in Lower Canada is often ignored by the Quebec press in favour of figureheads such as Louis-Joseph Papineau. Not so this time. A French translation entitled *Robert Nelson, le médecin rebelle* was published by Éditions L'Hexagone simultaneously with the English version. Both books are available at major local bookstores.

Our Historical Society should take an interest in this book, since the wider implications of the rebellion were felt in all parts of this region, and descendants of at least one English participant—Wilfred Scott of St. Eustache, who was imprisoned with the Nelsons in November 1837—still live in this area.

Less is known about Robert Nelson than about his brother Wolfred (later mayor of Montreal), who with seven other leaders of the rebellion volunteered for exile to Bermuda (the controversial measure over which Lord Durham resigned in 1838). Yet Robert Nelson made his mark with a U.S. publication on the cholera epidemics of the 1830s and was held in high esteem as a surgeon. The reforms that he advocated in a declaration of February 1838 we now take for granted: the secret ballot, universal suffrage, public education, trial by jury, and full citizenship rights for Indians.

Nelson was ahead of his time, and he failed in his attempt to introduce these measures. He never returned to Canada after 1838, considered too radical by the reformers of that time, even by those who, unlike L.-J. Papineau, would have given up seignery rights (one of the suggested reforms). Eventually, however, all of the reforms advocated by Robert Nelson became part of our present-day lives. We should not forget this man who valiantly proposed them at such inauspicious times, and whose life became a personal tragedy in ways well described in Mary Soderstrom's biography.

- Gunda Lambton

"When Giants Fall ..."

A letter to Society members:

I've co-authored a new book titled *When Giants Fall: The Gilmour Quest for Algonquin Pine*. I bring it to your attention because it is about the Gilmour lumber company, a significant player in Messrs Hughson and Bond's book *Hurling Down the Pine*, published by your society.

Whereas *Hurling Down the Pine* provides an excellent study of Gilmour and Company's Gatineau operations, *When Giants Fall* concentrates on the firm's extensive sawmilling business at Trenton on Lake Ontario, and logging operations in the watersheds north of there. These for many years were controlled out of Ottawa concurrently with the Gatineau operations. After Gilmour and Company was split in 1890, the Trenton branch became a completely separate entity with David Gilmour effectively in charge. In the face of dwindling pine resources in the watersheds that fed his big mill at Trenton, David embarked on a daring scheme to obtain pine from new limits in distant Algonquin Park. This entailed floating millions of feet of logs nearly 450 kilometres along three different river systems and building an ingenious system of conveyors, flumes, dams, and canals to lift them over the intervening hills.

Although the ultimately disastrous Algonquin episode is the *raison d'être* of *When Giants Fall*, the book traces the history of the Gilmour firm from its beginning in Scotland and its expansion westward from New Brunswick to Quebec and Ontario. If any Society members are particularly interested in the Gilmour story, I think they'll find our book a useful historical companion to *Hurling Down the Pine*. Randy Whiteman and I spent some ten years researching this book, with much of the material drawn from primary sources. We've tried to tell not only what happened, but to explain events in their geographical, political, and economic context. My background is in geography, Randy's in Ontario history.

I published *When Giants Fall* through my own little book company, Fox Meadow Creations. It can be ordered through any bookstore.

Sincerely,

Gary Long

[*When Giants Fall: The Gilmour Quest for Algonquin Pine*, by Gary Long and Randy Whiteman, softcover, 189 pages, retail price \$19.95. *Hurling Down the Pine*, by John W. Hughson and Courtney C.J. Bond, softcover, 130 pages, was published (third edition) by the Historical Society in 1987. It is available from the Society at a special rate of \$5.00.]

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Blue Sea Lake History

Bruce Ballantyne's story of the early settlement of the Big Island community at Blue Sea Lake (48 pages, with photographs), may be obtained from the Society at a cost of \$12 (with half of the proceeds from sales going to our Society).

To obtain copies of *Hurling Down the Pine* or *Blue Sea Lake* contact Gudula or Duncan Marshall at (819) 827-2077.

