



Victoria Historical Society Publication

NUMBER 28 SUMMER 2011

All meetings, begin at 7:30 unless otherwise noted, and are held at the James Bay New Horizons Centre.

28 April, 2011

Keepers of the Records. Archivist and author Deidre Simmons will speak about the history of the Hudson Bay Company, focussing on the Colonies of Vancouver Island and BC reflected in these records. Illustrated talk.

26 May, 2011

Historical Stories around the Saanich Inlet. Maureen Alexander, archivist and historian of the Bamberton area, has collected many stories of the people who lived in the area we know as "Saanich Inlet". An illustrated presentation. **(Our meeting this evening will start at 7 pm, to accommodate the reporting and business of our AGM.)**



Long-time VHS member and respected member of the Francophone community in British Columbia, Laurette Agnew, died in early April of this year. A short appreciation of her life appears on page 2.



HERITAGE HOUSES

I am the author of *At Home with History: the secrets of Greater Vancouver's heritage houses* (Anvil Press, 2007). The idea is that a house has a genealogy much like a person and it tells the stories that happened inside a house at a particular point in time. I'm researching a similar book about Victoria's houses.

I write a blog which features stories about the social histories of heritage homes in both cities – a sort of 'who lived in these houses and what happened inside them'. I thought it may be of interest to your members. I post once a week at www.blog.evelazarus.com and try to cover everything from research techniques for people interesting in finding out who lived in their house to heritage buildings slated for demolition and just what I hope are good stories.

Eve Lazarus
www.evelazarus.com



VHS SCHOLARSHIP

The VHS scholarship for 2010-2011 was awarded to Mrs. Kim Madsen. Here follows her letter of thanks to the Society.

Dear President of the Victoria Historical Society,

Thank you for awarding me the Victoria Historical Society Scholarship. I am very grateful for your recognition and financial support. I am currently in the first of a two year Masters of History program, studying Twentieth Century history.

My area of study is British history and I plan to write my thesis on the evacuation of children from the Channel Island of Guernsey. (Guernsey is one of four small islands located off the coast of France, in the English Channel. It was occupied by the Germans from 30 June 1940 until 9 May 1945.) This time period is of particular interest to me for several reasons. First, my grandparents, father, aunt and uncle lived on Guernsey during this time so the event has personal meaning to me. Second, I

am interested in investigating how people behaved during challenging times such as these. Third, I would like to explore the consequences that occurred as a result of evacuation and occupation. Events like these create some very interesting stories!

Your support will assist me to travel to Guernsey this summer where I plan to do research. Guernsey has an archive where I plan to spend many hours. It will also be helpful to visit the public library which houses literature about the war and recorded interviews with people who experienced WWII. I also hope to interview some adults who were children in 1940. I would like to learn more about the experiences of both those who were either evacuated or remained on the island during Occupation.

Again, thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,
Kim Madsen



LAURETTE AGNEW

Laurette Agnew, née Laplante, was born in 1917 at Ste. Monique de Nicolet, Quebec. It was a small village with just two Anglophone families. Her family was one that encouraged learning, particularly with respect to history and education. They were well aware of the advantages of bilingualism and were determined their daughter should become fluent in both official languages—not an easy task in the parochial environment of small-town Quebec in those years.

Following graduation from high school, Laurette studied at the convent of Mesdames de la Congrégation where courses were given in English and French.

Her firm grasp of English enabled her to find employment with Bell Canada in Montreal. This was 1944, a time when most corporations in Quebec were largely controlled and administered by unilingual Anglophones.

In 1974, when she arrived in British Columbia with her husband she had not foreseen that she would be able to have conversations in French. However, on the day of her arrival as she and her husband were moving in, a neighbour arrived to greet them in French. The neighbour had overheard Laurette and her husband speaking, detected a French accent,

and came over to welcome them. It was a pleasant surprise to discover her neighbour was a Francophone and to realize she could speak her native tongue in this western outpost of Canada.

Once here she devoted her time to the promotion of the French language and to the work of the French Society which had been organised in 1941 under the name of the French Canadian Club.

In 1982, Laurette started teaching French at the elderly centre in Sidney. An initial enrollment of 5 students grew to 40 during her time teaching there.

From her childhood Laurette had always had an interest in history and over the years collected a considerable body of research notes. Her first published work came when, at the age of 12, she submitted an essay to the newspaper *La Presse* and it was duly published.

She held a firm belief that a knowledge of the past was essential for an appreciation of the present, both in terms of one's own culture and that of others. The lack of history programmes at elementary schools was source of great concern to her. As a researcher with more than 60 years experience she became a valuable resource for young students seeking information for their projects.

In 1993 Laurette was invited to present a paper to the Canadian French Language Education Association (ACELF). She realized this was an ideal occasion to launch a new book. She had, over the years, accumulated and published numerous articles for a magazine published by the French Society of Victoria and these essays became *Pages of History*, published in a limited edition of 200 and no longer in print. She also co-wrote *Presence Francophonie à Victoria, CB. 1843 - 1987*. She was one of several authors associated with this work and when enthusiasm stalled it was Laurette who urged the successful completion of the book. Other titles include *James Agnew, son of William Agnew and Elizabeth Nelson*; and a book tracing the descendants of Joseph Laplante.

Laurette was a member of the Hallmark Society and archivist for Saanich Pioneer Society. She will be sadly missed, but her writings will remain as testimony to her rich and productive life.

This appreciation was distilled from an interview with Laurette which can be found at:
http://www.csfb.bc.ca/LeGrandOrdinaire/Communaut/e/expo_virtuel/lauretteag.htm

CHINESE CANADIAN HISTORY RESOURCE

On March 31st, two exciting new online resources were launched, commemorating Chinese Canadian history. These resources may be of interest to our members.

The first is a website, *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967*. Visit <http://soosee.ca/MHSO/cwp/media> (note: Chrome, Safari or Firefox recommended). This website will allow you to discover a compelling chapter of Canadian history through the experiences of Chinese Canadian women. Thirty-three new oral history interviews and over 1,000 historical photographs are brought together in a series of exhibits, activities, learning resources and a collection database.

The second is the premiere of the documentary video *The Ties That Bind: Building the CPR, Building a Place in Canada*. This video complements the existing Ties That Bind website (www.mhso.ca/tiesthatbind), and recounts the history of Chinese Canadians from the building of the railroad to the present day.

We believe that these are important parts of Canadian history, and would encourage you to feature one or both of these resources in your publications.

Thank you very much for your time, and please do not hesitate to contact us with questions, comments.

Sincerely,
Britt Braaten Curator/Manager
Multicultural History Society of Ontario



THE BEAVER¹

From the *Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 April, 1925.

The Hudson's Bay Company's steamer *Beaver*, Capt. Swanston, which arrived in our harbor some time since, is one of the most remarkable vessels in the world. Her history, if written out, would fill a book, and the many singular adventures that have transpired on her decks, make a volume more strange than the works of fiction.

The *Beaver*, we are assured is the first steam vessel that ever puffed its smoke in the air of heaven on

the Pacific Ocean, and up to the present day she retains her reputation as a pioneer by parting waters undisturbed by sea-going crafts. She scorns to traverse seas known to other vessels, and astonishes even the Indian in his canoe by her temerity and sudden appearance.

The steamer *Beaver* was built in the year 1835, for the Hudson's Bay Company, at Blackwell, England, of the best oak and in the most substantial manner. Her engines are of Bolton & Watts' make, and may be described as the old fashioned "beam engines". Although clumsy in appearance, they work well, and seldom or never get out of repair. Her wheels are placed far forward, are very small, and do not look unlike the forepaws of a land terrapin. Her poop is high out of the water, square, and slanting in toward the rudder. Her sides and timbers are unusually heavy and substantial, and everything about the old ship denotes durability and worth. Nothing for show and everything for use, seems to have been the motto of her builder. In the spring of 1836, she arrived at Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia river, having sailed around the Horn. Soon after, she steamed down the Columbia, and has never since entered that river. At that time, with the exception of a few trading posts at distant intervals along the river and coast, the whole of the North Pacific coast was an almost unknown wilderness. San Francisco did not contain more than fifty inhabitants, and Victoria had not been laid out. A few trappers and hunters were the only white men in the country.

For the last twenty years, the *Beaver* has been constantly engaged in running from port to port in the extreme north, and trading with the Indians². Her voyages extend as far north as the 59th parallel of latitude, and 13 seconds — the head of inland navigation, and the beginning of the Arctic region. She is usually absent from Victoria about seven months, leaving in April and returning in November, and deals entirely in skins and furs. The Indians are accustomed to her annual visits, can tell almost the day when to expect her, and are always prepared with their skins and furs, which they trade for blankets, clothing, hard bread, and other articles of prime necessity and ornament. She carries 30 men, 4 six pounders, and a large complement of small arms. Her decks are protected from invasion by a border netting of rope, so as to prevent the Indians from clambering up her sides, and never more than thirty are allowed to come on board at any one time, unless accompanied by their wives and children. The trading is conducted under the direction of one of the H. B. Co.'s "Chief Traders," Capt. Dodd, and is kept entirely separate from the sailing of the ship.



The discipline on board is as strict as on a man-of-war, and the greatest caution is used to prevent being taken at any time by surprise.

The *Beaver* generally, during her cruise, makes six visits with a full cargo to Fort Simpson — the extreme northern post of the Company, and just within the British line — 58 degrees, 40 minutes — making that fort her depot while absent from here. The *Otter* generally pays this port a visit to bring down these extra cargoes, soon after the arrival of the *Beaver* here.

There are many Indian curiosities aboard the *Beaver* — specimens of Indian mechanical skill and ingenuity which, to most people possess great interest, as showing the position the savage nations hold with regard to the arts.

1. This article was published in the *Victoria Gazette* in December, 1859. It was re-published on October 6, 1880, in the *North-West Tribune*, of Colfax, Washington, from which it has been copied by J. Orin Oliphant.

2. The above was first published in December, 1859. Those voyages continued until October 13, 1874, when the Hudsons Bay Company sold the steamer to Stafford, Saunders, Morton & Company, of Victoria for \$17,500. After that she was used as a freighter and towboat until Thursday night, July 26, 1888, when she ran upon the rocks at the entrance of Burrard Inlet, the harbor of Vancouver, B.C. Charles W. McCain in his *History of the S. S. Beaver*, page 30, says the old craft attracted many visitors until the swell of the steamer *Yosemite*, passing near on June 26, 1892 "caused the boiler to work loose. when with a crash it fell outward into the channel carrying with it a large portion of the hull". — Editor.



M.R. SMITH & CO.

According to the *Victoria Illustrated*,

M.R. Smith, Senior member of the firm of M.R. Smith & Co., commenced business in the bread-baking line in the year 1858, carrying on operations, with the aid of his two sons and his wife, until the present time, and has now the largest business in his line in the city, if not in the province. Two years ago, he established a steam factory, the only one of the kind in Victoria. He keeps twenty-six hands constantly employed, turning out bread, cakes, biscuits, jumbles, etc., etc. They supply the bulk of the Indian trade in pilot biscuits between here and Alaska. The factory is a large three-story and basement building on Niagara street, 25' x 84', with outbuildings and stables. The bread is all

baked in the basement. A forty horse-power engine runs the machinery on the upper floors. Smith & Co.'s bread and cakes are well and favorably known to the house-keepers of the city.

Moses Rowe Smith was born in London, Ontario in 1833. He married Sarah Anne Hamilton, also born in London, Ontario. They had three children, Selina Frances who was born in London, Ontario in 1854, Hamilton "Hammie", born in Victoria in 1867, and Garrett, born in Victoria in 1869. Moses Rowe Smith came west by 1858 and started a bakery which became the largest in Victoria, possibly in the province. He was also a partner in the Erickson claim on Williams Creek which was one of the richest placer claims in the Cariboo. M.R. was joined by his wife and daughter about 1866. There is some contradictory information that says Hammie was born in Ontario, but he always claimed that he was born in Victoria. The writer was fortunate enough to meet Hammie in 1962, and spent many hours listening to his stories of early Victoria. One of the things he told me was that his father had lost money when Macdonald & Co., bankers failed in 1864 following the robbery. Hammie was still baking excellent bread in his old wood and coal kitchen range.

Selina was an accomplished pianist who studied in Toronto and Leipzig. After her return to Victoria she taught piano and music for many years in Victoria. Neither she nor Hammie married. Selina passed away in 1938, age 83. Garrett married Emily Elizabeth Vogel in 1900 and they had one son, Garrett B. Garrett died in 1960 at age 90. He had retired in 1945. He was shown as a widower, but there is no death registered in B.C. for his wife. Garrett B. died in Casper, Wyoming where he had lived for some years. There is no evidence that the son ever married.

There is little information about Mrs. Sarah Anne Smith beyond her birth in London, Ontario and her passing in Victoria in 1913, other than we know that she was active in the family business. The Smiths are all buried in the Ross Bay cemetery, near the E.G. Prior plot.

In 1858 M.R. Smith started a small bakery on lower Johnson Street, near Waddington Alley. The next year he moved to larger premises on the north side of the 500 block of Yates Street, (near the St. Francis Hotel building now being renovated by LeFevre & Co. for condos). In 1859 there was a large fleet at Esquimalt, some 3,500 men, and he was asked to join in supplying bread and cakes to the Royal Navy. He set up four large ovens in Esquimalt and employed a number of bakers. Soon

he bought out the other operators and became the sole supplier of provisions to the navy. When, in 1883, the number of Royal Navy ships was reduced at Esquimalt he sold out his interests at Esquimalt and opened up on Fort Street. He added space there, but soon had outgrown the location. In addition to bread sales the company supplied biscuits and pilot bread to many ships and the sealing fleet.

In 1888 Smith built a biscuit bakery at 125 Niagara Street. A photograph shows Mr. Smith with his employees at the bakery in 1892. When he died in 1896 his wife and sons, all of whom had worked with him, took over the business. The business was incorporated in November 1900 as M.R. Smith & Co., Limited with Mrs. Smith and her three children as shareholders.

In 1907 there was a merger of sorts with the Capital City Bakery of George O'Kell, to form The Bakeries Limited, represented by Samuel Moscrop O'Kell, and a public offering. The Capital City Bakery was a large producer of quality breads which were supplied to the Army, principal hotels, shipping and the public. M.R. Smith & Co., Limited was supplying bread to the Navy, shipping and the public. The Smiths wanted to concentrate on biscuits and confectionery and sold their bread baking business to the new company. George O'Kell sold his business to the new company as well. The effected merger of the two companies would allow the cost of baking bread to be reduced and would provide a good return for investors. The monies provided by the investors were to build a model bakery. Sarah Anne Smith and Hamilton Smith became minor shareholders in The Bakeries Limited.

The next half dozen years were not particularly kind to the Smiths. The Niagara Street biscuit bakery was destroyed by fire in September 1909. Following this M.R. Smith & Co., Limited was wound up. Garrett Smith acted as the liquidator and then opened the Garrett Smith Candy company. Hamilton Smith incorporated the H. Smith Biscuit Co. Ltd., in January 1910, with Garrett as a partner and company secretary. In 1911 the company acquired the Okanagan Flour & Feed Company Limited of Armstrong, B.C., paying for the acquisition with shares. Hammie did not rebuild the destroyed factory in Victoria but moved to Vancouver by 1910, where at 223 Columbia, he built a new building. He told me that this was the first reinforced concrete building built in Vancouver, but I have not confirmed this independently. About the same time, or not long after the acquisition of the Armstrong mill, the Regal Biscuit Company of Calgary

purchased a controlling interest in the H. Smith Biscuit Company. Hammie told me that the Regal Biscuit Company very shortly afterwards went broke and he lost everything that he had in the biscuit company. The H. Smith Biscuit Co. Ltd., went into voluntary liquidation. Smith then entered into a short-lived partnership with William Kleine, forming the Vancouver Pickle Company. In April 1913 Mrs. Sarah Anne Smith passed away at the age of 75. By 1914 Hammie had moved to California where he lived for a dozen years working as a bookkeeper. He returned to Victoria in the mid 1920's. He worked variously as a broker, an accountant, and real estate agent. By 1932 he was either retired or out of work.

Hammie Smith went through a very tough time in the 1930's and sold the four gold medals won by M.R. Smith & Co., in the 1890's for gold value. The jeweller who bought them saved at least one - we don't know what happened to the other three. This medal is now in a local collection.

I would like to thank Chris Hanna who kindly shared his Smith files with me.

Ronald Greene



Pictured is the medal awarded by the Royal Agricultural & Industrial Society of British Columbia, which also referred to itself as the Provincial Exhibition, held annually in New Westminster at Queen's Park. Engraved on edge, "M.R. Smith & Co. 1895 Biscuits & Fancy Cakes Display and Quality"

