

Flora Macdonald Denison

Flora Macdonald Denison, the author of most of the articles in this work, and its editor, was born in a shack on the Skootamatta River, during a snowstorm in 1867. She taught school in French Settlement, now a ghost town, when she was just out of school. Later, she became a modiste for Simpson's in Toronto, and then started a dress firm, designing apparel for the elite of Rosedale. At the same time, she was a driving force in the women's movement for suffrage in the years 1890 to 1920.



Flora was a strong figure in the Theosophical Society of Toronto, and took part in séances with others of that movement, both in the city and here at Bon Echo. In addition, she had quite a strong urge to write fiction. She published "Mary Melville, the Psychic", as well as a weekly column for the Toronto World called "Under the Pines". She also organized a society to forward the poetry of Walt Whitman. *The Sunset of Bon Echo* was her publication devoted to the democratic ideals of Whitman.

Read and enjoy this reprint of her work which gives you some idea of the breadth of her concerns. She summered here on Mazinaw during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and must have been in touch with the spirit and nature of this place. Flora died in Toronto in 1921.

Stuart MacKinnon
July 2007

If you are interested in buying *The Sunset of Bon Echo*, priced at \$29.95 for the set, it is available through this newsletter, and once spring arrives, from the museum itself and at the Greystones Gift Shop at Bon Echo Park. Just send an email to <pioneer@mazinaw.on.ca> or call 613.336.2203. We can make arrangements for delivery. Obviously, if mailing is involved, there will be an extra cost.

A HOPE FOR PEACE

The dark ages of sacrifice are gone,
Or so we think;
But as each day goes by,
Some one of us must pay the price.
The timbre of our souls is tried
By Mighty Hands
Plucking at the harp-strings
Of the universe.

Oh God will ever 'gain
The tone be pure, as once it was
In Eden's Garden, long ago?
Or always, will
The pettiness of undeveloped souls
Strike the one discordant note,
That e'er would spoil
The Messiah's perfect symphony?

If, ever, should that time do come,
When all the strings
In exquisite tune shall be,
Will all that beauty be too much to bear?
And hearts burst,
In their ecstasy?

Gene Brown

Fire Towers of Our Area

John Bolton

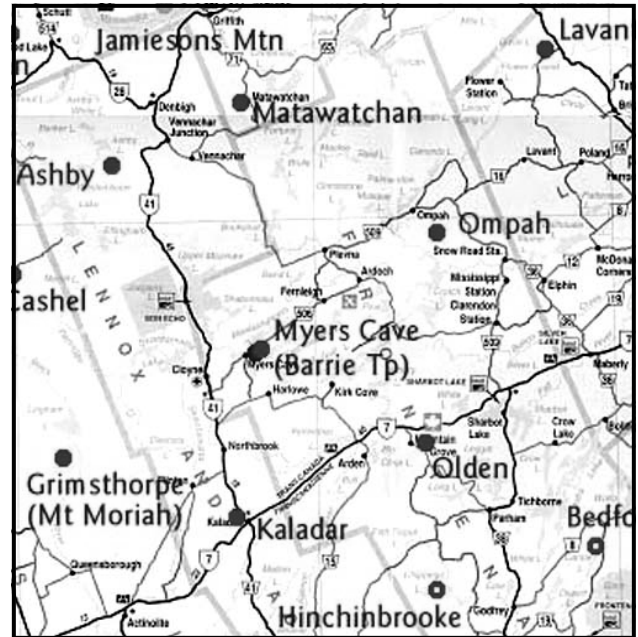
For anyone born after 1970, knowledge of fire towers is limited to Ranger Gord on the Red Green Show. However, for the most part of the preceding century, fire towers played a very important role in the minimizing of fire damage to Ontario forests and the settlements nestled in them. Bill Graham, editor of the *Madawaska Highlander*, has given permission to use parts of his story in the March/April 2006 edition featuring the history and construction of the tower system.

The “Great Fire of 1903”, which was the last major fire in the north part of Lennox and Addington and south part of Renfrew Counties, raged out of control because there were no fire warning systems in place. Fortunately there were no fatalities, but thousands of acres of timber were destroyed. An extensive fire in Northern Ontario in the Porcupine area in 1914 saw 781 square miles (500,000 acres) burned. 73 deaths were recorded, but it is believed many more perished working in the bush. Towns of Pottsville, Cochrane and Porcupine were entirely destroyed.

The first fire towers, or lookouts, were wooden structures, built around the start of the 20th century after World War I. The first ones were approximately 35 feet in height, but these were abandoned as the forest grew up around them. The building of steel towers 80 feet high was begun in the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1960s, towers erected in Ontario were in the 100 ft. range. Towers were erected by the Department of Lands and Forests. Some of the first structures were built with too light a material and swayed badly in high winds. Then they began building them with heavier material and cement block bases. The material was hauled by horses to these high elevations. When one tower made from the lighter material and not bolted down properly blew over in high winds, knowledge on better construction was gained quickly.

Tower watchman was a seasonal job, May 1st to October 1st. Most fire locations were reported by using two towers to pinpoint the spot. There would be a map of the area mounted on the table and a compass-like tool would be used to plot the

fire direction. The watchman would report the compass direction, distance and size of the fire to fire headquarters by bush phone line. These lines were supplied by Ellery Thompson of Northbrook, Sproule in Plevna, and Burgess in Denbigh.



Area Fire Tower Map, Gary Long Website

Ashby Lake Tower was located on the high hill behind the Pettifer farm (Mr. & Mrs. Bill Snider reside there now). Philip Plotz Sr. was the first towerman, followed by Les Mountenay, who was the ranger for many years at this site.

At one time there was a wooden tower on the high hill west of Meeks' Flat. This tower had a crows-nest type of lookout and it was manned by Bryce Brown.

The next watch tower south was at Skootamatta, but was a ranger cabin rather than a tower. The ranger was a “fire chaser”. A Mr. Marrisett worked this location for many years. A local story tells that when he was investigating the location of a fire he came upon a couple of local lads waiting with shovels in their hands. It was not uncommon for fires to be set as “make work” projects, but it was difficult to prove. The last years of this location, Harry Meeks was the ranger. He reports that the phone line to the cabin was simple—one line in and one line out. When this operation ceased, Harry went to work at the Ranger Camp on Mazinaw Lake.

The Grimsthorpe Tower was a log camp with the tower built on top of it. Charlie Snider (Ted's father) manned it, and was also designated a "smoke chaser". He would receive a call from another tower about smoke spotted, check the compass to verify the location, and then investigate. The compass was half the size of the table and would pinpoint the location with remarkable accuracy. Ted Snider remembers spending time with his Dad at this location when he was approximately six years old. There was a spur from the Picton/Bancroft railway line to a lumber mill in there that moved lumber to the main line. If Charlie needed supplies, he would take the gasoline car down the spur line to MacMurray's store in Gilmour. When Charlie was going home, he would walk the telephone line to Ashby Lake and be picked up there.

The Gilmour Tower, manned for many years by Harry Ellis, replaced the Grimsthorpe tower. It could be seen on a clear day from the Kaladar tower and from "Candy Mountain" along the hydro line south of Cloyne.

The Mountain Grove tower was manned for many years by Gerald Wilkes. Forest growth was hindering the view and when it was no longer in use, it was not dismantled. It could be seen from Highway #7 near the O'Reilly Lake turn.

Arnold Boomhour was the ranger in the Kaladar Tower from 1959-1968. He tells me of observing a local lad setting the blueberry hills on fire. When questioned, he told Arnold he was looking for berries; when asked why he had no berry pails, his story was he left them in the bush for when the berries did come on. Another time, he observed a neighbour setting his raccoon traps. After he left, another neighbour and his sons came along, sprung the traps and stole them.

Arnold tells me that when his son Coleman was about 2-1/2 years old, he made a sling to carry him up the ladder and he would stay with him in the tower all day. By the time Coleman was 8 years old, he would climb the tower on his own. These early years must have had a lasting impression, because today Coleman is a top forester with Hydro One. After 1968, Arnold transferred to Fish and Game, and Millard Oliver took over the tower watchman job until it was decommissioned in 1972. Mrs. Florence Oliver tells me Millard was in the tower when a vicious lightning storm came up unexpectedly and he was forced to stay in the tower because of the

danger of lightning striking the steel. Mrs. Oliver said she never was brave enough to climb the tower and when she brought her husband his lunch, he had to come down for it.



Myers Cave Tower, 1955 photo
Dept. of Lands and Forests collection
Courtesy of Gary Long

Myer's Cave Tower is located on what is known as Tower Road just east of Myer's Cave on North Frontenac Road 506. This tower was an important one in the system, overlooking Marble, Mississagagon, Kashwakamak and Gull Lakes with many resorts and camps in the area. Ezra Wheeler, Harvey Spencer, Jim Perry and Oscar Lemke manned this tower over the years. Jim was probably the best known; he would welcome guests to come up to admire the view and explain the working of the system. After a long day, Jim would walk to Myer's Cave and stay overnight with his brother George and sister-in-law Beatrice Perry. In the morning, he would go to Myer's Cave Lodge, start the kitchen wood stove for cooking the breakfast for the many tourists. Ellery Thompson of Kaladar Northern Telephone told me that the phone batteries had to be changed at this tower on a regular basis. If the fire watch was slow, Jim would call friends and visit so the batteries would run down quickly. (continued page 10)

The first phone lines were installed from Northbrook in 1910 for Lands & Forests fire protection. The line from Denbigh to Plevna was built in 1921, then lines into Griffith and Matawachen. Lines were built to serve the fire towers and overnight cabin. A line was even built from Denbigh to Dacre, an amazing feat considering electricity had not been introduced to the area. The Gatineau Hydro transmission lines were built around 1927.

Fire detection progressed from the use of the towers to aircraft. Arnold Flieler of Fernleigh, worked through the Tweed Ministry of Natural Resources offices. He had a Piper PA-11 float plane kept at his base near his home on Mississagagon Lake. The first radio was installed in his aircraft May 13, 1977 and this was used to contact Ministry offices in Tweed or Carleton Place.

In addition to fire detection, he would fly men and equipment in to fight fires. When the area was not accessible by road, he would fly them to a lake nearest the fire and they would walk from there. This was labeled "Fire Suppression". Arnold's wife, Eileen, has shared with us some of his notes regarding his work.

Fire Detection Flights

I usually start about 1:30 pm. On a good clear day, about 2:45. Hazy days take about 10 minutes longer. If a fire is spotted, it takes about 20 minutes to pinpoint the location and log the information.

Info logged: base camp number, then block number—read up, then left.

Water supply if needed is logged; often this is a beaver pond.

Some small smokes are easily missed as there is sometimes just a puff of smoke, then later another puff before you actually see any flame. When it is hazy, a beaver pond can look like smoke. Also dust from rock crushers. The info is radioed in to Tweed or Carleton Place; reception is often poor before a thunderstorm. The dumps are marked on my map, as these are set on fire, so I expect smoke near dumps. Dry storms, (lightning without rain) are a problem. Distance is hard to estimate from the air.

The fire tower account was written September 2007 by John Bolton. His notes were compiled from conversations with people who were involved with the early fire detection systems. Our thanks to all who took the time to tell their stories. □

Ed. Note—On behalf of the whole historical society, we would like to thank John for this excellent article. What a superb job; it is so full of information and human interest stories. It was well worth the wait. CM

Denbigh-Matawachen Heritage Bus Trip

Carol Morrow

Saturday, September 29 dawned sunny and warm, a perfect day for a bus tour sponsored by the Cloyne and District Historical Society. A full busload of eager passengers left the Pioneer Museum in Cloyne for a historical tour of Denbigh and area. Denbigh's earliest settlers filtered in from Leeds and Prince Edward counties, but many of these later left to be replaced by immigrants, many of them from Germany.

Jane Potyok gave a description of the Eady and Graham Lumber Mill on Louse Creek, a stop along Hwy 41 north of the Moosehorn Restaurant. Jane recalled for the group her days as a young child enjoying visits to the family operation with its huge cookhouse, large horse barn, and the actual mill itself back along the Creek. In its hey-day, the Eady and Graham mill supplied quality lumber for Gibbards Furniture. By 1957 the area was getting pretty well "lumbered out" and the mill closed shortly after that. The location is now overgrown with pines, and all that remains of this thriving operation is the cookhouse chimney.

Roy Berndt of Denbigh had his antique engine display ready when the bus arrived there. It was most interesting to see these old monsters in operating condition with a fresh coat of paint.



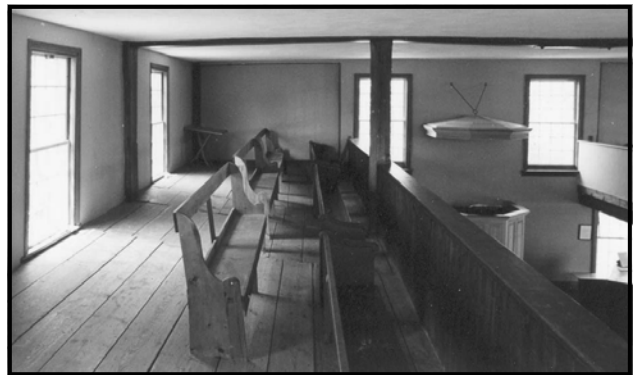
From Vennachar, the bus meandered cross-country along the rivers and around Centennial Lake to the old village of Matawatchesan. The colours were at their peak and it was a beautiful drive over the hills and winding roadway. Surprisingly there is quite respectable farmland once you leave Hwy 41, and you would never know there was so much history with interesting stories of the area. Around a bend you could often see scenic pasture-land across a valley with a farm house and buildings perched along the crest. Gary Ferguson boarded the bus along this route and gave the guided tour. He pointed out spots where once stores, churches, and schools thrived in “them thar hills”. In one place a potash business operated and in another a sawmill. Where the counties of Renfrew, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington meet, people were farmers or worked in the bush. All these services are gone now in the name of progress, centralized schools, reorganized municipal government and shifting population. Many residences still remain and the people either commute to work, have found their little niche in this wide community that was once known as Miller, or have returned to their childhood home after retirement from some career “out front”.

After lunch, Roy pointed out some of the historic landmarks of Denbigh. Thanks to our tour guides Jane Potyok, Roy Berndt and Gary Ferguson for giving of their time and knowledge. Every year, each heritage tour is better than the last. □

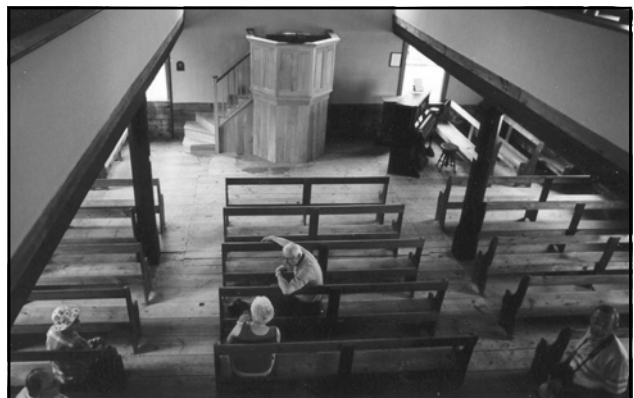
More Photos of Adolphstown Field Trip



Historical Society members hear Brandt Zatterberg’s description of the settlers’ arrival at Adolphustown in bateaux.



Interior of the historic Hay Bay Church established in 1792 by the Adolphustown settlers.



Genealogy Corner

is suspended this issue.

Look for us to return in the spring 2008 issue.

The Cloyne and District Historical Society
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We invite you to show your support for local history by becoming a patron of the Cloyne Pioneer Museum, and/or becoming a member of the Historical Society. For all donations, including Patron fees, charitable receipts for income tax purposes will be issued for amounts of \$10.00 or more. Membership fees are ineligible by law for charitable receipts.

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