

Friends of the Quesnel Museum & Archives

Spring 2007 Newsletter



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Believe it or not they tell me it is SPRING. I am definitely not convinced. Perhaps I'm just getting too old and have become even more impatient but I can't wait for the warmth of the sun and some green trees and grass.

Speaking of warm sunshine, keep your fingers crossed for good weather, on May 5th when we will host our second annual **USED BOOK SALE** from 10 am to 2 pm in the Museum parking lot. We still need help getting the books outside in the morning, so if you can lend a hand for about 2 hours starting at 8:30 am please call Lorna Townsend 747-2988 or email me at mlust@telus.net. Even if you are not available to help, please come out and stock up on your summer reading. Be sure to tell your friends!

Our annual membership drive is now underway. We will be at the Home and Garden Show on Friday Saturday and Sunday April 20th 21st and 22nd where memberships will be available. If you have not renewed your membership stop by and see us.

We recently received a grant of \$10,000 from the Spirit of BC Arts Fund toward the C. S. Wing project. This money is for curating and preparing the CS Wing photos for exhibit. We are now seeking grants and fundraising to cover the costs of research, writing and publishing a book to accompany the photo exhibit.

Partnering with the Quesnel Genealogy Society, we also received a \$2,000 grant from the Quesnel Community Foundation to develop a website. We will keep you posted on this development.

AND....we contributed \$600 towards new showcases for the Museum Gift Shop. The Gift Shop has a new face lift, come down to the Museum and check it out, there's lots of new stock! Remember your Friends membership gives you free admission to the Museum and a 10% discount on all items in the Gift Shop, except consignment items.

One final note....at our last meeting a motion was passed to hold our meetings during the day on a trial basis, as many of those who attend regularly find evening meetings difficult. Our next meeting will be 30th April from 10 am to 12 pm in the C. D. Hoy room at City Hall. Remember our meetings are held January, February, March, April, May, June - September, October and November - the last Monday of each month. We always look forward to new faces and ideas. *Mary Lust*

For information about the Quesnel Oral History Project contact:

Pam Crocker-Teed

Phone: 747-1925

e-mail:

pcrocker@quesnelbc.com

Love books?

The Friends need some help sorting and getting ready the books for their 2nd annual Used Book Sale. Call Mary (747-1444) or Lorna (747-2988) for more information.

2nd Annual Used Book Sale



Saturday
5 May 2007
at the Museum
10-3

Want to donate your
books for the sale?
Drop them at the
museum during
opening hours!

TRAVEL BY STERNWHEELER ON THE UPPER FRASER RIVER

1863 – 1921 by Jeff Dinsdale

For 35 years anyone interested in the history of sternwheelers on British Columbia's lakes and rivers turned to the Art Downs book *Paddlewheels On The Frontier...The Story of British Columbia and Yukon Sternwheel Steamers* as a reference work. This book is the result of a huge amount of research on the part of the author and the photographs accompanying the text make it a joy just to pick up and peruse at any time. A recent addition to this valuable resource is Jack Boudreau's *Sternwheelers & Canyon Cats...Whitewater Freighting on the Upper Fraser*, published in 2006. Together these two works offer a wonderful glimpse of a special period in time in our local history and allow us to look at the not insignificant role that Quesnel played in the era of transportation by sternwheeler. These books form the reference sources for this brief article.

While the Downs book is clearly much broader in scope, both take a close look at sternwheel travel in the region known as the Upper Fraser...that stretch of river running for more than 400 miles from Soda Creek to the headwaters of the Fraser River on the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains near Mount Robson. The first sternwheeler plied these waters in 1863, and the sternwheel era in this region lasted until 1921. The story of these vessels is closely intertwined with the story of the Cariboo Gold Rush, the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and the surveying and settlement of the lands of north central British Columbia. It was an era that spanned the transition of travel by horse and wagon to use of the internal combustion engine. It was an era that saw the development of the first means of long distance communication, the telegraph.

During this period, a total of 12 paddle wheelers plied the Upper Fraser. Several of these were constructed in Quesnel, which was clearly a thriving centre of sternwheel transportation. One photo in the Downs book shows the sternwheeler ways in Quesnel, located essentially underneath the present-day Moffat bridge at the bottom of Front Street. At low water it is still possible to see the pilings that were no-doubt part of the docking facility at that location.

The first vessel to travel on the Upper Fraser was the *Enterprise*, built near Fort Alexandria (Soda Creek). She ran between Soda Creek (the spot where goods from the Cariboo Waggon Road were transferred for river travel) and Quesnel (the gateway to the Gold Fields). In the 1870s gold was discovered in the Omineca country and the *Enterprise* made the almost impossible journey up the Fraser, Nechako and Stuart Rivers, then across Stuart Lake eventually into the Middle River where it met its demise. The boiler and other metal hardware from the *Enterprise* were eventually salvaged and are arranged on display along Quesnel's Fraser River, not far from the location of the above-mentioned sternwheeler docking area. I have often thought that this very significant collection could be much better displayed for all to see, possibly with a (model) replica of the *Enterprise* incorporated into the display, or at least with the metal hardware arranged so that it was evident just how it was used in the vessel.

The *Victoria* was launched at Quesnel in 1869 and this vessel took over for the *Enterprise* on the Soda Creek to Quesnel run. The *Victoria* remained in service until 1886 when she was left to decay near Fort Alexandria. There was no functioning sternwheeler on this section of the Fraser River for ten years. This is no-doubt a direct reflection of the declining demand for transport as the Cariboo Gold Rush had long-since faded and the gold seekers had moved northward.

In 1896 a new vessel was constructed and launched at Quesnel...the *Charlotte*. This boat was both launched by and named after Mrs. Senator Reid. Can you imagine what an exciting day it must have been...August 3, 1896. The *Charlotte* plied the Upper Fraser alone for 13 years, traveling upstream, making her first trip to Prince George and beyond in 1908. Eventually the *Charlotte* was damaged in the Fort George Canyon, she was salvaged but had become waterlogged and was abandoned at Quesnel.

In 1909 a new economic driver stimulated the construction of two new vessels to join the *Charlotte*, both of them constructed in Quesnel. This economic driver was the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway from Edmonton to Prince Rupert. This is of course a story in itself, but there was a demand for transportation of



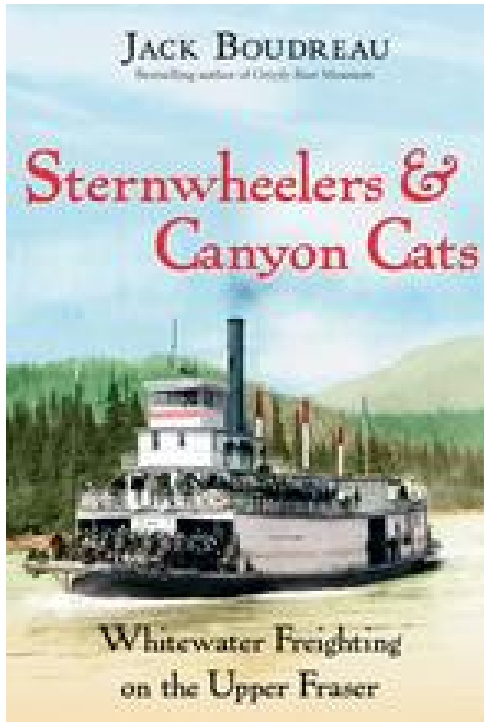
Sternwheelers, 1914 (Image courtesy of BC Archives, HP 27222)

both workers and goods to facilitate this huge construction project. Again Quesnel was strategically located as a gateway to the northern part of the province.

The first of these two boats was called the *Nechacco* and was launched on May 29, 1909 and true to her name among other accomplishments, she did open up the Nechako river. This vessel was eventually renamed the *Chilco* and sank in the Cottonwood Canyon. The second vessel was grandly called the *City of Quesnel*. She was financed by pioneer Quesnel merchant Telesphore Marion (whose beautiful brick home is now the location of the Clayton's funeral home) and local Quesnel carpenter John Strand (Eileen Seale's grandfather). At first the *City of Quesnel* (which was designed to burn local coal rather than the usual wood) didn't perform up to expectations. She was taken out of the water, her hull was lengthened and her name shortened (to *Quesnel*). She had a mixed career but was actually the very last sternwheeler ever to run on this section of river in 1921.

In the spring of 1910, driven by the above-mentioned demand fed by the railway construction, three more vessels appeared. The B.X. was constructed at Soda Creek, and in many ways proved to be one of the greatest vessels ever to work on these waters. Eventually she earned the title "Queen of the North". She was owned by the B.C. Express company, a pioneer transportation firm. The Chilcotin, also launched this year was constructed for the Fort George Lumber and Navigation Company, a rival transportation form. The other vessel launched this year was the Fort Fraser.

The Jack Boudreau book doesn't include the same in-depth construction history of the vessels of the Upper Fraser. The focus of this book is the significant hazards that these boats faced as they travelled these waters, hazards that almost universally claimed these vessels. Soda Creek was chosen as a put-in point on the Fraser River as it was located above a treacherous set of rapids. As you journey upstream, the next significant hazard is the Cottonwood Canyon, located just above the point where the Cottonwood River flows into the Fraser on river right. Travelling further upstream these vessels would have to navigate the China Rapids and then the Fort George or Red Rock Canyon located 15 river miles downstream from Prince George.



*Jack Boudreau's book, **Sternwheelers Canyon Cats** is available for purchase at the **Quesnel Museum gift shop.***

Above Prince George on the Fraser River it was necessary to navigate the relatively tame Giscome Rapids and then the truly formidable Grand Canyon of the Fraser, also known as the Longworth Canyon, a section of water that claimed many lives.

Over the years, attempts were made to mediate the danger in some of these areas by using explosives to blow away hazardous rocks, but no solution was really found to this problem. The whole matter was exacerbated by the fluctuating water levels that followed the seasons. Both high and low water levels had their own unique hazards.

The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway had constructed four big and powerful "super sternwheelers" for use on the Skeena River as they built that section of railway starting in Prince Rupert. These boats were the Skeena, Omineca, Conveyor and Distributor.

When their job was finished on the Skeena, the latter two were dismantled at Victoria, transported by rail to Jasper and then by horse and wagon to Tete Jaune Cache on the Upper Fraser where they were reassembled and became the workhorses that made construction of the railway possible from Alberta to Prince George. Their heyday was 1913-1914, after which the railway was

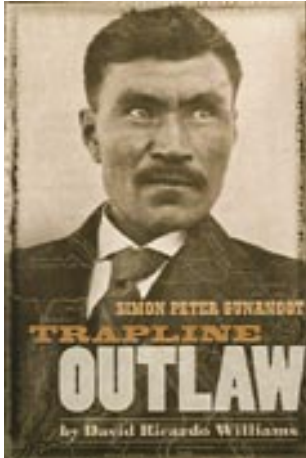
completed. Another fact that brought the use of sternwheelers on the section of the Upper Fraser above Prince George to a halt was the construction of the railway bridge across the Fraser River at Dome Creek. It was deliberately built so low that no vessels could pass under it, therefore effectively ending sternwheel traffic on the river and eliminating any competition (for freight traffic) for the railway.

The last vessel built on the Upper Fraser was a smaller somewhat nondescript vessel called the Robert C. Hammond. This boat had limited use in the Prince George area. The outbreak of World War I brought an end to any major railway construction in the area, the Quesnel saw some use in 1915, the BX ceased operation in 1915, was relaunched in 1918, but in 1919 she was claimed by the Fort George Canyon and sank. The BC Express operated in 1920 but then she too was beached. The engines and furnishings of both the BX and the BC Express were shipped to Waterways in Alberta, for use on the Mackenzie River sternwheeler.

In 1921, Captain Foster, the long-time skipper of the Quesnel (he is buried in the Quesnel cemetery), along with businessman W.H. Matheson, relaunched the Quesnel in late April 1921 and three weeks later she was wrecked in Fort George Canyon. The days of sternwheeler travel on the Upper Fraser had come to an end.

Jeff Dinsdale is a member of the Museum & Heritage Commission of Quesnel.

(If people want to see excellent photos of the Quesnel-built sternwheelers, the place to go is the Billy Barker Hotel...they have some great ones in there.)



Book Review

Trapline Outlaw: Simon Peter Gunanoot

Author: David Ricardo Williams, 5th printing, 2005, Sono Nis Press, Victoria.

- by Andy Motherwell

David Williams was a Duncan attorney (and our family lawyer) who turned his legal ability to historical figures in this book and previously in *The Man for a New Country*, the biography of Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, published in 1978.

The story of Gunanoot is more or less well-known in B.C. in all its many versions. David Williams did considerable research in the provincial archives in Victoria, in newspaper files, in court records, and with Gunanoot family members, uncovering in the process much new and more accurate information.

Gunanoot became a folk hero partly because, after he was accused of murder in 1906, he eluded many attempts at capture for 13 years, finally surrendering voluntarily in Hazelton. He also earned respect for his ability to survive in country not well-explored and very harsh. His travels took him to cabins and caches of the Yukon Telegraph Line, by its own merits an amazing project in a vast wilderness.

The author took pains to know the geography by visiting many of the locals such as the old HBC Fort Graham on Takla Lake at the mouth of the Driftwood River.

Gunanoot is remembered across northern BC with a lake named after him north-east of Hazelton, a road named after him west of Williams Lake, and a mountain between Telegraph Creek and Hazelton named after him, as well.

His real name was Johnson but he and his later family used the name Gunanoot. He was tried and acquitted in 1919, after surrendering to police. He lived until 1933, working as a trapper and successful businessman. His fellow co-accused, Peter Himadam was never brought to trial and died while trapping in 1937 on the banks of the Sustut River.

The author concludes that Gunanoot was guilty by his own admission to others, through his children's recollection of the events and through later evidence gathered by a BC policeman.

To really appreciate this book you need a good map of north-central BC. Guy Lawrence in his book, *40 Years on the Yukon Telegraph*, gives one version of the murders. Williams gives another and re-examines the evidence to support his case of "guilty."

Enjoy, as I did. Andy.

Andy Motherwell is a local writer with an interest in local history.

To contribute to the Friends newsletter, please contact editor Susan Smith: smithjosephy@shaw.ca
We appreciate all contributions!

Requesting information on: ?Paul Krestenuk?

I am interested in any information regarding Paul Krestenuk, a trader who established a network of trading posts in Nazko, Kluskus and Ulgatcho in the 1920's. Does anyone out there remember this man? Do you have any information about his trading operation, how he maintained his supply routes, just what it was like inside one of his stores? Do you know of any written records or biographical information? Please give me a call, Jeffrey Dinsdale, 992-9143 or email jdinsdal@quesnelbc.com

Next Friends meeting is Monday, April 30, 10 am until noon in the C.D. Hoy room at the Quesnel City Hall. For information call Mary 747-1444 or email: mlust@telus.net



Chinese New Year celebration at the Museum

Museum & Heritage Commission

The past few months have been very busy for the Museum and Commission. Some of the projects and events keeping us busy include:

1. **Chinese New Years Celebration** – February 17th – More than 70 people attended this special event at the museum, which was also part of the Spirit of BC Week celebrations. The highlight of the event was the inaugural viewing of the Chinese Heritage Video, featuring oral interviews from some of Quesnel's Chinese pioneers.
2. March 10th – Museum staff helped to organize a **Community Pow Wow** at Correlieu Secondary, which attracted more than 300 attendees. A video and photographic record of the event was produced by the museum and presented to Ecole Baker students and the Pow Wow Committee on April 4th.
3. **The Community Heritage Register** was formally adopted by City Council on March 26th. The register includes a total of 73 properties, with established procedures to add properties and/or make required changes on an annual basis. The Commission will continue to work with the City to establish a program of recognition aimed at encouraging preservation of Quesnel's heritage assets.
4. **Elders Stories: Memory & Wisdom** – March 31st. The museum, CNC and local First Nations groups co-hosted a special event at the Community Campus, which attracted over 200 participants and featured the premiere video presentation of oral interviews of the region's Carrier Elders, Native dancing and drumming, and a traditional feast of bannock, stew and 'Carrier ice-cream.'
5. Finally, thanks to financial support of the City, Northern Development Trust, West Fraser, RMV and the Canadian Dept. of Heritage, we have contracted the consulting firm of Boni-Maddison to conduct a **feasibility study** aimed at improving the museum and visitor's information centre facility. The study is currently underway and is expected to be completed by the end of May.

- *Lorna Townsend*



Elders Stories: Memory & Wisdom

Thank you to the gracious women who told their stories, and to everyone that helped with this project.





Host Drum: Qwatna Mountain

Master of Ceremonies: John Terbasket

*Thank you to Ecole Baker
Pow Wow Committee,
Ecole Baker Students,
honoured participants
and guests for inviting
the Quesnel Museum to
take part in such a
wonderful gathering!*



Community Pow Wow