

Five Historical Events in the History of Chapleau and Area

Thank you Bill for sending us these five facts.

1. The Ancient Michipicoten-Missinaibi-Moose Fur Trade Collapses

Prior to the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886, furs from vast areas of Northern Ontario including Lake Superior were transported by canoe to Moose Factory via the Michipicoten, Missinaibi and Moose Rivers. From there, the pelts were shipped once a year to England. When the railway was completed those furs could then be shipped directly to Montreal in about a day. The port of Montreal was open for ocean-going ships far longer than Moose Factory enabling furs to be exported to Europe almost year round. The Missinaibi-Moose portion of the old canoe route saw no more voyageurs or coureur de bois.

2. Paper and Subsequent Letters Written in the Early 1920s written by William McLeod

In the early 1920s the fur trade in North eastern Ontario was in serious trouble as a result of unsupervised, unregulated and rapacious over trapping. William McLeod (1872 – 1940) was a fur trader and merchant in Chapleau Ontario. In 1923 he wrote an extensive paper on the problems of the fur trade and his proposed solutions. All of his suggestions except one were eventually enacted into law in the Province of Ontario. His recommendation to create a Game Preserve where animals could breed and multiply without the pressure of hunting and trapping was adopted by Order in Council in 1925. It remains the sanctuary he envisioned.

3. The Forest Fires of 1948

In the spring and early summer of 1948 hundreds of fires raged across Northern Ontario. Two in particular resulted in profound change for the then isolated community of Chapleau. After the fires were extinguished, the Government of Ontario had to move quickly to remove the damaged timber before it was destroyed by insects. The timber north of Chapleau was harvested mostly by French Canadians who came from Quebec. This group changed the cultural, linguistic and religious makeup of Chapleau forever.

To remove the fire damaged timber south of Chapleau a new network of roads had to be built. This meant that the depression make work road south of Chapleau was connected with the McFadden Lumber Company roads that stretched from Thessalon and Iron Bridge to Aubrey Falls. One year later, for the first time, people of Chapleau could drive to Highway 17 and not have to depend on the Canadian Pacific Railway to access the rest of the country.

4. Louis Hemon

In July of 1913 Louis Hemon, author of the classic French Canadian novel "*Maria Chapdelaine*", was walking along the railway track near Chapleau. He was struck and killed by a train and was buried in the Old Roman Catholic cemetery on Birch Street in Chapleau. There has been some considerable debate about the exact location of his grave but a memorial to him stands in the little park near the C.P.R. station in Chapleau.

5. John Ceredigion-Jones

Some time in 1949, John Ceredigion-Jones, a penniless, unemployed, 64-year old itinerant Welsh poet was sent to Sultan, Ontario by a Sudbury employment agency. There was work in a lumber mill in Sultan which is located about 50 km east of Chapleau on the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway. A few days after starting his job at the Sultan lumber mill, Ceredigion-Jones collapsed and died of a heart attack. He was buried in a small cemetery along the road between Sultan and Ramsay. Unbeknownst to the folks in Sultan, the deceased Welsh poet had penned two immortal lines that had been inscribed in the Peace Tower in Ottawa. *"All's well for over there among his peers a happy warrior sleeps"* is a couplet that is forever connected with Sultan.