

# the LOG

Yukon's Spirited History



Summer 2012, Volume 3, Issue 1

## Thoughts from a Diocesan Summer Archivist

Haley Wilson



My project for this summer has been in the making for a few years as the last big deposit to the Yukon Archives from the Diocese of Yukon happened in the 90s.

When I started, I wasn't sure what sorts of pieces and collections I was going to come across but, as I found out, each box had at least a few gems. There were pictures. Many stand on their own. Others have been compiled into albums or collections, as was the case with two from Dawson and Old Crow.

For Old Crow, there was narration provided to accompany each numbered slide. There were also registers (many registers) including one from 1913 to 1990. While looking through it not only was I able to appreciate what sorts of changes were occurring within society (the disappearance of certain illnesses, for example) but,

if my mind was being particularly quick, I could follow a person through their whole life.

My absolute favourite find, though, came from a man who had been a reverend in Dawson in the early twentieth century. I found this collection in the 'early days' of the project so it's always been special for me. I found the stack of writings tucked in a gold plastic bag and wrapped in Eaton's paper. Included was a book he, Rev. J.H. Warren, had written on the Anglican Church in Canada called *Some Path Finders and Trail Breakers*.

The book wasn't just a collection of his thoughts, but was something he had researched and included a bibliography at the back. Recently I took this collection (along with everything else) up to the archives. Rev. Warren's collection will be accessioned separately but will be mentioned in the finding aid for the Diocesan records. While this collection is certainly special for me it's only one of the gems I've stumbled across throughout this project.

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# The Stories of Reverend Vincent Collier Sim

Neil McGrath



Photo Credit: Old Log Church Museum Database

Reverend Vincent Collier Sim was born March 23rd, 1855 in Windsor, England. He came to the Yukon as a young missionary excited to bring the word of God to the native peoples of Northwest Canada and Alaska who had little contact with modern Christianity at the time. Sim was the first missionary to visit many First Nations groups around Rampart House on both sides of the border through the latter half of the 19th Century.

Vincent Sim was taught the missionary lifestyle by Robert MacDonald, who is featured in the Old Log Church Museum for his work with the Tukudh language. He took many trips along the northwest side of the Yukon, writing all the small details that explorers and previous missionaries would leave out, proving quite valuable to future anthropologists. He noted what posts were abandoned and what diseases had spread through native communities helping future researchers to better understand

less known Yukon history (with a First Nation context) at the time surrounding the gold rush.

Sim was young and excited to convert as many people as possible to Christianity. This caused him to grow impatient with the people he was attempting to convert because they would not always readily agree with all he had to say. He did not approve of certain non-Christian aspects of First Nations life, showing how he did not truly accommodate First Nations like the Stringers did on Herschel Island (also featured in the OLCM). His perseverance with preaching proved valuable to some First Nations people. Some of them would visit him all day for weeks at a time to learn how to read and write in their language and in English.

This perseverance, however, proved fatal to Sim because the amount of time and effort he put in, paired with his tendency to share his own scarce rations to those in need, greatly affected his health. After a few years of traveling the Yukon and Porcupine Rivers, he was stricken ill and confined to his bed for weeks. He was suffering from malnutrition, pneumonia and exhaustion from the cold elements as a result of his prolonged missionary work. He continued to grow weaker and eventually succumbed to his ailments May 11th, 1885.

Sim's correspondence, letters, diary and some possessions were sent back to England after his death to his relatives. His things were passed down through the family where one member ended up meeting

someone with ties to the Yukon, and had many of his possessions and diary given to the OLCM for display, including the bible bag seen here.

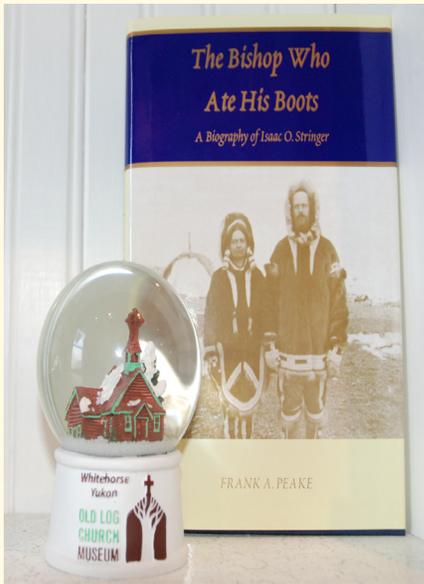
The story of Sim encompasses two journeys: one of the late Vincent Sim, and the other of his great niece Christine Roe (Sim) to try to find his resting place. Mrs. Roe eventually inherited Sim's possessions and was curious to find his legacy. She came to the Yukon from Brighton, England to find Sim's resting place at Old Rampart House. This proved difficult as the trading post had been closed since 1893 and most of its records were destroyed. Also, the post had been abandoned for decades, and so was overgrown and its landmarks were unidentifiable. Mrs. Roe unfortunately was not able to locate her great uncle's burial grounds, but learned much about Yukon culture and history during her journey.



Photo Credit: Old Log Church Museum Database

## Gift Shop Picks

### New at the Old Log Church Museum



Purchase a unique Old Log Church Museum snow globe and *The Bishop Who Ate His Boots* hardcover book for the special price of **\$39.95!** Enrich your visit to the Old Log Church Museum and take home some memories with you!

### HERSCHEL ISLAND: A METICULOUS NEW ACCOUNT



This June a new book, *Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk: A Natural and Cultural History of Yukon's Arctic Island*, has found itself on the shelf of the gift shop at the Old Log Church Museum. Herschel Island is the focus of some major exhibits at the OLCM, so the book is an important addition to the gift shop.

Published earlier this year by the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), the 242-page book is a detailed look at the island's natural and human histories. Edited by Professor Christopher R. Burn, it is compiled of chapters written by various contributing authors.

Divided into four major sections, the book is impressively thorough. "Land and Water" focuses on geology and geography, while "Flora and Fauna" is dedicated to looking at the many diverse species of plants and animals on, or around, the island. "People and Culture" follows the course of human history relevant to the island. Included in this section is a chapter that is committed specifically to missionary history and written by Glenn Icton, who actually worked at the OLCM for a period of time. It also features some familiar photographs from the General Synod Archives of the Anglican Church of Canada that are featured in the Herschel Island displays of the OLCM. The last section, "Conservation and Governance," looks at the establishment and management of Herschel Island as a territorial park and at the conservation of the old buildings at Pauline Cove.

*Herschel Island Qikiqtaryuk: A Natural and Cultural History of Yukon's Arctic Island* is on sale for **\$34.95** at the gift shop, and is worth every penny.

### Just Perfect Earrings

This August, the OLCM received a new selection of Just Perfect earrings. With many kinds from which to choose, you are certain to find a pair that suits you!



Each pair comes with a decorative "gift" box. For only **\$32**, you could own a pair of hand crafted, Canadian-made earrings.

Visit the Old Log Church museum to view the designs that we have to offer.

## Richard A. Fox: Exercise at Scratching the Surface of History

Zach McCann-Armitage



Photo Credit: Old Log Church Museum Database

As the collections technician it was expected that I would write an article for this newsletter on one of the museum's artifacts. I settled on an innocent enough looking ivory letter opener on display in the museum that I was drawn to. But every object has a story deeper than just its appearance.

My preliminary research into the museum database informed me that a man named Richard A. Fox carved the letter opener, along with an ornate wooden box and two napkin rings that are on display with it. The letter opener, napkin rings and parts of the box are made from mammoth ivory found by Fox in the Klondike goldfields, while the box is inlaid with "rare woods from various parts of the world."

Upon a little more investigation into the museum's records I discovered that, along with the artifacts on

display, the museum also possesses a copy of Fox's will in storage. The will, dated January 1934, describes the items and bequeaths them, along with a gavel also carved from ivory, to Jesus Christ, "whose return [Fox expects] in the near future." The items were given to the care of Mrs. G. Shaw after his passing, who then donated the box, napkin rings and letter opener to the Anglican Church and the gavel to Dawson City to be used by the City Council. Gavels are the ceremonial mallets used by judges in courts of law.

From the few scattered details I've collected it seems that Fox was quite an eccentric. He was a member of the Anglican Church in Dawson City, where he lived. He was apparently a slim man, who "worked for nobody," and "thought he was a mystic."

A shot-in-the-dark Google search brought me to the website of the Yukon Archives where there is an online copy of a book that Fox wrote. *The People On Other Planets* was published in 1925, distributed by the Walter Southworth Co. in Benton Harbor, Michigan. It is structured in a series of different out-of-body experiences that Fox apparently took to other planets from 1905 to 1924. In his descriptions Fox seems particularly interested in the societal structures of the other worlds that he visits, commenting on their similarities or contrasts to Earth's early 20th century

social dilemmas.

History is like a yard full of buried treasure. A remarkable character like Richard A. Fox is not hidden too deeply beneath the surface, but is easily left forgotten without a treasure map. I simply stumbled upon him randomly, and am wholly glad of it.

History as a treasure, of course, is not concrete; it's unsure and left up to speculation, and so the actual truth about Fox may be lost. Even so, it is fascinating to re-discover such a man. What other buried stories lie waiting in the display cases of the Old Log Church Museum?



Source: The Yukon Archives

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## Reflections on the Past, Prayers in the Present

*Ethan VanderLeek*

Dressing up in the traditional garb of a late 19th century Anglican priest was not exactly the job I had in mind while looking for summer work, but it has turned out to be one of the most interesting duties I've had at any job. As an employee of Christ Church Cathedral for the summer one of my main assignments has been leading historical evening prayer services at the Old Log Church Museum every Wednesday and Sunday. The priestly robes are just one part of making these services historical; we also use the old language from the Book of Common Prayer, we sing traditional hymns, and we use the Old Log Church as our place of worship.

Part of the preparation for these evening services has involved the research and compiling of historical biographies centered upon the founding and/or influential figures of the Anglican Church in the Yukon. These biographies were read during the service in place of a sermon and the cast of characters which they describe were nothing if not colorful and interesting. These people lived and experienced the Yukon and the church in a variety of different ways; suffering, adapting, or even breaking, physically or mentally,

to their work. Many left a life of comfort and ease to follow the nudging of their faith. But all were truly dedicated in life and in deed to the good news of their saviour, Jesus Christ.

Reflecting on the lives of all these servants of the Anglican Church, it is in some ways difficult to find a common thread other than their commitment to the Christian gospel; and indeed, even that cannot necessarily be counted as a common thread, for there were certainly varying interpretations of the gospel, as, for example, some of these figures were deeply involved in the protection of First Nations culture while others were known to have aided in the implementation of Indian Residential Schools. But what has struck me as I work in both the past and the present of the Anglican Church of the Yukon is that the present in which we live is always built upon the past. The richness and depth of the church community which I have experienced at Christ Church Cathedral this summer is built upon the history of this place, both the hopeful stories of loving, long, and fruitful lives, and on the tragedies of those who died young from the lack of self care.

It has been quite remarkable to

hear our voices lift together to fill the corners of the Old Log Church during quiet summer evenings these past few months. It is an important blessing we have to recall and relive some of the memories which are held in that building, both through our worship and through our reflection on the lives of those who have gone before us. As I finish leading these historical prayer services I will certainly be thinking intentionally about the rich tradition and history which has brought this church and this building to where it stands in time today. And perhaps the long, flowing robes which I pull over my head won't feel so much just a weird traditional custom, but more a real sense that as we move into the future, as individuals and a community, we take both our individual and communal history with us; even in the somewhat odd form of robes which sometimes look and feel more like bed sheets than priestly clothing.



Photo Credit: Kevin Van Der Leek

# Summer Events and Programs

## Programming Update

*Dana Hart*

This summer 2012 I have been working on some very exciting projects as the Old Log Church museum's Heritage Interpreter. To date, we have developed a program for preschool group visits on the topic of Herschel Island. Though the use of creativity, discovery, story, and song, this program gives students an understanding of the geography and history of Herschel Island and the whalers, missionaries, and Inuvialuit that lived there. The students also have access to the other exhibits and artifacts that we have on display at the museum.

I have also organized the events for this past Canada Day. The tours and activities went as planned and the day as a whole was a success thanks to all the lovely folks who visited us. For those of you who missed it, we will be featuring the same festivities on Discovery Day, August 20th. In the meantime, we here at the Old Log Church Museum are preparing for afternoon visits from local summer camps. These programs will be adapted for each age group and the duration of their visit. We will even be including a tour of the Pioneer Cemetery! If you're visiting for a day or have lived here your whole life, come visit the Old Log Church museum and see what exciting things we've been up to!



Photo  
Credit: Old  
Log Church  
Museum

## Summer Tours

The OLCM offers two interpretative tours a day, free with admission.

*Herschel Island: Past and Present* - A detailed look at the Arctic Island's history, as well as Bishop Stringer's story there.

*First Nations Art & Beading* - Explore the different beading artifacts on display in the OLCM.

*Anglican Church in Yukon: History & Practices* - Learn the story of the Anglican Church through the artifacts at the OLCM.

*Famous People of the North* - Find out about the spirited characters connected to the Anglican Church in the Yukon.

*Pioneer Cemetery Tour* - By request, minimum 3 people. Usually takes an hour.

*Mrs. Bompas, Bowen and Stringer: Women of the Early Church* - Delivered by Barb Forsyth, a veteran interpreter. This special program is offered at 2:30pm Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

## Multimedia Project

*Neil McGrath*

It is part of my job this summer to organize all of the multimedia items in the Old Log Church Museum's collection. This involves finding them all, cataloguing them into the database and sorting them back into storage for future use and reference. This will help the access to the multimedia articles for use of the OLCM whether in exhibits, for programming, etc, or for use by other parties. The multimedia items include DVDs, CDs, cassettes, floppy disks, slides and electronic pictures varying from different production dates. They contain interesting pictures about Yukon history as well as the history of the building itself. Some particular files include detailed picture accounts of whalers on Herschel Island, with inside looks on their ships and their day-to-day routines. The videos also show the history of various parts of the Yukon, focusing increasingly on First Nations relations with the Anglican Church.



Photo Credit: Old Log Church Museum

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