



# It's Our History, Our Country

*Written by: Ronald Wolf*

## Simon Fraser

- May 20, 1776- Aug. 18, 1862



The year 1776 was a milestone not only for our neighboring country of the United States but for Canadians as well. One Canadian in particular, whose name still radiates throughout Canada; just two months before the cry of America's independence came the human cry of the pain of childbirth followed closely by an infant's cry of telling the world he has arrived. That infant's name was Simon Fraser.

The son of Scottish Highlanders from Culbokie, Scotland, Fraser was born in Mapleton in the present town of Hoosick, New York, approximately six miles west of Bennington, Vermont, during the American Revolutionary War, the ninth and youngest child in the family.

Fraser's father, after whom he was named, was a British army captain who was taken as a prisoner of war by the American forces at Saratoga and who died in custody. After the war ended, Fraser's mother moved the family to Canada. With the assistance of Fraser's uncle, a judge of the Court of Common Pleas, the family settled near present-day Cadillac, Quebec.

At the age of 14, Fraser moved to Montreal and, after receiving some additional schooling, was apprenticed to the North West Company two years later. Two of Fraser's uncles were active in the fur trade, which was a major part of the commercial life of Montreal at the time, and the Frasers were related to Simon McTavish, a leading figure in the North West Company.

Fraser explored and charted much of what is now the province of British Columbia. Fraser was employed by the Montreal-based North West Company. By 1805, he had been put in charge of all the company's operations west of the Rocky Mountains. He was responsible for building that area's first trading posts, and, in 1808, he explored what is now

known as the Fraser River, which bears his name.

Fraser's exploratory efforts were partly responsible for Canada's boundary later being established at the 49th parallel (after the War of 1812), since he, as a British subject, was the first European to establish permanent settlements in the area.

In 1818, Fraser retired from the fur trade. He settled on land near present day Cornwall, Ont., and married Catherine McDonnell on June 2, 1820. The couple parented five sons and three daughters. He spent the remainder of his life pursuing various enterprises, none with much success. He served as captain of the 1st Regiment of the Stormont Militia during the Rebellions of 1837. According to historian Alexander Begg, Fraser "was offered a knighthood but declined the title due to his limited wealth."

Fraser died on August 18, 1862 at the age of 86. His wife died the next day, and they were buried in a single grave in the Roman Catholic cemetery at St. Andrew's.

Fraser founded at least five British Columbia communities. They include:

Hudson's Hope (Rocky Mountain Portage)- (1805), McLeod Lake (Fort McLeod) - (1805), Fort St. James - (1806), Fort Fraser - (1806), Fort George (Prince George) - (1807).

Even though Fraser may not have left a huge amount to his children, his name was never forgotten as his name bears witness to various items including: The Fraser River, named for him by the explorer David Thompson; Fraser Lake, a lake in north-central British Columbia and a community on the lake's western shore. Fort Fraser (just east of Fraser Lake); Simon Fraser University, in Burnaby, B.C., The Simon Fraser Bridge (in Prince George over the Fraser River along Highway 97) and in numerous schools, neighborhoods and roads. The Simon Fraser rose, (explorer series) developed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, was named in his honour. Various street names were named in his honour as well throughout Canada. The list is virtually endless.

Those who helped shape Canada may not have been born here but they will never be forgotten in a place called It's Our History, Our Country.