The Serendipitous Back Story of The FRASER Family.

The acquisition of source material can happen in various ways for writers. But seldom through pure serendipity. This is the short tale of one such occurrence.

I had researched a goodly amount of material on the Frasers from my usual sources. I had posted it on the Family Registry of this website, FRASER, Hugh and Elizabeth Selves Fraser, starting with its formidable patriarch, *"Highland Hugh."* I knew that Alex's branch of the Fraser family had been heavily affected by the two World Wars, leaving no sons of the next generation to take over the businesses. FRASER, Alexander and Sarah Chamberlain.

I then moved on to other things. Then a twist happened.

One cold, dull day in early November 2015, someone named Sandra wrote to my site. She was not the average local history enthusiast I usually heard from.

> *November 12, 2015....I am not related to Frasers but I have some things you might be interested in. For free. I'm in Ottawa. There are photograph albums and lots of photos and documents and other stuff that are Fraser related. I think they belong with someone who cares about it, rather than giving it to Archives Canada.*
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> *My mother passed away and for reasons unknown to me she had a collection of Fraser items. I know the Frasers were rich lumber barons from Westmeath and Renfrew areas. I can send you pictures of what I have. It is 2 boxes the size that paper comes in. I think there is another box but I can't find it. Thank you. .....Sandra*

I immediately emailed her and made arrangements to meet in Orleans, an Ottawa suburb, at a small restaurant in a nondescript strip mall. She seemed unsure about meeting strangers and wanted to use a public place. She was a middle-aged, unremarkable woman and seemed very nervous. She wouldn't give her last name. My husband and I tried to be reassuring and open to wherever this story took us.

Sandra explained that her mother was a hoarder known to take home things others left out at the curb for garbage pick-up. Her small apartment was soon bulging. After her mother died, Sanadra had moved the accumulations into her own apartment so her mother's place could be put on the market. Now she was sorting through all the material, deciding how best to keep, donate or trash. She had looked online and found my Fraser entry.

There on the restaurant table sat two full boxes of documents, random papers, correspondence, and photographs, both compiled in albums and loosely tossed in. Each piece a Fraser Treasure Trove. Sandra wouldn't let us buy her lunch, and she would take no money, repeating that she just wanted to be rid of the boxes. So into our car trunk they went. I was excited to root through everything. What a fabulous find.

I knew that this branch of the Fraser family spent their winters in Ottawa and had corporate offices there. It was probable these things were left behind when the family moved on from the premises or homes.

In the following days, it became apparent that I could use many items to paint a much fuller portrait of the illustrious Frasers. There were letters between Alex and his sons, JB and WHA, and records of the company lumber business. This was to be expected as the men of the family were highly successful lumbermen of the Upper Ottawa Valley. They had the firm of Fraser & Co., as well as an interest in various industrial enterprises.

What was unexpected was the private family material and the wonderful photographs. The Frasers were wealthy, and their activities reflected that. The final newspaper obituaries have a long list of prominent positions. A directorship of Fraser-Bryson Lumber Co., and the Ottawa & Hull Power Co., directorship on the Ottawa Bank Board, establishing the IOC with fellow lumber dynasties, serving as an officer in the Ottawa's 8th Calvary Unit in the First World War and a son going overseas in World War Two, becoming a prisoner of war. The children went to private schools, and the adults socialized with the Ottawa elite of the time. Alex's grandson Lt.

Col. John Donald "Jack" Fraser, served as the honorary Aide de Camp (ADC) to the then Governor General, Lord Tweedsmuir.

There were photos of the Great Fire of 1900, which consumed the extensive lumber yards at Lebreton Flats and the mounted troops and companies preparing for war. All taken by Fraser photographers giving a very personalized overview.

The family summered at Westmeath with its fine stables, lush orchards and gardens with a full staff both at the residence and farm manager and worker quarters at the adjacent Arkland Farm. The 1921 Westmeath Township Census lists six servants in the Fraser Household.

The next generation built Malakoff Lodge for cottaging and hunting parties, close to the much older Fraser's Landing, which was a depot for the Fraser lumber camps, opposite Deep River, near Sheenboro, Pontiac, Quebec.

My own notes from then:

> *The Outcome: The two boxes contained a treasure trove for me because there was correspondence and documents of all kinds and photos loose and more photos in albums. There were lovely leather portfolios with gold initials and boxes and receipts from stores and even Bibles. On and on it went.... some dating back to the 1890s and up to the 1940s. I found many things that I used on the website regarding the timber and lumber business-side of things. I was able to bring to light the impact that Timber Baron Alex Fraser and his two sons, JB Fraser and WHA Fraser, had on this region.*

I went through everything, choosing what should be digitized by camera or by scanning, for use on the website. I sorted the material and uploaded the parts I would use.

In the 1945 Voter List for Ottawa West, I found both daughters with their parents, John Donald Fraser "Jack" and Loretta Fraser, living in Apt. 11 of the Roxborough Apartments in Ottawa. JB and Beatrice had lived at 30 Cooper Street, Ottawa. The Fraser company headquarters were at 53 Sparks Street, Ottawa. WHA Fraser lived at 180 Metcalfe Street, Ottawa. Where was the memorabilia left behind?

Then I began the next stage: finding the direct descendants of Alex, JB and WHA, and putting these family treasures back into their hands.

I tried everything I could think of searching online. Nada. But I had one slim lead. There was a clipping saying that JB Fraser's older granddaughter, Joan Elizabeth, had died in Rome, Italy, after a short illness in July 1972. The notice listed her sister Mrs. David A. Deziel, of Windsor, Ontario. Then I used the Yellow Pages online. I found four Deziel phone numbers all clustered around Windsor, Ontario. One was a law firm. I started phoning the numbers and after a couple of false starts, I had a connection with the family of the younger Fraser daughter, Beatrice Bertha "BeBe". She wintered in Florida but was coming back north for Christmas, I was told. BeBe Fraser Deziel, then aged 94, was the last of this Fraser line – living outside of Detroit, Michigan. I got her son's address and sent the family memorabilia to BeBe and her family in Christmas Week 2015. I hoped that made her Christmas special.

I received two Thank You emails from the Fraser family members. JB's great granddaughter Liza had gone through the material with her mother, BeBe, and told me about her mother's memories and reactions, which I loved to hear.

> *January 26, 2016* *Thank you so very much! We certainly enjoyed going through the documents and memorabilia in the first box you sent. BeBe remembered many of the locations and people in the more recent photos. Unfortunately, she didn't know a lot of the people in the older photos (such as that amazing photo album with the old photos). There were several photos of WHA Fraser, who my mum refers to as Uncle Willie! We loved seeing the photos of mum and her sister Joan, the Westmeath location, and, of course, all the stories that then come from seeing the old photos. The old plates were very interesting and I loved all the photos of my grandfather in his canoe! We were amazed at how well preserved the old letters were. .....Liza*

JB's great grandson Ronald Fraser Deizel – as a teenage boy, remembered going to Grandpa's place on the Ottawa River in summer.

> ***December 23, 2015****....I wanted to thank you for your efforts on my family's behalf. I await with anticipation the historical materials you so kindly have preserved and forwarded to me. A little about me. My middle name is Fraser. While I was raised in Windsor Ontario, I earned my college and law degrees in the US. I am now retired and living in a 1929 Tudor on the banks of the Detroit River some 20 miles south of the City of Detroit. As a teenager, my grandfather, Col JD Fraser sponsored me for a summer working for the Ottawa River Forest Protection Association stationed north of Otter Lake, Quebec. I have many fond memories of the Pembroke region. I have quite a few photographs of the Frasers including numerous 16mm films taken by my Grandfather in the 1920's and 30's including scenes from Westmeath. .....Ronald*

This conclusion could not have been better. Thank you to Sandra's mother, whoever she was, for taking this material home from the curb, and to her daughter for contacting me; they made many people happy that Christmas and provided us with a much fuller picture of a prominent Upper Ottawa Valley family.

Gayle McBride Stewart

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