

**Minutes of the 875th Meeting of the Brodie Club, March 17, 1992.
Faunal Laboratory, Borden Building University of Toronto**

Speaker Mrs. Norma Martin
Title Catherine Parr Traill Pioneer Botanist, and the Rice Lake Plains.
Chairperson Anne Falls
Secretary Jim Bendell

Business

1. The minutes of the 874th meeting were adopted. Moved Carrick, seconded Young.
2. Present were 16 members and 6 guests. Kathy Lindsay guest of Riley, Yvonne Bendell - Bendell, Betty Speakman - Speakman, Steven McQuard and Frank de Matties - Carrick, and Jennifer Young - Young.
3. Savage introduced a letter written by Ken Reading. Full text to be sent by mail to members.
4. Norman Martin announced that: money was available through a number of organizations for environmental work, the Ontario Environmental Network wants the Brodie Club as a member, the ROM has a new exhibit of magnificent minerals, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology warns against putting antifreeze in bird baths, and nature tours were available to Costa Rica.

Savage called attention to a lecture in forensic medicine at the Academy of Medicine. Speakman noted the excellent accommodation for naturalists and the opportunities for nature study at a lodge on Grand Manan Island in the Maritimes.

Talk

Catherine Parr Traill was the sister of Susanna Moodie of "Roughing it in the Bush" fame. Both were born and married in England. Their father was a Mr. Strickland of Reydon Hall, of some wealth who encouraged scholarship and counted Sir Isaac Newton as a relative. Catherine used the name Parr as proof of her link to Catherine Parr, the last and one of the happier wives of Henry VIII. Among the 9 Strickland children 6 became authors. Susanna hated the bush and settled near Port Hope. Catherine loved the area of Rice Lake and the Rice Lake Plains and spent the last 40 years of her life in homesteads she and her husband built near Lakefield.

Catherine and her husband Thomas, a retired naval officer who loved books, emigrated from England in 1832. They obtained a land grant of 200 acres on the shore of Rice Lake and into the Rice Lake Plains. Because of Catherine's love of botany and her books (and Norma Martin) we learn something of the original forest of the Rice Lake Plains. She was the first to record the distinctive features of this landscape.

Catherine described the plains as scantily clad in oaks and pines with a park-like appearance. In modern times the plains have received the attention of Paul Catling and other distinguished botanists. They deserve further study and preservation in a nature reserve; Catherine Parr Traill Plains Reserve. Catling notes the surveys of 1826 by Birdsall and others describe the plains of old pine and oak. Catling qualifies the vegetation as plains with < 1 mature tree/acre and a tree canopy > 50% open. The plains are above the oak ridge moraine, extend 96-111 sq. mi to the SE of the lake, have a coarse well drained soil, and are an extension of plains that occur in N.Y. State and western Ontario. All are remnants of the once more extensive prairie vegetation of the west. By 1805 most of the natural vegetation of the plains was destroyed, the last sweet chestnut in 1860. Elements of prairie vegetation remain, most on Indian land. These include a golden rod, lupin and 2 species of grasses.

Catherine and her husband had a tough life intensified by the death of young children, and the loss of a log cabin home and possessions to fire in 1857. She turned to botany and writing as an escape from the hardships of her life and to make money from the sale of plants and her books. As a girl she was a vivacious beauty and at 60-70 years of age her portrait revealed a gracious face and an indomitable spirit. She wrote "Backwoods of Canada" which added to her fame and attracted a Jamaican gentleman who loaned her his Wolf Tower home on Rice Lake after the loss of her cabin. After a brief stay and writing "Lost in the Backwoods" (originally "Canadian Carusoes", she and her family moved into another log cabin in Lakefield in 1863.

Wolf Tower is now gone but was built like an octagonal lighthouse with a number of floors above ground and several below. One entrance was by a door in the bank of the lake. On the top floor was the bell room also used as a classroom for her

children. Behind the Tower was the valley of the big stone and church services were held at the stone. Martin showed a picture of the stone as it is today.

Catherine continued to write about plants; their identification, ecology, and uses until 2 years before her death in 1899 at 96 years of age. In 1863 she published "Canadian Wildflowers" without illustrations. In 1868 she teamed up with an artist, Agnes Fitzgibbon to produce an illustrated "Canadian Wildflowers" with exquisite lithographed and hand painted plants and their arrangements. A. Fitzgibbon was a daughter of S. Moodie. The flora described painted cup, a prairie flower, no longer found in the area. Editions of the 1868 work appeared in 1869 and 1870 with the 1870 printing now the rarest. Speakman showed us a copy of the 1869 edition purchased by his mother. It was remarkable for its clean print, beautiful art work and a tangible and evocative link with an early Canadian naturalist. Catherine's next book appeared in 1885, when she was 83, "Studies of Plant Life in Canada" or "Gleanings from Forest and Plain", a scholarly work. The illustrations were mechanically produced by chromolithography and are not as pleasing as in the hand painted books.

Martin then showed her coloured slides of wildflowers as they were described and annotated by CPT. These were 55 excellent images grouped by season and comments about their values as medicinal, food, dyes and other. Flowers of pearly-everlasting were used as stuffing in pillows and decoration. Her little grandson was buried with a bouquet of pearly-everlasting in his hands. Imagine, burying your grandson, and the life of pioneers.

Questions

Speakman: What sparked her? Just curious. She loved the woods while her sister Susanna Moodie hated them.

Thanks

Riley thanked the speaker for her excellent presentation and how her research and pictures had brought Catherine Parr Traill, her work, and her love for nature into our lives. The warm applause and affirmations of members also showed much appreciation for Martin's effort.

Notes and observations

Young saw 5 sun bitterns and 100 scissor-tailed flycatchers in Costa Rica. Falls noted there were many tundra swans at Long Point. Rarities were an eurasian widgeon, white-fronted goose, and gyrfalcon. Lyons saw many tundra swans at Presquile Point.

Lumsden has a mallard that laid 2 eggs in 36 hours. This nesting is his earliest record. Bodsworth reported a mute swan mired in mud at Bluffer's Park. Carrick suggested it was lead poisoned. Bodsworth expressed skepticism of the numbers of rare waterfowl reported in the CWS Progress Notes No. 197, December 1991. Lumsden explained this might happen because of the sampling method.

Lumsden said to watch for trumpeter swans among the tundra swans. Trumpeters are coming from the west and Minnesota and move through in late March and November. A red line along the lower mandible helps identify a trumpeter, also its sharp bugle or claxton (bicycle horn) like call.

Aird remarked on new information on the distribution of the rare pitch pine. Riley commented some are misidentified. Speakman displayed his copy of the 1869 edition of the book by CPT and AF.

Savage showed some vertebrae thought to come from the popcorn snake. Tasker remarked on the huge and unusual concentration of white-winged scoters on Lake Ontario. This may be linked to the abundance of zebra mussels.

Bendell tried to give impressions of his recent trip to India: Professor and graduate students working on elephants and tigers, Kerela, dry tropical forest, monsoons, crush of people, colourful saris, skirts on men, horrendous bus rides, 50 species of birds, baza in the evening light, temples, vegetarian meals, zapped by time zones, etc.

McQuard had seen an immature bald eagle, 2 white-fronted geese, killdeer, and red-winged blackbirds.

The meeting adjourned for coffee and cookies at 2210 hours.

J. F. Bendell
March 30, 1992