



UPDATE 42- JULY 25, 2010.

Summer goes by quickly and we all make the most of it as we pursue our different endeavours. For the Ballinafad pioneer community, as with all farm communities past and present, it was the busiest time of the year. Just to give you an idea, horses were used for the field work until the 1960s in this hilly terrain near Georgetown. In a later update, we will describe a typical workday on the farm and the role the horses played.

For now, we wish to re-establish communication with you, our loyal supporters on a regular basis. The final vote on designation comes in September and it is essential to muster all our resources.

To refresh our memories, the following is a short history of the campaign to preserve the site. It is to be part of the application to incorporate an official non-profit historical society.

THE VISION IS TO PRESERVE, MAINTAIN, AND RESTORE WHERE APPROPRIATE THE UNIQUE HISTORICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FALLBROOK HERITAGE SITE. THE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE FIRST CELTIC IMMIGRANTS TO THIS AREA WILL BE RECOGNIZED AND HONOURED BY MAKING THE SITE AND THE SETTLERS' STORIES ACCESSIBLE TO ALL RESIDENTS OF AND VISITORS TO HALTON HILLS

This short resume, prepared as part of the application for incorporation of the Northern Halton Celtic Historical Society, will hopefully provide a general understanding of the 30 month campaign to preserve the only surviving symbol of this pioneer community. The focus is the preservation of the McClure- McKay farm mill-site, log cabin, farm house and original vault bridge.



The actual campaign first began in October, 2007 when a great grandson of Donald McKay (the original scot crofter) and the nephew of the last farm manager met serendipitously while working on a Celtic festival in Durness, Scotland. Upon returning to Toronto, a visit to the Fallbrook site was arranged. Posted on the front gate was a notice that the house was to be demolished. Although referred to as "the Beecham House" on the Halton Hills Heritage list, it was not designated and was slated for historical salvage.

An ad hoc committee of Donald McKay descendants, members of the farm manager families and others was quickly formed in November, 2007. Their initial strategy was to stop the demolition and convince the owner, Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVC) to preserve the cultural history in conjunction with the existing natural heritage education center housed in a barn on the site. Discussions were initiated with the CVC, Halton Hills Heritage Committee (HHHC), Halton Hills Municipal Council (HHMC), Ministry of Culture Heritage Team, Ontario Heritage Trust, Ontario Architectural Conservancy, the Vaughan family, Glengarry Historical Society, and many others. An important partnership with the Department of Scottish Studies, at the University of Guelph and with the webmaster of the Electric Scotland website was established. A very detailed history of Fallbrook, the campaign and all associated documents can be found on www.electricscotland.com. The permit to demolish was stayed by the HHMC on December 7, 2007 on the recommendation of the heritage committee. 2008 began with intensive work on 2 fronts.

- (1) To strengthen the campaign for designation by further documenting and validating the sites architectural & historical significance
- (2) To collect an oral history of Ballinafad area families with the support of the University of Guelph.

The purpose of the interviews was to capture details of the day to day activities of these pioneer crofters who cleared the land and used their initiative and the available resources to develop a self sufficient farming community.

The first Fallbrook committee met Tom Murison, one of Ontario's best historical architectural consultants and a long-time supporter of community heritage projects who does his own restoration. With the collaboration of CVCA, he accessed the home, did a complete architectural investigation and produced the Murison report available at www.electricscotland.com/history/canada/fallbrook13.htm) His very thorough work demonstrated the structural value of the home but also documented for the first time that the stone structures near the creek were remnants of a water driven sawmill. The report proves that the log cabin was built by William McClure and his wife in 1856 and that they built the saw mill as one of the first business endeavours in the area. Donald McKay, an expelled crofter from Scotland, built the farm house over the log cabin in 1879 and began clearing the land. One of their fields, later sold, was the site of a native village. Extensive archaeological research and documentation has been done on the native village site by the Universities of Toronto and Laurentian and the Ontario Heritage Trust

As well as producing this report, accepted by all as definitive, M.Murison has acted as consultant on the project for 2 years on a volunteer basis. Having just completed the CN museum annexed to the CN tower, he awaits the go ahead to do the Fallbrook restoration.

Inspired by the Murison report, the Volunteers of the Fallbrook committee worked very intensely to produce a business plan, incorporate, prepare a Trillium application and push forward towards designation through a wide network of supporters who received regular updates through the website. To build local support, the group, led by its own resident historian, concentrated on meeting the elders of Ballinafad to collect their histories and do formal taped interviews to be preserved at the U of Guelph. To celebrate the contribution of this community, 3 gatherings were organised with great success.

The 20 members of this first committee, all elders themselves and some dealing with major health issues were beginning to tire after more than 2 years of toil and ups and downs. However, on Dec 7, 2009, Halton Hills Municipal Council, on the recommendation of the Halton Hills Heritage Committee, voted to designate the McClure mill site and log cabin and the stone bridge (but not the McKay farm house). The Board of the CVA voted to oppose the designation and renew its application to demolish the log cabin and home.

From the beginning, serendipitous encounters and the commitment and endless toil of over fifty volunteers with ancestral roots and/or a passion for the preservation of our native and pioneer heritage as well as many organisations have worked together to make the Fallbrook and Ballinafad oral history project progress. In February of 2010, a new, renewed committee began germinating with more solid modern day roots in Halton Hills.

The farms and businesses of the original Ballinafad community were too poor to support families after the 2nd W.W. and land speculation was forcing the maintenance costs up. Lands were being bought to form the Credit Valley Conservation Authority. The priceless heritage of the Ballinafad community came very close to disappearing in the public domain. Once again, the torch was passed. The new committee is incorporating as the North Halton Celtic Historical Society (NHCHS). It is currently discussing strategies for moving the project forward with CVCA and HHMC representatives, the committee is also heading an information campaign in the wider Halton Hills community.

In the 16th century, the Iroquois and Huron peoples first utilized this unique site as a meeting place for trade and politics. Without doubt, earlier peoples in prehistoric times met here too as a natural waterway between Lake Ontario and the north. In the 19th century, expelled Celtic crofters pioneered the region with the same courage, perseverance and community spirit. The first Fallbrook committee and the renewed founding committee of the NHCHS are working in the same spirit to ensure the preservation of this incalculable cultural heritage in conjunction with the natural heritage already protected. To conclude, a very fitting message from A. McIntyre of the NHCHS-

`` Each generation of people who have lived in the Fallbrook area, from the Native people who resided there, to the original Scottish pioneers who cleared the land of rocks and who felled trees and established a sawmill to build a home and barn, to the farm managers in more recent times, utilized it in such a way that they could provide food and lodging for their families without negatively impacting the area. It is imperative that we move forward as good stewards of the land in harmony with the environment.

Hence our interest in preserving the past for the historical record while renovating where possible using proven 'green' technologies. ``

(Produced by S.McKay and L.McIntyre) 2010-07-30

The founding committee of the NHCHS has been working all summer continuing discussions with the institutions involved, recruiting, designing an information pamphlet and writing the incorporation application and the constitution of the new historical society. Its president, Bill McKay, great grand-son of the patriarch Donald McKay will be sending us a detailed update soon.

IN THE MEANTIME, WE CAN CONFIRM THAT THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NORTH HALTON CELTIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8 AT 11 A.M. AT THE UNITED CHURCH HALL IN BALLINAFAD. MORE DETAILS WILL FOLLOW IN PRESIDENT BILL, S UPDATE.

ALL ARE WELCOME FOR THIS MEMORABLE EVENT SO PLEASE MARK IT IN ON YOUR KITCHEN CALENDERS.

NORTH HALTON CELTIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ORAL HISTORY GATHERING AT BALLINAFAD UNITED CHURCH, MAY, 2009.AND FALLBROOK TREE PLANTING

