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# GLENGARRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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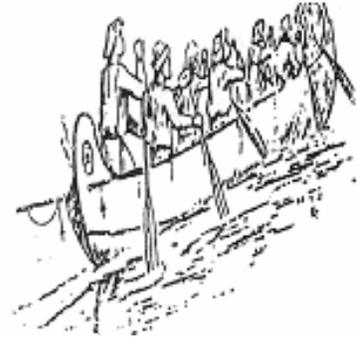
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## NEXT MEETING

**Date:** June 19, 2008  
**Time:** 6:00 p.m.  
**Location:** The Fraserfield Estate  
**Topic:** Picnic at The Fraserfield Estate



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## Fraserfield !!

Folks, this year's picnic is an absolute "Do Not Miss." It will be held at the Fraserfield Estate located on the north side of County Road 17, 5.2 km west of County Road 19 in Williamstown. So pack up the picnic hamper, stash away a few cold drinks, throw a lawn chair or two into the old family buggy and head out to Fraserfield on Thursday, June 19, 2008 at 6.00 p.m. As usual we will eat first and historicize next...can't do history on an empty tummy. President Allan Macdonell and Director Grant Cameron have cobbled together a show that promises to touch on every aspect of

Fraserfield's history. We are hoping to have a member of the Chateaugay Historical Society to provide some insights on the related Frasers from Dundee and possibly a member of the Lang family, the present owners of Fraserfield. Joan P. MacDonald, curator of the Nor'westers and Loyalist Museum in Williamstown, will speak about the Colonel Fraser collection at the museum and, with any luck, will bring along Colonel Fraser's sword, so don't anyone argue with Joan P., she's coming armed! The whole will be informed by David Anderson's prodigious knowledge of the Frasers in Glengarry.



Photo: Allan Macdonell

## The History of it All

### Alexander Fraser

By Rosemary O'Flaherty

Alexander Fraser of Fraserfield joined the Canadian Fencibles in Scotland in 1803 and was one of the non-commissioned officers to be retained when most of the regiment was discharged the following year. He came to Quebec with the Fencibles in September of 1805 where he assumed command of the regiment's recruiting department at Montreal. Four years later he became quartermaster and saw active duty during the War of 1812.

Following the war, Fraser settled in Charlottenburgh Township of Glengarry County, where he purchased land north of the Raisin River, from the family of his first wife, Catherine Grant (his second wife was Anne Macdonell) and it was here that he transformed a modest 200 acre farm into an estate of some roughly 1,200 acres. His acquisition of property and Loyalist connections through his two wives brought him to some prominence in the county by 1820.

Although not connected with the fur trade, he came to occupy a position in Glengarry society on a par with some of the great fur traders like Simon Fraser and William McGillivray, with whom he founded the Highland Society of Canada in 1818, the same year in which he married Anne Macdonell. In 1824 Fraser became the Member of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada for Glengarry where he served for the next decade.

By the time of the Rebellions of 1837 and 1838, Fraser had been promoted to Colonel and was once again called to serve in Lower Canada with the

Glengarry regiment. In November of 1838, Fraser was ordered to assemble his regiment at Coteau du Lac. The British colonial government feared that the rebels might seek to cross the river at Beauharnois to Coteau in an attempt to disrupt communications between the Upper and Lower provinces. Fraser immediately dispatched two companies to Beauharnois to engage the rebels, while maintaining another two companies at Lancaster as the "home guard" to preserve Glengarry from rebel aggression, leaving another two companies in reserve at Williamstown. It appears the Glengarries cut quite a dash in the lower province. The Ellice family, seigneurs of Beauharnois, described them as a "wild set of men very like what one imagines the old Highlanders in Scotland and equally difficult to manage." In 1838 Fraser became a member of the Legislative Council, retaining this post until his death in 1853.

### Fraserfield

By Rosemary O'Flaherty

Fraserfield was built circa 1812, and was the first house in Upper Canada built of non-wooden material. It was finished inside with black walnut and expensive ornamental plasterwork. Fraser obtained the original acreage from lots 39 and 40 on Concession 1, North River Road, and later expanded this with another 4 lots north of the King's Road.

In its hey day, Fraserfield had a formal, walled garden at the junction of the three private tree-lined entrance lanes. Two of these entrances still exist: the south entrance on County Road 17

and the west entrance on Chapel Hill Road. From the King's Road to the north, one can still see the trees delineating the one-time north entrance to Fraserfield. Some believe that there was once an eastern access and we shall have to do some exploring on June 19<sup>th</sup> to determine if any evidence of this still exists. In addition to the formal garden, the grounds of Fraserfield were, by all accounts, lavishly landscaped in the early part of the nineteenth century.

The exterior of the mansion is a fieldstone structure of limestone block imported from Kingston, covered by stucco and grooved to resemble an ashlar finish with cut stone quoins. The interior was fashioned after the Classical Revival Period while the fronting verandah is decorated with paired Tuscan columns.



Photo: Allan Macdonell

Fraserfield was enlarged between 1848 and 1851 and two wings were added to the central section along with a cupola, balustrade and porch. Legend has it that Colonel Fraser sat in his eyrie in the Cupola watching for American invaders. This would co-incide with the period of threatened Fenian invasions from across the border. But Oh! I'm not sure about this one, folks. This sounds awfully like an adaptation of Sir Hugh Allan watching his ships approach

Montreal Harbour from his perch at Ravenscrag (present day Allan Memorial Institute) in the days when the skyline of Montreal would have allowed.

As Evelyn Scullion described it in her book, *The Frasers of Fraserfield*, this was "a magnificent neo-classical mansion, commanding a sweeping prospect from a height of land, looking to the Adirondacks in the south, its classical proportions crowned by an imposing cupola."

Upon the death of Archibald Fraser in 1874, the property passed into the hands of Joshua Bowen who added to the grandeur by the construction of an admirable barn to the east of the mansion. Joseph Bougie bought the property in 1917 and it remained in Bougie hands until 1972. During the Bougie regime, the west wing of the mansion housed the farm office while the winter kitchen, dining room and living were combined in one, large room. Apparently throughout this period, the original living room was used as a chicken house for incubating chickens with baled hay piled along one wall. *The Glengarry News* reported that the east barn burned to the ground on Monday, July 2, 1934, "Fire of unknown origin destroyed the large barn and outbuildings on the farm of J.D. Bougie, Fraserfield last Monday night."



The Big Barn at Fraserfield.

[www.sensato.com/reunion/re143.html](http://www.sensato.com/reunion/re143.html)

Eventually the Bougies sold the farm to Edmund Alpin of Cornwall in 1972 and, five years later, George Lang and

his family from Coburg took over the ownership and operation of Fraserfield.

## The Romance of it All

By Rosemary O'Flaherty

In 1839, Colonel Fraser's nephew, John Fraser, came from Montreal to visit his uncle at Fraserfield. He described the winter roads as in good condition for serious sleighing. A smart horse (Ah! Horses are always smart!) flew across the frozen ground pulling a single cutter and the party overnighted at the Cedars. On arrival, John Fraser described Fraserfield as all ablaze as a gay party had assembled of old Nor'wester men, their colleagues from the Hudson Bay Company, and Glengarry's less than modest portion of military men. Renowned for its reputation as a centre of hospitality in Glengarry, Fraserfield, on this occasion, saw a cold winter's evening of merry-making. A little later, in 1883, the authors of *The Canadian Pen and Ink Sketches* remarked, "We had no idea so grand a building was to be found in the wilds of Glengarry."

Close your eyes and picture it.....Fraserfield aglow in lamplight.....a veritable picture from one of Jane Austen's novels. The bonhomie, the merry-making, the fireplaces crackling, perhaps a game of snapdragon was in order? The horses and sleighs lined up outside. Our fantasy only lacks one plausible component, a bona fide ghost. Sir Hugh Allan and Ravenscrag have their ghost....no word of a lie. My sister is a nurse-manager at the Allan and today, in 2008, still has nurses who refuse the graveyard shift because Lady Allan walks the halls of Ravenscrag. Who shall it be? My bet is on Colonel Fraser's first wife, Catherine Grant, who is said to have "languished" after the birth of her two sons. Now isn't "languished" a lovely nineteenth century phrase?

**"NOW"** Fraserfield 2008



Photo: Allan Macdonell

**"THEN"** Fraserfield circa 1860



[www.library.cornwall.ca](http://www.library.cornwall.ca)

**See You on June 19<sup>th</sup> at the Picnic!**

. . . . Rosemary O.