

Delta Marsh History Initiative, Steering Committee Meeting
9:00 am, 19 April 2004
Home of Shirley Christianson, Portage la Prairie

Present: Barry Bills, Shirley Christianson, Heidi den Haan, Gordon Goldsborough (sec), Bob Jones, Glen Suggett

1. **Minutes** of the last meeting (15 March) were approved by consensus.

2. **Old Business**

- a) *Fish fry* – Shirley reported that the City of Portage la Prairie will be happy to mention our Canada Day Fish Fry in their holiday literature. We should inform them of the details about six weeks in advance. Shirley will do this. Heidi reported that she had made arrangements with the Delta Waterfowl Station to use the interpretive building in exchange for use of the Delta Marsh Field Station's large tent. Shirley will check with Brian Pallister's office about flags, etc. to give away at the Fish Fry. Door prizes will be solicited from among DMHI members. Discussion ensued on plans for a raffle for a quilt donated to us by Mr. Vust. Barry advised that we will need a \$2.00 license issued by the City, which he will arrange and pass on to Gordon, who will design and print tickets then deliver them to Barry for cutting and binding into booklets. Ticket prices will be \$1.00 each or three for \$2.00. The draw will be held on Thursday, 9 December 2004 (coinciding with the DMHI Christmas dinner at the Field Station). Ideas for subsidiary prizes that could be drawn as well were discussed: copies of the *Manitoba Historical Atlas* from the Manitoba Historical Society (Gordon to check on), a photograph by Dennis Wiens (Bob to check on), CanadInn voucher (Barry will get a name/address and provide to Gordon, who will write a letter of request), copy of *Birds of Manitoba* (Glen to check on). These items, the quilt, and any other donated items will be displayed at the Canada Day Fish Fry. A call to Dennis Blanchard during the meeting confirmed that he will be available on Canada Day, at a cost of \$6.50 per person. Gordon will design and print posters and distribution at our next meeting.
- b) *Open houses* – Several people turned out at Portage la Prairie. Some newspaper clippings were donated by Mr. Les Green. Two people turned out at Oakland.

3. **New Business**

- a) *Interviews* – There are many people that we should meet on a less formal basis for interviews with one or two of us. Heidi will compile a list of potential interviews for the next meeting, based on information on our old minutes, and this list will be used to coordinate interviews. Composition of the "team" doing interviews will be flexible, as people are available and relevant to the interests of the interview subject. Bob and Glen will arrange to do an interview with Lois Forsythe. Glen suggested interviews with Bryan Dahling and Monty Simpson.
- b) *Fords* – A recent issue of the Delta Waterfowl Foundation's magazine stated that the history of the Delta Waterfowl Station dates to 1911, which lead to a discussion of the Ford family's involvement at Delta. Heidi will write to them to see if they have information they could provide us. Bob has a book on the history of General Mills that may contain some useful information for our purposes. The need to interview Peter Ward was reiterated and should be a high priority.

- c) *Flora Bailey* – She donated a collection of clippings from the *Portage Daily Graphic*, along with a short article on her father's work with the Inkster family. The material was given to Barry for cataloging.
 - d) *Ritchie* – Shirley mentioned that Mr. Ritchie, who had provided an interesting account of his youth on the south side of the marsh in the 1930s, died in British Columbia during the past few months.
 - e) *Roberta Christianson* – She is donating some photographs which were given to Barry for cataloging.
 - f) *Melba Brecknell* – She donated a collection of photographs (DM0003); these were turned over to Barry for safekeeping. We should provide him with an archival-quality storage box for all donated materials. Heidi will look into this.
 - g) *Dangerfield* – This collection of photographs was turned over to Glen, who will return them to their contributor.
 - h) *St. Laurent Métis book* – Gordon purchased a 2003 self-published book by Father Guy Lavallée entitled *The Metis of St. Laurent, Manitoba: Their Life and Stories, 1920-1988*, which was apparently his Masters thesis. Glen had looked at it, and was surprised that it made no mention of the “sister” community at St. Ambroise.
 - i) *Wilson Lake Lodge* – This tin-clad building, on the north side of Wilson Lake, is the last vestige of many such “duck shacks” that once dotted the north side of the marsh. It has not been used much in the last few years, judging from its dilapidated appearance. Gordon had spoken with John Fairman, a purchasing agent at the University of Manitoba, whose father was one of its most recent users. John said that his father removed the lodge's log book (which Gordon perused when he looked at the lodge last summer) late last year. Since then, Glen reported that his investigation of the lodge's status shows that its permit was cancelled on 29 September 2003 for non-payment of the permit fee and taxes. As such, it is slated for demolition by local Conservation staff to prevent its occupation by others. Whether this will be done remains to be seen, in view of the remote location of the lodge.
 - j) *Marsh plane crash* – Bob talked about the crash of a small commuter aircraft into the north end of Bluebill Bay in the 1970s or '80s. Four people were reported to have died in the crash. The remains of the airframe remain on a small island in the Bay, although its tail assembly were removed for inspection and remain on the site of the former (now removed) Sellers lodge.
 - k) *Book preparation* – We discussed plans to get underway on writing the book. Glen has asked his supervisor to be permitted to spend 2-3 days per week on the job, at the Field Station, between January and March 2005. This is a good time for Gordon too, so we anticipate that much of the book will be written during this period. In the meantime, Gordon will re-circulate the chapter outline that was prepared in late 2002 and each member is asked to add story ideas (collections of shorter “stories” will comprise each chapter). These ideas will be merged for a more detailed outline, as a basis to start writing some parts of the book this summer and fall.
4. **Next meeting:** The next meeting will be held at the home of Shirley Christianson (118 Wilkinson Crescent, Portage la Prairie) at **9:00 am on Tuesday, 25 May 2004.**
5. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 AM.

Working title: “The Fourth Station: Rise and Fall of Delta Marsh”

Section / Chapter outline:

1. The Setting

This reasonably short section will provide an introduction to the physical environment of Delta and its adjacent lake and prairie upland, as a backdrop for the people to come.

- a. Glacial Lake Agassiz and formation of the Manitoba Great Lakes
- b. Inflows and outflows to Lake Manitoba (north & south basins)
- c. Formation of Delta Marsh and other coastal wetlands
- d. Description of the dune ridge, marsh, etc. (landscape, vegetation, animals)

2. The People

Each richly illustrated chapter in this large section, the bulk of the book, will begin with a short narrative about the nature of the group, its first appearance at Delta, and experiences, then segue into a series of stories about topics relating to the group. The order of the chapters is yet to be determined.

- a. The Early People – aboriginal history; “totoganung”; Métis communities; early hunting and fishing in vicinity of the marsh
- b. The Farmers – appearance of first farmers in 1870s, land surveys, “swamp land” transfers to provincial jurisdiction, farming on the edge of the marsh and use of hayland
- c. The Railroaders – the fourth station; arrival of the railway facilitated industry (brief history of the gypsum industry in Manitoba, fishing and logging industries), cottagers, shooters
- d. The Campers – early demand for recreational opportunities leading to first cottage development in Manitoba
- e. The Fishers – the early lake fishery; closure of the summer industry and its social consequences; changes in predominant fish species; life of fishermen
- f. The Trappers – muskrats and other furbearers
- g. The Shooters – the market hunt for waterfowl and changes due to Migratory Birds Convention Act of 1917; the recreational hunt; Senator Kirchhoffer and visits of Royalty (1901, 1919); James Ford Bell and the acquisition of land for conservation; Jimmy Robinson and the Sports Afield Lodge; the private hunting clubs and development of a conservation ethic; origins of Ducks Unlimited and recovery of Big Grass Marsh
- h. The Entrepreneurs – miscellaneous industries; early salt works; Peter McArthur and shipping on the Whitemud River and Lake Manitoba; use of marsh reeds as building materials
- i. The Soldiers – use of marsh as bombing range during WW2

- j. The Women & Children – experiences of daily life for early women and children; how it differed from that of men
- k. The Artists – Hochbaum, Ward, and others
- l. The Engineers & Scientists – the two research stations; excavation of Delta Channel; dam construction on mouths of creeks to Lake Manitoba to regulate marsh water level; Portage Diversion

3. The Aftermath

This final section will summarize the changes that have occurred at Delta due to the various human influences over the past 100 years or so, review the possible means of reversing those changes, and end with a call for conservation of this and other coastal marsh environments.

- a) Development of an environmental ethic over the past 100 years; changes in our perception of the natural world and our relationship to it
- b) Description of human-induced changes in Delta Marsh environment (arrival of common carp and hybrid cattail, lake level stabilization, pesticides and nutrients from surrounding landscape); proposals made over the years to protect the resource
- c) Can the changes be reversed?
- d) Conclusion: The cause for conservation of Delta specifically, and other degraded natural resources generally