

## **First Nations people of North Hastings**

**S**am Baptiste was one of the more colourful native characters to live in the Bancroft area. He was the son of Chief John (Jean) Baptiste, who had given his name to the beautiful large body of water known as Baptiste Lake.

This had been the land of Algonkin tribes in the past but Chief Baptiste moved here from the Montreal area. When the rest of his band was relocated to the Golden Lake Reserve by the federal government, he refused to move. He raised his family here, and in the summer of 2002 a family reunion brought descendants from across Canada back to their ancestral homeland.

When Europeans arrived in North Hastings, the territory had become a sort of abandoned no-man's-land because of various native wars. There is an oral history of a running battle between the Mohawk, who lived south of Lake Ontario, and the Mississauga at Weslemkoon Lake. European settlers in North Hastings found native artifacts made of copper, iron, flint and pottery.

Local recorded histories and memories most often focus on the Baptistes.



ANNIE YATEMAN,  
DAUGHTER OF JOHN  
BAPTISTE, ON HORSE  
FRANK AT BAPTISTE  
LAKE.

—CHERYL ROHRBACK,  
GRANDDAUGHTER OF ANNIE



## **Behold, a stranger with a fish**

BY LORRAINE FELL

**I**t was a Friday evening of the long weekend in May. The year was 1955. I was a new bride, visiting my in-laws' cottage on Baptiste Lake for the first time. We arrived after dark. As I entered the back door Margaret and Max Fell lit the coal-oil lamps. In the dim and eerie glow I peered around the living room. Suddenly, I was startled to hear a soft tap-tap-tap on the front door. Slowly, the door opened and a tall rangy man quietly entered the room. Wearing a wide-brimmed brown felt hat, with grey-streaked hair below it, the stranger carried a monstrous fish in one hand.

As I stared at this apparition, the man was introduced simply as Sam. Bushy eyebrows shaded coal-black eyes that crinkled as he smiled. He strode straight by me, and with a low chuckle that sounded



FRANK LAVALLEE AND MARY BAPTISTE,  
SISTER OF SAM BAPTISTE.

—MIKE BURNS COLLECTION