

Apostle to the North . . . Silas P. Huntington



Forest and lake. Vast miles of untamed bushland. No sound save the sighing of the wind, the lonely call of the loon and the occasional cry of a woodland animal. Hard country. Rocky crags and swift running streams.

In this setting, men lived in bands, men of the Chippewa, the Objibwa and the Nipissing. Theirs was a nomadic life, rough and primitive. They were the overlords of the land and comparatively few of their number had lived with the men of paler skin. Few had visited the bustling lumber camps, fewer still had seen the great shining monsters belching smoke and steam, which, it was said, the white men made to run fleetly than the deer and with the strength of a hundred horses.

This, then, was Northern Ontario in the 1870's. Occasionally, the tribes would see a lone white man, a trapper or perhaps a prospector. Occasionally, the white men came in larger numbers, to set up a lumber camp, to cut the trees and when that happened, the Indians moved on through the empty land to a place where they could live undisturbed by the industry of the newcomers.

And industry was spreading. Already, Mattawa was a thriving town. Along the north shore of Georgian Bay stood small and busy communities. As the decade closed with the new railway pushing on across the country, its railhead camps brought more disturbance to the peace and natural life of the Indian.

By 1880, the new railway was already having a great effect upon the lives of white men and Indians alike. More people were moving into the virgin land, new communities were being set up and material progress was bringing with it many of the vices of men. Without spiritual leadership and guidance, a new generation was springing up in ignorance. Higher values had little meaning and life itself no aim.

It was in that year of 1880 that a great Canadian made his decision. A decision which was to have a great influence upon men of his time and upon the communities they created in opening up the northern bushland.

The Rev. Silas P. Huntington was 50 years of age. His had been a busy and dedicated life. He was Methodist minister at Mattawa and carried heavy responsibilities in that wide open and booming town. At 50, most men are past the age of adventurous enterprise, but

Huntington was only just beginning. He left his church at Mattawa and took to the old Champlain trail.

Westward travelled the missionary. Westward by way of railhead camp and lumber town. Westward to lonely outpost, to live in the bush with the Indian bands, to preach in French and English to the white men during a pause in their day's hard work, to preach in their dialects to the men of the Indian villages.

Huntington travelled to the waters of Trout Lake. He brought his light canoe down the La Vase River into the wider reaches of Lake Nipissing. With the whole North ready to open up in its first great period of expansion, Huntington proved himself to be a Christian strategist. He knew the railway was pushing north and realized that on the shore of this large lake a community would one day flourish.

Casting about for a possible townsite, Huntington beached his canoe. Climbing an elevation of rock along the shore and proceeding inland for a few hundred yards, he was constrained to kneel and pray for the men and women of the community he knew was destined for this place.

The spot on which he knelt became the site in 1884 of the Methodist Church in the infant village of North Bay. The point at which his canoe was beached became the site of the Canadian Pacific depot.

From that time forward, the settlements and camps were to know the burly, bearded figure well. He was a man of tremendous physical strength and endurance. For many years he travelled from camp to camp. His favourite chapel was any empty boxcar and his pulpit an upended packing case.

Huntington knew the bush trails and waterways as few other white men did. Long days under the pack, or at the paddle, lonely nights under the stars with wolves howling close-by, did not daunt him and many were the campfire stories and legends that sprung up about his wanderings.

It was said that he could lift with ease, a barrel weighing two hundred pounds. He often used another trick of strength to get the attention of the rough and tumble men about him. With a heavy (56-lbs.) weight tied to his little finger, he would lift his arm straight out to write his name on a bunkhouse wall.

Purposeful, man of strength, he

also possessed great patience and good humour. At one time, he was preaching in a boxcar, when two men seated at either end began to disturb the service as they fell to arguing with one another about a point the preacher had made. Several times they were asked for silence but to no avail. Legend has it that Huntington never paused in his sermon as he advanced upon the two men in turn. He took each by the collar with one hand and deposited the pair gently on the right of way outside the car. He continued with his sermon and concluded the service in a dignified manner.

Another story told of him, concerned an incident during the very early days of the Sudbury mining camp. It appears that Huntington was once again preaching in a boxcar which was up a graded siding. Two rascals climbed the outside of the car and released the brake. As the car gathered speed down the slope, Huntington guessed what had happened but did not falter in his discourse. He was sure the men who had played the prank would not let harm come of it. Eventually the car halted and when the service was ended, the preacher descended, walked back to town and uttered no word of surprise or rebuke to satisfy the pranksters.

That men loved and hesitated to offend Huntington is reflected in a story related in Rev. Dr. J. C. Cochrane's book "Tails and Trails of the Northland". Again, the early mining camp of Sudbury was the scene.

Silas Huntington was conducting a service in a boarding house one Sunday evening. The time came to receive the offering which was to be devoted to the start of a church building fund. The proprietor of the boarding house picked up a tray and began to make the rounds. As he passed a bedroom door, he stopped for a moment to listen. Pushing open the door, he entered the room to confront a number of men playing poker.

"Quick," he demanded, "hand over the jackpot or I'll call the preacher."

Three hundred dollars was transferred to the tray and the men besought this "ushér" not to let Huntington know what was going on. It was thus, adds Dr. Cochrane, that the first Methodist church in Sudbury was begun.

Above all, Huntington was a man of God, but at the same time he was a man's man. An excellent boatman, skilled as a bushman, he

was fond of sport and was a noted curler. His lined, but kindly face spoke of gentleness as well as strength. Many were the places, (reliable estimates say 100) now the cities, towns and villages of the north, where he was the first to preach the gospel. He entered enthusiastically into community life in many ways and in 1887 became the first master of the Nipissing Masonic Lodge.

With high courage and firm dedication, he followed the survey parties in their preparation for the ribbon steel rail now pushing north. As the rail was laid, Huntington travelled over the route again and again, back and forth, preaching to all who would listen, organizing congregations in the new communities, starting the building of churches. Thus, he earned the title of the "Apostle to the North".

In later years, he was superintendent of several districts for the Methodist Church, Nipissing and Sudbury among them. It was after 55 years of strenuous ministry that Huntington died.

His some-time assistant, the Rev. J. D. Ellis has made this tribute to him: "The Rev. Silas Huntington was a really great man. He deserves a monument somewhere in the north country . . ."

Plans for that monument are now going ahead, but no stone bust or marble plinth for Huntington. His tribute will be a living one. The name of the Apostle to the North shall live on in men's minds, his influence continuing, his teaching perpetuated.

Huntington's name is to be given to a United Church residential college. Across the north 12,000 citizens have joined an association pledged to found and support that college which will seek federation with other institutions in the proposed University of Northern Ontario.

Location of the college is still undecided. A special board set up by the United Church presbyteries of the north will examine the question and will make a decision, probably in the light of advice from the higher levels of the church, from government and industry.

The organization, the Northern Ontario University Association, is currently examining the possibilities of federation for its college. Talks are going forward with the existing Roman Catholic University of Sudbury and Scollard Hall, a Roman Catholic High School in North Bay. Federation of the pro-

WANT ADS

FOR SALE

FOR SALE — Two bedroom house, full basement, three piece bath, coal furnace. Just west of the track. No down payment. Also one 12 cubic foot upright freezer. Phone OS 2-3524, Haileybury. 34

ATTENTION TRAPPERS

The Canadian Association for Humane Trapping sells Humane KILLER TRAPS. Sawyer, size 1½, \$1.20 each, \$12.00 dozen. Wilkil, size 1½, 1.00 each, \$10.00 dozen. Bigelow, size 1½-2, \$1.40 each, \$14.00 dozen. Postpaid. No C.O.D. Write C.A.H.T., 28 Summerhill Gardens, Toronto 7, Ont. 22,44

USED CARS

FOR SALE — 1950 Ford sedan, radio, new tires, good condition. OS 2-3103. 34

TO RENT

TO RENT — 2-5 roomed and one 4 roomed heated apartments in Haileybury. Reasonable rent. For enquiries phone 4515 Cobalt. 31tf

TO RENT — In Haileybury, beautiful five roomed heated apartment on ground floor, all conveniences. Also four roomed apartment with all conveniences. Reasonably priced. For enquiries phone 4515 Cobalt. 33tf

HELP WANTED - FEMALE

WANTED — Waitress for Hotel dining room. Steady position. Apply Hotel Haileybury. OS 2-3401. 34

EMPLOYMENT WANTED

Will sharpen skates, dye and polish shoes. A Dugas, shoemaker, 6 Wellington St., New Liskeard. 32, 33, 34, 35

LOST

On Saturday night in the vicinity of the Haileybury Hotel, man's navy blue top coat, size 44. Reward. OS 2-5338. 34

MISCELLANEOUS

If you wish to have your piano tuned or repaired by Leonard Morin, Call Home Outfitters New Liskeard, Phone MI 7-5622. Leonard Morin is bi-lingual and has fourteen years experience in piano repairing and tuning. 31tf

Coming Events

St. Paul's Anglican W.A. are holding their regular business meeting on Tuesday, November 3, at two-thirty p.m. in the Parish Hall.

testant college with either of these institutions in a university would enable the university itself to qualify for government grants which are not given to denominational undertakings.

In this federation, the name of Huntington will live on . . . "he deserves a monument somewhere in the north . . ."

Huntington, man of God, missionary in a young and thriving land . . . son of a great pioneer family . . .

In the early seventeenth century, the Huntingtons arrived in the American colony from England. Their name appears now in the area known as Connecticut; in Long Island; in important libraries, and philanthropic foundations in the U.S.A. The American branch of the family has retained the English spelling of its name.

The war of Independence split the family. Some remaining Loyalist trekked north to Canada, where the name was given a county south of the St. Lawrence, while a larger segment remained to serve the cause of Independence. One member of the family, Samuel, actually was one of the signers of the Declaration, while through marriage a connection was established some years later with the family of John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States. Ever since, the name of Huntington has held an honoured place in the United States.