

Former Burma Forester Remembers:

# When Elephants, Snakes, Tigers Shared His Backyard

By MARY DAWSON

Rudyard Kipling wrote a song "On the road to Mandalay, where the flying fishes play", destined to become the favourite concert piece of male soloists for several decades.

But L. H. Baker, a new resident of Richmond Hill who spent 25 years in Burma, notes that although Kipling spent many years in India he did not visit Mandalay in neighbouring Burma.



Early Morning Bath

Exactly 60 years ago, Mr. Baker first stood in the palace of the last kings of Burma there. Returning from the Boer War, where he had served with the Welsh Mounted Brigade, he was offered a job in the teak forests of Upper Burma.

In those days, he explained to this reporter, the Union Jack flew over Fort Dufferin and the 89th Punjabis and a company of British troops helped keep Mandalay the pleasant place it was.

**MODERN CITY**

Mr. Baker said that thousands have sung Kipling's "Road to Mandalay" but it's surprising how few can say where that romantic city lies on the world's map.

Contrary to one American author, Mandalay is not an ancient city and could never compare with the splendid cities of the Muzul emperors, Mr. Baker, who knew it well, explains.

It was founded in 1857 by the last but one of the Burmese rulers, King Mim Doon Min.

and was built almost entirely of teak wood. The king's palace and the monasteries were decorated with highly ornate carving and in the case of the former crimson lacquer and gold leaf were used freely.

King Mim Doon Min decided on this new city and as a result decreed that 150,000 people should evacuate their homes in the old capital city of Ava, moving about 10 miles east, still on the east bank of the Irrawaddy to Mandalay.

A point of interest to Canadians is the fact that the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, former Governor-General took as a part of his title the name of a city once the capital of the kings of Burma.

The city, most beloved by the Burmese, with its tall Arakan Pagoda and the huge Hpoonyi population drew thousands of pilgrims to its shrines.

Climatically Mandalay has little to commend it. Situated in the dry zone of Burma, its annual rainfall is

about eight inches and its mid-summer temperature 120 degrees in the shade. It was no stranger to plague, Mr. Baker recalls.

The city remained the capital of the Burmese kings until 1885 when King Thebaw and his Queen Supaya surrendered to the British and went into exile at Rutnagiro on the west coast of India.

**ROYAL VISIT**

For Mr. and Mrs. Baker, the brightest memory of Mandalay was the visit in 1920 of the Duke of Windsor, then Prince of Wales.

Attending a dinner, in his

honour, they were delighted by the remarkable dances of many tribes from different sections of the country. They also recall it was reported at the time the much-harassed prince enjoyed his short stay in Mandalay more than any occasion of his entire Indian tour.

Referring again to Kipling's song, Mr. Baker said that despite 25 years' service in beautiful Burma, he had never heard a Burmese girl say, "Come you back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay." In spite of the exemplary behaviour of Mr. Thomas Atkins, the Burmese, female variety, were always rather frightened of him and his lack of the language would not be helpful.

Mandalay was described by Mr. Baker as a sort of Clapham Junction, situated on the Irrawaddy River about half way between Upper and Lower Burma.

It was a great meeting place for officials on leave or transfer. There was not a single hotel in the city and business other than teak and rice had passed it by.

The delightful city of the Bakers' youth will soon pass out of living memory, for teak wood burns well and the flames which devoured Thebaw's palace, years ago, must have made a wonderful sight for the watchers on the great plateau to the east.

**FORESTS OF KALEWA**

For Mr. Baker, Mandalay was just a port of call enroute to the forests of Kalewa, where he supervised the cutting of teak. One hundred and fifty elephants were the "lumberjacks" of the teak forests. These great beasts, ranging up to five tons, worked throughout the rainy season but rested during the summer's oppressive heat. They carried the logs to the rivers, which in spate in the rainy season were used to transport them, and dextrously broke up log jams. "The Lovable One"

had killed three men before being added to this work force, but Mrs. Baker rode her pony fearlessly among the elephants with impunity. However, Mr. Baker remembers having to shoot a "rogue" elephant, a task he accomplished with one shot.

Fifteen to twenty foot pythons were common but the cobra was rare. Mrs. Baker told a native story that when Buddha visited Burma he walked around a cobra lying in the pathway and in gratitude the serpent promised not to bother the people of that country. Mr. Baker interjected that Buddha also never was in Burma.

Tigers did not cause the Bakers much concern, although they were numerous, but leopards were a different story. "They are mean and vicious beasts," reported Mr. Baker, "and we lost three dogs to them. I actually saw the leopard take our third dog," he said.

Kalewa was overrun by the Japanese during World War II. The Bakers' forest bungalow

and the government rest house were the only buildings of their kind there, and undoubtedly were used by the Japanese staff.

The Bakers had left the area 20 years before the invasion but were most sympathetic to the British troops who fought there in all kinds of weather over rugged terrain.

Malaria, leeches and hordes of insect life must have made this theatre of war a nightmare of suffering for these brave lads, said Mr. Baker, who had travelled the same ground in comfort with his four transport elephants and servants to tend to every need.

The Bakers have a fund of stories of life in Burma, including tales of a tribe of head hunters who lived not far from the teak forest. We hope to bring some of these stories to our readers in the future.



Mandalay's Gate, Bridge, Moat

## 300 Students Are Offered Summer School Courses

Richmond Hill High School won't close its doors this summer.

Instead, York Central District High School Board will offer area students a chance to make up for last grades in a six weeks' summer school course here.

Recommendation for the course was contained in a report to the board Monday night by its management committee. A budget of \$5,000 was suggested for inclusion in the 1964 budget expected to be struck by the end of February.

Superintendent S. L. G. Chapman said possibly up to 300 students might be attracted.

Conditions for the course are that registrations be \$25 per student if in York Central area and \$35 if outside the system; salaries for staff will be \$750 for the six weeks and \$800 for the principal; students will include those in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 and no enrichment courses will be offered.

The committee said that in general, the course will be for those who have failed academic subjects in their year but that commercial option and possibly industrial arts may be offered at grade 9, 10 or 11 level. Registration and other details will be determined by Mr. Chapman.



## Public Speaking Contest Winners

Finalists in the Catholic Women's League-sponsored public speaking contest for Our Lady Queen of the World parish schools are shown above with their trophies.

Four finalists were chosen from each school in the parish. Back row (left to right), all from St. Joseph's Separate School, are: Wayne Cornack, Sheila O'Brien, Marilyn Webb, Guy Deslauriers. Front row (left to right), all from Our Lady Help of Christians, are: Alistair Reswick, Ross Tierney, Eleanor Stelling, Lauretta Atkins.

Ross Tierney was judged the best boy orator, and Eleanor Stelling the best of the girls. They hold the trophies won. They also hold the special trophy donated last year by the C.W.L. for the school from which the winners come. Since both winners are from the same school this year the trophy will remain for the full year at Our Lady Help of Christians School.

Judges were Mrs. Sam Cook, Mrs. William Henderson, past president of the Region C.W.L. and Mr. James McArthur, president of the parish Holy Name Society.

The two winners will go on to compete in the regional finals to be held February 23 in St. Mary Immaculate on Trayborn Road.

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