

Claude Garton- "Lineaus of THIS North"

by M. E. BARRETT

Many people in North-western Ontario know that name. Many more people, all over Canada know the man, and what he does. Would you believe there are people in Finland, and Sweden, and The Netherlands, and Italy, and Australia not to mention the U.S.A., who know and respect Claude Garton? People who communicate with him regularly, ask for his advice, his opinion, or want to exchange information with him?

He has had two public institutions named after him - For two different reasons. And he has so many awards and citations and orders bestowed upon him that he has difficulty remembering them all.

He lives in Thunder Bay - When he's there. Right now he's at Lake Nipigon Provincial Park. He'll be there for most of this summer - collecting plants.

Claude Garton is botanist. He is, in fact, a famous botanist. That's not all of his career, but it's the one to which he has devoted the past quarter century, at least.

Claude Garton was born at Almer, Ontario, on the family farm. He grew up learning about vegetables and flowers, and wild plants, mainly from his grandparents (grandparents always seem to have more time!). He went to high school, and to Teacher's College, at St. Thomas, and started his teaching career in that area.

He taught in small schools around St. Thomas for some years, in the days when teachers were expected to do more and more and more for less and less and less. Rather different from today! He found his classes (all grades) growing from 30 to 40 to 60 pupils.

When the pupil-teacher ratio got to 65 he figured that was too much. So he quit. He applied for a teaching position in Port Arthur in 1928, and was accepted. That was the beginning of a new life for Claude Garton-Teacher. He taught at St. James School for the next eight years.

During that time he also became Relieving Principal for ten schools in the Port Arthur system in which position he spent half a day in each school. In 1936 he became the Principal of the Current River School, where he remained until he enlisted in the Armed Forces in World War II.

Claude served overseas in the Army Personnel Services Branch, returning to Canada in 1946, where he worked on final discharge and reallocation of army personnel out of Winnipeg. Then it was back to Port Arthur and the Current River School.

He married, raised a family and remained as Principal of Current River School for a total of 30 years, until retirement from teaching in 1966.

The School was renamed the Claude Garton School in honour of his great contribution to that school and to education in the entire area.

During all those years, however, Claude Garton was doing more than teaching and inspiring students and running an educational system. He was also playing an increasingly important role in the life of Northern Ontario. Friends at the Department of Agriculture in Ottawa told him that research into the flora of this part of Canada was almost non-existent, and asked him to undertake the task. Arrangements were made with the Bio-Systematics Research Institute in Ottawa, and Claude Garton was launched into his career as a botanist.

Since then he has tramped and camped all over Northern Ontario, researching, studying, collecting and cataloguing the plants, flowers, ferns, mosses, lichens and every other green thing that grows in this vast part of the province.

In 1957, when Queen Elizabeth ascended the Throne, Claude Garton was awarded the Coronation Medal. Since then he has been given the Federation of Ontario Naturalists Conservation Award, and has been honoured by many other organizations both at home and abroad.

In 1966, Claude was asked to take charge of the Herbarium at Lakehead University. He did. And he has made it a showpiece and a centre for the study of plant life from all over the world. The Lakehead University Herbarium is now named the Claude Garton Herbarium, and is known to botanists and government agencies and University specialists from Helsinki to London to Sydney, Australia.

There is a display of plants from Claude Garton's collection at the famous Kew Gardens in London, England. Whole collections of special types of plants ferns, mosses, rushes, have been 'borrowed' by Universities and Herbariums in Europe, Australia, and as far away as Japan.

Claude is particularly interested in certain species of plants, that are found in Northern Ontario, mosses and ferns and "Arctic Alpine" plants which are adapted to the harsh climate and short growing season. He will talk at length on the adaptation made by these delicate looking but hardy northerners. They have found their own means of survival and reproduction.

Claude tells us they are perennials, which make thick roots to store food. They make shoots very fast, and produce astonishing quantities of seeds. The cell structure is different as well, so that the seed containers do not burst (like a frozen water pipe) when

the frosts come. Also the flowering season is very short, so that often you have a bud one day, a full flower the next, and then, very quickly seeds. It's a survival mechanism, and it works. We have a rich plant life here in our northern wilderness.

This summer the Ministry of Natural Resources has asked Claude Garton to do a study of the aquatic flora of the Lake Nipigon area. He has 'set up shop' in the Lake Nipigon Provincial Park (Blacksands) and he and his three young assistants are busily collecting and cataloguing everything in sight.

He has with him Bob Keen, of Thunder Bay, a biologist, out of Guelph University, Bruce Holmes of Kakabeka Falls, a Forestry stu-

dent, and Edward Fong, of Montreal, who is also studying Forestry at L.U.

These young men are obviously enjoying the hard pace set for them by their mentor. Stacks of flat cardboard 'sheets' of specimens are piled in the workshop - office - lab they have at the park. And, of course, they love the spectacular scenery that surrounds them.

We asked Claude if he was looking for any special type of plants. He said "No. That's not the name of this game. Our job is to find out what's here - now. So that a hundred years from now we'll be able to see if, and how, things have changed, in the plant life of this area".

Asked about the impact of man's activities

on the land, Claude Garton grew thoughtful. "Our philosophy about the land is faulty. We still have the idea that we 'own' it, and can do as we please with it. That's a dangerous attitude. We have to learn to be stewards of the land. To care for it. If we don't, we'll be in real trouble".

We asked him what he was finding on Lake Nipigon. He spoke lovingly of certain types of oak ferns, and lichens. And of 'cryptograms', a lower type of plant life, which reproduce by spores.

He told us of finding a rare orchid, a pure white Ladies Slipper in the Beardmore area. And he has located the site a bed of Hepaticas - the most northerly site so far found in Ontario.

"There are always surprises. Nature doesn't like to have us take anything for granted. We can make a statement today, and think it is final for all time, and tomorrow nature will make a liar out of you, it's fun". We had fun talking to Claude Garton and his assistants. We hope to go back to visit them

again later this summer. We'll keep you informed.

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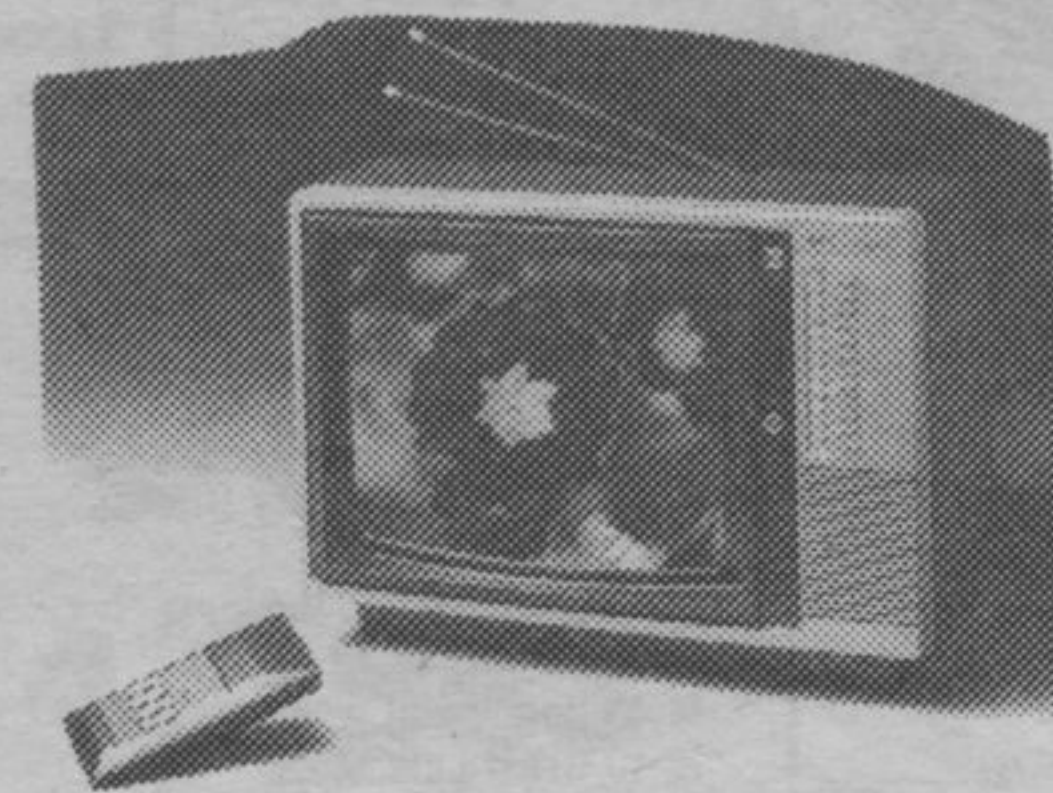
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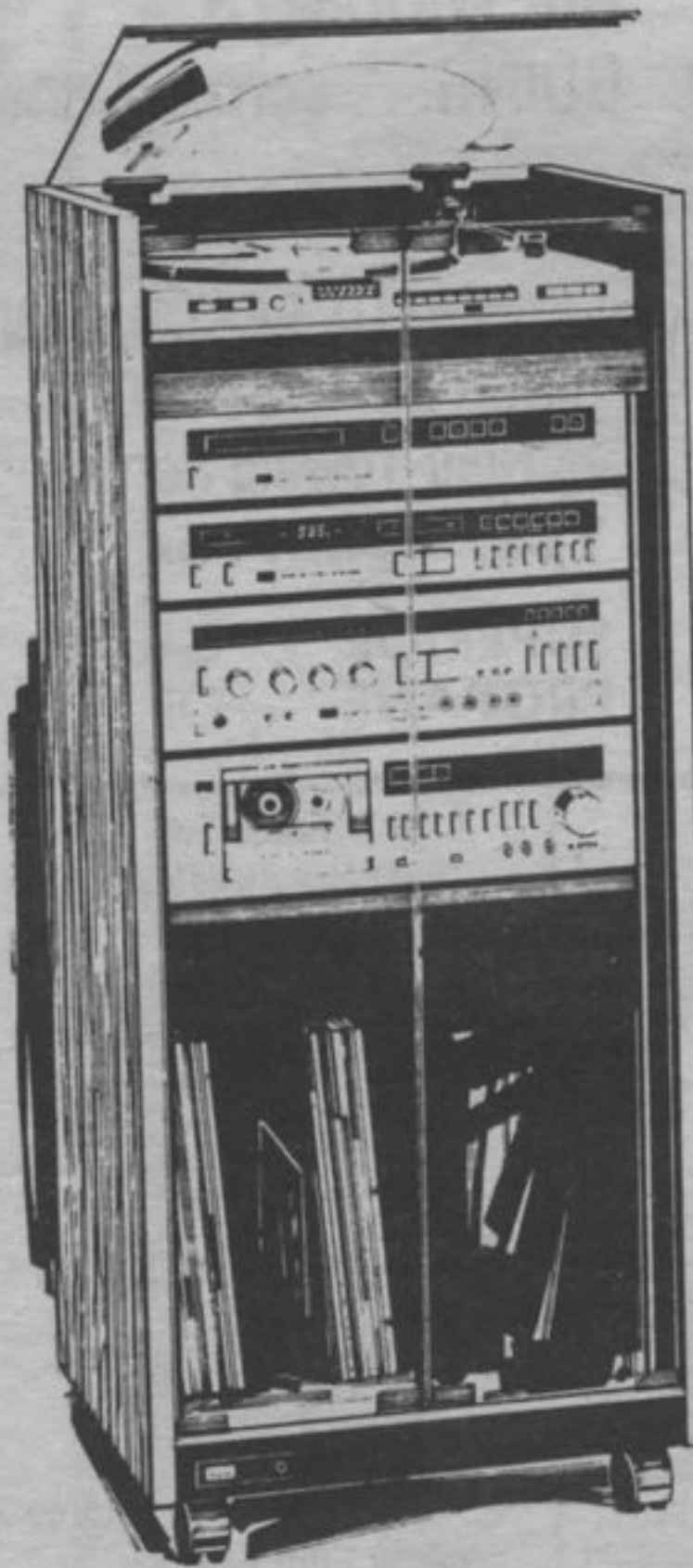


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