

News

Wednesday, August 7, 1985

Vol. 20, No. 39

Serving Terrace Bay, Schreiber and Rosspoint 35¢

Digging Up History

By: Lori Uusitalo

David Arthurs carefully examines a tiny button he's uncovered from the charred foundations of Red Rock House. "The building was like a time capsule. When it burnt down nothing was rescued and the fire preserved a great many artifacts."

The ill wind that fanned the flames over the trader's residence has blown some good for Arthurs' excavation team from the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture (MCC). "Red Rock House gives us a detailed look at what frontier life was like back then - and it was a lot more sophisticated than people think!"

The post, located on the south bank of the Nipigon River, was at one time one of Lake Superior's largest fur trade posts. Red Rock House, however, faded into history as the 19th century came to an end.

In 1891 the main dwelling house burned to the ground. The other buildings, one by one, collapsed from age or demolition over the following decades. All that remains to the untrained eye is a rolling, grassy meadow.

In 1984, with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Northern Affairs, Arthurs supervised Project Archaeologist, Scott Hamilton, and a team of young students who began to unearth the remains of

Red Rock House.

Among the artifacts that have been found were ceramic dishes, cutlery and buttons, all with very detailed decoration. Because of the way the fire preserved the artifacts, the building is unique in Canada. Arthurs said, "It is one of the few fur trade posts in an urban area that hasn't been destroyed by later development."

Doug Melville, Northern Affairs fieldworker for the Nipigon area, says it is important that the history of the town be preserved now so it can be incorporated into the planned redevelopment of the waterfront. "It's ironic that this part of Nipigon is now overgrown with weeds and brush. The waterfront was where all the action took place during Nipigon's early years in the fur trade era."

In a few years Nipigon's waterfront could shed its weedy, somnolent character and bustle again. The town fathers are actively seeking the redevelopment of the shore for tourism and recreation. The first step was a redevelopment plan.

After obtaining a grant from Northern Affairs in 1984, the town commissioned Moore/George Associates, a landscape architecture and planning firm. The results of the study suggested the con-

struction of a visitor information centre with a museum, meeting rooms, and possibly a restaurant. The firm also suggested the construction of a waterfront pavilion and children's playground, a better docking facility with a marina and service buildings, a 40-50 bay campground, and a historical interpretive walking trail.

But before any development could proceed it was essential to uncover the area's history. A few historians and archaeologists had poked around the waterfront and the Nipigon Museum had a display on the post, but the details of the fur trade lay hidden underground.

The first real interest in the property by archaeologists developed with K.C.A. Dawson's survey of fur trade sites in the Lake Nipigon area in 1969 and 1970. He located the foundations of the stone powder magazine and collected several historic photographs and plans, however, no excavations appear to have been done.

In the winter of 1981-82 when the town dock was being reconstructed a bulldozer apparently destroyed parts of the walls of the powder magazine. This prompted the curator of the Nipigon museum, Roland Choiselat, to contact Arthurs, who is the

Field Archaeologist for Citizenship and Culture in Thunder Bay.

During the 1982 field season, Arthurs conducted excavations to assess the damage done and to help date the structure. He also did a great deal of research and the following winter in the Hudson's Bay Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba. He wanted details. What were the number and function of the buildings at the post? By 1983 he'd discovered a lot about Red Rock's history.

The breakthrough came in 1984 when the MCC got a \$70,000 grant from Northern Affairs to form an excavation team. They could determine the size of the site and what was left of it in order to aid the developers in planning the redevelopment of the property.

Another role of the project aimed at public education. Guided tours were developed so that people could see the archaeologists at work.

Between 500 and 1000 people took part in the program and a majority of them enjoyed the experience thoroughly and indicated an interest in visiting similar sites in the future. Few people realize that "prehistoric times in Northwestern Ontario means less than 200 years continued on page 7



Elizabeth Wieben

Amelia Earhart Memorial Scholarship Fund

Eight scholarships for advanced flight and ground training were awarded by The Ninety-Nines, an international organization of women pilots, at its annual convention being held in Baltimore, July 24-27.

The scholarships are given annually in memory of Amelia Earhart, first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, 53 years ago. Earhart was first president of The Ninety-Nines. The organization, formed in 1929, now has more than 6000 women pilots worldwide.

Recipients of the awards are all licensed pilots seeking advanced flight training or enrollment in a college or university aviation-related program to further their aviation careers.

Among the recipients of the awards was Elizabeth Wieben of Wieben's Air just past Pays Plat. Elizabeth is currently a bush pilot in Northern Ontario flying floats on the vast shoreline of Lake

Superior. She intends to use her scholarship to obtain her Canadian multi-engine airline transport license. For the past 5 years she has been working in the bush flying prospectors, geologists, hunters, fishermen, lumber and camp supplies.

First introduced to the 99s by the Intermountain chapter in 1976, she is presently a member of the Winnipeg chapter. Her flying base is 580 miles from Winnipeg, which is the closest 99 chapter.

Elizabeth, who has a university degree in business and economics, holds commercial licenses from Australia, Canada, and United States, having done charter work in those 3 countries.

"Since I have moved extensively in my adult life, I enjoyed the companionship of the 99s, the Australian Women Pilots' Association and a variety of other aviation organizations including skydiving

clubs." She says: "My husband (a South African) and I are raising a family of four children which includes two Australians, one Canadian and one American. I am truly grateful for this exciting opportunity to further my aviation education and career and encourage each member to work to keep our organization strong so that we may help and encourage other women flyers."

Elizabeth is the daughter of Orville Wieben, well-known Canadian aviator and one of a flying family of 5.

Final judges for the awards were: Michigan Lieutenant Governor Martha W. Griffiths; Paul Poberezny, President of the Experimental Aircraft Association; Brig. Gen. Paul Tibbets, USAF (RET), President of Executive Jet Aviation, and John H. Winant, President of the National Business Aircraft Association.

Terrace Bay receives fund for commercial site

Terrace Bay is receiving a \$101,648.00 dollar grant from the Ministry of Northern Affairs and Mines towards water and sewer services for a new highway commercial site and four apartment lots. In announcing the grant, Minister Rene Fontaine said, "This

project will allow the construction of a 35-unit motel and restaurant leading to 18 full-time jobs. It is in keeping with our goal to increase Northern Employment Opportunities." Four apartment lots located behind the highway

development will also spur construction of housing to relieve Terrace Bay's shortage of rental accommodation. Water and sewer servicing of the \$293,000.00 dollar project will be completed in the 1985 construction season.



Here, archaeologist Cal Richie is hard at work looking for what remains of the old Hudson's Bay Company post, Red Rock House.