

Shaftesbury and Brick's Hill Sites of Historical Interest

(Sources: Peace River Remembers; various David Leonard books; Government of Alberta; Carm Ellis and his book on barns of the Grimshaw/Berwyn Area; Peace River Museum, Archives and Mackenzie Centre)

As one heads right off Highway 2 after crossing the Peace River vehicle bridge (built 1968), be aware there was once (circa. 1920) an oil well nearby. Turning left at the T-intersection continue along Shaftesbury Trail across railway tracks first laid in 1918 and which have carried steam and diesel traffic and the freight and people it conveyed to and from this part of northern Alberta

Shaftesbury Trail (Secondary Highway 684) wends its way along the Peace River south of the Town of Peace River, passing through the Shaftesbury Settlement. The settlement is situated on flats, which extend some 15 miles along the north bank of the Peace River – the former site of Indian camps and trading posts.

The trail takes its name from **Anthony Ashley Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885), a British parliamentarian, who devoted much of his life to social reform with a great interest in overseas missions**

In 1879, Rev. A. Garrioch arrived at the flats to select a site for an Anglican mission and farm. The unsuccessful project was abandoned in 1881.

Rev. J. Gough Brick, however, was undeterred and in 1887 he started what became a prosperous new mission farm. Here he taught the Métis people to grow grain and vegetables. By 1893, Brick's sample of Red Fife wheat gained international recognition at the Chicago World's Fair. This was the beginning of a long reign as one of the finest grain growing areas in Canada.

Going along the route, one can imagine the original trail being used by native, fur traders, explorers, missionaries and adventurers on their way to the Klondike gold fields.

Going along Shaftesbury Trail, just over the embankment – opposite the mouth of the Heart/Harmon River was the third of three forts named St. Mary's built along the river (1820) by the amalgamated Hudson's Bay and Northwest companies. This was abandoned in 1821 when Fort Dunvegan became the main fur trading post on this portion of the Peace.

In the same general area in Lower West Peace one can imagine a shipyard where sternwheelers, such as the D. A. Thomas (1916) were built and a cable ferry (1908) carried people, horses and equipment across the mighty Peace River from a landing just below the present-day Peace River Museum, Archives and Mackenzie Centre.

Canoes carrying explorers and Indians plied the river as did sternwheelers and scows.

On the right is Misery Mountain, now well-developed into a skiing area of note. Although skiing, had been part of Peace River life since the early 1920s, with interest waxing and waning and ski hill locations changing from the east to the west side of the river and back again. It wasn't until 1976 that the current location was acquired and a group of avid skiers turned their passion for skiing into a viable resource. Many of these same 'mountaneers' had skied the slopes below 12 Foot Davis Gravesite for years making do with used equipment and ingenuity.

About three miles along, on the flats, the first Peace River airport operated. No one is certain when the first Peace River Airport was commissioned, but in April of 1937 it was abandoned. The site was abandoned when one of Grant McConachie's pilots had a near fatal accident on landing. The airline was called "United Air Transport Limited" It became Pacific Western Airlines.

As one continues along Shaftesbury Trail, changes in elevation are apparent and will become a trademark of the Trail named for the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. The traveller will notice green metal signs wearing a River Lot number. River Lot 35, for instance, is the site of a now humbled log cabin (circa 1900), with only its roof apparent, which belonged to North West Mounted Police Sergeant, later Inspector K. F. Anderson. The well-respected Anderson was the NWMP member attending the signing of Treaty Eight between

Queen Victoria, and the peoples of the Cree, Beaver and Chipewyan.

River Lots 30 and 31 are attributed to Alex McKenzie, described as pioneer, trader and gentleman, but according to his great granddaughter, who researched her family history and published it in *Peace River Remembers*, he was so much more. His legacy lives. In 1998, the farm he established as a Free Grant was lauded by the province as a Century Farm – a farm remaining in the same family for 100 years. In 2008, the farm remains in the proud McKenzie family.

Moving along, just next door, there is a lay-by at River Lot 32, In the foreground is a large provincial sign telling of the many important forts along this stretch of the Peace River and a small obelisk with brass plaque commemorating Fort McLeod in the background. They mark Fort St. Mary's number two post (1819), owned by the Hudson's Bay Company. Across the river, on the peninsula between the Smoky and Peace Rivers was the original Fort St. Mary (1818).

As one continues the journey along the trail, the Peace River Correctional Centre (1968) appears on the right beyond the crest of a hill. It covers River Lots 21, 22 and 23, where once St. Augustine Mission stood (1888). The Catholic Mission was established and operated by priests of the Order of Mary Immaculate (OMI). The school opened in 1891 and was operated from 1898 to 1950 under the guidance of the Sisters of Providence. Among the Mission's remaining buildings are the church (1896) and barn (1936). The church and adjacent cemetery are designated a Provincial Historic Site. The priests' house, built in 1918, was moved over the ice in 1958 to where it now stands as the Third Mission Suites on the corner of 100 Ave and 98 St., across from Fas Gas and Peace River Broadcasting in Peace River.

Venturing a little farther, one will come upon River Lot 19, surveyed during 1906 by Henry Selby, on the river side of the road. This is where the Mackenzie cairn was unveiled in 1929 to honour Sir Alexander Mackenzie, explorer, fur trader – the first to cross North America, north of Mexico, 1792-1793. Hundreds of people attended the ceremony – many arriving on the celebrated sternwheeler D.A. Thomas while others cruised by motor car on the gravel trail. Across the Peace River from the cairn, one may see a red flag with the white letters NW, representing the North West Company for whom Mackenzie toiled. The flag marks the approximate site of Fort Fork, where Mackenzie overwintered. The change in the river, due to the building of the dams at Hudson's Hope in the late 1960s and the tendency of the land to slump, have deprived us of its existence. The Peace River Museum, Archives and Mackenzie Centre, however, has artifacts from the fort, including a fireplace and lantern.

As one approaches the Brick's Hill turnoff, a crusty old barn (circa 1900) stands on River Lot 12, somewhat stooped in greeting – bowing, perhaps. It is thought to be the oldest barn in the area. The land was owned by Thomas Allen (T.A.) Brick in 1917 having previously been owned by his father Rev. John Gough Brick, Allie, became the Peace River riding's first Member of the Provincial Parliament in 1906. His representation would have been in 1905, except for an election irregularity in 1905
Bridgeview Gardens are current owners of this property.

Still farther along, past the Brick's Hill turnoff, on Lot 11 is the original site of the Anglican Mission, erected by Rev. Gough Brick for whom Brick's Hill is named. On the dismantling of the church in 1932, the stained glass windows and alter rail were salvaged and reinstalled in St. Helen's Anglican Church in Fairview.

As one comes closer to the Shaftesbury Ferry Landing, one will, on the river side; see another grand reminder of what was and what

will soon disappear – another barn – the third of three remaining significant barns visible from Shaftesbury Trail – the Henderson barn, apparently on River Lot 5, but according to Grimshaw/Berwyn barn researcher, it was originally an Indian Reserve. Many land changes occurred. Jack Henderson became its owner in about 1938.

And now, the Shaftesbury /Tangent Ferry story:
Everett Thomas Blakley (1886-1970) was the man, who provided, way back when, the means to traverse the Peace River from the Shaftesbury Trail to the Tangent Landing and back. Take a look at the cairn as you enter the entrance to the ferry landing to determine more of the story.

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