

2013 Centennial Articles: # 2

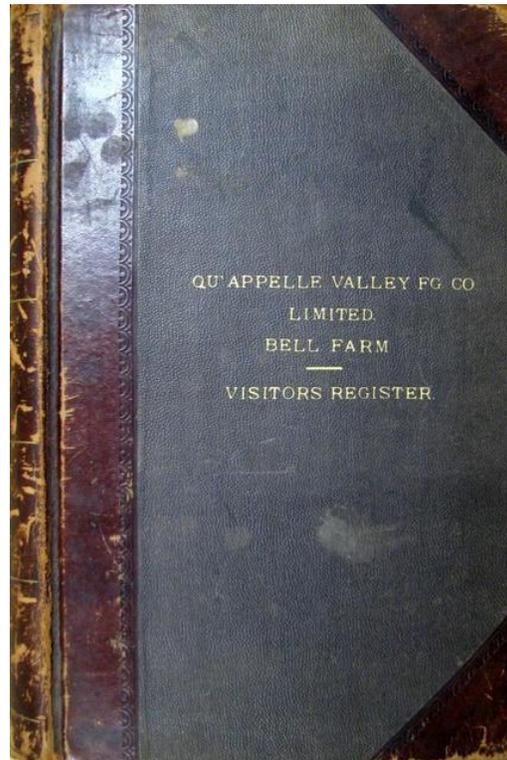
All Roads Lead to the Bell Farm

In late 2009 I had the opportunity to meet “*Legacy of Stone*” authors Marg Hryniuk and Frank Kovermaker. Marg took note of research I had gathered about one of their stone houses and suggested to Frank that I might be helpful to the Bell Barn Project. On January 16, 2010 I received from Frank the scanned images of the Bell Farm’s ‘*Visitors’ Register*’ containing 308 signatures of people that visited the farm between 1884 and 1895. I went straight to work deciphering signatures, locating biographical information and photos. Flash forward three years and I’m still working on the Register!

Unraveling the names and stories of the Visitors has impressed upon me how much of the Bell Farm story might have been lost if not for the generosity of the Bell Family’s gift of the Register to the Saskatchewan Archives. Those 308 signatures are key to telling the story of the “World’s Largest Farm”.

Deciphering the creative handwriting styles of Visitors, and finding images of people that lived in a time when photography was not as prevalent as now, has been a challenge. But this is not the main reason the Register project is still ongoing. What I discovered early on was that identifying one Visitor that signed the Register inevitably led to finding others that visited the farm but did not sign.

An example of this is Entry 97, Sir Richard Temple.



Temple visited the Bell Farm in September of 1884 as the head of a contingent of eminent scientists belonging to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Although some of the 100 members of the group signed the Register, many of them did not. Compiling that list of missing names is crucial. Newspaper accounts and books of the time mention members of the Association sketching scenes and taking

notes. This could mean that archives across the sea hold the possibility of untapped Bell Farm information.

BELL FARM. INDIAN HEAD, N. W.T.		
VISITORS' REGISTER.		
DATE	NAME	RESIDENCE
97 98 99	Richard Temple	Worcestershire England

Among the contingent on the Farm that August were two female scientists or “lady scientists”, Miss Hargreaves and Miss Pearson (Entries 18 and 19). The women of the Register are an impressive yet small group. Quite often women accompanied male visitors but their names do not appear on the Register. Entry 61 is Edith Brown: a daughter of George Brown (a Father of Confederation) and one of the first women graduates of the University of Toronto. Miss Brown was crossing Canada with Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Entry 60) another Father of Confederation and a Canadian prime minister. Entry 284 is Janie Allan, of the Allan Steamship Line, and one of Scotland’s leading suffragettes. The Honourable Mrs. Ellen Joyce, who was instrumental in relocating thousands of British girls to Canada and new lives, is Entry 134. The wives of Canadian Prime ministers, Mrs. Bowell and Mrs. Mackenzie, also signed the Register.



13: Jane Dewdney, wife of Lieutenant Governor Edgar Dewdney, was the first woman to sign the Visitors' Register, and did so on August 8, 1884, the first day that Major Bell made the Register available to his guests.



#134 and 135: Mrs. Ellen Joyce and her son, Rev. A.G. Joyce, signed the Register on September 22, 1884.

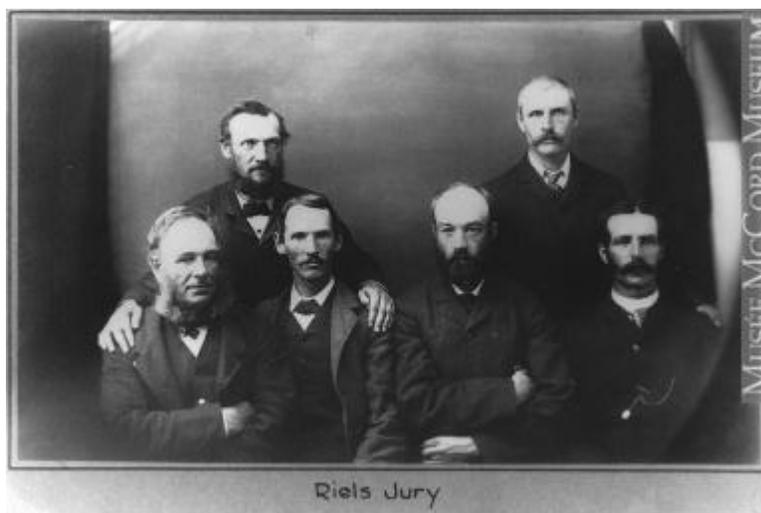
BELL FARM. INDIAN HEAD, N. W.T.		
VISITORS' REGISTER.		
DATE	NAME	RESIDENCE
July 16, 1884	J. H. Fisher (Magdalen College, Oxford)	Northampton, England
	Mary Gilbert	
	R. J. J. J.	Birr Castle, Birr, Co. Wick, Ireland
Aug. 19	Henry Fisher	Regina
	Geo. B. Booth	Chicago
Sept. 22	Dr. J. H. J. J.	St. John's, Nfld.
	Mrs. Ellen Joyce	Windsor, Ontario
	Rev. A. G. Joyce	Windsor, Ontario

Prominent names related to Canadian history appear throughout the Visitors' Register. Dr. Barnardo, renowned emigration missionary visited in 1884, the same year as Sir Hector Langevin, also a Father of Confederation. To date, research shows four Fathers of Confederation stopped at Major Bell's farm. As did many of the men that helped finance and build the Canadian Pacific Railway; five Visitors can be found among the faces that make up the famous "Last Spike" photo.



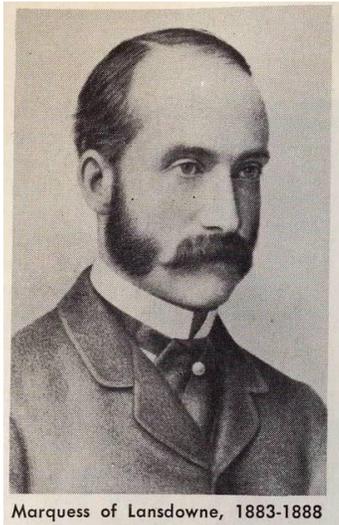
At least five of the people in this well-known photograph visited the Bell Farm in 1885, including Donald Smith (Lord Strathcona) nailing in the last spike on the Canadian Pacific Railway at Craigellachie, British Columbia.

Governors General and many of the major players in the North-West Rebellion of 1885 can also be found amongst the Entries. A Bell Farm resident and Indian Head merchant, Edwin Jackson Brooks, was one of the six men that made up the Riel jury.



In 1882, E.J. Books, seated second from left, worked as a carpenter helping to erect the first 100 buildings at the Bell Farm. In 1885 he served on the Jury that convicted Louis Riel.

Since taking on the research for the Bell Farm Visitors' Register, I've found that the Visitors leap from the pages and into my day to day as a mother of seven. Family road trips across the Western Provinces have now become more of a history lesson; with me making note of Saskatchewan communities like Lebret, Milestone, Esterhazy, Grenfell and Osler- all named after Visitors. What once might have just been passing sign posts in Alberta, I now recognize as towns bearing names of Major Bell's earlier guests, such as Staveley, Cochrane, Strathcona, Dunmore and Gleichen (the latter being one of two of Queen Victoria's nephews that toured the Farm). The Manitoba towns of Boissevain, Elphinstone, Routledge, Scarth and Whyte also pay homage to men that "drove over" the Bell Farm. The summers that have been spent transporting children to and from the West Coast now include stops in the Rockies to point out mountains named for Visitors such as Temple, Bedson, Burgess, Van Horne, LeFroy and Stephens.



Marquess of Lansdowne, 1883-1888

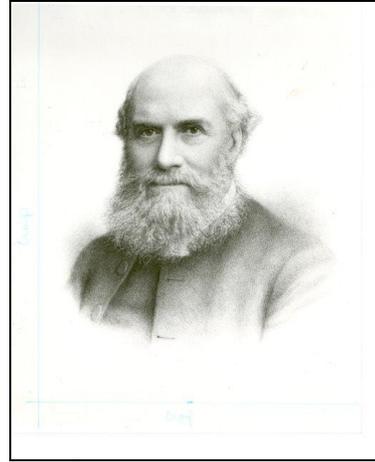
#188: As was customary among royalty, the Governor General of Canada – who visited the Bell Farm on September 21, 1885 – signed the Register with only a single word: Lansdowne.

BELL FARM. INDIAN HEAD, N. W. T. VISITORS' REGISTER.		
DATE.	NAME	RESIDENCE
Sept 21/85	Lansdowne	Ottawa



#43: Mrs. Clara Cameron accompanied her husband Hector, MP for the North Riding of the county of Victoria, Ontario, and they both signed the Visitors Register on August 15, 1884.

I recently watched an episode of the BBC's 'Antique Road Show'. The setting was Shugborough Hall, the ancestral home of Adelbert Anson, first Bishop of Qu'Appelle and the first Entry on the Visitors' Register. When I mentioned this fact to my children, one of my sons made the cheeky comment "All roads lead to the Bell Farm". Three years into the Visitors' Project and I think he might just be right!



Anglican Bishop Adelbert Anson

Michelle Cabana
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