A Place Called Osnaburgh

The History of the Old Post and Village

Rob Bundy

Dedicated to James Masakeyash -

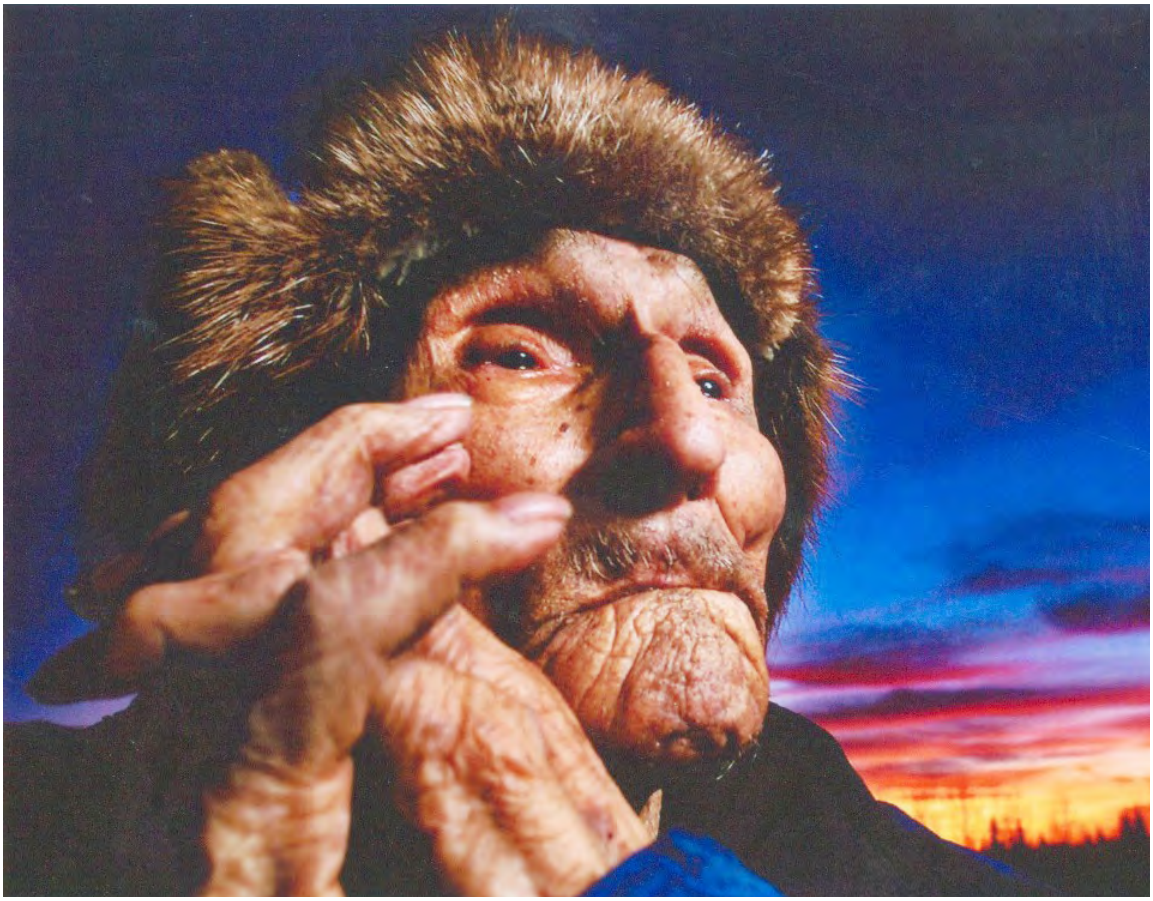
I first met James Masakeyash in 1976 at the Hudson's Bay Company store in New Osnaburgh where I was working as a manager trainee. Over our many years of contact, I came to know this extraordinary man not only as a customer, but also as a friend, and a spokesman for his people. James became a regular fixture at the Albany Free Traders store after we bought it in 1983 and it was during these times that my respect for him grew. His wisdom and deep understanding of the land and its people knew no bounds. His honesty, integrity and insight were exceptional and so, when the idea for The Old Post and Village began to take shape, it was James I first shared my vision with. He and Chief Roy Kaminawaish wholly supported my ambitious plans and I thank them both for that. With their blessing we moved forward with our dream, and as a symbol of his support, it was James who first raised the flag at the property as we began the redevelopment of Osnaburgh House in 1986.

I last spoke to James as he lay on his deathbed at the age of 104. As a token of our friendship I brought him some fresh pickerel and I will never forget the time we spent together that day. There may never be another man like James. He was not only a friend and confidante, he was an inspiration to many.

The following story of how Osnaburgh House came to be is dedicated to this exceptional man. May his spirit live on in the winds that sweep the lakes, in the trees that seek the light and in the hearts of the people who are better for having known him.

John C. Grace

The Old Post and Village Inc.



James Masakeyash
1896-2000
(Photo by Hans Deryk, Toronto Star, April 29, 2000)

Forward by John C. Grace

What is it that would inspire someone to come to such a remote and isolated place to start a business, a business literally built on the ruins of another? In my case, the inspiration was the profound beauty of Lake St. Joseph, a deep respect for the Native people who live in these wilds and a burning entrepreneurial spirit to create something from almost nothing. The result is the Old Post and Village, a world-class fishing lodge that rose from the ashes of a 200-year-old Hudson's Bay Trading Post on the shores of this legendary lake.

Born and raised in Goderich, Ontario, I spent my summers at a family cottage on the Cape Croker Reserve on Georgian Bay. It was during these extended vacations that I first had contact with Native Peoples, their character, philosophy and accepting ways. A free spirit and the positive influence of these generous people early in life eventually brought me to the northern community of New Osnaburgh in 1976, where I accepted a managerial training position with the Hudson's Bay Company store. I have fond memories of those times when Hockey Night in Canada on CBC Radio was the highlight of the week. The roads were rough and it wasn't always an easy life but the isolation allowed the development of many very special relationships with the people who call this area home. A unique and lasting bond was created, not only with the inhabitants, but also with the land that has supported them for a thousand years.

In 1982, after having gone into the field of social work in the Pickle Lake Area, I met a young and dedicated school teacher named Wendy Dell. Having been so taken with the north it seemed appropriate that I would fall in love with a northern girl and in a few short months we were married in Wendy's hometown of Red Lake. A year later Wendy and I returned to Osnaburgh where we bought a store called Albany Free Traders situated at the source of the Albany River.

Albany Free Traders was an old fashioned general store offering everything from milk to lumber, mail delivery to taxi service and just about everything in between. A large part of our thriving business was the purchase and processing of the prized wild rice gathered by the local people. Every winter native trappers would bring in furs for trade. Pelts of beaver, martin and fox were graded, purchased and sold to the Hudson's Bay Company. Much to our delight, the store quickly became the community gathering place and we made many lasting friendships. The fall of 1984 brought us the first of our three sons, Jonathon, right in the middle of the busiest time of the year - wild rice season. He would continue to add high energy and that spark for life to our family and business.

On a sunny Saturday morning in the spring of 1986, Wendy and I took a short boat ride that would bring a profound change to our lives. After crossing Lake St. Joseph we set foot, for the first time on the property that once supported the Hudson's Bay Trading Post known as Osnaburgh House. The site itself was absolutely breathtaking. Although in complete ruins, the old trading post was still there along with a dilapidated old church and a graveyard covered with weeds and lost in time. Our decision to acquire the property came quickly and so, after a meeting with the elders of the local reserve, we bought the small amount of free hold land available and negotiated a long-term lease for the remainder. This is when I can truly say that the entrepreneurial spirit inside me took over.

Our vision for the family was to grow a business that would utilize the extraordinary natural assets of Lake St. Joseph and its Native Community without exploitation; to develop a business that would be viable and a leader in the sport fishing industry while still maintaining the rich historical and cultural significance of the property. This delicate balance has always been very important to us and we endeavor to uphold it in everything we do at The Old Post.

With this vision and the blessing of the elders of the community, we began creating what would soon become one of Ontario's premier fishing lodges. We carefully restored what we could of the old trading post, added a series of new buildings, installed a generator and a state-of-the-art water treatment facility and did everything in our power to recreate the spirit of the original Osnaburgh House. We even wintered at the site with our one-year- old son Jordan and Jonathon, now 5, in an effort to fully experience the natural cycle of the land and the lake. Our third son, Joel, was born the following summer and I'm happy to say all our children have a strong connection to Osnaburgh. Founded in 1786 by John Best for the Hudson's Bay Company, the post has a deep and rich past; it was an integral part of the fabled fur trade era in Canadian history, it was the site on which Treaty 9 was signed – one of the most significant and encompassing treaties ever negotiated in this country. It was a burial ground, a place of worship, a place of meeting and a place of business.

Lake St. Joseph is a phenomenal fishery, far exceeding provincial averages, and in an effort to assure that it would remain so in the future, we implemented strict conservation practices and encouraged others to do the same. The Old Post and Village was built on a dedication to fisheries conservation and a commitment to providing excellent customer service. We are proud of the fact that more than 80% of our customers are repeat guests and we attribute this to not only our concern for the fisherman but the fisheries itself. The expectation level for all components of our operation is extremely high and the staff, facilities, infrastructure, equipment, even the boats and motors that fishermen use on a daily basis, reflect our commitment to running a first class operation. Today, under The Lake St. Joseph Accord, fishing licenses are restricted to a precious few and a catch and release program is in effect, making the lake a valuable resource for generations to come, not to mention a sport fisherman's paradise.

In developing one of the finest fishing resorts in Northern Ontario, Wendy and I have seen our vision come to life in The Old Post and Village. This is where we raised our three boys and made, not only a living, but also a commitment to the north, its resources and its people.. In the years since we first set foot in Osnaburgh, the business has grown with our family, and our family with it. We have developed enduring friendships, created employment and we've been able to look to the future while celebrating the past. This is a very special place and we like nothing more than sharing it with others.

We have been blessed to have a wonderful relationship with a unique individual who has been able to use his incredible talent to help us pull all these experiences together into this very special narrative. By doing so, he has not only established his place as story teller but has become part of the story.

Thank you Rob Bundy.

John

Preface

To set foot on the sandy point of land that dominates the northwest shore of legendary Lake St. Joseph in Northern Ontario is to take a step back in time. Like the pages of a history book, this remote and secluded property has a tale to tell; a tale hidden just underfoot, revealed through the original hand-hewn beams of the centuries-old buildings, silently shining from the stained glass windows of a once abandoned church and read on the faces of the people who gather here just as their ancestors did for hundreds of years before them.

The story of the place called Osnaburgh, the present day site of The Old Post and Village, is one of basic needs and creature comforts, of large summer gatherings of distant family groups, adventure and exploration, trading, commerce, reward. It is also a story whose chapters reveal hardships, death, betrayal, abandonment and ultimately, like any good story, rediscovery and renewal.

The history of Osnaburgh that follows has been gleaned from a wide variety of sources, not the least of which has been the Records of the Hudson's Bay Company housed in the Archives of Manitoba. Historical data and facts have also been used from The Centre for Rupert's Land Studies at the University of Winnipeg and from a variety of books on the history of the area that are listed in the Bibliography. Also,

*three archaeological research projects undertaken at the site (*Archaeological Reconnaissance of Lake St. Joseph, Analysis of A Historic Burial Bundle from Osnaburgh House and Skeletal Analysis of Human Remains found near Osnaburgh House) *provide a contemporary scientific element to the story.*

In these times of political correctness, it may be prudent to explain the terms used when referring to the indigenous peoples who play a central role in this story. In all the earliest records, logs and reports filed by explorers and traders, the term 'Indian' is used to describe the indigenous people they came in contact with. This is a carry-over from Columbus' mistaken assumption that he was in India when he landed in North America in 1492. When the term 'aboriginal' is used, it is meant to reflect the definition "peoples inhabiting a land from the earliest times or from before the arrival of colonists". Similarly, the term 'native', which is most often used in this essay, is meant to indicate "indigenous peoples of a region as distinguished from settlers". Use of these terms is for clarity and distinction and is not intended to cause offence.

While some descriptive licence has been taken in the telling of the story, to the best of the author's knowledge, the dates, names and facts given in this account are true.

It all happened at A Place Called Osnaburgh.

Rob Bundy

A Place Called Osnaburgh

Long before it became home to one of Ontario's premier fishing lodges, before it stood as an important Hudson's Bay Company trading post, and even before European explorers pushed through the dense woods in a relentless search for a route to the Pacific Ocean, the spectacular sandy point of land which juts out into the dark waters of a long lake teeming with fish was a place of convergence. The lake flats were a natural and convenient camp, with commanding views out over the bountiful waters to the east and the protection of high hills to the west.

For hundreds of years before the French Voyageurs picked their way up streams and rivers towards the great promise of western trade routes, the Native peoples of the land that would eventually become the Dominion of Canada gathered here in extended family groups for the summer months. We can see in our mind's eye, through the artifacts they left behind, small clusters of tents made from animal hides lining the sandy shores of the lake. Birch bark canoes ride the gentle waves while further up the beach racks of fish pulled from the lake are smoked over pine bough fires. At night, as the smoking fires became coals, the elders of each of the family units or totem groups would gather round to tell stories, relate information and share food. At any given time during the

Artifacts found on the site, such as this stone spearhead, pre-date European contact by 1,000 years.

summer months there may have been as many as 300 people camped on the lakeshore. It was during these pre-historic times that Native languages were developed; it was a time when myths were created to explain the world as it was seen at the moment; it was a time to forge family allegiances, establish contacts and grow. It was a time when man lived in peace with his environment and took only what he needed to live. This was the time before the white man came.

As the summer turned to autumn and autumn to winter, each family group would pack up their belongings and the supplies gathered in summer and travel back to their winter hunting grounds deep in the thick, wild bush that blankets this land. Over many generations and long before European explorers pushed west, this natural cycle of seasonal habitation established the site as a place of meeting and regeneration.

This arrowhead dates back almost 300 years to about the time white men pushed into the area.

Native history indicates that small totem groups of Blackfoot Cree were the first peoples to make use of the natural camp site on the deep lake located almost due north of present day Thunder Bay. While the Cree began their slow migration north and west during the 17th and early 18th centuries, the Ojibway peoples used the north shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior as their traditional hunting and fishing grounds. The Ojibway first had contact with white men – French explorers and traders – at Sault Ste. Marie in 1623.

It was about this time that small groups of Ojibway began to move north, away from the big lakes. Following the travel routes used by their Cree counterparts, family groups of Ojibway began to establish themselves as the dominant peoples of the large tracts of land north of Lake Superior and west of Hudson and James Bay. It is estimated that there were about twenty such family groups, each numbering between 100 and 300 people for a total population of perhaps 5,000, living in the area at the time of first contact with Europeans.

Ojibway Indians at their summer camp at the head of the Albany River.
(Photo by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada)

In the year 1670, with nomadic groups of Ojibway beginning to establish small, seasonal, lakeside communities in the area, the King of England made a decision which would greatly affect the exploration, and some would say exploitation, of these as yet unmapped lands. In May of that year, King Charles granted a charter which created the Hudson's Bay Company, named the area Rupert's Land and made the newly formed corporation of "Gentlemen and adventurers true and absolute Lordes and proprietors" of the vast drainage area of

the Hudson Bay basin – an area of almost a million and a half square miles. This sweeping charter gave the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) extraordinary rights to establish not only an economy for the huge area, but a system of exploration, contact and governance as well.

The HBC maintained control of Rupert's Land until 1869 when it agreed to transfer the area back to the crown under a document known as the Deed of Surrender. A year later the territory was officially incorporated into the new Dominion of Canada. For its efforts over almost two centuries, the HBC received as compensation from the crown a large sum of money and substantial land holdings.

After establishing company offices on the western shores of Hudson Bay at places like Moose Factory, Albany and, further north, at York Factory, the HBC began an aggressive investigation of Rupert's Land fuelled by an insatiable demand for fur on the European market. This was the

The Hudson's Bay Company offices at Moose Factory on James Bay.
(Photo by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada.)

beginning of the rich and fabled fur trade era that would last for 150 years. And so the powerful company sent out intrepid traders and explorers west from Hudson Bay with instructions to "mingle with the bands of Indians of the interior".

With competing French traders pushing north from Lake Superior in the footsteps of the Ojibway, the HBC was determined to establish a relationship with the natives of the area and so gain access to the valuable furs they collected. Archival records don't tell us who the first European was to reach Lake St. Joseph, or who named it, but we do know a map of the area made in 1748 by a trader and mapmaker named Henry Ellis does not show it, though Ellis does indicate Lake Nipigon and Lake Winnipeg.

Why a Factory?
The common title for a man who "traded in mercantile goods" at the time was a factor, which is why many of the larger HBC posts were called factories.

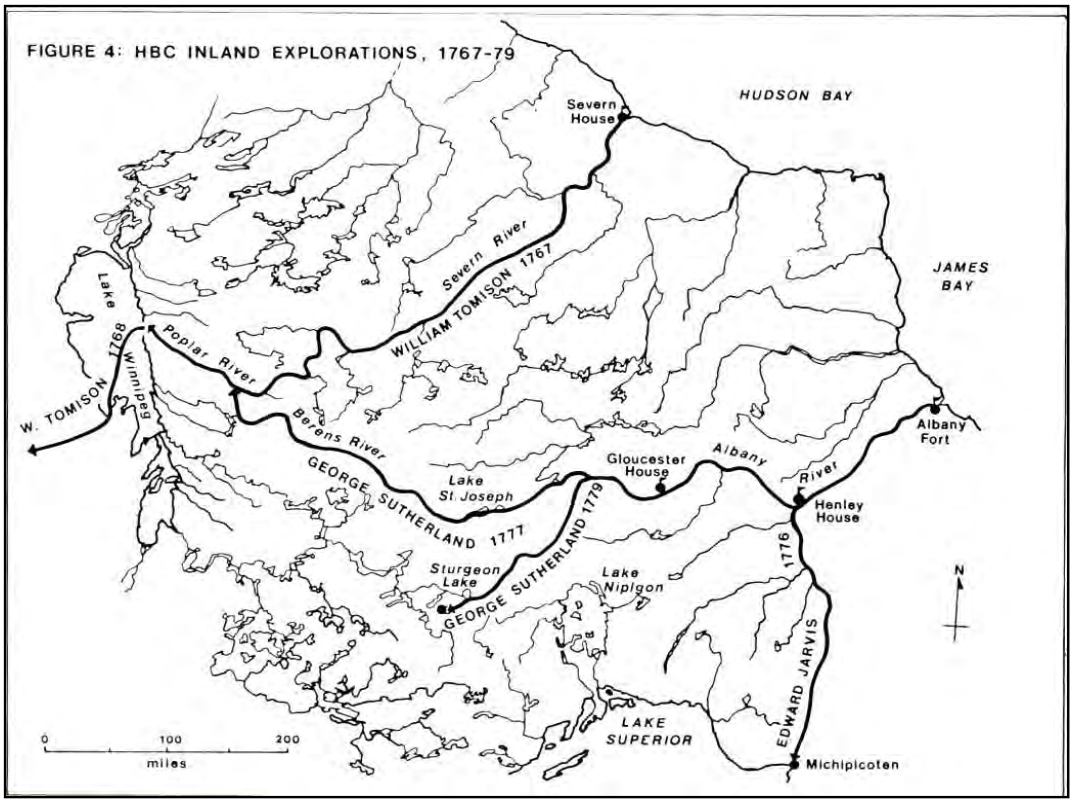
It is known that French explorers passed through the area in the mid-1700s – hence place names such as Lac Seul and Lac DeLesseps. In 1753, a free-trader named Anthony Henday claims to have made a trek into "the wild and barren lands of the northwest", which may have included Lake St. Joseph. Henday may even have traded goods for furs with the Ojibway at their summer camp on Lake St. Joseph, though he produced no map of the area.

The first written record of this body of water comes from an expedition in 1777 when George Sutherland, "a man of great prudence", was instructed by the HBC to "strike west from Fort Albany on James Bay". Two years later another Sutherland, though no relation, named James, accompanied

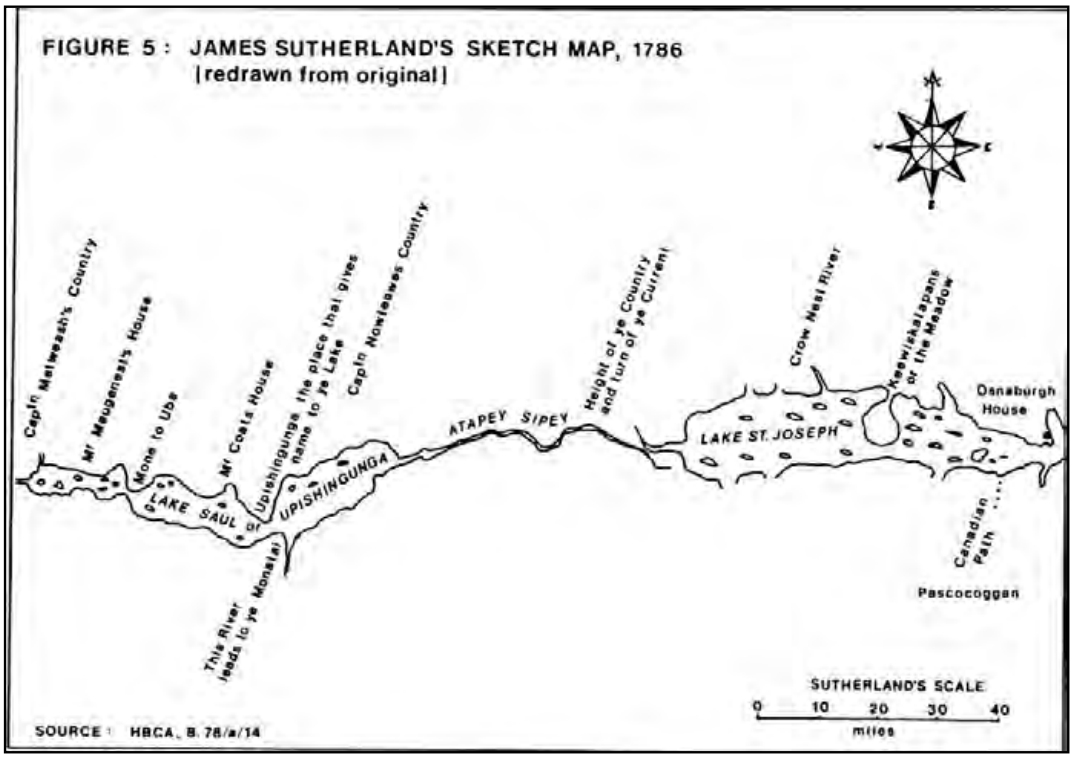
by an Ojibway guide named Abitawescum, passed by Lake St. Joseph and made “a rough sketch of the waterways” feeding into the Albany River. During this expedition, Sutherland reports of “a Canadian house on the river which leads to Eabemit Lake” though it appears it was abandoned by that time. ‘Canadian’ was a term used by the English to describe French traders, though more correctly spelled ‘Canadien’.

On a return trip to the area in 1784, James Sutherland wrote in his journal that he camped and traded with Natives at a lake they called Mishkeegogamang (Swampy Lake) and indicated it as a potential site for an HBC post as “a number of traders are plying the area lying in a semi-circle to the north, west and south of the lake”. The traders were looking to deal in the beaver pelts collected by the Indians during the winter and, according to Sutherland, “The beaver is in great plenty here, the Indians throwing away numbers (of them) as beneath their notice, and even cut pieces of the whole beaver to make them lighter carriage.”

On a map from the same year, Sutherland calls the lake ‘St. Joseph’ using a name given to it by the French traders who were taking furs under the corporate entity The Northwest Company, in direct competition with the HBC. In addition to Lake St. Joseph, Sutherland’s map of 1784 also indicates Lake Saul, a misspelling of Lac Seul. It should be noted that the lake Sutherland referred to during his travels through the region in the 1700s was much smaller than it is today. Dams added to the head of the Albany River to create hydroelectricity in 1935 caused Lake St. Joseph to swell and link it with other, smaller lakes in the immediate area.



The map above shows the routes followed by George and James Sutherland in the 1770s. Below, James Sutherland's 1784 sketch of Lake St. Joseph, relabelled in 1786 to indicate Osnaburgh House.



The numerous and scattered logbooks and journals left behind by explorers and traders such as James Sutherland paint a vivid picture of what it was like in the unfamiliar wilds. Aside from providing maps, geographical descriptions and information on travel routes, Sutherland himself often included in his diaries valuable insight into daily life of the aboriginal people. One such entry made in 1786 tells of the killing of a large black bear by a group of Indians, the meat of which is distributed freely to all who would have it: "Such strangers are the Indians to frugality that they vie with each other who shall give the most away", and "They are remarkable kind to us, we being invited the same as themselves and they give us a large share." This simple act of sharing by the Natives, which was so refreshing to Sutherland, was seen by another HBC man, Samuel Hearne, with a much different insight. In 1769 Hearne reported, "A sufficient proof of the singular advantage which a native of the country has over an Englishman, when at such a distance from the Company's factories, as to depend entirely on them for subsistence". Hearne also sheds some light on the trade economy of the time when he notes in his journal that he

Taking Notes

A required duty of each factor of an HBC trading post was to complete a daily journal. These entries, some detailed, some brief, chronicle the various aspects of life in and around the posts. Things such as weather, water levels, animal populations, even forest fires and crop conditions were noted in these journals and provide us with a tangible link with the people and natural resources involved in the fur trade. Researchers and archaeologists continue to use HBC journals as a source of information for scientific projects such as climate change.

exchanged a single knife for a canoe, the knife being worth, in Hearne's words, "not much more than a penny".

It should also be noted that Hearne was twice robbed and abandoned by his Indian guides while exploring the region on behalf of the HBC.

A birch bark canoe on Lake St. Joseph, circa 1880.
(Photo by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada.)

In the same year Sutherland observed and reported the generous nature of the Indians he came in contact with, another HBC front man was sent out west from James Bay to follow Sutherland's route and to establish a trading post in the interior of Rupert's Land. In the spring of 1786, John Best travelled up the Albany River and eventually pushed through the bush at the north end of Lake St. Joseph. This difficult journey would have taken Best over forty days by canoe. In his journal, Best wrote: "I intent to stop here until I see if any Indians come this way or not to inform me if this is the right place or not." At this time, Best gave his location as "on the shore of Pashcocoggan".

It was actually on Lake St. Joseph, on the very site used for summer gatherings by the Ojibway and the Cree before them, that Best established a permanent HBC trading post and not Lake Pashcocoggan. There are a couple of possible explanations for the discrepancy. Either Best mistook his actual location at first, or he moved his camp from Pashcocoggan to St. Joseph between his arrival in the spring of 1786 and the establishment of the post in July of that year. Maybe the Indian he waited for to pass by told him that the natural camp on the northwest shore of Lake St. Joseph would be a better place to set up shop. With his location described as "on a low sandy point projecting from the north side of the Lake about a mile from the head of the Albany River," the truth of how John Best came to be on the site is now lost in the mists of time, but we do know the post he founded on Lake St. Joseph on July 16, 1786, has remained on the same site. We also know that the name Osnaburgh House was given to the post at this time.

With regard to the name Best gave to his trading post, there are a variety of reasons he might have chosen Osnaburgh. HBC archival records note that Osnaburgh was "presumably named in honour of the province of Hanover (Germany) named Osnabruck". At the time, due to royal allegiances, the King of England also held the title Prince of the Bishopric of Osnabruck, so Best may have been looking to honour King George III of England with the name. Another plausible origin of the name comes from the fact that Osnaburgh is the name of a shopping street in London, England, a street that is crossed by another roadway called Albany Street. Best probably would have been familiar with these places and may have used a common name from his homeland for his trading

post as opposed to the name of a foreign city he had never been to. A final source of the name, and one that best fits with the story, might be the rough fabric made in Europe that the HBC bought in bulk for trade purposes. This course cotton was sold under the brand name ‘Osnaburgh’ and was regularly used to make shirts for HBC traders. Without a thought for kings or large European cities, Best may simply have named his post after the clothes he was wearing when he arrived. He may even have given one of these Osnaburgh cotton shirts to the kind Indian who directed him to this place. No matter what the origin of the name, Osnaburgh first appeared on maps made in the mid-1780s and has remained there ever since.

Bolts of Osnaburgh cotton used by the HBC to make shirts.

At the time of its founding, Osnaburgh House was meant only to be a temporary post aimed at cutting off the competition of the French traders from the south. Instead it quickly became the most important HBC trading post west of James Bay. Within a few short seasons Osnaburgh House was a busy and profitable place, due in no small part to the fact that it was established on a well-worn travel route at a site which had been used as a gathering spot for hundreds of years before

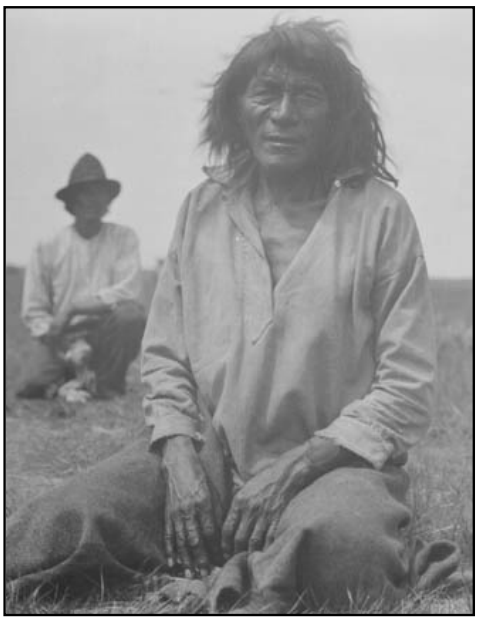
Sutherland or Best ever set eyes on it. Journal entries from the winter of 1787 indicate the post took in 4,330 beaver pelts during a single season, for which it traded things such as knives, axes, cloth and pots and pans – simple items the natives quickly came to crave and later became dependant on.

A button found at Osnaburgh House dating to the early days of the post.

Best wasn't the only trader in the area at the time. Mercenaries, known as 'free traders', often set up temporary shop in tents near the Osnaburgh site and the upstart Northwest Company regularly vied for the attention of the native fur trappers. By the late 1780s, despite its remoteness, the area was dotted with competing trading posts and competition for furs was fierce. As time went on and the resources of the HBC grew, the well-managed Osnaburgh House from its commanding location on Lake St. Joseph emerged as the primary post for the region and remained so for almost 200 years.

The intense rivalry between competing traders in the Osnaburgh-Lac Seul area in the late 1700s made for some very vivid journal entries and produced a number of colourful characters – Sutherland and Best among them. One of the thorns in the side of the HBC men was a Northwest Company trader named Duncan Cameron. A feisty and respected little Scotsman, Cameron seemed to relish taking pot shots at his competitors. His journal entries at the time describe a discussion he has with "an Indian named only Cottonshirt who claims to come from the fort at Osnaburgh, his fort as he

calls it". Duncan writes: "This Indian has been spoiled by the Hudson's Bay people at Osnaburgh where they consider him the master." He then goes on to explain that the Indian called Cottonshirt "had his nose bitten off at the door of the Osnaburgh fort!" It may just be romantic notion but could this claim of Osnaburgh House being "his fort" suggest that Cottonshirt was in fact the Indian who directed Best to establish his trading post where he did? We may even go so far as to conclude that this Indian took his name from a shirt made of Osnaburgh cotton. Claiming to have had his nose bitten off naturally leads us to believe that this Indian had enemies. Possibly he was a lone Cree living among the dominant Ojibway who tragically overstepped his bounds by claiming ownership of Osnaburgh. If so, Cottonshirt could be the answer to a mystery that wouldn't reveal itself for another two centuries.



A Cree Indian of the North wearing a cotton shirt made by the HBC. *(Photo by T.C. Weston)*

At the time Best was setting up his post at Osnaburgh on Lake St. Joseph, his friend and fellow fortune seeker James Sutherland was exploring the lands around Lac Seul and Red Lake making maps and noting suitable locations for future HBC expansion. In 1789, possibly weary from years of travelling in the wild, Sutherland returned to Osnaburgh House and took on a position at the post. The following year, Best himself set out in the hopes of heading off the other traders in the region and set up a temporary trading post on

Cat Lake to the northwest of Osnaburgh. While at Cat Lake and with Sutherland literally 'holding down the fort' at Osnaburgh, Best reported to the HBC that "there will be a poor trade from inland this year as there is so many traders, and everyone will get but a little." Late in the summer of 1790, with Osnaburgh firmly settled and left in the care of Robert Goodwin as factor, a rejuvenated Sutherland leaves "with 13 men in canoes to establish a Hudson's Bay House on Red Lake, north of Lake of the Woods".

Goodwin was, by all accounts, an excellent businessman and very good at establishing a working relationship with the natives he traded with. In his journal entries, Goodwin notes the growing appetite for European goods – especially tobacco, liquor and guns – and how the natives would travel long distances to obtain them. In the 1791 post records he wrote: "Even strange Indians from the Great North (north of Lake Winnipeg) also arrived this season. It would appear the natives have learned to shop around for the best trade." Goodwin also speculated on the impact free traders were having on his business. "The Hudson Bay Company is losing 50 percent of their trade to these peddlers," he lamented.

While Goodwin grappled with a market economy at Osnaburgh, his predecessor Best went on to establish a series of trading posts in the area and didn't return to his beloved Osnaburgh House until late in 1796. The next year, after hearing of the death of his old friend James Sutherland at Red Lake, Best travelled west and assumed Sutherland's position of Master at the trading post there. Two years later, John Best retired from the employment of the HBC as a Master Inland Trader and returned to Scotland to live out his days as a respected adventurer and gentleman. The epitaph on his grave reads: "In Memory of John Best who resided 32 years at Hudson Bay whereby his strict integrity, zeal, personal strength, courage and humanity he gained the confidence of his employees and the affection of the inhabitants of that country."

At about this time in our story, another significant death and burial occurred, this one at Osnaburgh itself. We know that first the Cree and then the Ojibway people used the site as a summer camp and can only surmise they experienced deaths and traditional burials while occupying the land, but there is precious little physical evidence of pre-contact or early contact graves, with one notable exception. Sometime in the late 1700s, according to an analysis conducted by William Ross of Ross Archaeological Research Associates, a 40-year-old male of native ancestry

Skull of an unknown Indian buried behind the trading post in the late 1700s.

was buried along with a bundle of his possessions in a shallow grave behind the original trading post built by John Best. There is no mention of this unusual grave in any of the HBC records kept at the time therefore any information applied to the circumstances of this man's premature death and subsequent burial is pure speculation. Was the man murdered over a trade deal gone bad or during a rum-fuelled argument? Could this be the remains of the Cree Indian Duncan Cameron called Cottonshirt who claimed to have had his nose bitten off at the door of the trading post? More clues pointing to the identity of this poor soul are literally unearthed later in the story.

There is only one other Indian mentioned by name in the post journals of the time. In the late 1780s, an Ojibway chief called Shewequenap is noted as arriving to trade furs at Osnaburgh with a flotilla consisting of no less than 14 canoes. The trading post at Osnaburgh had become the centre of a growing economy for the region.

As the 1700s came to an end and a new century loomed, John McKay had taken over as Post Master at Osnaburgh House after serving as an assistant to Sutherland at Red Lake. With the fur trade raging, the natives were eager to do business to obtain the European goods they had come to appreciate. There is evidence that a trade in the wild rice gathered by the natives began to emerge along side the traditional fur business before the start of the 19th century. McKay first reported dealing in wild rice in 1799 when his logbooks show "2 gallons of rum and 2 pounds of tobacco for 16 gallons of a brown rice." To this day, the wild rice of the area around Lake St. Joseph is a prized commodity and highly sought after.

Getting to Osnaburgh was an arduous but spectacular journey by canoe. At right, 'Harry the Cook' prepares a shore lunch on the Albany River in 1883.

(Photos by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada)

In 1810, almost 25 years after it was founded, Osnaburgh House consisted of the two original buildings constructed during the time of Best and Sutherland. When William Thomas arrived to assume the position of Post Master in the spring of that year, he reported back to the HBC head office that the site is "a warehouse of store with the upper floor appropriated (sic) to the Master's residence and a house in which the men reside when at home; they are in a very indifferent state…" Thomas expressed his plan to upgrade and expand the operation with the

construction of new buildings and also notes the abundance of fish available in the lake: "…whitefish, pickerel, trout and sturgeon are found, with whitefish being the most plentiful."

Though his intentions may have been good, it doesn't appear any serious construction, other than the addition of a stockade fence, occurred at Osnaburgh until Thomas was replaced by John Davis as Post Master in 1816. In the autumn of that year he reported: "…a temporary building was put up…wood was got home and the foundation laid for a Master's residence, the one occupied at present is falling down with one of the walls having sunk considerably…" The next year, Davis further reported: "The dwelling house began last year is very little further advanced. Two sides of the stockades were taken down and reset in a smaller compass by which the place is strengthened and more easily defended. Two log houses are erected and are placed at opposite angles on the stockades so as to sweep round the whole place…" Regardless, or maybe because of the stockade fortification around the post, Osnaburgh House was never threatened or attacked in all its years serving the area.

Other buildings were constructed over the next two years including replacing the Master's residence which was "merely a NW house built in the usual manner of round logs without going through the carpenters hands and the vacancies plaistered with loam." Of this type of construction, Post Master Davis reported: "These houses are warmer and better adapted for this country than houses built by a carpenter of square logs and look equally decent when neatly finished."

During the winter of 1816, a catastrophic event on the other side of the world began to have very serious consequences for the English traders at Osnaburgh, ones which would affect the entire area for the next three years. Though it wasn't understood at the time, a huge volcanic eruption in far-off Indonesia sent a plume of dust and ash into the atmosphere that would change weather patterns all over the world. In Rupert's Land, the traditional home of the Cree and Ojibway, this climatic disruption caused a drought, failed crops and a near famine. The years 1816 through 1818 were very difficult times for the traders at Osnaburgh who couldn't grow food and came to rely heavily on the local Indians to keep them alive. In fact it is noted, "the Hudson's Bay men (are) in a state of near starvation as they are unable to forage for food and crops are poor; excluding potatoes, the Post is totally dependent on the Ojibway for food." Journal entries from these lean years indicate "the Indians also supply fat for candles, sturgeon oil for lamps, quills for pens, birch bark for shingles and spruce pitch to seal cracks and patch canoes."

A lone canoe on the placid waters of Lake St. Joseph.
(Photo by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada)

By the time the 1820s rolled around, with weather patterns in the area returning to normal, crops in place and trade routes well established, the post at Osnaburgh flourished once again. By this time, the handsome profits of the fur trade it dominated allowed the HBC to acquire its chief rival, the Northwest Company. Save for a few straggling free traders, the trading posts of the HBC were the only business ventures in the area and small communities of natives began to establish themselves near each post. Between the years 1774 and 1821, the HBC established as many as 250 trading posts in the vast area known as Rupert's Land.

Construction of a birch bark canoe at Osnaburgh, circa 1883.
(Photo by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada)

It was common for Osnaburgh House to employ as many as 30 Indians during the summer months as a new flurry of building and expansion began. In 1821, Post Master William McKay reported: "This post requires new buildings…it is now 30 to 40 years since Osnaburgh was settled and the Post has continued on the same spot." McKay even considers

moving the post “to the narrows about 7 miles higher up the lake” because the fishing was better but upon further examination these plans were abandoned. In 1823 he reports, “The Osnaburgh House buildings have been completely renewed and we have 3 new buildings with a stockade around all.”

Elsewhere in the Dominion of Canada, settlement was occurring at a rapid pace. Far to the southeast of Lake St. Joseph, a man named William ‘Tiger’ Dunlop on behalf of the Canada Company, travelled through the Huron Tract and, in 1827, established a town site at the mouth of the Maitland River on the shores of Lake Huron. Dunlop named his town in honour of Viscount Goderich, an English statesman who at the time was the vice-president of the board of trade for the new Dominion and who would go on to become a member of the Select Committee of the Hudson’s Bay Company. His namesake, the Town of Goderich, with its unique octagonal Market Square, would eventually become the birthplace of a man whose fortunes would have a profound effect on Osnaburgh. Also, the eight-sided octagon would reappear numerous times in the latter-day history of the property.

Arial view of the Town of Goderich, founded in 1827 by William Tiger Dunlop, showing its unique octagonal Market Square.

In the minutes of the Select Committee on The Hudson's Bay Company dated June 4 1857, Viscount Goderich has the following exchange with David Anderson, a director of the HBC:

Viscount Goderich*:* Will your Lordship tell the Committee what route you followed from Lake Winnipeg to Moose (Factory)? – *David Anderson: By Fort Alexander, across Lake Seul, by Osnaburgh House, Martin's Falls, down the Albany River, and from Albany to Moose.*

Goderich*:* What mode of conveyance did you use? – *A canoe.*

Goderich*:* How long did it take your Lordship to go from Fort Alexander to Moose? – *I was absent going and returning three months and a half, spending a fortnight at Moose.*

Goderich*:* It took you about six weeks then? – *Yes.*

The post journal entries from Osnaburgh House for 1820 through 1870 indicate continued good relationships with the natives and a reasonably steady business in furs. One notable report comes in 1829 when Post Master Alex Collie wrote, almost as an afterthought, "The store blew up today and was almost completely destroyed". No further explanation or description is offered until the spring of 1830 when it is reported, "A new store has been built".

Another significant event in the history of Osnaburgh House occurred in 1835 when Post Master John Vincent's wife Charlotte gave birth to a son, Thomas. In addition to having

the unique distinction of being the first person of European descent to be born at Osnaburgh, Thomas Vincent went on to become a famed missionary for the Church of England in the region. From his humble beginnings, Thomas spent his adult life ministering to "the people of the wild wastes of the north including Lake of the Woods, Lake Seul, Lake St. Joseph and all along the Albany" and was the only religious influence in the region until other Anglican missionaries began to visit the area in the 1870s.

Vincent's mother, Charlotte, was a pleasant and steadying influence on Osnaburgh House during her time there. She hung curtains in the windows, tended the meagre gardens in the yard behind the Post and transplanted wildflowers into beds around the master's residence. The enduring touch of her hand on the property was seen in the flower garden she planted and framed at the base of the Post's most distinguishing feature – the flag pole which rose above the trees and flew the bright red HBC flag. Before filling it with hardy peonies, Charlotte made an interesting choice for the shape of her garden in the wilds. The shape she chose was an octagon.

The early to mid-1800s may well be called the hey-day of the Osnaburgh trading post. Furs and food were plentiful and business was brisk. Each summer, family clans would travel from their winter trap lines to gather in tents around the post. There they would trade for cloth, knives, guns and clothing, and spend their days fishing the bountiful waters of Lake St. Joseph before heading back inland for the winter season. In 1871, T.C. Rae, a clerk at Osnaburgh House, recorded the first reference to the use of dogs to pull sleds. He also reports the

practice of employing the natives to make snowshoes: “Trapping began in November and many men were employed making snowshoes.” Rae further notes that in August of 1872, “a large house is built of squared timbers, stonework and pinebark…a cellar (is) dug for ice and a load of stones to install a new chimney for the shop is collected…”

A trapper prepared to leave the Osnaburgh post to check his winter trap lines. *(Photo HBC Archives Museum of Manitoba)*

By this time the famous York boats, the workhorses of the HBC, were a common sight on the waterways of Rupert’s Land. Basically big canoes with 12 oars, York boats were used as barges to transport large quantities of goods and furs between trading posts. With Osnaburgh House at the centre of an expansive trading area and enroute to the large factories at York and Moose, it became necessary for the post to build its own York boats. For much of the mid- to late 1800s Osnaburgh was responsible for providing most of the boats for the area with the post master employing dozens of men to cut wood and mass produce the big Yorks. Over a few short

years more buildings were constructed on the site to accommodate this boat-building frenzy and Osnaburgh took on the look of a factory itself. Boatloads of goods and people came and went almost daily during the summer months as the flurry of economic activity raged on unabated.

Osnaburgh House at the peak of its boat production circa 1900 and, at right, a 12-oared York boat plies the waterways of the Northwest. *(National Archives of Canada)*

But by the late 1880s, the rash and unchecked trade in furs began to have a noticeable impact on the population of fur bearing animals in the region. Post clerk Robert Wilson, who used his journal to express fears about the thinning of the beaver population, duly noted this decline in available furs. He attributes this to the fact that "the local Indians, driven by the encroachment of hunters and trappers from elsewhere, no longer spare a few animals for breeding purposes as has

hitherto been their custom." With demand for furs still high in Europe and supplies waning, prices for furs jumped and eventually led to an almost complete depletion of the beaver population in the region. This fact brought about the end of the fur trade era in Canadian history, an era which had flourished and prompted extraordinary exploration for almost 250 years.

Towards the end of the 19th century, missionaries travelling in the footsteps of Osnaburgh's famed Thomas Vincent began to have an impact on the spiritual lives of the local population. It is noted that an Anglican missionary would visit Osnaburgh "once or twice each year to perform marriages and baptisms". Though infrequent, the visits of the missionaries had a huge influence on the region. In 1898, St. John's Anglican Church was constructed near the trading post overlooking the waters of Lake St. Joseph on a site that had been used as a graveyard for over 100 years. Though records fail to indicate who proposed and oversaw construction of the church, it would not be wrong to imagine it was Vincent himself who, being in his 60s at the time, felt inspired to build a place of worship on the site of his birth.

The Canon Sanderson in front of St. John's Anglican Church just after it was constructed at Osnaburgh House.

The mission influence on the region must have been great as it was noted “church services are held nightly at the post”. In 1902, the Anglican Diocese of Keewatin came into being with Joseph Lofthouse as its first Bishop. Keewatin remains as one of Canada’s largest dioceses to this day.

Happy couples having just been married at St. John’s Church at Osnaburgh House in 1930 by Rev. L. Garratt.
At right, getting to the church on time was a problem when marriages were performed only once or twice a year!
(National Archives of Canada)

The Signing of Treaty 9

In 1905, having been the site of a Hudson's Bay trading post for almost 125 years, Osnaburgh was chosen as the perfect place for government officials to meet with Native leaders to present one of the most significant treaty documents ever negotiated in Canada. The historical signing of James Bay Treaty 9 at Osnaburgh House on July 12 of that year would have far-reaching social and economic impacts on the Mishkeegogamang Nation, as the local native peoples had become known.

Having been made aware that a large summer gathering of Native family bands regularly took place on the grounds of the Osnaburgh Trading Post, a group of commissioners representing the Crown set out in a convoy of canoes to present the treaty. The governmental party lead by Duncan Campbell Scott, the son of a Methodist preacher, included three commissioners, a doctor, a photographer, an HBC representative, two police officers and a leather case containing the extraordinary sum of $30,000 in small bills.

Crown Commissioner Scott arriving at Osnaburgh by HBC canoe in 1905.
(Photo by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada)

Upon arriving at Osnaburgh House and being formally welcomed by Post Master Jabez Williams, the commissioners asked the Native people assembled there to appoint a leader to speak on their behalf. The spokesman they unanimously chose was a respected and charismatic elder named Daniel Missabay who, incidentally, was illiterate and completely blind. At first, Missabay was reluctant to accept the duty but at the urging of his nine-year-old son Thomas, who never left the old man's side, he relented and was presented as the spokesman for the Mishkeegogamang. After having the full wording of the treaty read to him through a translator, Missabay asked that he be given until the next day to consider what he had been told. The commissioners readily agreed and retired to the Post Master's house to rest after their long and arduous journey.

The blind Ojibway Chief Missabay discusses the presentation of Treaty 9 at Osnaburgh House in 1905.
(Photo by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada)

During the night, Missabay discussed the treaty with the other elders of the people gathered around the post. They understood it to be a request from the English King to share the land, but the wording, especially as read through a translator, was not clear to them. Tired and still not prepared to give an answer to the commissioners, Missabay slept. It is said that a vision came to the great Missabay that night – the spirit of Cottonshirt?? – a vision which told him the treaty would benefit his people as long as two specific conditions were agreed to. With this insight, Missabay prepared himself to answer the King's representatives.

With dawn the next morning, Missabay called the commissioners together and told them he needed to hear the answers to two questions before he would sign the King's paper: "Will my people still be able to live on their traditional lands?" and "Will we be able to hunt and fish and live the life we always have?"

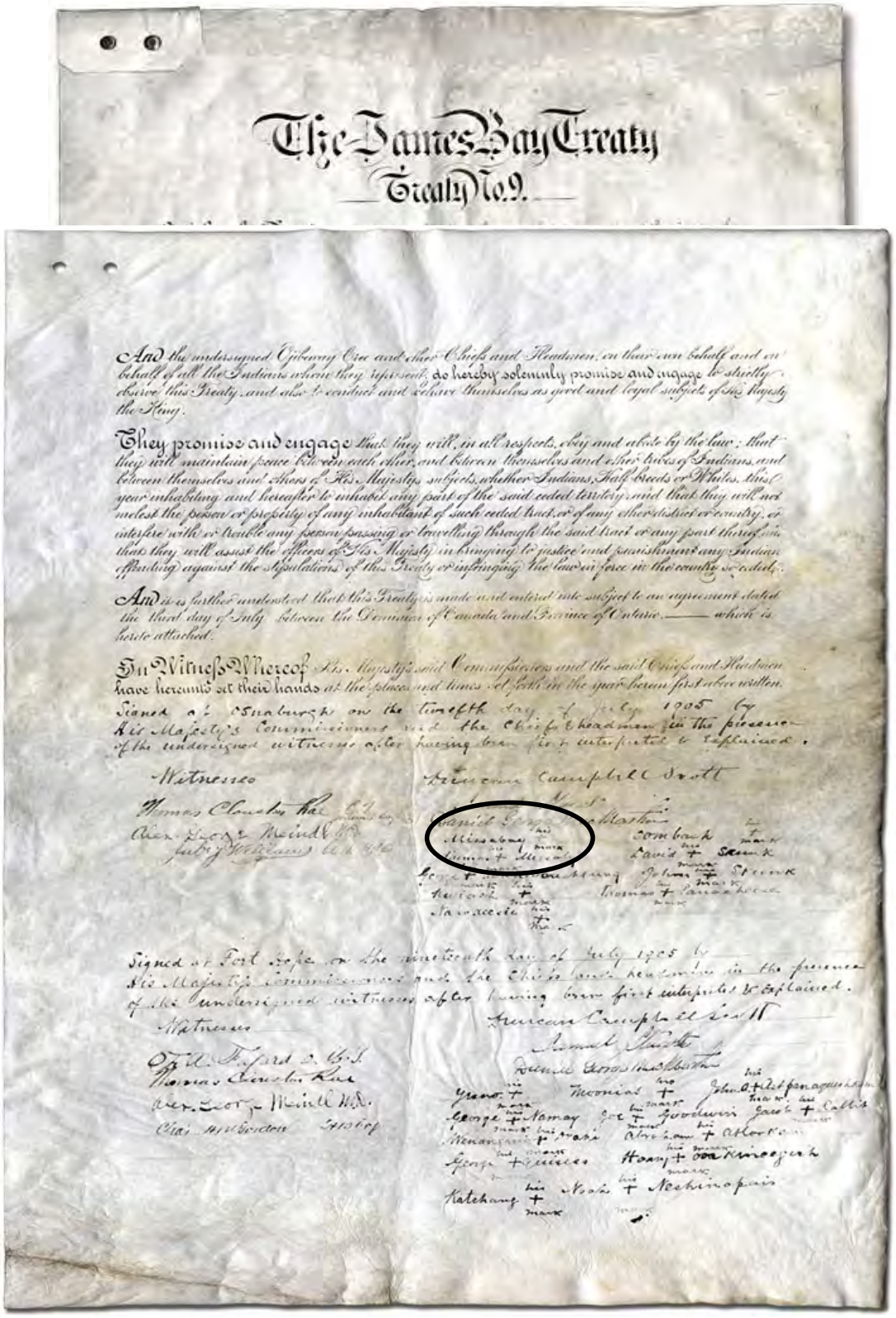
In all good faith and eager to have the treaty signed, the Commissioners told Missabay that the traditional lifestyle of his people would not be affected by the agreement and that they would be able to hunt and fish to sustain themselves as they always had. In addition, they pointed out that the treaty included provisions for the building of a school for the children. Satisfied with these answers, Missabay called his people together and told them, in what was at the time described as "an eloquent speech" that he would sign the agreement. During his address to his people, Chief Missabay praised the government and "advised the young men to listen well to what the white men had to say and to follow their advice and not to exalt their own opinions above those of men

who knew the world and had brought them such benefits." Just prior to a lavish feast of bannock, bacon, pork and tea followed by a plentiful supply of pipes and tobacco, the great Chief Missabay set his mark – a simple 'X' – on Treaty 9.

With the signing complete, the commissioners immediately gave every person present a gift of $8 in cash along with a promise to return each year with additional payments of $4 each. During this distribution of cash to almost 350 people on the beach at Osnaburgh, Commissioner Samuel Stewart observed with some astonishment that a payment was made "to one particular Indian, his three wives and seventeen children!" For his part in the negotiations, Chief Missabay was presented with an official copy of the treaty and, according to the logbook of the Treaty 9 Commission, "a twelve-foot Union Jack, much to the delight of all the Indians."

With the all important signature of Missabay in hand, the Commission promptly travelled from Osnaburgh House to other outlying settlements and had little trouble in securing enough signatures of Native leaders to form one of the largest encompassing treaties ever agreed to in the history of Canada.

As proper Victorians, the Commissioners often noted in their journals when particular Indian Bands could be praised for their "cleanliness and godliness". Com. Scott wrote: "At Osnaburgh, the civilizing work of the church Missionary Society was noticeable…a commodious church was one of the most conspicuous buildings at the Post and the Indians held services in it every evening."



The James Bay Treaty

Treaty No. 9.

And the undersigned Ojibeway Cree and other Chiefs and Headmen, on their own behalf and on behalf of all the Indians whom they represent, do hereby solemnly promise and engage to strictly observe this Treaty, and also to conduct and behave themselves as good and loyal subjects of his Majesty the King.

They promise and engage that they will, in all respects, obey and abide by the law; that they will maintain peace between each other, and between themselves and other tribes of Indians, and between themselves and others of His Majesty's subjects, whether Indians, Half-breeds or Whites, that year inhabiting and hereafter to inhabit any part of the said ceded territory, and that they will not molest the person or property of any inhabitant of such ceded tract, or of any other district or country, or interfere with or trouble any person passing or travelling through the said tract or any part thereof, in that they will assist the officers of His Majesty in bringing to justice and punishment any Indian offending against the Stipulations of this Treaty or infringing the laws in force in the country so ceded.

And it is further understood that this Treaty is made and entered into subject to an agreement dated the third day of July between the Dominion of Canada and Province of Ontario ——— which is hereto attached.

In Witness Whereof His Majesty's said Commissioners and the said Chiefs and Headmen have hereunto set their hands at the places and times set forth in the year herein first above written.

Signed at Osnaburgh on the twelfth day of July 1905 by His Majesty's Commissioners and the Chief & Headmen in the presence of the undersigned witnesses after having been first interpreted & explained.

Witnesses

Thomas Chamberlain

Alex. George McNeill M.D.

Judge Williams

Duncan Campbell Scott

Missabay his mark

Signed at Fort Hope on the nineteenth day of July 1905 by His Majesty's Commissioners and the Chiefs and Headmen in the presence of the undersigned witnesses after having been first interpreted & explained.

Witnesses

Thomas Chamberlain

Alex. George McNeill M.D.

Duncan Campbell Scott

Samuel Stewart

Missabay his mark

Missabay's mark appears beside his name about half way down this page of the original Treaty 9 document signed in 1905.

An Ojibway Indian at the time of the first treaty payment.

Scott made particular note of the Christian influence in the area and of the simple and pure nature of the Native people when, in recalling the events of June, 1905 he wrote: "The James Bay Treaty will always be associated in my mind with the figure of an Indian who came in just as we were ready to leave. The pay-lists and the cash had been securely packed for an early start next morning, when this wild fellow drifted into the camp. He did not ask for anything, he stood, smiling slightly. He seemed about twenty years of age, with the face of great beauty and intelligence, and eyes that were wild with a sort of surprise – shy at his novel position and proud that he was of some importance. His name was Charles Wabinoo and we gave him eight dollars. When he felt the new crisp notes he took a crucifix from his breast pocket, kissed it swiftly, and made a furtive sign of the cross. 'From my heart I thank you,' he said. There was an Indian at the best point of a transitional state, still wild as a lynx, with all the lore and instinct of his race undimmed, and possessed wholly by the simplest rule of the Christian life, as yet unspoiled by the arts of sly lying, paltry cunning, and lower vices which come from contact with such of our debased manners and customs as come to him in this wilderness."

It is interesting to see Commissioner Scott so pointedly blame any unseemly behaviour by the Natives on their having had contact with white men. This was not an opinion readily expressed at the time.

The meetings, circumstances and festivities that followed the signing of Treaty 9 in 1905 are well documented. Part of the Commission's party included photographer Robert Bell who, using heavy, almost primitive equipment, recorded the historic signing of Treaty 9 on film. Having travelled extensively in the area in 1883, accompanying the Treaty 9 Commission would mark Bell's second trip to Lake St. Joseph. He returned again and for the last time in 1906. Many of the images laboriously captured by Bell during those times, along with a large number of historic artifacts, are still on display in The Old Post and Village Store today.

Photographer Robert Bell, with beard at front, taken during an expedition to Lake St. Joseph in 1883.
(National Archives of Canada)

In 1929, almost two decades after Missabay set his simple mark on Treaty 9, another government commission made the long trek to Osnaburgh House. As Canada and its provinces and territories were settling on borders, it became necessary to amend the treaty to indicate that the border of Ontario, which until that point only went as far as the Albany River, would now extend much further north. Instead of being in the Northwest Territories, the Osnaburgh Reserve Lands were to be part of Ontario. After hearing and agreeing to the amendment to Treaty 9, the Natives gathered around the trading post to feast, celebrate and collect their treaty money. In the words of the Commission Report from the time: “At Osnaburgh some 498 Indians were paid treaty money and during the afternoon a program of sports was provided. The games consisted among others of running, jumping and stone putting. The games were all spiritedly contested.”

Families gather beside the Osnaburgh trading post during treaty payment day in the summer of 1906.
(Photo by R. Bell, National Archives of Canada)

While the commissioners of Treaty 9 assured Missabay and his people that they would be able to hunt, fish and live on their lands as they had always done, this promise, as the Natives understood it at the time, was not always kept.

The back of the Osnaburgh House property circa 1929 with the church overlooking the grounds of the trading post.
(National Archives of Canada)

Things changed greatly for the people of the area in the 1930s when gold was discovered north of Osnaburgh, near what is now the community of Pickle Lake. With mining poised to replace the fur trade as the basis of the local economy, industry moved into the region and demanded hydroelectric power. By 1934, two large mining operations, the Pickle Crow Gold Mine and the Central Patricia Mine were in place and Hydro Ontario was under pressure to supply them with electricity. To do this, the Crown Corporation unilaterally moved to install a dam at Rat Rapids on the Albany River at the north end of Lake St. Joseph. The dam and hydroelectric plant it ran was complete by March of 1935 and water levels in the lake began to rise, taking with it some seasonal homes,

gardens and even gravesites. Suddenly, beaches used for summer gatherings were flooded and untold archaeological treasures were lost in a bid for power. Despite this rush to provide electricity to the mines, the residential communities in the area didn't have hydro service until 1970.

At Osnaburgh House, the buildings situated nearer the lake had to be moved and the post itself quickly found itself much closer to the lakeshore. But still it and the church that stood behind it remained the centre of activity for the area. Now being closer to the shore, the post added a dock that allowed goods to be moved from boat to the warehouse with greater ease. As Lake St. Joseph swelled with water, it spilled over to encompass nearby smaller lakes and created numerous small islands. One of these newly created islands was called 'Grace', a name that would come to play a big part in the rich and colourful history of this place in the years to come.

All dressed up for a visit to the store at Osnaburgh House in 1929.
(National Archives of Canada)

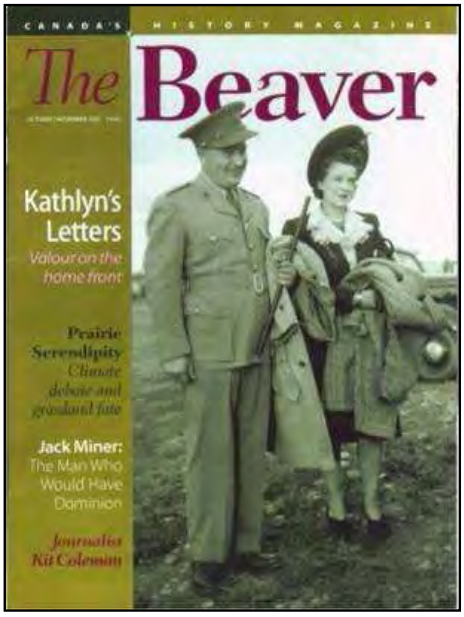
Another technological change affected Osnaburgh following the First World War. Travel and trade took on a whole new dimension with the arrival of the first bush planes to the area. By the 1930s, the trading post was being regularly serviced by Austin Airways, a small company owned and operated by renowned WW1 flying ace Jack Austin. After 200 years of having to travel long distances by canoe, the bush plane created a fast and dependable supply line for the post and the community surrounding it.

A bush plane from Austin Airways made its first visit to Lake St. Joseph in 1929 and brought with it a fast, dependable supply route.
(National Archives of Canada)

For visitors to the area at least, travel by canoe had become a choice; an adventure to be had by following the routes used by the voyagers, factors and free traders 200 years before. In a 1936 issue of The Beaver, Canada's History Magazine, author Martin Bovey wrote about his "modern canoe journey down the famous Albany River, a journey which seems to have lost none of its thrill." In his essay entitled Albany River Adventure, Bovey wrote, "…we paddled across the east end

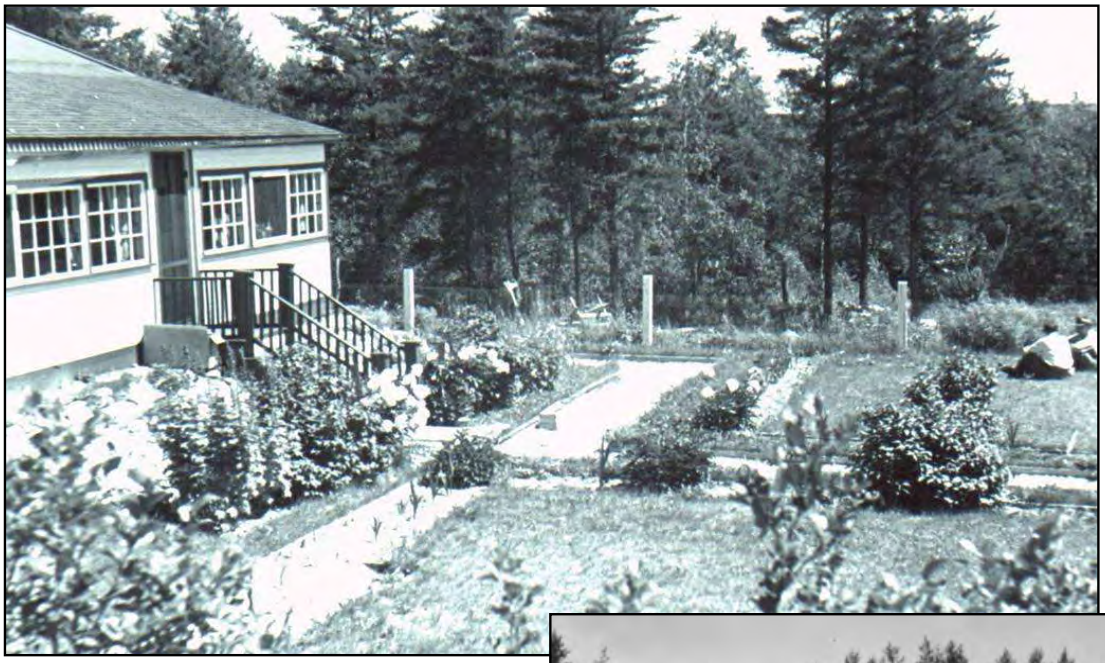
of Lake St. Joseph and beached our canoes on the sand before a cluster of red roofed white buildings, over the largest of which was a black sign with gold letters reading, 'Hudson's Bay Company'."

During his stay at Osnaburgh House, Bovey is hosted by Post Master Sandy Hughes and Clerk Wilson and treated to a comfortable place to sleep, ham sandwiches and "innumerable bottles of beer." Like so many adventurers and travellers before them Bovey and his party enjoyed the rare solitude, serenity and long established hospitality of the place. "Not soon shall we forget our visit to Osnaburgh House!" wrote Bovey in the spring of 1936.



The cover of the 1936 Beaver Magazine that featured a story of a canoe trip to Osnaburgh House.

It wasn't until 1937 that the Province of Ontario considered building a road to link the communities around Lake St. Joseph with the CNR railway line that passed by Savant Lake to the south. After much discussion and negotiation, a roadway to Rat Rapids that ran within three kilometers of the landing at Lake St. Joseph was completed in 1944. By then, a small community called Old Village had sprung up on the point of land directly across the lake from Osnaburgh House. At the time the highway was being built Old Village consisted of two churches (one Anglican, the other Catholic), a small school, a council hall and two-dozen homes.



The gardens and grounds of Osnaburgh House as they appeared in 1941. Notice the peonies filling the gardens in front of the Master's Residence. Within a year, the church behind the post would be struck by lightning and burn to the ground.

When the road was complete, the community of Old Village moved north of Rat Rapids to Doghole Lake and established New Osnaburgh. It wasn't until 1956 that Highway 599 finally made the community of Pickle Lake accessible by road. To this day, there is no road on the west side of the lake leaving the Osnaburgh House property isolated and accessible only by boat or bush plane. The wild boreal forest has reclaimed the site of Old Village now, though some of the old structures can still be seen through the trees. It is interesting to note that the older log buildings have withstood the ravages of time much better than their more 'modern' neighbours – a testament to a style of building well suited to its environment.

The large warehouse at Osnaburgh House looking out across Lake St. Joseph. The community of Old Village can just be seen on the far shore. This photo was taken from the steps of the Master's Residence in the late 1930s.

It was a bolt of lightning in 1942 that destroyed an integral part of this historic site when the church that long looked down on the trading post from the hills behind burnt to the ground in a spectacular storm and fire that lit up the waters of Lake St. Joseph. But thanks to the goodwill and hard work of a God-fearing local man, St. John's soon rose again like a phoenix from the ashes. In 1947, the Bishop of the Diocese of Keewatin commissioned Henry Gray to rebuild the church at Osnaburgh. For this work, Gray received no pay; instead he was told by the Bishop that he would "see his reward in heaven." It is remembered how Henry Gray, years after rebuilding the church and then well into his 70s, would remark he had still received "no shunia (money) and no heaven." Gray died in October of 1987 at the age of 80 while cutting wood for the winter, quite literally with an axe in his hands. We can assume the debt owed to Henry Gray by the Bishop has now been paid in full. His legacy lived on through his granddaughter Connie Gray-McKay who went on to become the first female Chief of the Mishkeegogamang People.

The Catholic Church at Old Village across the lake from Osnaburgh House. Notice the octagon window on the front of the rotting building.

During the early 1940s it was HBC Post Master A. McKinley and his wife, known to all simply as Missus, who left their lasting mark on Osnaburgh House. After the dramatic rise in the water levels of Lake St. Joseph in the late '30s and the subsequent moving of the post back from the new shoreline, the McKinleys took on the task of re-establishing the grounds of the post. While her husband saw to the building of a wharf and other pressing construction projects, Missus, who by all accounts was as hard working as she was fun loving, tended to the extensive courtyard of the post. She transplanted peonies to flowerbeds in front of the manager's residence, made vegetable gardens behind and, just as Charlotte Vincent did 100 years before her, created a large octagonal 'lawn' at the base of the flagpole in the centre of the yard. It was probably Missus McKinley who found, painted and placed two large stones at the gate to the courtyard, two white rocks that remain in exactly the same place today.

Post Master McKinley saw to much of the reconstruction of Osnaburgh House in the early 1940s.

Missus McKinley carried on Charlotte Vincent's love of peonies and octagons.

The octagon lawn re-established by the McKinleys in 1940 after the post was moved back from the lakeshore.

In the late 1940s, the HBC sold a two-acre parcel of land at Osnaburgh to the Province of Ontario for the construction of a nursing station to serve the area. The station was later moved to the community of New Osnaburgh after it headed north with the highway. These two-acres are the only piece of the original property not still owned by the HBC.

Anglican missionaries operated summer school in the church at Osnaburgh and later in the council hall at Old Village between 1950 and 1961. During those years, the HBC Post Master would bring children across the lake by barge to attend these often haphazard and poorly organized classes. It wasn't until 1962, almost six decades after it was promised to Daniel Missabay at the signing of Treaty 9, that small, dedicated school buildings were constructed at New Osnaburgh. These inadequate classrooms were eventually replaced by a state-of-the-art facility, aptly named the Missabay Community School, in 2001.

The last 20 years of its life as a trading post were not good ones for Osnaburgh House. Furs were no longer in demand and goods once only available from the post could now be had elsewhere. With trade falling off dramatically and other stores and shops opening for business, the writing was on the wall for the 180-year-old post. The HBC eventually recalled its last factor, Jock Gibb, and in 1963, the famed Osnaburgh House was closed and abandoned. The forest slowly began to move in.

Above, one of the last photos taken of the trading post in operation, complete with customers on the doorstep, and below, after being abandoned by the HBC in 1963.

Osnaburgh's Years of Grace

While Osnaburgh House gasped its last breath as a trading post and was slowly reclaimed by the wild from which it had sprung two centuries before, a young man from Goderich was spending the summers of his youth at a family cottage on Georgian Bay. Far to the south and east of Lake St. Joseph, near the Cape Crocker Indian Reserve, John Grace became fascinated with his native neighbours. It was this intrigue of the native people, their culture, philosophy and character,

coupled with a burgeoning business sense, which prompted Grace to seek employment with the Hudson's Bay Company as a manager trainee. In 1976, Grace accepted a posting at the HBC store in New Osnaburgh. During his time among the Mishkeegogamang people, he also worked as a dispatcher for Austin Airways and, in keeping with his growing commitment to the community, eventually took on the challenging position as a social worker for the area.

It was in the spring of 1982 while working with families around Osnaburgh that Grace met a young woman who would eventually become his wife and partner. Wendy Dell was born at Red Lake, in the very shadow of James Sutherland's trading post, and after receiving a post-secondary education in Winnipeg and then Toronto, returned to the north as a teacher at a small school in the remote community of Pickle Lake. In a few short months after their first meeting, the two were married. "Having developed a love of the north," Grace wrote, "it seemed appropriate that I would fall in love with a northern girl."

John Grace arrived in the north in 1976 complete with a burning entrepreneurial spirit.

A job transfer later that year took the newlywed couple to Wendy's hometown of Red Lake but it wasn't long before the shores of Lake St. Joseph and the Albany River called them back to Osnaburgh. In 1983 John and Wendy purchased a store at the

narrows of the Albany and under the name Albany Free Traders, went into business for themselves. Not unlike the original Osnaburgh House, the store was much more than a simple retail venture. In addition to offering everything from milk to lumber, Albany Free Traders also delivered mail, ran a taxi service, provided charge accounts and even traded for furs brought in by the trappers in winter. “Our customers were all native people from the reserve and small family residential areas such as Pashkekogan, Ten Houses and Mile Fifty,” remembers John. “We traded fur all winter and wild rice during the summer months.” The store very quickly became a meeting place for the people living in the area, a place to hear news, greet friends, negotiate for supplies, and renew relationships. Indeed, John Best would have been proud.

All the while, the site of Osnaburgh House was largely ignored and had fallen into ruin. During the two decades since it was abandoned, some of the buildings were dismantled and moved but the church and one or two of the older structures simply decayed and began to collapse. Weeds and tree roots took over the sprawling graveyard leaving the once proud and sacred burial sites almost hidden beneath the forest floor. And behind the oldest building left standing, the HBC store itself, a much more mysterious grave was left unmarked, undiscovered, untouched…waiting.

The forgotten graveyard of Osnaburgh.

It was a leisurely afternoon boat ride early in the summer of 1986 that first brought the Graces to the sandy point of land sticking out into Lake St. Joseph about a mile from the head of the Albany. Accompanied by the first of three sons, two-year-old Jonathon, John and Wendy pushed through the weeds and brush and found the treasure that is Osnaburgh.

Osnaburgh House as John and Wendy Grace found it in 1986, 200 years to the day after John Best first set up shop here on the advice of a passing Indian.

Though the site of the old trading post was in an almost indistinguishable state, “the property itself was absolutely breathtaking.” It was while walking the site that day that John and Wendy came upon, first two large white rocks and then what appeared to be a long wooden flagpole rotting on the ground, surrounded by peonies. At that moment, like a whisper from the past, the octagon shape set down by Charlotte Vincent and then Missus McKinley revealed itself around them. That shape, the most distinguishing feature of

his hometown in far away Goderich, appeared as a sign to the young man and sparked in him a vision of what Osnaburgh House once was and, more importantly, what it could become. Almost 200 years to the day after John Best first opened for business here, the Graces bought the two acres of freehold land and negotiated a long term lease with the owners of the rest of the property, John's former employer, the Hudson's Bay Company.

The lawn of the Old Post and Village showing the two large stones placed at the gates of Osnaburgh House by Missus McKinley in 1940.

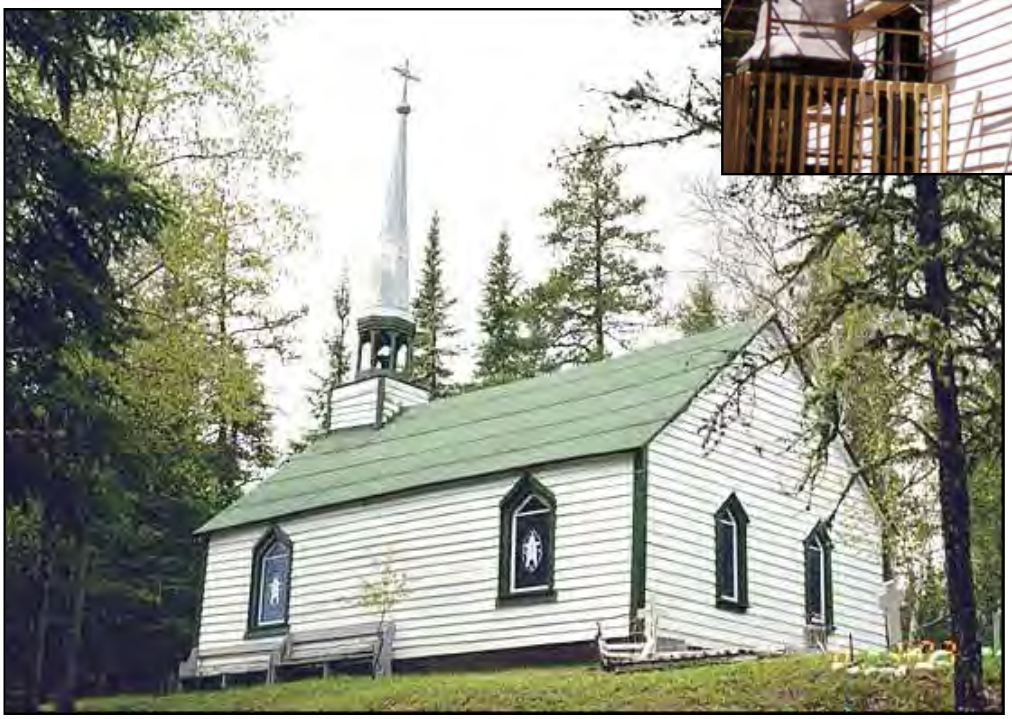
With little but a dream inspired by an octagon lawn, the Graces brought a spark of life back to Osnaburgh by building a small log cabin on the property that summer. Over the winter, the growing family began planning how they could make a future there and it was during those cold, dark months the idea for The Old Post and Village was born. With a vision in his mind and a child in his arms, John invited the elders of the surrounding communities to meet with him on the very spot John Best met Cottonshirt back in 1786. Under the newly erected flagpole in the centre of the octagon, John shared his vision with the people he had come to know and deeply respect. Speaking on behalf of the elders was James Masakeyash, the only person still living who was present when Daniel Missabay set his famous mark on Treaty 9, also on this very spot, in 1905.

The vision John brought to the people was one of renewal and respect; to grow a business that would utilize the extraordinary natural resources of the lake without exploitation, and to revive and maintain the rich history and cultural significance of the property. With the assurance that the burial site behind the church would be shown all due respect and that it would always be accessible to the people of Mishkeegogamang, the Graces received the blessings of the elders that day. As a symbol of understanding and acceptance of this arrangement, Masakeyash pulled the rope to raise a flag over Osnaburgh again. Old James Masakeyash would live on to see the Graces' dream become reality before surrendering his spirit at the age of 104.

The next order of business was the restoration of the property and the resurrection of the church and the accompanying graveyard. With a burning entrepreneurial spirit and a solid business plan, construction on The Old Post and Village began. A power generator was flown in, buildings went up and the creeping boreal forest was once again pushed back to reveal the splendour of Osnaburgh.

One of the biggest projects undertaken was the careful rebuilding of St. John's Church and, after much negotiation with church administrators, the Graces received permission to remove the steeple from the abandoned Catholic Church at Old Village across the lake and move it to the St. John's chapel at Osnaburgh. The decision to go to the trouble to move the fragile steeple came when John first set eyes on the decaying building at Old Village: it boasted an unusual window in the shape of an octagon.

Above, the abandoned church as it was found in 1986 and below, after its resurrection complete with stained glass windows and a ‘new’ steeple, being installed at right, thanks to the ruins of a church at Old Village.



As the physical assets of the business took shape and new buildings were constructed on the property, John looked carefully at a hard lesson learned by the HBC factors when over-trapping during the fur trade era led to a severe depletion of the beaver population. The lesson was careful conservation of nature's resources. With an eye towards the future rather than exploitation for quick profit, John worked closely with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Mishkeegogamang People to have strict conservation practises imposed on the taking of fish from Lake St. Joseph. Thanks to his efforts and those of like-minded others, the Lake St. Joseph Accord now protects the rich fishery of the lake assuring bountiful seasons for many generations to come.

Lake St. Joseph has become one of the best fisheries in Ontario.

Things moved quickly for the business in the months following the meeting with the elders under the flagpole at Osnaburgh. With the church reconstructed, complete with new stained glass windows reflecting the Native culture of the area, new buildings in place and

More than two decades after it was abandoned by the HBC, Osnaburgh was given a new lease on life and opened as The Old Post and Village on the first of June 1987.

the old HBC trading post restored to its former glory, the Graces erected a plaque on the property which reads: "Osnaburgh House, founded in 1786 by the Company of Gentlemen Adventurers. The store was first established here on July 16, 1786. The post stayed active until 1963. It has now been restored as The Old Post and Village by Dell-Grace Enterprises on the 200th anniversary of its founding."

Two centuries after John Best set up camp on the shores of Lake St. Joseph and more than 20 years after it was abandoned by the HBC, Osnaburgh had a new lease on life and a bright future ahead. Since the official opening of The Old Post and Village on June 1, 1987, fishermen and adventure seekers from all across North America began making their way to the legendary lake and Osnaburgh once again became a place of meeting and shared camaraderie. Guests of the Old Post are housed in five ultra modern cabins, four named after factors of the original trading post and one a memorial to Daniel Missabay; visitors spend their days leisurely angling for "pike the size of fence posts," according to Bruce Ranta of Ontario Out of Doors Magazine. "Lake St. Joseph is, without doubt one of Ontario's most fantastic pike fisheries," Ranta wrote in a recent issue of the popular magazine. "After your first visit, you'll want to return again and again."

Osnaburgh House trading post restored as The Old Post and Village.

In fulfilling the promise made to James Masakeyash, the graveyard behind the church once again became a sacred place and is often visited, not only by the Mishkeegogamang People, but also by others travelling long distances to seek out the final resting place of their ancestors. Though the cemetery is no longer used for interment, five guests of the Old Post have had their ashes scattered on the property – Joe Price, Hal Turner, Dick Morgan, Russ Ward and, 15 years later, Russ's son David, a testament to the spiritual impact Osnaburgh has on those who have spent any length of time there.

The old cemetery once again revealed behind the church.

In the summer of 1998, the Old Post was honoured with a visit by the granddaughter of Canon Sanderson. In retracing the steps of her missionary ancestor, Margaret made the long journey to Osnaburgh and, with a tear in her eye, knelt in the church her late grandfather had held worship in so many years ago. A year later, in 1999, the chapel of St. John's was the site of a very special wedding ceremony when Cheryl Hooker, the great-granddaughter of Richard Hooker, was married there. Richard had been the Post Master at Osnaburgh House from 1917 to 1922.

Another figure from the distant past made an appearance at Osnaburgh in 2002 when, on a fresh early summer morning the eldest son of the Graces, Jonathon, made a startling discovery. While making his way along the path behind the store, the curious young man noticed something unusual sticking out of the lawn beside the track. Upon closer examination and much to Jonathon's surprise, it became apparent the object was a human skull.

Remembering the commitments made to the local people, the Graces took into consideration not only the legal ramifications of the discovery of unidentified human remains, but also the historic and cultural issues associated with such a find. In addition to contacting the provincial police and coroner, John called upon not only an anthropologist and an archaeologist, but most importantly the elders of the Mishkeegogamang for help. With the complete skeleton exposed, the wise old men of the Mish people used nothing but the powers of instinct and intuition to proclaim that this was the unmarked grave of a Blackfoot Cree. For their part, the police simply excavated the site, noted the find and returned everything they found to the Graces.

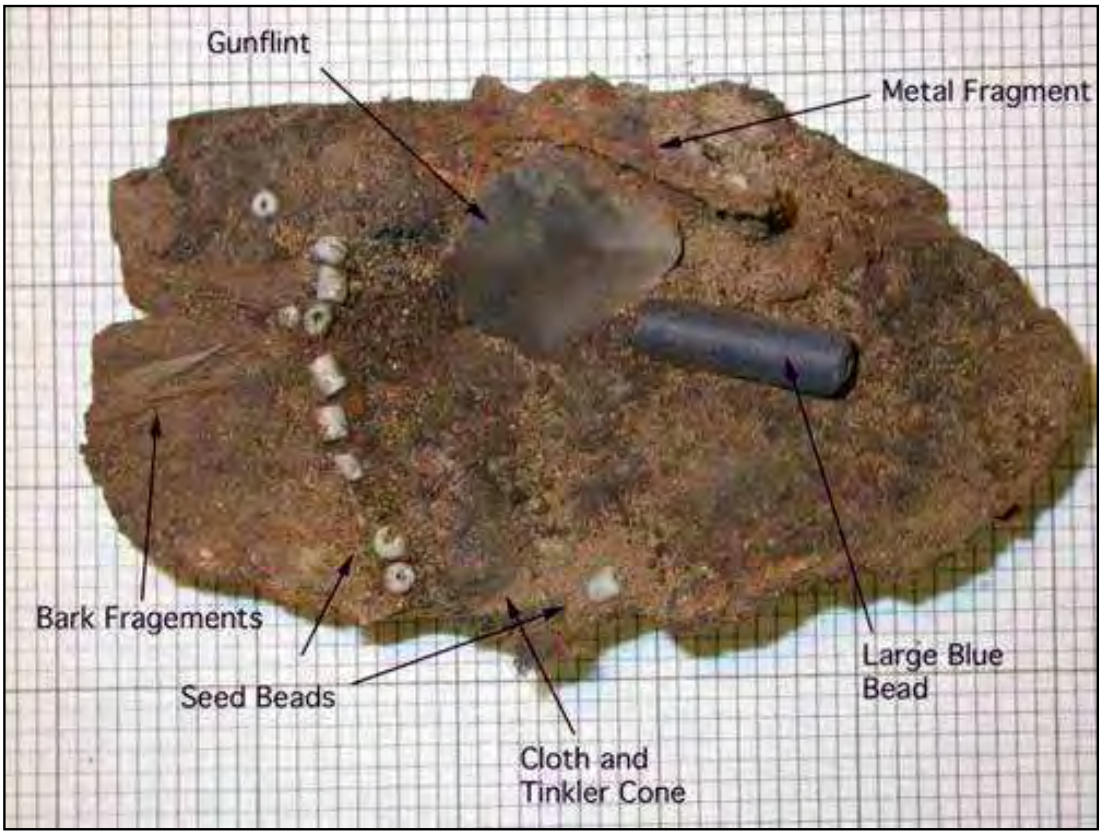
Ontario Provincial Police excavate the unmarked grave discovered by Jonathon Grace in 2002.

The two scientific studies done on the find, one a skeletal analysis conducted by Dr. Joseph Molto, the other a detail of the 'burial bundle' found with the body done by William Ross, give us a few more tantalizing clues as to who occupied this most unusual grave. According to Dr. Molto, the bones found a mere 17 inches below ground at Osnaburgh belonged to a 40-year-old man of native descent who had "a traditional rather than a European diet." The archaeological analysis suggests a burial date "to the end of the late 1700s." A middle-aged Cree Indian living a traditional lifestyle buried behind the HBC trading post in the late 1700s – might this be the remains of the kind Indian who led John Best to the camp site in 1786 and who received a new cotton shirt for his troubles; the Indian who identified himself to Duncan Cameron as 'Cottonshirt' claiming Osnaburgh was his fort and that he'd experienced violence there? Would it not be natural to conclude that Cottonshirt eventually met his end at Osnaburgh and was unceremoniously buried behind the post?

Along with the skeletal remains, the shallow grave also yielded a burial bundle consisting of a decorated cloth bag containing a number of artifacts including beads, a gunflint used to make fires, two small pieces of metal, a bundle of birch bark strips and 11 copper tinkler cones. Due to the release of copper salts as these cones degraded over time, the burial bundle was very

Copper tinkler cones found with the skeleton helped preserve many of the artifacts.

well preserved making it a rare find indeed. Even more unusual is the presence of cloth that normally would rot away very quickly but in this case was intact thanks to the copper cones. The cloth that made up the bundle was described in the analysis as "heavy, coarsely woven fabric." It is impossible not to suggest Osnaburgh cotton, made into a bag from a worn out shirt.



Contents of the 'burial bundle' taken from the shallow grave at Osnaburgh House.

Of course, we will never know for sure who it was Jonathon found sticking out of the ground that morning, but there is more evidence pointing to ol' Cottonshirt than anyone else. Maybe once again and for the last time, the wild Indian who had his nose bitten off at the door of the trading post made his presence known at Osnaburgh. Whoever he was, this lost soul

was given a proper re-burial in September of 2006 when Mish elder Levius Loon joined Chief Connie Gray-McKay and a small group of others in a sacred ceremony on the front lawn of St. John's Church. First wrapped in moose hide and placed in a hand-hewn pine box, the bones and all the possessions found with them were placed back into the ground by the same hands that pulled them out – Jonathon's.

Knowing the importance of Treaty 9 to the local people and the historical role played by Osnaburgh House in its signing, the Graces were honoured to host a celebration at the site on its centennial anniversary. In July of 2005, one hundred years to the day from the time Chief Missabay set his mark on Treaty 9, a commemorative re-signing was conducted under deep blue skies at The Old Post and Village. This re-establishment of the agreement made between the Crown and the Native people living on the vast lands surrounding Lake St. Joseph was a very important event for the Mishkeegogamang Nation. Just as it was a century before, hundreds of people travelled by boat and canoe to Osnaburgh to acknowledge the treaty in celebration. The event included a large traditional feast for all and a public viewing of the original document signed by Chief Missabay, as well as numerous ceremonial dances and drumming circles throughout the summer's day.

Reflecting the spirit in which the historical document was signed, Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Stan Beardy said the treaty agreed to by his ancestors "represents the recognition of our nationhood as a people of Northern Ontario and we are really proud of that." Also on hand for the centennial were such luminous dignitaries as National Chief

of the Mishkeegogamang Ojibway Ronald Roundhead, Grand National Chief Phil Fontaine and Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse. Representing the Government of Canada and the Province were the Minister of Natural Resources and Aboriginal Affairs The Hon. David Ramsay, Minister of State The Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario The Hon. James Bartleman and Leader of the Federal NDP Jack Layton. The Governor General of Canada, the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, was scheduled to speak during the centennial celebrations at Osnaburgh House but unfortunately had to cancel at short notice for health reasons.

Numerous dignitaries took part in celebrations to mark the 100th anniversary of Treaty 9 in 2005.

Today, just as it did when John Best and an Indian named Cottonshirt walked the site, and as it did when nomadic clans camped here for hundreds of summers before that, the sandy point of land that juts out into the dark waters of Lake St. Joseph is once again a place of convergence. It is a place where adventure seekers come to try their luck and where others come to find a rare peace and solitude. It is a place with a rich past, a bright future and, if you listen to the wind in the pines, a wonderful story to tell.

It all happened at a place called Osnaburgh.

Site of the Osnaburgh House trading post prior to the rising of the waters of Lake St. Joseph in the mid-1930s and, below, the same site as The Old Post and Village begins to take shape 50 years later.

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The Author

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