

*"Providing the window into the past to preserve Langley's heritage for today and tomorrow"*

## President's Message

Greetings at Christmas time. Your board of directors have been having socially-distanced styled meetings as necessary to stay up-to-date on events and prepare for the return of more normal activities.

In anticipation of at least a partial summer reopening some alterations are taking place at the CNR Station.

Planning for the new building for the museum in Fort Langley is in progress, and we hope this will be one of the projects that will proceed as part of the economic stimulus plan.

We have not been able to sponsor thousands of school children to have a learning experience at the Langley Centennial Museum this year because of the restrictions.

Following a serious flooding incident at Milner Chapel, the Milner Community Association have asked for assistance in restoring the exterior building damage not covered by their insurance. The directors approved the funds needed.

Large numbers of people are viewing our website and I wish to thank Mark Forsythe for his efforts in keeping it interesting. I also wish to thank Helen for her dedication to the station volunteers and the production of the newsletter.

The directors wish everyone continuing good health and a happy Christmas and New Year.

Fred Pepin  
*LHS President*

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Christmas traditions have arrived in BC from around the world. Many come from areas of Canada settled many years before BC— including Upper Canada. Gordon Sly is a retired history teacher based in Kingston, Ontario and he sheds some Christmas light on these traditions.

## Evolution of Christmas Traditions

By Gord Sly

When immigrants first came to North America, Christmas was not an important, or was perhaps a dormant, celebration. Many settlers were too preoccupied with survival to take time to celebrate.

Many, especially in the northern regions of the continent, worked on Christmas Day for the first year or two after their arrival. They needed to clear land, construct buildings and generally prepare for a long, cold winter in their new home. Christmas celebrations, when they did begin to appear, were originally adult affairs, visiting neighbours for parlour games, parties, feasting, dancing and other merriment. It wasn't until the early 19th century when Christmas became an exciting, important part of children's lives. As communities grew, schoolhouses began to replace haphazard home education and tutoring.

Most pioneers in Upper Canada came indirectly from European countries, especially the British Isles, by way of the United States as United Empire Loyalists after the American Revolution. They brought with them many of their old Christmas traditions, somewhat improvised, given the resources available.

Decorating for Christmas was relatively simple and usually involved the whole family. The father and boys in the family would go to the woods and cut down an evergreen tree for the branches to make garlands to decorate the home. Garlands, decorated with ribbons, bows and berries, would be placed over windows, doors and on mantles of fireplaces. Cranberries substituted for the red holly berries used in the old country.



Image: Pioneer Christmasses..., Gerry Burnie

Since mistletoe was not readily available in North America, the "kissing bough" served the same purpose at Christmas time. It was made from evergreen branches and hung by ribbons from the ceiling, usually at the entrance of the home.



Photo: Lang Pioneer Village Museum (@langpioneer)

The centrepiece of early Christmas celebrations was the Christmas pudding. The process of making this plum pudding began on "Stir Up Sunday," the last Sunday before Advent in November.

The first puddings contained meat, eggs, flour, cinnamon, currants, berries and other fruit; in later years, it contained more fruit and little or no meat. Sometimes a coin or two might be inserted into the pudding, perhaps along with a "bachelor button."

This superstition indicated that the one who found the button would remain unmarried. Everyone in the family made a wish as they took their turn stirring the pudding. It was kept in a big pot for five weeks, and then on Christmas Day it was steamed in a cloth or special mould and served with rum and brandy sauce. The latter was poured over the pudding and set ablaze immediately before mother carried it flaming to the dinner table. It would be served at the end of a meal of bagged and fattened wild turkey and fixings. The turkey replaced the traditional Christmas goose of the old country.

Eventually, the Christmas tree became a major focus during the Christmas season. Early Christmas gifts were usually made by members of the family and placed under the tree without wrapping. A girl might receive a cornhusk doll and a boy a wooden horse carved by his father.

# *Wheels of Time Christmas*

By Mark Forsythe

Frost crunched under his feet as Richard Simpson stepped onto the station platform. He scattered sand from a bucket and glanced down the steel rails that glistened in the moonlight. A horn's wail drifted in from the east, the train from Edmonton was rounding the bend at Glen Valley. Right on time.

At the far end of the platform a man tugged at the flaps of his tweed cap and craned his neck. He rocked slowly inside a long overcoat. Clusters of people stamped their feet. Mr. Simpson rolled the cart out from the baggage room, its wheels screeched like angry blackbirds. The oil can could wait until tomorrow. Christmas Day, 1919.

A wreath made from cedar, salal and red ribbon hung on the waiting room door. Inside, Mary Simpson sat behind the ticket counter studying her seed catalogue and dreaming of spring. It couldn't come soon enough. This was the coldest December she could remember. Families had already been skating on the channel. The coal supply for the station stove was disappearing faster than sunflower seeds in the bird feeder. The newspaper spread out beside her blared more warnings about the killer flu. Mary wrapped her shawl tighter and sipped her tea. Maybe she would try growing the hardy Hibiscus.



A bell clanged from inside clouds of steam erupting from the engine — a volcano on wheels. The iron horse pulled to a stop, exhaled beside the platform, while the engineer gave a familiar wave. With a sharp snap followed by a grunt, the baggage car door slid open. "Ahoy, Richard!"

A small mountain of freight quickly formed at the baggage car door. Mr. Simpson stacked it all neatly onto his cart: mailbags, trunks, even a box of newly hatched chicks. He wrapped the box with a woollen blanket that muffled the frantic chirps inside. The man wearing the tweed cap was now making his way down the platform.

"Scuse me sir...have you seen a Red Rocket?"

The station agent glanced at the man's boots. Military. Scuffed and well worn.



“Is this what you’re looking for?” A child’s wooden sleigh with chipped paint and a slightly bent handle sat on the platform. “That sure has some history”, remarked Mr. Simpson. The man in the tweed cap nodded. “I used to fly down the coulee on it. Right behind our barn. It’s for my niece — her father will pick it up.” Mr. Simpson took mental note and said, “It’s arrived just in the nick of time then.”

“And could you please give him this.” The man handed Mr. Simpson a patch of leather that had been fashioned into the shape of a star. It was soft to the touch. Carved onto its surface was the word, HOPE. The other side read, FAMILY.

A truck engine roared to life, someone was singing the Wexford Carol. “In Bethlehem, upon that morn...” Other voices lifted into the night, high above the station's peaked roof. Mr. Simpson turned to the man in the tweed cap. He vanished into a swirl of steam. The station agent drew another breath of icy air and whispered, “Merry Christmas, stranger.”

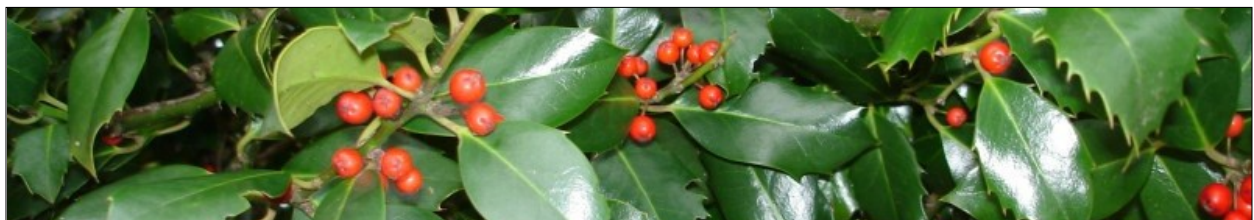
## Invasive Holly Mapping Team

By Derby Reach Brae Island Parks Association

After the leaves fall from the trees we can look deeper into the forest and see things we couldn't before. This is why winter is a great time for invasive species mapping. And this winter we'll be focusing on invasive holly. There is lots of invasive holly beginning to pop up at both Derby Reach and Brae Island.

The Invasive Species Council of BC explains how English holly has become seriously invasive because of its adaptability to grow in shade or sun and how easily its seeds are spread by birds. It grows rapidly 7 to 10 m tall, casting deep shade that deprives native plants of light. Its roots effectively out-compete many native species for nutrients and water; it is a notorious water hog, thus preventing native plants from obtaining sufficient water.

If you want to join our volunteer invasive species mapping team, please email Roxci at [outreach@drbipa.org](mailto:outreach@drbipa.org).



## Down By The Station

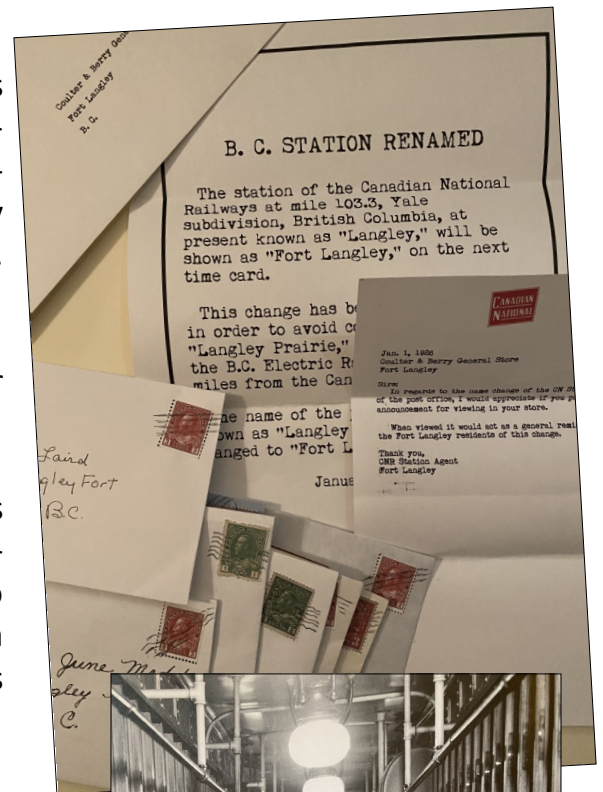
Station agents across Canada's early railway stations numbered in the tens of thousands. A prominent position in the community with extensive job duties. Railways were often accused of overworking their solitary agents by agreeing to offer more services at depots. Postmaster was one such service.

Knowing this, we've added period mail in the office for volunteers to elaborate upon an agent's responsibilities.

LHS member Mary Watt has carefully reproduced letters and postcards complete with stamp, envelope, and postmark. Mary, also a station volunteer that prefers to do projects behind the scenes, was inspired by rereading a family member's letters dating back to the early 1900s and scanning digitized newspapers for real-life events.

A 1926 letter to Coulter and Berry General Store from CNR advises that "Langley Station" at mile 103.3, Yale Subdivision, will now be "Fort Langley" and the village post office known by "Langley Fort" will be "Fort Langley".

Early postmasters dropped off and picked up their mail sacks at railway stations. In communities too small for separate post offices, depots served as the town's post office with agents handing mail to residents through the ticket window.



*Left:* Baggage wagons piled with mail sacks ready to be loaded. Canada's mail service moved mail mainly aboard headend cars on passenger trains.

*Right:* Sorting mail under a Pintsch gas lamp, 1937. "Post office cars operated between key Canadian cities in fast passenger trains, and all through the trip postal employees sorted mail for distribution at destination. Mobile sorting continued until airlines began to carry mail on a large scale after World War II."

Photos: From "Train Country," MacKay & Perry

# The Arrival Of The Christmas Tree

Evergreen boughs were symbolic in ancient Egypt and adorned windows and doors of homes and temples across the Roman Empire. Many believed evergreens kept away witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness.

Trees are documented as being decorated on Christmas Eve in Riga, Latvia in 1510, in the German region of Alsace, France in 1531, and in Strasbourg, Germany in 1605. Popular legend, however, frequently credits Martin Luther (1483-1546), leader of the German Reformation and founder of the Lutheran Church, for inventing the Christmas tree in the 1500s.

In Canada, the Christmas tree was introduced around the end of the 18th century. Some sources attribute settlers of German Lutheran descent in Upper Canada for sharing their deeply-rooted customs.

We know trees were illuminated with little candles and decorated with home-made ornaments that included ribbons, small gifts, cookies, and strings of popcorn. Candles were replaced at the beginning of the 20th century by electric bulbs.

It wasn't until the mid-19th century, that the Christmas tree became common practice in England. Popularized by Prince Albert, Victorians considered a good Christmas tree to be six branches tall and placed on a table covered with a white damask tablecloth. Europeans typically used small trees about four feet in height, while Americans liked their Christmas trees to reach from floor to ceiling.

Blown-glass ornaments produced in small workshops in Germany and Bohemia were being sold in Britain and the United States in the 1870s. By 1890, F.W. Woolworth was selling \$25 million in ornaments annually.



Queen Victoria, German Prince Albert, and family gathered around the Christmas tree as published in the "Illustrated London News" in 1848. What was done at court immediately became fashionable.

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Sources include: History.com; Britannica.com; CHIN; TheCanadianEncyclopedia.com





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