

From the Chair

The Influence of Water

The Great Lakes and its tributaries have been a dominant force in the settlement of all peoples who have come to this land. For thousands of years, the Indigenous peoples depended upon those waters for food and transportation. Settlements sprang up proximal to these waters. Disasters also occurred on these waters and because of these waters. What we now call Ontario is mostly bordered by water from the Great Lakes to Hudson and James Bays and the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers.

More specifically the Great Lakes and the watershed feeding them, have always defined the region's economy, culture and climate much as a sea defines those same aspects of the coast. That impact upon the people has defined both settler and Indigenous landscapes. In early times before trains and roads, the water was the only means of travel and trade. Consequently settlement developed along the waterways. Our earliest settler communities sprang up on these shores. Communities such as Moose Factory, York (now Toronto), Kingston and Cobourg owe their existence to the waterway they border.

For many individuals, the attachment to the water is almost primordial. I grew up in the Beaches in Toronto and spent many summers on the lakeshore. When a quieter town became a need in my life, I moved to Cobourg also on Lake Ontario. I live only metres from the lake and walk the Boardwalk in all types of weather. I have come to know the stories of others who were influenced in the same way. Sir John Murray, who founded the study of Oceanography spent his formative years in Cobourg. Fern Blodgett Sunde was the first female to serve in WWII as a wireless operator, making 78 safe trans-Atlantic crossings, delivering much needed supplies to the Allies. Her youth was spent on that very same shoreline as Sir John Murray.

In this issue, you will find more stories that speak of the relationships between the peoples who settled here and the waters that they depended upon.

As incoming Chair I want to thank Kae Elgie and Leslie Thompson who have guided me through my year of learning. I can only hope to follow on the amazing pathway that they have forged.

- Diane Chin, president@ontario.ca