

FALLBROOK FARM HERITAGE SITE

MARCH 22, 2008

ARCTIC DIVISION

KANGIRSUK, NUNAVIK.



Greetings from the North.

As the great grandson of Donald McKay, the first patriarch of the original Georgetown farm that you see in the above, I have come a very long way from the land of my ancestors in the fifty years that have passed since I knew Fallbrook as a youngster. For most of the last ten years, I have worked as a dispensary nurse in isolated Nordic communities. The last three years has been in the small Inuit community of Kangirsuk (JOM1A0), originally named by the Scots of The Hudson's Bay Company as Payne Bay.



Here you see some of its more illustrious citizens as well as the new municipal garage and turbine electric plant. Why come so far and to such an isolated place? Especially on this stormy night with white out conditions that prevent all movement and especially the arrival of medievac planes to take our sick babies and elders to hospital. What could this land ever have in common with the hills and dales of Silvercreek, Georgetown or Rogart, Scotland?

Ironically the landscape is similar minus the trees. We are at exactly the same latitude as the highlands of Scotland. Yet another similarity. Remember when my great grandparents Donald and Jessie left Scotland in 1869(just after their marriage) to come to Toronto, they were soon homesick and trekked through the farmlands of Brampton to the familiar hills of Balinafad. The land was rich in forest but arduous to cultivate. Yet, along with other pioneer families of Celtic descent, they prevailed and built a vibrant community. The McKays, Kirkwoods, McClures, Mcdougalls, McKecknies, Sinclairs, Shortills, Snows and many others formed a tight knit community built on helping your neighbour in times of need. The Inuit also have lived in small groups, often only 5-6 families. In both worlds all were mutually interdependent.



The nature was pristine and sometimes brutal, especially during the hard winters. A bit like the arctic and like the Inuit, they learned to adapt and bring up their families. A landscape where stone dominates. The Scots made fences and bridges, the Inuit build inukshuks to guide them on their journeys over the tundra. Wolves are common to both countries. The Inuk hunter sold his fur to the Scot traders who worked for the Hudson Bay Company. The Scots drove a hard bargain, making great profits for their English bosses for which the Inuit paid dearly. Even today, the only place outside of Scotland where you find male Sandys is in the far north.



Some might find the picture of the polar bear offensive. But this is the reality of the north. Inuit hunters like Adamie still provide much of the basic diet of caribou, seal and beluga and the fur they trap is back in fashion. Climate warming means that starved bears (20 last summers) are coming further south where they never came before, looking for ice and seals. Desperate, they come into the village scavenging dumps and garbage bins. Disoriented and starved, they are aggressive and pose a great threat to children especially. At Fallbrook, it is urban sprawl and monolithic government agencies like the Credit valley Authority which are a great threat. The Inuit have survived over many centuries on their traditional lands in spite of massive invasion by southerners. After only 150 years all the first pioneer families from

Scotland and Ireland have been, for the second time, cleared from from the land. Fallbrook is the last surviving symbol of their toil. An igloo can be rebuilt. A demolished pioneer farm is gone forever.

The stark natural beauty which commands great struggle to survive. People living interdependent lives with a strong sense of community. The solitude and the total silence. The promise of a new life. All these factors help to explain why 150 years after the forced emigration of my highland ancestors; I find myself a long long way from home and family. Only I had a choice. Maybe those Celtic genes are stronger than we would ever imagine.

James Alexander (Sandy) McKay Great grandson of Donald and Jessie McKay

For more information or if you wish to help with the campaign to save Fallbrook, please contact us at fallbrook@live.ca