

Diligent River Honours Simon Gibbons – Canada's First Inuit Priest

By Maurice Rees with files from Lorraine Maskill

It took three years, but Lorraine Maskill and a number of Diligent River residents have finally seen their dream come true to complete a project to honour Simon Gibbons, Canada's first Inuit Priest. Gibbons (1852-1896) was from Red Bay, Labrador

The group organized several fund raising projects to put in place a 5 1/2 foot granite sculpture, plaque and an interpretive panel. The sculpture was supplied and installed by Nelson Monuments. The Municipality of Cumberland and Government of Canada also contributed funding to complete the project. The official unveiling ceremony was held on Sunday, May 19th. Members of Gibbons' family from Labrador were invited to the ceremony as were members of local, provincial and federal governments. Dave Baker and his wife provided musical entertainment throughout the afternoon.

Lorraine Maskill is a former resident of Diligent River, but now resides in Bible Hill although she still maintains a summer home not far from the church built by Simon

Gibbons and where the sculpture and interpretive panel are located.

During the unveiling ceremony, Eric McCully, Master of Ceremonies noted the Parrsboro Shore like many other coastal regions of the province is rich with history and multi-cultural beginnings which included: Early on the Mi'kmaw made this their home, bringing with them their unique culture and legends. The Acadians also settled here and named this place Gascogne. They farmed, fished, and built dykes, so they were able to harvest the marsh hay for their cattle. Traces of these dykes can still be found at the turn in the harbour.

Continuing through history, the Loyalists came from the New England States, as well as a mixture of other nationalities, and called these shores home. This region has been blessed by each of these cultures and their many unique gifts.

One such gifted person who came, lived, worked and died here was a man called Simon Gibbons who we are here to honor today. Simon was an Eskimo from Labrador and Canada's first Ordained

Eskimo priest. When he arrived Simon Gibbons brought a message of Light and Hope to these shores and this community.

His life began on the harsh rugged coast of Labrador, and at a very young age he was orphaned. Not a very hopeful beginning for a young boy. Simon was fortunate and was eventually taken into the care of an Anglican Orphanage in Nfld, where he excelled in academics and social skills. Special notice was taken of him by Sophia Mountain, superintendent of the orphanage. Later on Bishop Fields of Nfld/Labrador took him under his wing and made it possible for him to pursue his education and eventually become a priest.

Simon was a true missionary priest, who knew the importance of bringing healing to both body and spirit. During his time here he fed many hungry people both physically and spiritually. Simon was married, but never had any children. Mrs. Gibbons was very supportive of her husband's ministry, and was frequently at his side. She was a church organist and regularly took part in many of the church activities.

Simon was a Church Builder and under his guidance, seven new churches were built in NS. Each of them were built bearing his version of the 10th century Rhenish Helm church towers in Europe. He has been given credit for raising large sums of money and many gifts for his churches. He made several trips abroad to England and the New England States speaking to large audiences. On one such trip, he was given the opportunity to meet with Her Majesty Queen Victoria.

He's been described by his peers as an eloquent speaker with a musical voice, attractive personality, and above all his thoroughly Eskimo physique. He once remarked that his face was his fortune.

Several articles have been written about Simon over the years and many stories have been told about him; some have been passed down through the generations. A family friend from the next community of Port Greville, the late Anglican Bishop of NS. Leonard Hatfield has even written a book about him.



Pictured prior to commencement of the ceremonies are Lorraine Maskill, co-ordinator for the project; Pastor Greg Doyle, Parrsboro and Eric McCully, Diligent River and Master of Ceremonies. Eric is the president of the Diligent River Hall Association the project's sponsor. (Submitted)



RCMP constable, Nick Rustige and Cindy Gibbons pose for photos, after both the sculpture and the interpretive panel were unveiled. (Submitted)



James and Penny Augustine of Truro were on-site the day the sculpture was erected. They were the first to have their photos taken. (Submitted)



Two members of Simon's family attended the unveiling on May 19th. (Submitted)



Cindy Gibbons, Red Bay Labrador and a great niece of Simon Gibbons with RCMP constable Nick Rustige from Parrsboro detachment assisted with the unveiling of the Interpretive panel. (Submitted)



When Cindy Gibbons of Red Bay, Labrador visited Diligent River for the first time last year, she wanted to see more of Simon's churches. She's shown here at the church Simon built in Moose River. (Submitted)



An inmate from Labrador, who was serving time in Dorchester, heard about the Simon Gibbons project and carved several pieces to assist with the fund raising. (Submitted)



Cindy Gibbons at St John's cemetery in Diligent River. (Submitted)



The interpretive panel, which was unveiled on May 19th. (Submitted)

MacCaul Villa Notes

By Hazel Hill

The birthday party for the 90 & 90+ held May 4th at the Economy Recreation Centre was sponsored by the Shoreline Journal owners Maurice & Dorothy Rees. It was a great success and a fun time for many of us to see friends we only see once a year.

Many thanks to Maurice and Dorothy for arranging the party each year. The meal, catered by the Ladies Auxiliary of Economy United Church, was very delicious. A large birthday cake donated by Masstown Market was

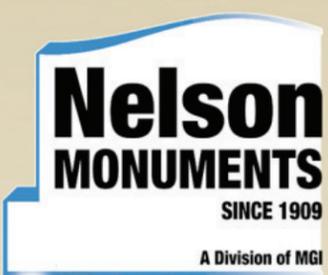
served following the meal.

Those celebrating birthdays in the Villa this month are Shirley Ryan and Shannon MacAloney. The party for Shannon's 80th birthday, held Sunday, May 19th in the Legion Hall, was well attended with lots of food and a large birthday cake. The hall was well decorated for the occasion. Shannon received lots of cards and best wishes.

On Sunday evening, May 19th, Doug Lake, his family and friends from Faith Baptist Church came and spent a couple of hours with singing and

scripture readings. They brought along cake, juice and fruit as a celebration for those having a birthday in May. Doug also made plans to organize a bible study with us. He is coming back on June 10th for the first meeting.

Bernice Kaulback was out to dinner with her daughter, Valerie and family, on Sunday, May 19th to celebrate a belated Mother's Day. On mother's day she had visits and calls from all her family. Visitors with me this month were Joan Mitchell, Dartmouth and a surprise visit from Sharon Brown, who was home from Viet Nam to visit with her family.



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Nelson Monuments is pleased to have been chosen to supply and install the 5 1/2 foot granite sculpture in Diligent River to recognize Simon Gibbons (1852-1896), Canada's first Inuit Priest, who build seven churches in Nova Scotia.

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