

Simon Fraser Biography

Simon Fraser

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Biography

Simon Fraser (1776-1862) was a Canadian explorer and fur trader and the first man to follow the Fraser River from its source in the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

Simon Fraser was born at Bennington, N.Y., the son of Capt. Simon Fraser. The father, a loyalist, was captured by the rebels during the American Revolution and died in prison in Albany. His widow took their son to Canada immediately afterward. Placed in the care of his uncle Judge John Fraser of Montreal, young Simon was educated in that city. In 1792 he was apprenticed to the North West Company, the great Montreal fur-trading organization. For several years he was employed in the Athabasca Department.

In 1801 Fraser became a partner in the North West Company and 4 years later took charge of all the company's operations beyond the Rocky Mountains. The great adventure of his life took place in 1808, when he explored the Fraser River (named after him) to its mouth. It was almost foolhardy to try to shoot that wild and turbulent canyon in a frail canoe, but he persuaded his party to follow him, and the laconic report in his journal hardly does justice to the accomplishment.

Fraser's daring enterprise earned him a promotion, and he was placed in charge of the Red River Department, the largest in the western part of British North America, in 1811. In 1817 he was arrested by Lord Selkirk as an accessory to the Seven Oaks massacre near Red River the preceding year. Fraser had not been directly involved and was acquitted in the much-delayed trial held at York in 1819.

Shortly thereafter, Fraser retired from the service of the North West Company and settled among the Highlanders in St. Andrews, Upper Canada. The following year, 1820, he married at the age of 44. He eventually had five sons and three daughters. Little is known of this period in Fraser's life. He turned up again as a captain of militia during the rebellion of 1837-1838 in Upper Canada. He was then 62 years old, which might account for the permanent knee injury he suffered while on a night march. As a result, Fraser was awarded a government pension in 1841.

Fraser died, in relative poverty, on Aug. 18, 1862, one of the last survivors of the old "Nor'westers."