



(opposite) Gestingthorpe; (this page, clockwise from top) St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church; former public school in Summerberry; Lanark Place at Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site.

near Indian Head (follow the signs) has been a wonderfully successful project that brings to life the momentous history surrounding the 1885 Northwest Rebellion as well as the age of the colossal corporate farm. But that project cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Harvey MacFarlane had a hunch we'd find Gestingthorpe "six miles" south of the highway on the nearby cemetery road, and he was right. But it's not visible from the road, which didn't exist when Bernard and Ada Searjeant built their imposing abode on the shores of a small lake more than 120 years ago. Farmer Ron Kraushaar, current owner of



a dozen structures we're visiting on our ambitious two-day tour of fieldstone buildings in the southeast corner of the province. Gestingthorpe is next on our list, but we don't know precisely where it is.

We find Summerberry resident Harvey MacFarlane and friend Janet Blackstock in front of MacFarlane's place on the east end of the town's solitary street. I pull over and step out of my vehicle to ask if they know how to get to Gestingthorpe. The short answer is they do not, although MacFarlane would later offer a guess. But between "hello" and "no" I discover that MacFarlane, a retired chuckwagon racer, and Blackstock, an area artist, show Clydesdale horses. This provides some perspective on the bevy of gentle beasts in the corral behind me. MacFarlane and Blackstock tell me they're preparing the animals for their annual trek to the Calgary Stampede parade. From there, it's a busy summer of demonstrations, clinics and shows (MacFarlane and his team placed third at the world championships in the U.S. last year). "And more Hindi weddings!" Blackstock adds in an excited tone. MacFarlane explains it's a Hindi tradition for the groom to travel by horse to the site of the nuptials. He has provided this service once in Regina and has requests to do three more weddings. I'm delighted to learn a retired chuckwagon racer in rural Saskatchewan has found a new business niche in urban Hindi weddings. It's one example of how our tour

of grand and once-grand fieldstone buildings is as much about journey as destination.

Legacy authors Margaret Hryniuk and Frank Korvemaker, an architectural historian, estimate as many as 1,000 fieldstone buildings were constructed in what's now Saskatchewan, most between the late-19th and early-20th centuries and many by immigrant Scottish stonemasons. Transportation routes were poor to non-existent, particularly before the railway arrived, and that made local building materials like uncut fieldstone a practical – and beautiful – alternative to lumber. Hryniuk, a self-confessed "heritage nut," says she loves these old buildings. "They show us what we were and where we came from." Stone itself, she adds, "is probably the oldest thing we'll ever touch."

Sadly, many of the remaining structures are in decline and repairing or restoring them is expensive. Reconstructing the Bell Barn

the property and a nearby resident, kindly leads me through Gestingthorpe's summer kitchen and dilapidated living quarters and upstairs to the second floor and doorway to the tower (N 50° 20.151 W 103° 5.510;* call 306-698-2039 before visiting). Once a three-storey structure crowned with battlements and rumoured to have been used for stargazing and hunting as well as viewing water and land-based sporting events, the tower today is a foreshortened hash of stone, mortar and



Rock of Ages

Sturdy and stylish, Saskatchewan's fieldstone buildings once commanded the prairie landscape *story & photography by Dave Yanko*

OUR SEARCH FOR THE VACANT 19TH-century fieldstone home known as Gestingthorpe begins in the southeast Saskatchewan community of Summerberry (pop. 10 in summer, nine in winter). It's said that aristocrats once watched polo matches and sailing regattas from its castle-like tower.



Legacy of Stone

Using the 2009 Saskatchewan Book of the Year winner, *Legacy of Stone: Saskatchewan's Stone Buildings*, as our guide,

intact despite the fact it hasn't witnessed a hair tug or spitball since it was closed nearly 50 years ago. It's one of

my spouse Renée and I are in Summerberry checking out an impressive fieldstone public school designed by Victor W. Horwood (he would later become Manitoba's provincial architect). Constructed in 1909, the handsome facility with decorative yellow-brick trim around the windows and doors stands

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wood that's virtually inaccessible to all but three turkey vultures who've taken up residence in recent years. Kraushaar says his stonemason friend in Fort Qu'Appelle estimates repairing the entire building "would cost \$200,000 for the stone work alone."

Our first stop earlier on Day 1, after leaving Saskatoon at 8 a.m., was the quaint and now only occasionally used St. Thomas Anglican Church (N 50° 34.045 W 104° 1.448) situated in the countryside just outside of McLean, about 40 minutes east of Regina on the Trans-Canada Highway. The village was named in honour of William McLean, a former chief fur trader at Fort Pitt who allowed himself and his family to be taken hostage by Chief Big Bear during the 1885 uprising in order to save a group of Mounties. Built in 1898, the church and active cemetery sit in a cozy and peaceful little meadow skirted by aspen. Inside, white walls contrast with handsome auburn-coloured wainscoting and pews, while an elaborate brass chandelier – a gift from St. Peter's Anglican Church in Qu'Appelle – hangs from the dark wooden ceiling.

From there it was on to the lovely Qu'Appelle Valley and picturesque St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church, located on the corner of Bay Avenue and 4th Street in Fort Qu'Appelle. Built in

that pivotal year of 1885, it's one of the province's oldest stone churches, yet is well maintained in its leafy setting. Gothic-style windows and doors caught our eye, but it was the stone-buttressed tower that won us over. After grabbing some takeout lunch in "the Fort," we headed six kilometres east of town on Hwy. 56 to Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in Lebret, settled shortly before Canadian Confederation as a Roman Catholic mission. Built in 1925, it's a commanding structure that stands in strong counterpoint to the subtle stations of the cross and small chapel shrine on the hill overlooking the village.

The road then took us onwards to perhaps the best-known fieldstone residence in the province. Lanark Place, at Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site, is south of Abernethy off Hwy. 22 (N 50° 43.151 W 103°

The old Wright Farmhouse and its "oculus" windows; (below) Christ Anglican Church in Wapella.

25.433). It's a fabulous example of a fieldstone home, and first-time visitors can spend at least a couple of hours here learning about W.R. Motherwell, an icon of prairie agriculture. But before threatening clouds in the west turned to rain, we wanted to find the old Wright Farmhouse about eight km west of here (N 50° 39.870 W 103° 32.418). It was used for exteriors in Terry Gilliam's 2005 "poetic horror movie" *Tideland*, starring Jeff Bridges and Jennifer Tilly. Once you see the "oculus" windows – round single panes in pediments along the roof – you'll know why. Owner Ronnie Robb says vandals have taken a heavy toll on the building and visitors enter "at their own risk."

By mid afternoon, our itinerary had led us on to the Bell Barn in the rain, then east to Summerberry and Gestingthorpe, which we now leave for a look at some of the old stone houses in Wolseley and Whitewood. There we call it a night (see sidebar).

THE MORNING OF DAY 2 ON THE fieldstone trail finds us driving around Wapella (pop. 408), searching for Christ Anglican Church. We spot an elderly man tending



his garden and stop for directions. Ron Schmidt is 81 and (bingo!) a former town councillor who helped drive efforts to attain heritage status for the church. He's a helpful and gentle soul, twice widowed, with a deep affection for fieldstone buildings. "There used to be stone buildings all along Main Street, but they've all been knocked down," he says before adding that many locals now regret the loss. "Easily 80 per cent of our old stone buildings are gone."



St. Paul's Anglican Church; (opposite) chalet at Moose Mountain Provincial Park.

she says. We follow her in her car to the handsome Kinsey House (corner of Main Street and Mark Avenue) and then to Smithers House, built in 1886 and, the current owner tells me, as solid today as it was then. Smithers was built by John Smithers, owner of

Schmidt gives me directions to the church and then arrives shortly after us in his spotless grey SUV to offer insights and information about the handsome landmark. Twice he drives away and returns with more details, observations and chit-chat about the careers of his adult children, of whom he's very proud. He leaves and then reappears a third time to ask whether we noticed the thick blue extension cord spiralling up the trunk of one of the large trees on the perimeter of the property. "Each year we string Christmas lights right around the church, and people pay five dollars to add a light for a deceased loved one," says Schmidt, adding that the money goes toward maintaining the building.

A short jaunt down the highway and we're in well-manicured Moosomin (pop. 2,500 and growing) seeking two examples of beautiful old fieldstone homes still in use. I approach a middle-aged woman as her hand touches the doorknob of the Sears outlet in the commercial area and ask for directions. "Oh c'mon, it's easier to show you,"

Moosomin Saddlery & Harness Emporium, in a community the *Manitoba Free Press* described in 1892 as "more of a society town than most other places in Manitoba and the North West Territories," according to *Legacy of Stone*. British poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson's nephew Bertram, whose name pops up time and again in histories of the region, was a member of the local polo club and is reported to have been a star of the Moosomin-Cannington Combines rugby team as well.

Next stop is the chalet at Moose Mountain Provincial Park, which now serves as a visitor centre. Constructed as a relief project early in the Great Depression (1931-32), the chalet's sheer size, Tudor-influenced rustic style and veneered fieldstone walls make it the most striking of the public fieldstone buildings we visit. But our favourite is a church near the beginning of our journey home. St. Paul's Anglican Church, two km south of Langbank on Hwy. 9 (N 50° 01.539 W 102° 18.121), is surrounded by tall pines and has a palpable serenity about it. It's noteworthy for its rustic exterior and unfinished interior



walls, the Norman-style tower housing the entrance, and the small apse that appears as a half-round protrusion in the back wall. Still, it's not clear how much longer this church will survive without repair. There's a large crack in the mortar running the height of the wall in the southwest corner, and a note inside warns visitors they enter at their own risk during high winds and storms.

In the cemetery behind the church is the shared gravestone of Charles Parker, the accomplished stonemason who built St. Paul's and Moose Mountain Chalet, and his spouse Rebecca. His side reads "Charles: A Man of Faith Who Laboured With Stone." Hers sings in counterpoint: "Rebecca: Distinguished for Her Kindness to All Living Creatures." Their epitaphs seem almost as eternal as stone. ▣

a stone's throw away

■ GPS coordinates have been provided in the main story, but this is still an ambitious tour. A good number of the buildings we visited are in the Fort Qu'Appelle district. You can focus on these to greatly reduce your travel time while enjoying the beauty of the Qu'Appelle Valley and its wealth of recreational and cultural opportunities. Have lunch or dinner at Off Broadway Bistro in Fort Qu'Appelle (grab a town map at the tourist booth on Hwy. 10) and enjoy the same French cuisine that then-Governor General Michaëlle Jean enjoyed when she visited town. Accommodations include the Castle Bed & Breakfast (306-332-5847), which sits on the site of the original Hudson Bay trading post and was built by its last chief factor. Or drive west of town on scenic Hwy. 210 to the small (two rooms) acclaimed B-Say-Tah Point Bed & Breakfast (fortquappelle.com/bsaytahbb.html).

■ If your tour takes you further southeast, you might consider an overnight stay or meal at the Banbury House Inn in Wolseley, built in 1905 by the founder of Beaver Lumber (banburyhouse.com). Another option: Boxtton Prairie Experience in Grenfell, an Eaton's catalogue home with a reputation for great food (boxttonprairieexperience.com).

■ Points of interest: Moose Mountain Provincial Park, Kenosee Superslides, Cannington Manor Provincial Park, White Bear Lake Golf Course and Bear Claw Casino.

■ Don't leave home without a copy of *Legacy of Stone: Saskatchewan's Stone Buildings* by Margaret Hryniuk and Frank Korvemaker, with photographs by Larry Easton (Coteau Books; \$29.95). □ -D.Y.

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