



**Jasper-Yellowhead
Museum & Archives**

Brewster

As I walked down the length of Elm Avenue, I was surprised by the sprinkle of gold among the dense summer green and the scent of winter in the crisp morning air. I picked up my pace and hurried up the stairs of the quiet brown

building. I was the first one here, today. The building was dark and cold. I felt my way down the stairway to the basement and my office. As I opened the door, I caught a whiff of tobacco, not cigarette tobacco, but sweet tobacco, the kind my grandfather used to smoke in his pipe. Who could have been smoking in the archives? It must be my imagination, I thought. I quickly flicked on the desk lamp and looked around. Everything seemed to be in place. I went to the stacks to grab my work load for the day and noticed a box out of place, the lid had been left slightly ajar and files and papers were scattered all over the floor. Could it have been mice? Did I forget to put the box away? Was I losing my mind? I scooped up the papers and grabbed the box and headed to my worktable to sort things out.

The box was filled with personal papers. I began to carefully look at each paper to see if I could recover the original order and then I saw it, a portrait of a man, his head turned towards me, as if I had startled him. His eyes offered me no hint of whether or not he approved of my voyeuristic stare, but it didn't matter, I couldn't turn away from his piercing stare. Who are you? What is your story? Are you a fisherman? A lumberjack? A wanderer? A fugitive on the run? I continued to stare at his dark wool turtleneck, his dirty hands, scruffy hair and unshaven face. Perhaps if I stare long enough, he will tell me his story, after he had finished lighting his pipe, of course. The pipe! That's it! Was it his tobacco smoke that I had smelled in the archives? Was he here, looking for something?

I quickly spread out more of the papers, in front of me, desperately searching for a name - Major Frederick Archibald Brewster. Ah, I knew the name Brewster, during the summer months their grey and blue buses were all over town. The Brewster clan has often been described as the first family of the Canadian Rockies and pioneers in the practice of transporting tourists throughout the Rocky Mountain parks. Fred was born in Kildonan, Manitoba (1884) to John and Isabella Brewster. He had two older brothers William and James and three younger siblings, Jack, George and Pearl. Fred's father went to Banff, Alberta, ahead of the family, to scope out business opportunities in the booming tourist

industry. In 1888, his wife, Isabella and the children moved permanently to Banff. Fred had stayed in Manitoba to complete his studies at St. John's College in Winnipeg (1905) and then later attended Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Upon his graduation, he headed west to seek his fortune, along with other young opportunists across the continent.

The Brewster family had been a well-respected business family that had done well financially and socialized in many well-to-do circles. Fred, however, was less interested in business and social perks; he was only interested in getting out on the trail and exploring the great unknown. He had taken a vow of adventure and to enjoy the simplicity of the outdoor life. So Fred and his brother, Jack left Banff and headed north. Fred first came through the Yellowhead Pass in 1911 and traveled towards Jasper. He set up his first base camp near Hinton. The valley was swarming with surveyors, engineers, and Jack's-of-all-Trades that had come to feed off the railroad frenzy. Fred, Jack, and their brother-in-law, Phil Moore, worked the area packing ties and transporting supplies ahead of each new stretch of track to be laid, like a pace car ahead of a furious race for the finish. As the Brewster boys approached the present site of Jasper town site, Fred decided to settle at the old Cottonwood Creek campsite (the patch of land on the right hand side as you veer off the highway to enter town on the east end), and staked his claim.

I continued to sort through the papers and discovered business documents for Brewster Moore Ltd. The brothers had established the outfitting company in 1912 and it quickly became known as the premiere guiding and outfitting establishment of the Jasper area. Brewster and Moore catered to millionaires, aristocrats, famous artists, and adventurers. They outfitted for big game hunters looking for trophies of mythic proportions and well read scientists hoping to be the first to classify newly discovered species of flora, fauna, and the wild creatures of the northern Canadian Rockies. Fred, however, often had his own agenda. He avoided guiding for wealthy visitors full of show and entitlement and instead preferred guiding for the scientific expeditions. A silent type, Fred, perhaps felt a kindred spirit among those interested in some of the simpler pleasures of life on the trail.

A ragged looking portfolio containing crinkled, yellowed, onion paper with burnt corners, from his pipe perhaps, looked like a journal. The date was 1914:

Friday, June 26, 1914: Cloudy – warm: Fred had to go off for a week and Jack is coming along for a week or so and then Fred will hurry along and catch up to us near the Sulphur River. We left Jasper at 3:15 p.m. with 16 packhorses – a big outfit – and 5 saddle horses. Most of the horses had been running for a month and they were a pretty wild bunch but we managed to pull out without much fuss. Bob Jones is coming as a packer and Jack Symes, recently of the Northwest Mounted Police, as cook. Both are green at trail work but are a good type to get on things quickly... it seemed good to be on the trail once more and especially good to have Bob Cross along. We crossed the Snaring River and it was a mean stream, swift and deep almost deep enough for the horses to swim, so that some of the packers got wet. At 8.15, about five hours on the trail, we camped at Moberly's flats...it was such a beautiful night that we didn't put up the tipi but just unrolled our blankets on a little knoll looking up and down the valley, as pretty a camp site as could be found, and turned in for the night...

Sunday, August 9: Hot – bright: ...Fred and I left for the day to visit our little lake discovered in 1912 and to try to get over the pass west of it to the other valley that runs from camp to the big mountain, which by the way we have named Mt. Alexander after Alexander Mackenzie, who, in 1793 was the first [white] man to cross the Rocky Mountains via the Peace River and passes west of here up the parsnip River. The lake was as pretty as ever, backed as it is by the high rugged cliffs at each end of the which is a snow peak about 10,000 feet high. This, I think, should be called The Fortress...

The journal was special; it was a record for a group of friends travelling from Jasper to the Peace River district. The group included American Samuel Prescott Fay, Robert (Bob) Jones (later to become one of the first Park Wardens), Jack Symes, Robert Cross, Fred and Jack Brewster. Their journey started on the 26th of June and the group looped back to the Jasper area, via Edson, by November of the same year. The group travelled a total of 926 miles. When the group returned in November the world had been at war for five months. Brewster, Fay, Jones, Symes, and Cross, enlisted with the Canadian military. Fred, who lost a coin flip to his brother to stay and look after the business, enlisted with the 2nd Tunneling Company of the Canadian Engineers and was sent to Ypres Salient.

I glanced away from the thin diary paper and stared once again at Fred's portrait. His eyes looked softer than before. There was a sensitivity there that I had not noticed before. His eyes had gazed upon the most idyllic lakes and mountains and upon one of the

bloodiest battlefields. Fay knowingly made a copy of the journal and distributed it among the entire group of friends, perhaps to create a touchstone to a world, to which they would return someday, far away from the muddy trenches of Europe. [1450]