

# **APPENDIX C**

**Historical Background Paper,  
Daniel Fowler, 1810-1894**

## **PLAQUE ON AMHERST ISLAND COMMEMORATES DANIEL FOWLER**

On Sunday, October 11, 1959, a historical plaque commemorating the artist Daniel Fowler will be unveiled on the grounds of his former home, located on Concession Road 1 near Emerald, Amherst Island.

This is one in a series of plaques being erected throughout the province by the Department of Travel and Publicity, on the advice of the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario.

The unveiling ceremony is being sponsored by the Women's Institutes of Amherst Island. The Reverend W.B. Williston of the Amherst Island Mission will act as programme chairman. Speakers will include Professor G.F.G. Stanley of the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario; the Honourable William M. Nickle, M.B.E., M.C., Q.C., Ontario's Minister of Planning and Development; Dr. Charles Comfort, President of the Royal Canadian Academy; Mr. F. Fleming, Reeve of Amherst Island; and Dr. H.C. Burleigh of Bath, a noted local historian.

The plaque will be unveiled by Miss Edna Fowler, a granddaughter of Daniel Fowler.

The plaque reads:

### **DANIEL FOWLER 1810-1894**

In this house Daniel Fowler, a well known nineteenth-century Canadian artist, lived for over forty years. Born in England, he first took up law, but on the death of his father studied art under the English watercolour painter, J.D. Harding. As a result of ill health he came to Canada in 1843 and settled on this farm on Amherst Island. He subjects ranged from landscapes to still life, and his work was marked by originality and a strong sense of colour. In 1879 he became one of the first members of the Royal Canadian Academy.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

Daniel Fowler was born at Champion Hill, Surrey, England, on February 10, 1810, the fourth child of Daniel Fowler and Mary Ann Pope. He received a formal education in England and at the age of sixteen was articled to Doctors' Common to study law at his father's insistence. Following the death of his father in 1829, Fowler left the practice of law which he had always disliked and took up drawing and painting. As a boy he had made innumerable drawings of his school friends, family, landscapes and still life studies, and from an early age had shown considerable skill in precise rendering of observed objects. After three years of study with the English watercolour painter and lithographer J.D. Harding, and a walking and sketching tour of the Continent in 1834-35, Fowler married Elizabeth Gale and opened a studio in London as a professional artist and teacher.

Suffering from poor health, Fowler was advised to emigrate to the open spaces of North America, and in 1843 he arrived in Canada with his wife and three children. He traveled to various spots in present-day Ontario, and finally decided to settle on Amherst Island where he purchased a 100-acre farms named "The Cedars". During his first fourteen years in Upper Canada, Fowler did not paint professionally. He devoted his time to farming his land and raising his five children. In 1847 fire destroyed "The Cedars" and the next nine years were spent in rebuilding it. In 1854 he was appointed local superintendent of schools for the Township of Amherst Island, a position he held until 1857.

In 1857, Fowler returned to England to visit his mother. Fired by the season's art exhibitions, the impact of the new Pre-Raphaelite school of painting, and a meeting with J.D. Harding, Fowler returned to Canada with his luggage bulging with drawing materials. He then began a second career as an artist in Canada, continuing to draw and paint until about a year before his death in 1894. His first Canadian works were small and experimental and, being somewhat drab, gained little notice. He began to add colour to his work, intensifying the backgrounds to his still life studies, and over the next thirty-five years produced paintings of local scenes and subjects characterized by originality and strong use of colour.

In 1863 Fowler began to exhibit his work, and took first prize at the Provincial Exhibition at Kingston that year. In 1872 he was elected a founding member of the Ontario Society of Artists, and in 1880 a founding member of the Royal Canadian Academy. In 1876, he was awarded a bronze medal and diploma for his watercolour painting "Hollyhocks" at the International Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, the only award made to a Canadian artist on that occasion. Further public honours and awards were presented to the artist over the years, including a medal at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886, and in 1893 fourteen of his watercolours were accepted for exhibition at the World's Fair at Chicago. That year he began writing his autobiography, which exists in manuscript form. Daniel Fowler died at his home on Amherst Island on September 4, 1894.

Working exclusively in watercolour (sometimes over pencil or black chalk) and taking his subject matter from his home and surroundings on Amherst Island, Fowler developed a forceful, mature style which resulted in paintings that, according to art historian and curator Dennis Reid, “crackle with creative energy. [He] could touch existence itself in a single watercolour ... what we might venture to call a great artist”.

According to Fowler himself, he was guided by one principle that of:

producing as nearly as I could the appearance of reality, as if you could cross the bridge or make a call at one of the houses. That is the one quality that I strove to accomplish, and I never leave my work until I had satisfied myself that I had carried it as far as my capacity extended.

Fowler's sketches and watercolours can be found in many private collections as well as collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University among others.