



Dick Wallace of the Free Press

Bob Tremain, Lambton Heritage Museum curator, holds the lead sheet with a message dated March 11, 1791, which he has been trying to decipher since October, 1979.

Two-century-old message mystery to museum curator

By Hanna Pilar
of The Free Press

GRAND BEND — Names from the past have been haunting museum curator Robert Tremain since October, 1979, when he first heard of "Tea Luck," "Jo," and someone named "R. Reed."

The names are a part of the message scratched into a thin sheet of lead which was given to the Lambton Heritage Museum here by Muriel Frame of Bright's Grove last fall.

The etched-in message dated March 11, 1791 reads:

"Tea Luck shot Jo if they get me take Mary to York. R. Reed Car."

Searching through old books about Lambton County's history, Tremain said Thursday he has been unable to learn who the people were and whether Mary ever got to York safely.

Tracing the names and history of the period has been frustrating, Tremain said.

"The problem is it's so early. There are hardly any artifact records from that period — let alone any written records."

In 1791, there was no Sarnia, no London, and no Confederation of Canada. The nearest town to where the lead sheet was found was York, now known as Toronto, and the only inhabitants in the area were Indians and perhaps soldiers and traders, he said. But, there are no records about the area from the late 18th century, he said.

Frame originally found the lead sheet in the early 1920s, when she was eight or nine years old, at the side of a small creek which runs parallel to the St. Clair River. The area used to be known as Lake Huron park and was used by trail rangers, a group similar to the boy scouts, for hiking. The area is now a housing subdivision north of Sarnia, and the nearest landmark is Mac-

Millan Parkway and Lake Shore Road.

"We hiked through there a lot, it was all bush at the time. The creek was dry and I sat down under this old tree. I was just poking around when I saw the lead sheet up under

an old root. That's all there was."

Frame said Thursday she and her companions deciphered the faded but readable message on the spot.

"We had quite a time imagining what it might mean. I was thrilled and my imagination worked overtime."

Over the years she kept the lead sheet as a conversation piece but she said she gave it to the museum because "it's a piece of history. This is something that some day might be important to someone." She said she was never able to crack the message.

One theory about the message is that "Reed" was escaping from Indians, soldiers or traders, Tremain said. He said another possible clue was that lead sheets such as the one Frame found were not usually carried on short trips.

"If you were just going hunting you wouldn't take it along. But, if you were going for good, you'd take it with you."

Lead sheets were used to make shot for flintlock rifles. A one-inch square piece of lead was cut out of the sheet, melted down, poured into a shot mold and allowed to cool. A long process, it was not likely shot would be made while on short trips, Tremain said.

While more research is carried out, the mysterious message scratched hastily into lead will be on view in a new pre-settler display planned for the museum. But, unless a new clue is found, no one may ever know why "Jo" was shot or what happened to "Reed," the man who still haunts Tremain.