

The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #2

April 2009

Antigonish has long been recognized for its tradition of nicknaming. The commonality of particular surnames and the popularity of some Christian names encouraged the old Highland practice of naming people. Before surnames were utilized in Scotland, folks were identified by their own name, their father's name, and maybe even their grandfather's name; hence, John was known as "John, son of Donald, son of Hugh" – in Gaelic, *Iain Mac Domhnull 'ic Eoghain*. In time, "mac" or "son of" became part of the surname and John became known as John MacDonald. This form of naming is a remnant of the old oral Gaelic culture brought over by the Highland settlers hundreds of years ago. Much of their history was passed on orally through story and song and many Scots could recite their ancestry, or their *sloinneadh*, from memory.

In my husband's family in Maryvale, this old "naming" practice was quite prevalent. Ron's great grandfather was known as Ronald "Andrew" MacGillivray. In turn, his son, Daniel, was known far and wide as "Danny Ranald Andrew" or "Dan R.". In fact, Dan R.'s wife was identified as "Mrs. Danny Ranald" and their kids were "the Danny Ranalds". This practice of naming was actually quite useful for there were at least four MacGillivray families living side by side in Maryvale, all related to one another. To make matters worse, each family was large and each utilized the same Christian names over and over, generation after generation, making identification quite difficult. What resulted was men with names like "Ranald Hughie", "Johnny Sandy", and "John Danny Ranald". Interesting, some of these names are still in use today.

Other forms of nicknaming soon developed to further identify individuals. Some folks were distinguished by their trade, others were recognized by a physical feature, and still others were distinguished by some particular event. While some nicknames were of a practical nature, others could be humorous or down right cruel. In Maryvale, "Angus Hughie Allan the Blacksmith" was obviously the local blacksmith; "Angus *Og*", or Young Angus, was the younger of two men in a household sporting the same name; "Big Andrew" MacDonald, of course, had a neighbor called "Little Andrew"; and "John the Piper" MacGillivray or *Iain am Piobaire MacGillebhrath* was the famous piper and poet who farmed the beautiful hills of Highfield up across the road from where I live. Nicknaming was so widespread and useful that sometimes an individual's real name became all but entirely forgotten.

Not being of Scottish descent, I have always been quite fascinated by this local custom of naming people. Maybe you, too, have some interesting stories regarding nicknames that you would like to share with us.



Until the next time,
Catherine MacGillivray

Visiting the Museum...

Early in April, the museum had a visit from Bonnie Elloitt, vice chair of the Costume Society of Nova Scotia. Ms. Elloitt is travelling the province, visiting museums and private collections, looking for items with "good provenance". Working on a book that will focus on items of dress from Nova Scotia collections, she is interested in finding artifacts with a personal history or an interesting story.

From the museum's collection, Jocelyn was able to show her a lovely two-piece, intricately pieced, wedding ensemble that had once belonged to Florence MacDonald, bride of John "Stonecutter" MacIsaac of Dunmore. Ms. Elloitt pointed out that the machine stitching, alongside of the hand stitching, helped to date the outfit to shortly after 1880.

Bonnie also examined a box of hand crocheted articles donated by Bernadette Gillis of Hawthorne Street. Included in the collection were a number of finely detailed collars, as well as bibs for camisoles and nightwear.

The item that interested me most was the heavy brown "beaded" cape donated to the museum by the late Anna MacDonald of Maryvale. The cape had once belonged to her grandmother, Christina MacGillivray, of Highfield – the wife of John, son of "John the Piper" MacGillivray -- the famous bard, musician and teacher.



Bernadette Gillis, Catherine MacGillivray and Bonnie Elloitt pose with a cape that once belonged to Christina MacGillivray of Highfield.

Upcoming Events...

The *Heritage Association of Antigonish* meeting will be held on Monday, June 8, at 7:00 p.m. Guest speaker for this event is Blair Morrow with his talk "*Iron Bridges: 1883 – 1915.*" He will identify some of our local bridges, tell us why they were constructed, where they were located, and who built them.

On June 27th, we are celebrating "Trains and Tunes" with "*Blue Wing*", a local band, who will delight us with an afternoon of train songs. Come and join us at 2:00 p.m. for this afternoon of fun.

On Wednesday, May 13, we are welcoming back "*Bette Wallet*" in the persons of our very own Mary Beth Carty and her partner, Gabriel Ouellette, from Quebec. They will be performing French and English traditional songs as well as some of their original work. Those of you who attended their performance last year will agree that their music is both imaginative and fresh. Come one, come all. (Time to be announced)

The Garden Club Annual Plant Sale will be held on May 16 at 9:30 a.m. Proceeds are in support of the museum. Anyone wishing to volunteer, please call Jocelyn at the museum.

VON Antigonish will be holding their annual walkathon from the museum on Saturday, May 23rd. Support the good work this organization does within the community.

Contact Information: Antigonish Heritage Museum antheritage@parl.ns.ca or 902-863-6160

Museum News...

Jocelyn Gillis and Marlene Hubley are taking a Core Curriculum course to receive basic archival study certification. This course involves six two-day sessions with topics that range from Introduction to Archives, Accessioning, Appraisal and Acquisition, Rules for Archival Description, Arrangement and Descriptions, Access and Reference. Upon completion of the course work, participants receive CNSA Certificate of Completion. The museum will benefit by having staff/volunteers handling, documenting and making accessible the collections as archivists across the country – in a standardized way.

Student visitations to the museum are up considerably due to the Heritage Fairs that are being held at various schools in the district. Heritage Fairs are held in April as a way to create an awareness of history and heritage. Students are asked to research a topic that relates to their roots and then they are judged on their level of research, their originality and creativity, impression created, and, finally, their depth of understanding. This year I was asked to help judge the student projects at H.M. MacDonald Elementary School in Maryvale and I must admit that I was impressed by the sophistication of some of the presentations made by the grade four, five and six students. Topics discussed were of a wide range: the Cape George Lighthouse, the Halifax Explosion, L'Arche Antigonish, Angus L. MacDonald, Giant MacAskill, and Canadian Tire, to name a few. Needless to say, many of these youngsters stopped by the museum for a bit of help and direction from Jocelyn.

Please Note...

St. Mary's, Lismore, Summer Anniversary Festivities are fast approaching. Would the public have any photos related to the parish or the community of Lismore? If anyone is able to help, please contact Don Butler at 926-2589.

The Genealogist's Corner...

The museum has received a letter from Mary Colwill of Hudson, MA, seeking information on her great grandmother, Isabella MacInnis, born about 1869 at Ballantyne's Cove. She was the daughter of Alexander and Catherine. She had a sister, Christina, and possibly a brother. Anyone able to help, please contact : anheritage@parl.ns.ca

Judith Muldar of Toronto (originally from Newfoundland) is looking for information on the Latin books that were passed down in her family. (See references to these books in Ray MacLean's *History of Antigonish*, p. 162.) Specifically, she would like to know -- what was the nature of these books?

Mary Vernon of Cornwall, Ontario, is seeking the ancestry of John Angus MacGillivray, native of Antigonish. John was a glass blower. He was married to Pearl Hicks of Montreal. In 1946, he passed away in that same city.