



The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #6

August 2009

Travel through Maryvale was interrupted this month due to major road construction but we dare not complain. The newly cleaned ditches and the upgraded culverts at the end of each and every driveway are a vast improvement over what was there before. The removal of the large wooden culvert at the end of our driveway was a major undertaking -- the brook had to be pumped up and over the road, the



old neighbourhood fishing hole had to be drained and the highway had to be closed for a week for excavation to take place. Thankfully, traffic could be detoured through the Old Maryvale Road, thus allowing men and machinery to work without delay. Our neighbour, Hugh MacDonald, remembers what a task it was to build that particular culvert back in 1958. A huge modern cement culvert now replaces the old wooden beams that once allowed the brook to follow its original path towards the Malignant Brook. New paving will put the finishing touches to this major overhaul

of our highway. How fortunate we are that the government takes a keen interest in the upkeep of our public roads -- for they weren't always in tip top shape.

The miserable state of early roads in the town and county of Antigonish became quite apparent with the arrival of the wheeled carriage in the early 1800s. Narrow, rough and rutted, these roads were not terribly adequate for vehicular traffic of any sort, least of all, the "gasoline horseless carriage" when it finally appeared on the scene in 1909. Muddy in wet weather and dusty during dry spells, these roads ran up hill and down with very little planning. Hair-pin turns and washouts were all too common. While roads took early settlers from one destination to another, they were primitive and challenging by times.

Early records shed a little light on conditions before the emergence of paved roads and streets.

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recognized but there would be many growing pains before all was said and done. Vehicles in The 1898 *Bylaws and Ordinances of the Town of Antigonish* (found at the museum, of course) acknowledge the existence of a "Superintendent of Streets" whose responsibility it was to attend to all matters relating to the streets of the town. He saw to it that drivers of vehicles were no less than fourteen years of age and that no one drove his horse "faster than a slow or easy trot in or through any part of Town." It was the duty of the Police Constable to "impound any (farm animals) found at large on any street, lane or other public place within the Town" -- but any person could impound wandering animals. The fact that anyone at all could lock away animals seems to indicate the frequency of the infraction. Owners of impounded animals were fined accordingly. "For each and every horse, ox, cow, bull, sheep, ox or pig the sum of fifty cents for the first offence, and one dollar for every subsequent offence, and for each and every hen, goose, duck, or turkey the sum of ten cents for the first offence, and twenty cents each for every subsequent offence." Obviously attempts were being made to improve conditions but, the mere fact that these laws existed, was proof that these offences actually occurred. "Any person guilty of throwing or sweeping dirt or depositing rubbish, dead animals, or nuisances of any kind on the street or any part thereof ...or causing or permitting (sic) any offensive matter to run from any manufactory, slaughter-house, butcher's shop, dung hill or privy into any street shall for every offence forfeit not less than one dollar nor more than ten dollars." Needless to say, our streets have improved considerably since the era of the horse and carriage.

Conditions didn't improve with the advent of the automobile – in fact, the situation got progressively worse. On May 26, 1910, *The Casket* announced: "We have already two automobiles in the town, and, if reports are true, are likely to have some half dozen within the next few weeks." The emergence of the automobile caused quite a commotion on the roads and streets of the town and county. Horses and their owners had to learn to exist alongside of the automobile and that was not an easy task at first. The May 26, 1910 edition of *The Casket* reported: "The great objection to autos is that they are an object of terror to some horses and therefore are likely to be a menace to the owners of such horses." In no time, folks were complaining about the speeds at which automobiles travelled and so speed limits were introduced: the speed on country roads was set at 15 miles per hour and half of that in town. Obviously these laws did not deter all operators for on August 28, 1913, *The Casket* declared that "the automobile rushes over our roads wholly regardless of the safety of pedestrians and of teams, utterly indifferent to the feelings of all else on the road, at a speed of twenty, thirty and, it is said, as high as forty miles an hour." Drivers who persisted to speed would be "taught a lesson" by being hauled into court and taxed as much as ten dollars!

It wasn't long before automobiles were restricted to travel on certain days of the week only. On June 2, 1910, *The Casket* reported that automobile owners were not permitted to travel the country roads on Tuesdays and Saturdays between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. "This gives every timid person a chance twice a week to visit the town and to do their necessary work without hindrance." On September 15, 1910, *The Casket* stated that automobiles were now restricted to travelling on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only – with the exception of clergymen and doctors of medicine who could use them "in cases of extreme urgency."

When the automobile first arrived on the scene, it was utilized for pleasure trips only. In time, its use as a "vehicle of business" and "an improved method of transportation" was the province travelled on the left-hand side of the road until April 14, 1923 when the "rule of the road" changed and vehicle owners had to travel on the right. Research shows that all vehicles were supplied with large stickers that read "Keep to the Right." These were placed on all windshields facing on-coming traffic as a reminder to others. Imagine the confusion! For an entire month, automobiles were banned from the roads to allow horse-drawn traffic to become familiar with this new law.

Advertisements in *The Casket* during the early 1920s paint a colorful picture and one can clearly see a period of change. On July 8, 1920, Walter Grant from the Harbour advertised the following: "A horse six years old, good driver and worker, guaranteed sound and not afraid of cars." John J. MacGillivray from Lakevale posted an ad in the July 15, 1920 edition: "For Sale – a horse 8 years old, sound, a good worker, and roadster. A woman can drive him." Imagine! On October 14, 1920, Alfred DeLorey from Big Tracadie advertised: "At a bargain a second hand Ford touring car." A transformation was taking place on our roads but change was slow, especially in the countryside.

As early as the late 1800s, Surveyors of Highways in each community were responsible for holes and washouts on country roads. At the same time, Fence Viewers were trying to ensure that fences were in good repair and that animals were kept off the roads. While owners of wandering animals were taxed, advertisements in *The Casket* indicate that infractions were numerous. In the July 8, 1920 edition of the paper, Hugh MacLean of North Grant posted the following notice: "Strayed from the premises of the undersigned about June 5, a red horse, narrow white stripe on face, rope around neck." At Georgeville, D. A. McInnis tried to discourage wandering farm animals when he published this note on October 14, 1920: "Strayed to the premises of the undersigned an aged ram marked a V under the right ear. Owner can have him by proving property and paying expenses." Angus McIsaac, at Lakevale, sounds firm enough when he announced the following on July 15, 1920: "All live stock found running at large on the public roads of the district of Beaver Road, Lakevale, will be impounded and owners prosecuted, according to the provisions of the Herd Law." The task of the Overseer was arduous indeed.

Exactly when paving arrived is not entirely certain but *The Casket* did report "street work" in its April 20, 1933 edition. At a meeting of town council, a deal was struck with a Halifax company to "treat the gravel streets of the town with 8,000 gallons of Road Tar. This is the same material used here with satisfaction during the past two years, though it is understood that less will be used this year than heretofore." Secondary roads continued to be quite primitive even into the 1940s. As a result, roads were open to automobiles for only about four months or so of the year. In April 20, 1933, *The Casket* illustrated this quite aptly when it wrote: "Lack of snow all winter, late frosts, and then a heavy fall of snow as the frost was coming out, combined to break down the surface under heavy traffic. One observer remarked that some of the mud his grandfather used to put on the road came to the top last week."

Research shows that there were only twenty-eight miles of paved roads in the province of Nova Scotia in 1933 when Angus L. MacDonald became premier of Nova Scotia. To deal with the grave problem of mass unemployment during the depression era, Premier MacDonald put jobless men to work on highway projects. By 1940, he had succeeded in paving one thousand miles of roads in the province. Interestingly, Antigonish is noted as the first town in Nova Scotia to have all of its streets paved.

We've come a long way since the era of dirt roads and primitive modes of transportation. Driving up to visit friends in Parrsboro last weekend, Ron and I travelled the Trans Canada Highway, totally oblivious of our good fortune. Our brand new Silverado truck is spacious, air conditioned, sound and reliable. The roads are well engineered and extremely safe. It wasn't until we were rooting around in our friend's old blacksmith shop, looking for a fan to cool down his cottage, that we experienced a reality check. There, tucked in a back corner, in among lots of other old treasures, was an old Model T Ford; unfortunately, it had seen better days. The sleigh and carriage that we discovered, tucked away in another corner, had fared far better as both were in mint condition. What was meant to be a simple search for a fan, proved to be a wonderful step back in time.

That's all for now!

Catherine MacGillivray





A Step Back in Time...

This lovely old photograph, dated about 1950, is of some unidentified folks picking berries at Lochaber. Antigonish provides so many different berries for those who enjoy picking and preserving. While the bears and the rain took most of my wild strawberries, I did pick lots of raspberries, chokecherries, red currants and black currants for jam and jelly. Now I must get out and collect some blueberries and blackberries. How I love the harvest season!

As Part of the Museum Collection...

In among an assortment of old cookbooks at the museum, I discovered a little booklet entitled *Gems of Fancy Cookery – A Collection of Reliable and Useful Recipes Published by J. D. Copeland, Druggist, Antigonishe, N.S.* (Note the old spelling for Antigonish.) Copeland was a prominent local druggist in the 1880s. Alongside of his recipes, I discovered advertisements for “toilet goods”, perfumery, medical syrups, baking powder, witch hazel, worm remedies, hair dye, horse medicine, asthma cures and a variety of household remedies. For those of you who enjoy berry picking, I’ll include his simple recipe for “Spiced Currants.”

Six pounds currants, five pounds sugar, half pint vinegar, spices, cloves and cinnamon. Boil till thick.

The Genealogy Nook...

Rosalie MacEachern is piecing together stories of pioneer women in Antigonish. She sent us the following note.

“I am looking for anyone who might have some scrap of information on a remarkable woman who came from Knoydart, Scotland to Meadow Green. Her name was Marcella MacLellan Gillis MacDonald, second wife of John MacDonald, Adjutant to the 10th battalion Nova Scotia militia. John died in Meadow Green in 1838 but I do not know when Marcella died. She had two children by a first husband, a son who never married and a daughter, Margaret, who married Angus MacDougall, SW Margaree.

Marcella and John had eight children: Dr. Alexander; Angus who lived at Pomquet River; Anna Teresa who married Ronald MacDonald Breac; Marcella who married John MacDonald of St. Andrews, a station agent at Heatherton; Emily who married Joseph Chisholm known as Joe Meadow Green; Kate who died young; Mary who married Andrew MacDonald of Marydale and Theresa who also died young. I am interested in ANY details of Marcella’s life.”

Notices...

The Program Committee is seeking suggestions from the community at large on potential guest speakers, topics, outings, etc. Please contact Jocelyn at 863-6160 or Susan Cameron at 867-5328.

The Museum Fabric Sale will be held on Saturday, September 12, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Anyone interested in helping with this sale – either setting up or assisting on the day of the sale – kindly let Jocelyn know.