



The Old Train Station News



The San Francisco earthquake of April 18, 1906, has gone down as one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States but, wouldn't you know it, details of this major quake quickly trickled into homes right here in Antigonish. Roderick Chisholm, one of the "Schoolhouse" Chisholms of Glassburn, was a Jesuit student working at Santa Clara College in California at the time of the quake. The following day he sent a postcard home to his brother, "Johnny Jim" Chisholm at Glassburn – on the old Manchester Road to Guysborough. The card was plain and simple – an address on one side and a message on the other – just a quick note to alert his family that he was alive and well.

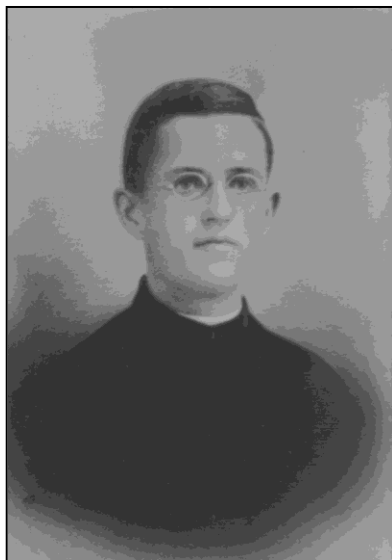
The quake that struck at 5:15 on the morning of April 18 lasted for about a minute and is considered to have had a magnitude of somewhere between 7.7 and 8.25. While it caused considerable damage, it is thought that about ninety percent of the total destruction was the result of fires that burned out of control for three days. Research indicates that the quake and fire destroyed 490 city blocks and a total of 25,000 buildings. Over eighty percent of the city was destroyed and the death toll

is estimated to have been about three thousand people. Out of a population of 410,000, between 227,000 and 300,000 people were left homeless.

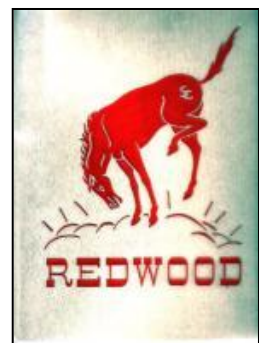
Neighbouring cities suffered considerable damage from the quake. Santa Clara, where Roderick was stationed, is not far from San Francisco so, of course, it felt the effects of the quake too. Knowing that his family would worry, Roderick quickly sent word to reassure them. The letter was dated April 19 and postmarked "Santa Clara, Cal. 1PM Apr 22, 1906".

Dear Bro.

I suppose you are all anxious about me. Well, I am safe and sound – not a hair injured, though the earthquake was dreadful. Not a single soul in the college was hurt tho our buildings are (many of them) old & shaky. Three miles from here Agnew's Insane Asylum, an enormous place (1100 patients) caved in killing hundreds of patients. We were all out to assist – it's dreadful. Stanford University (20 miles away), the most magnificent in the world, is in ruins. S. Fran most wiped off the face of the earth. The fire is spreading in all direction – already half city is down. Last night (S. F. is 50 miles away) the western sky was fiercely red, and the dull booming of dynamiting could be heard every few minutes. They are throwing down the buildings to stop fire but in vain. It is certainly a visitation from God. S. F. was an extremely wicked city. Our St. Ignatius Church & college are a thing of the past. Its fathers take refuge here. Last night all the boys & most of us slept in the centre of college yard, scared of another shock. Many of boys gone home, school closed about a week. Churches all over have suffered much. God's providence over S. Clara was miraculous. Regards to mother & all. R. Chisholm



Roderick had been working at the Jesuit college in Santa Clara since 1902. A man of "brilliant talent and exemplary character", he had graduated from St. Francis Xavier College in 1895. Accepted by the Jesuit Order, he was sent to Montreal to pursue his studies but, before long, ill health forced him home to Glassburn for some well-needed rest. Accepted back into the order three months later, he was sent to California in hopes that the warmer climate would agree with him. After three years of study, he was sent to Spokane, Washington, to continue his studies but again his health deteriorated. In those days, folks would say that Roderick "suffered from consumption" but while tuberculosis may have been taking a toll on his body, Roderick was determined to follow his calling. Finally, the order sent him to California to teach at their Santa Clara College. When his condition would no longer allow him to teach a full class, he was made director of the college *Redwood*, a monthly magazine started in 1903. (In 1922, the college published its first edition of a weekly newspaper called *The Santa Clara*. Soon after, *Redwood* became the name for the school's yearbook.)



Sometime in May of 1906, Roderick sent another letter home to his brother Johnny Jim in Glassburn. This letter was undated but would have been written sometime after May 10, 1906 – the date given in the letter for his visit to San Francisco. This piece of correspondence was written on letterhead from Santa Clara College, Santa Clara, California, complete with a crest in the upper left-hand corner. Roderick's experience with the earthquake would certainly give him lots of material for the next edition of the college newspaper – the quake itself, the subsequent fires, the aftershocks, the impact on staff and students at the college, the destruction of San Francisco, the looting that took place shortly afterward, and how people coped after this major disaster.

Dear Brother:

A few days ago I received two letters from home, one from you, the other from Mary, and this must serve as an answer for both. I suppose you expect to hear some more about the earthquake. Well, I must try not to disappoint you.

You say you cannot [know] what an earthquake feels like. When you are inside a house it feels as if you were in a box and someone outside were trying to smash it with a monster axe. Watch one trying to loosen up a wood box. First he hits it on one side, then on the opposite, then he hits it back and forth on the remaining sides until the box gets looser and looser and falls down in pieces. So it was with the house in which I am now writing. It worked and jerked back and forth, to this side and to that, with such a frightful tearing noise, and so violently that I hardly understood how it stood it. At the final lurch of the quake, I was altogether sure the whole house was coming down upon me, and I was calculating if there was any chance of dodging the beams and saving my life by some lucky chance.

Strange to say, I was hardly scared. Of course there was an intense strain, but so many things crowd into one's mind at such a critical time, that fear cannot be attended to. This wasn't the case with a good many but now—why the slightest noise of any kind frightens people. There have been three or four slight aftershocks since April 18th, and they have caused more fear than the big quake. Twice our boys rushed out of study-halls and dormitories in a panic of dread at slight shocks that we should hardly have minded before. Another day, there was a faint clap of thunder—out rushed the boys into the center of the yard. Some of the boys could not study, they sat at their desks hat in hand waiting for the next quake. These we sent home.

The next Redwood---- Well! Well! I have just had a big start. In a room not far from me, a poor sick man fell out of bed, making quite a racket. Having my mind intent on our earthquakes, I really thought one of a formidable nature was upon us, and I sprang up to rush out. However, to tell the truth, this is the first scare I have received from those aftershocks. They are not dangerous at all. The next Redwood will contain an account of the "Earthquake at Santa Clara". Written by your humble servant so that when I send it to Alex he can take it as a personal letter, a printed one at that.

I went to see San Francisco on May 10th. I got there along with my companion at 10:30 am, getting off at a substation on the edge of the burnt area, out intention being to walk it over

from one end to the other. Even before I came upon ruins I was saddened by the sights in the intact portion of the city. As the fire department was in disorder, fires were prohibited in the houses, and so people had to cook on the streets. Each house accordingly had a stove or range or some sort of fire-place on the sidewalk in front of it, and there they did their cooking right in the public gaze. Some of these stoves were boxed over, and bore inscriptions such as "Palace Hotel," "Hotel St Francis", "Don't Worry Restaurant—Open all Night"—and others showing that people could see the humorous side of things despite all their misery.

The burnt district began at the station. To right and left of us lay a plain of bricks, mortar, and gas and sewer pipes and all there is now to be seen are cellars filled with brick. As we [were] getting into this vicinity we saw people hurrying off with relics—no one seemed to be guarding—and some were selling articles they had picked up. My greed was aroused. "Gracious", I said to my companion, "if anything comes my way, I'll certainly take it. On the main street, or alley, we found dozens of people scraping and scratching among the brick and debris for relics of Chinatown. I saw one fellow going off with the lid of a preserve jar. "Got a relic?" I asked. "Yes, I got one" he replied "and that is everything for me". "Well, if you see another, just point it out to me," I told him whereon he advised me to stay on the crowded alley as the most part of the relics had been found there. I thought there was no hope, for how could Religious let people see them digging for relics, or in plain language, looting. Anyway, I said three Hail Marys to St Anthony and I looked carefully all around me as I advanced. At one place I stopped to look down into a cellar and saw a fine vase, too large to carry, and anyway impossible to get at. "Oh well, there is no hope", thought I, and I was just going to leave, when I looked down to see at my very feet a mound of little relics piled up on each other. Imagine my delight. I started to fill my pockets as fast as I could with little vases and teapots and saucers. Then I stuffed my overcoat which I carried on my arm, but the pockets broke and two of my pieces pots fell and broke. I called my companion who was aimlessly strolling around, took his satchel from him, and packed in my goods. To my intense delight, I noticed in spite of my hurry, that most of the relics were from a joss-house and four of them were idols.

You may feel sure that we lost no time in making tracks, to use a slang phrase. We breathed more freely after we had left the place out of sight. The fun of it was that half an hour after the soldiers came along and ran in our fellow-looters by the dozens.

It never occurred to me until sometime afterward that some poor unfortunate had piled those relics there with the intention of carrying them off! I suppose he blessed me when he found them gone!

I have kept two of the idols to take east with me if I go there this summer, as is likely. I am become very fond of them. They are very squatly old Buddhists—about 3 ½ inches high, with high turbans, long beards, and the most bland and silly or imbecile smile on their faces. As the neck is not stuck to the body, but is pivoted on a little pin, the heads way back and forth, so that the little men seem to be bowing most deferentially at you. They're very comical. I even have a piece of silver taken from some handsome dish which melted down in the fire.

It is raining today. Weather very gloomy ever since the earthquake. Excuse this rambling letter. Next will be shorter.

Before I close, I must express the hope that you say night prayers in communion. It is very important.

Frater in X

R Chisholm

As much as he wanted to, Roderick never did attain ordination. In 1906, he returned back to his studies as he seemed well enough – but that was not to last. He died, still a deacon with the Jesuit Order, in 1909 at just thirty-four years of age. The news of his untimely death reached Antigonish in late June of 1909; *The Casket* reported the event on July 1.

(It should be noted that Roderick had a brother, Father Angus Chisholm, who was editor of *The Casket* and professor at St. F. X. University when he died of typhoid fever in December of 1892 at the age of thirty-two. In 1904, Roderick wrote a poem in memory of his brother – but that’s a story for another day.)



Catherine MacGillivray

Recent Acquisitions – Thanks to one and all!



Gerard Chisholm of Harbour Centre brought in an interesting item this month. This old bottle was found in St. George’s Bay back in about 1980 while fishermen were dragging for scallops. The scallop drag was one operated by Dannie “Josie” Boyd. The bottle, thought to predate 1860, is quite heavy compared to bottles we have today. Dark greenish-black in color, it features a kick-up bottom. Identified as a “black glass bottle”, it has an “applied lip” – one that was added after the bottle was made. The bottle carries no markings, is primitive in appearance and is a bit unsteady on its base.

Interesting, “black glass bottles” are usually not really black. When held up to the light, the true color (ranging from dark brown to olive green) is revealed. Research indicates that one reason for the production of this particular “black glass” bottle was that this glass protected the contents of the bottle from the harmful effects of the sun.

David Brown, from Lochaber, brought in a *Marion Boy Choir* program as well as a program from St. Andrew Rural High School.

Sister Isabel MacLellan donated her copy of the *Canada Book of Prose and Verse* that she used during her teaching career.

Hugh Webb, of Antigonish, brought in a couple of publishing printing plates.

Owen and Greta MacDonald, of Tulloch Way in Antigonish County, donated a photo of Town Council dating back to 1951. (Owen's father, Stuffy, served on Council during that period.) The MacDonalds also brought in some newspapers from the 1940s and a delightful old copy of *The Nexus*, the St. F.X. yearbook of 1924 (which includes some wonderful old snapshots of Antigonish town and county).

New Reference Books

While at the Public Archives this month, Jocelyn purchased three new reference books to add to the museum's collection.

Obituaries from the Sydney Post-Record (1933 - 1938)

Obituaries from the Sydney Post -Record (1939 -1944)

Nova Scotia Vital Statistics from Newspapers (1769 – 1812)

Antigonish Heritage Association

Joe Ballard – *Old Real Estate Ads and What they Reveal about our Built Heritage*



The inclement weather may have kept some of the regular crowd away on May 9th but those who came out to listen to Joe Ballard speak about old real estate ads were certainly rewarded for their efforts. Joe, a staunch heritage advocate and an architectural historian, lives in Truro – but, wouldn't you know it, he has an Antigonish connection. His wife, Melanie, is a daughter of D. L. and Mary Ellen MacDonald of Heatherton.

Two centuries ago, homes were valued somewhat differently than they are today. Nineteenth century property ads reveal a great deal about luxuries and trends that were commonplace back then but that, unfortunately, mean little to the average reader today. With copies of old newspaper clippings, Joe was able to identify long forgotten particulars of Nova Scotia's rich architectural heritage.

Back then, prospective buyers wanted to know (and real estate ads always revealed) the location of a house that was up for sale. What was its proximity to the railway station, the church, the post office, the school and the downtown? Was it a five minute walk or a fifteen minute walk? One old ad in the 1844 edition of *The Yarmouth Herald* mentioned that a particular house was located in “the central and growing part of town.” Another ad in *The Nova Scotian* in 1859 described a house as being “pleasantly located” opposite the Public Gardens in Halifax where a band played twice weekly. Wow. What a selling factor!

The description of a particular advertised house told the size, the number of storeys and chimneys and whether it had a cellar or an attic. How many rooms did the house contain? How many rooms were on the first floor and how many were on the second? Old ads often spoke of a certain number of rooms *and* a kitchen. Interestingly, the kitchen was not a room frequented by the upper classes but by the hired help and, therefore, not really recognized as a room. The help from the lower classes could work there and not be seen by members of the household or invited company. At the same time, fumes from the kitchen sinks were kept separate from the remainder of the house. Nineteenth century homes often had an intentional L off the back of the house that housed the kitchen.

A house advertised in *The Morning Chronicle* in 1873, boasted that it was “quite new and thoroughly well built” and “finished with every modern improvement.” In 1821, *The Acadian Recorder* advertised a house “constructed on the most convenient plan.” The greater part of the inside was “well finished”. Not all homes were completely finished on the inside and out. In some, just the lower floor was finished. Was the house painted? Not all houses were painted. Others were freshly painted. Was it a wooden structure or a stone structure? In towns, houses were often stone to prevent the spread of fire. Each detail in the advertisement was significant.

Property ads always disclosed the quality of the construction of the building. In 1863, *The British Colonist* posted an ad for “one of the warmest houses in the city. No water ever freezes in the bedrooms.” While old houses were not insulated, some were double-boarded and double-floored thus providing a bit of insulation, some soundproofing and rat protection. Prior to the nineteenth century, some wood-framed buildings were brick-nogged – exterior walls were covered with bits and pieces of brick and then covered with clapboard. While this didn’t provide insulation, it did provide a bit of a wind barrier as well as a sound barrier. While walls held no insulation, eel grass or horse hair was frequently tucked in the floor boards as an insulator. Mice hate eel grass, thus providing some rodent protection.

A good water source was, of course, a great selling feature whether it was a “never failing well in the garden”, “excellent spring water” or a “brook of water running through the cellar”. One advertisement from 1888 boasted “town water” as well as hot water in the bathroom and the kitchen. A house advertised in *The Morning Chronicle* in 1873 had hot and cold appliances *and* a bathroom. Those were certainly modern conveniences (no doubt in a well-to-do home) in a time when not all houses could claim water in the house.

A good cellar was another selling feature – especially one that was frost proof. In 1821, *The Acadian Recorder* advertised a house with a paved cellar under the house. A brick partition ran through

the middle of the cellar. Both chimneys were built on brick arches providing more storage space. Perishables would, of course, be stored under these arches.

Reference was often made to a hall. Why mention a hall when this is usually considered to be wasted space? Victorian homes frequently had wide central halls. The house advertised in *The British Colonist* as “one of the warmest houses in the city” also stated that “no stove or fire was needed above the hall.” Interestingly, halls distributed heat throughout the house. They often ran from front to back with doors on both ends. When these doors were left open, a fresh breeze could pass through the entire house. Front rooms might feature double doors that could then be opened to create one large front room. Clearly, the hall was a significant feature in older homes.

What other conveniences were noted? Some houses featured gas; some noted hot air furnaces. Maybe the house had a porch or a library. Books were becoming more common allowing some well-to-do homes to sport a library. If the mantles were made of marble, this was definitely noted. Marbleized slate mantles were inflammable and wouldn't stain. Victorians loved their carpets and area rugs so, of course, this was noted as was the condition of the carpets. One house advertised in *The British Colonist* in 1862 boasted a “fine airy and healthy situation.” The house was *almost* dust free. Dust was a great problem in both cities and towns.

What about the rest of the property? Was there a barn? How many acres of farmland were included? Was the property fenced? Thorn hedges, both beautiful and functional, kept livestock both in and out. Were there any outbuildings? Properties might include a stable, a coach house or a carriage-way of a particular width. Landscaping was often noted. In 1889, *The Colchester Sun* listed a house with a “handsome fine woven wire street fence” – no doubt positioned around a garden. This same property had fruit bushes, fruit trees, roses and vines. What a wonderful garden description! Gooseberries, currants and raspberries were valued for the jellies, pies and sauces that they could produce. *The Digby Weekly Courier* posted a property in 1882 that included “one dozen thrifty apple trees and a number of fine cherry trees.” Obviously, the orchard and gardens were worthy of note.

Who could ever have imagined so much architectural history packed away in twenty or so real estate advertisements! We'll certainly never look at old ads the same way again. A very special thank-you to Joe for coming all the way from Truro on a miserable wet evening to treat us to a wonderful evening of old home nostalgia.

Antigonish Heritage Association Membership

We'd like to welcome the following new members (as well as some old members who have renewed) of the Heritage Association. We're currently on a membership drive to welcome other new members.

Hugh J. and Frances Haley, Antigonish Harbour
Ninetter Atwood, Nepean, Ontario
Jim Grant, Oakville, Ontario

Tony and Mary Bekkers, Lanark, Antigonish County
Cordis MacDonald, Antigonish
Ron and Catherine MacGillivray, Maryvale, Antigonish County
Carolyn Ross, Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia
Janet Sweeney, Etobicoke, Ontario
Marlene MacDonald-Cheng, Victoria, British Columbia
Hilda MacGillivray and family, Antigonish
Mary and Donald Barry, Antigonish
Shaun and Pamela Chisholm, Antigonish
Doug and Lorraine Dadeau, Church Street, Antigonish
Donnie Beaton, Antigonish
Dave Brown, Lochaber, Antigonish County
Keith Skinner, Antigonish

Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish

Recently someone asked me, “Why be a member of the Heritage Association of Antigonish?” I have given the question some reflection and would like to share with you my thoughts.

There appears to be no direct benefit for being a member. This newsletter will be sent to anyone interested in receiving the same and the learning events are open to everyone.

However, there is a reward in knowing that your membership in the Heritage Association of Antigonish is supporting our efforts to make our community stronger. The financial cost to be a member is a nominal charge of seven dollars per year. These funds and all funds donated are used to further advance the objectives of the Association. The two most important objectives are to promote and preserve a cultural understanding of our heritage within the town and county of Antigonish and to preserve historical records and documents.

I would encourage all readers to become members of the Association and to be partners in supporting the Heritage Association of Antigonish achieving its motto: “Working today, preserving yesterday for tomorrow.”

Angus MacGillivray

Upcoming Guest Speakers

Paul Bennett, our guest speaker for June, will discuss “The Antigonish Consolidators and Their Impact on Nova Scotia Education.” Details will follow.

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