

The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #28

June 2011

What treasures do you have hidden away in old suitcases, boxes or trunks, stored away in the barn, attic or shed? Believe it or not, you may actually be surprised by what you find!

One dreary summer back in the 1980s, Michael MacDonald of Toronto was rooting around in his grandfather's shed in Maryvale, looking for something to do, when he came across an old blue suitcase. Opening the case, he discovered a bunch of papers and an old business ledger belonging to his great grandfather, Allan MacDonald. When he showed the ledger to his grandfather, Angus Hughie replied, "I haven't seen that book in seventy years!" The long forgotten ledger is a detailed account of all of the business dealings of Allan the Blacksmith between 1893 and 1920 – his working life, all summed up in a book.

Allan's ledger is a standard 8 x 13 inch book. The spine is brown in color and the covers are a mottled black-green. The tag on the upper part of the spine reads "Journal". The cover is tattered and worn, a few pages are missing, but the bulk of the work is fairly intact and, most importantly, the ink is clear. The first few pages are missing so the journal now starts on page five. The neat handwriting on this page of the ledger indicates that Angus Gillis of Williams Point started his business dealings with Allan MacDonald on December 17,



1893. A typical business ledger, dates of transactions are located on the left-hand side of the page, a description of the dealings is listed in the middle, and debits and credits are found on the right. The book contains about 380 pages, fully detailed, and clearly tallied on the right.

In Allan's day, the blacksmith was a valuable member of society. In fact, communities would be hard put to survive without a blacksmith. In the 1890s, there were more than sixty blacksmith shops in Antigonish County. In rural areas, much of the blacksmith's work involved shoeing the horses and oxen that were part and parcel of every man's transportation and work. The rest of the time, the blacksmith was busy producing and repairing metal articles necessary for the daily running of homes, businesses and farms. Specialized industries relied extensively on his services. The blacksmith played a pivotal role in rural communities well into the twentieth century until the advent of the automobile and then, slowly both he and his forge disappeared from our landscape.

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



When Allan started his ledger in 1893, he was living and working on College Street in the town of Antigonish. There he worked for many of the local merchants – J. H. Stewart, founder of Antigonish Wholesalers' Limited; Fred Trotter who dealt in agricultural equipment and feed and who shipped large numbers of lamb and cattle to markets abroad; D. G. Kirk, whose empire included a hardware store, several department stores and a woodworking shop; Thomas Somers, owner of Thomas Somers Store, a general merchandising store that specialized in dairy-related supplies; Patrick S. Floyd, carriage maker and undertaker; and T. J. Bonner who operated Antigonish's leading grocery store on Main Street. Allan supplied their horses with "nu shoes", repaired their buggies, express wagons and sleighs, and supplied parts for all sorts of things. He made axes, picks, stove bolts, chains, gate irons, door latches and the frames for wagons. He repaired baby carriages, tricycles, sleds, wheelbarrows, chairs and furnaces. He put new handles in axes, repaired pots and kettles, and fixed broken legs on stoves. You name it and Allan could either make it or fix it.

Livery stables were the garages of the day and they needed Allan's services too. Horses, carts and carriages had to be kept in good working order. Fred Randall, Colin Grant and William Cunningham supplied Allan with all sorts of work from shoeing horses to paring their feet and putting tires on buggies and coach wagons. Allan repaired gears, brakes and harnesses. He fixed mail wagons, truck wagons, coach wagons, express wagons, buggies and sleighs.

Date	Description	Amount	Total
Aug 1	J. Shallock 2 nd pair part of harness	15	
Oct 1	Repairing collar	30	1 94
Jan 13	W. A. McNamee 2 nd pair of harness	1 50	
Apr 20	W. A. McNamee 2 nd pair of harness	55	
Nov 6	Colman 2 nd pair of harness	60	
Dec 19	Colman 2 nd pair of harness	2 60	3 69
May 7	Colman 2 nd pair of harness	50	
		6 53	5 63
1900			
Oct 31	J. M. Bal. due to life rendered	90	
1901			
Oct 30	By Cash		90
		0.90	0.90

Allan worked for men of every profession and trade – C. E. Harris, the banker; Rufus Hale, who ran Merrimac House; Dr. Cameron; L. C. Archibald, who ran the milk condensing company; James Eddie, a farmer from Clydesdale; Mr. Walker, a marble cutter; R. L. McLean, a coal dealer; Dr. Agnew, the dentist; Hugh McDonald, a shoemaker; William McKenzie, a butcher from Beech Hill; Alexander McDonald, the local policeman; and John Kell, a carriage maker in town. Folks came from all parts of the town and county

for Allan's services: Dan McDonald came from Rear Salt Springs; James Delaney and John Grant came from North Grant; John McInnis "John's son" came from Georgeville; Captain Alfred Dickson came from Fairmont; Alexander Fraser came from Egg Mountain and J. D. McGillivray came from Brown's Mountain. Allan was clearly a respected blacksmith and craftsman – conducting a fairly lucrative trade right here in town.

What did it cost to do business with Allan back then? In 1893, he charged 50 cents for two new horseshoes and 50 cents to have four horseshoes removed. A new wagon "tyre" cost \$1.00, a door hinge cost 10 cents, and a door latch cost 25 cents. In 1894, he charged Alexander McDonald, Police,

\$5.50 to repair his wagon and Alexander Grant of North Grant \$1.75 for wagon repairs. In 1895, he charged Donald McDonald of Glen Road 60 cents to repair his sleigh and 15 cents to repair a wagon wheel. That same year, he charged C. E. Harris 25 cents to put a handle in an axe and Allan Cameron 48 cents for pointing 48 harrow pins. In 1897, John "Archy" McDonald of Hollowell Grant was charged fifty cents for putting a perch in his sled. In January of 1898, John McPherson, Allan's brother-in-law, paid \$27.00 for "1 nu sleigh". On July 1 of that same year, John paid \$60.00 for "1 nu wagon". (Prices have gone up a bit since then.) Just before Christmas of that year, Allan charged James Dunn of South Side Harbour 15 cents to repair his gun. In 1902, he charged Angus McDonald of Hollowell Grant \$9.50 to repair a carriage. Prices varied, of course, depending on the nature of the work and the repairs.

How did folks pay for Allan's services? Well, some paid in cash: 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 40 and 50 cents at a time. One dollar here and two dollars there – folks generally paid in small amounts of cash. On occasion, you can see a \$5.00 or a \$10.00 credit entered in the ledger but not often. Many of Allan's customers used the barter system – they paid in butter, potatoes, turnips, beef, firewood, fish, cabbage, straw, hay, cheese, crabapples and even a pig. Some men paid their bills by doing work in return for Allan's services. All in all, Allan kept a clear record of all transactions.

In the fall of 1901, "Little Allan" moved his business out to Maryvale. Page 194 of the ledger appears to be the beginning of a new era when in late October he charged James G. Ross of Maryvale 75 cents for "2 new shoes & 2 removes." From that point onward, Allan's customers came largely from the local community of Maryvale and the neighbouring communities of Malignant Cove, Highfield, Big Marsh, Doctors Brook, North Grant, Pleasant Valley and Hollowell Grant. Now and again he did business with customers from Georgeville, Lakevale, Morar, Cape George, Fairmont, Arisaig, McArras Brook, Greendale and Livingstone's Cove. The nature of his work was now more rural based as he dealt mainly with farmers, fishermen, woodsmen and millers.



Allan's old ledger is an absolute gold mine for historians and researchers alike as it gives a clear description of the products produced by a local blacksmith and the prices that he charged for his goods and services. At the same time, it is a study of a particular time period in our local history and a record of the business dealings of a community of people in the village of Antigonish just prior to 1900 as well as the dealings of folks in a rural community in the county just after the turn of the century. We can plainly see the industry found in the community, the modes of transportation used by folks during this era, the equipment utilized by various tradesmen and items found in typical homes during that specific time period.

Michael MacDonald walked over with the old ledger several months ago when he was home visiting Hughie and Shirlee, my next door neighbours and his Dad and Step Mom. "Keep it for a week or

so,” he told me. Well, I’ve only gone through half of it so far! The ledger can be studied on so many different levels. I love the old spelling of some of the words that were used and I’m still trying to figure out some of the blacksmithing terminology. And then there is the matter of the inscription inside the front cover: “1918: 27 of Nov. first snow storm” and “Big snow storm 11, 12, 13, 14 of March”. I’ll have to look into that as well. Looks like I’ll be busy for a little while yet.

Many of you probably have historical nuggets hidden away somewhere among your property as well. These treasures sometimes come in the guise of old letters like the one that Robert Williams of James River/Glen Bard brought in to the museum several weeks ago. This spring, Ray MacDonald, better known around the town and county as “Ray Mac”, loaned me his February 1899 copy of *Excelsior*—the short-lived predecessor of the St. F. X. *Xaverian* newspaper. Like many of you, I had never heard of this little publication. Both of these articles have historical significance too but time and space dictate that I save those discussions for another edition of this newsletter. In the meantime, thank you to Michael MacDonald, Ray “Mac” and Robert Williams for sharing their treasures with us.



Catherine MacGillivray
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Our Readers Respond

Shortly after our March newsletter on fires, **Bonnie Elsten from California** sent us the following note: “The article about fires made me think there might be a record or news article about a fire in which two daughters of Daniel Slattery and Margaret (nee Chisholm) died on July 9, 1872. They lived in Tracadie. The girls were Catherine Helen and Ann.” Unfortunately, Bonnie, there are no editions of *The Casket* for the year 1872. The collection at the St. F. X. Library is a wonderful source of local information but, sadly, the early years have considerable gaps.

Sister Rita Chisholm CND stopped in to the museum shortly after reading our May newsletter article on Father Roderick Chisholm of Glassburn. She was delighted to read about an uncle whom she had never met but whom she had heard lots about. The academic achievements of the uncles were well known. Sister Rita will be sending a copy of the article to one of her nieces living away.

Bill Hooper from Massachusetts wrote to say that they were “so pleased with the article about Fr. Rod Chisholm”. Father Rod and Father Dr. Angus were great uncles to his wife, Kay. “Their sister, Aunt Jennie, lived here in Boston for many years as a cook for a Doctor. She died in the Guest House on December 1, 1967. Their other sister, Mary, who married Wm. Grant, was Kay’s grandmother. Another sister, Rose Ann, was Sister Rita Chisholm’s mother.”

Please Note: With regards to the article on Father Roderick Chisholm, my apologies to **Paschal Chisholm of St. John, New Brunswick**, for not giving credit where credit is due. Both letters and the postcard mentioned in the article were from Paschal’s private collection.



Does anyone recognize this old house?

Located at Lower South River, this old house has been well photographed because of its setting and architectural interest. Hannah Sears, one of the museum's summer students, is currently working on a power point presentation for the museum. If anyone has any stories, information or photographs of the Fraser house or the families who inhabited it, please contact the museum by phone, e-mail, or in person.

Addition to the Museum Collection

Jocelyn has added *Fragile and Fanciful*, the story of Nova Scotia glass, by Deborah Trask to the museum collection. Between 1880 and 1920, there were three factories in Pictou County that manufactured glass. I was interested to learn that Clan MacGillivray's President, Jerry MacGillivray's father was a glass blower at one of these factories. Right now, the museum has a lovely plate on display (pictured on the right) that was actually produced at one of these glass factories in Pictou County.

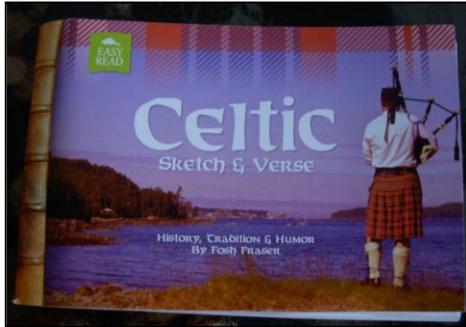


Recent Acquisitions

Jill Mermagen of Maryland donated a copy of *Samuel M. Cornatzer*, a family history compiled by Patricia Chambers. This book contains information on the family of William Gillies Patterson, principal and teacher at the Protestant School in Antigonish in 1876. Jill is a descendant of this Mr. Patterson.

The date 1876 seems to predate St. Ninian's Street School (established circa 1882) and so we're wondering where this particular school may have been located. Did the Main Street School serve both Protestant and Catholic students back then? We're hoping that someone may have some information for us regarding these early schools.

- **Hilda MacGillivray** (mother of Angus MacGillivray, Chair of the Heritage Association of Antigonish) donated embroidery templates that display Coronation themes.
- **Debbie Mattie Pettipas** brought in a portrait of a youthful Zina Cameron.
- **Angus MacIsaac** donated a framed collage of the 150th Anniversary of St. Ninian's Cathedral.
- **John Rovers** contributed an oversized aerial photo of Antigonish dating to about 1975.
- The **St. F. X. Library** donated a copy of Bishop John Cameron's Catechism.
- **Colleen Mason** brought in a dressmaker's hem measure.



Thank you to local writer, **Fosh Fraser**, for donating a copy of his new book, *Celtic Sketch & Verse: History, Tradition & Humor*. This delightful little book covers a wide range of customs and traditions practiced by the Scots who first settled Nova Scotia back in the late 1700s and the early 1800s. The reader will soon realize that many of these traditions are still quite evident right here in Antigonish today. It is only fitting that we share a sketch or two with our readers.

Strong Tea

*A soothing staple for the Celtic Scot,
A cup of good strong black tea,*

*A break from the toil of everyday life,
A Social drink for visitors and more,*

*A continuing tradition as long as we know,
And it's softer than rum, the older we grow.*

Knitting and Quilting

Part of the fabric, part of the culture.

*Women gathered for quilting bees.
Easier to share the burden and a cup of tea.*

*Pictures adorn our history books,
depicting the providers who clothed us.*

*And that which gave the women a change,
away from the men.*

Teddy Bear Contest for Children

The museum is home to a stuffed bear that is believed to be the first teddy bear to have come to Antigonish. Dating back to about 1920, this vintage toy once belonged to Charlie Archibald, one time projectionist at the Capitol Theatre. (You can read more about this bear at: <http://people.stfx.ca/lstanley/material/Recreation/Toys.htm>) This nameless teddy, shown here with museum summer student Hannah Sears, is a tad worn and sad but if children would participate in our naming contest and story contest, he would certainly cheer up. The contest is open to children up to ten years of age. Each child can submit two names.



Children are also invited to write a story about the stuffed bear. The setting for the story must, of course, be Antigonish. Stories can be no more than 250 words and only one story can be submitted per child. Submissions (including name, age, address and telephone number) can be sent to antheritage@parl.ns.ca or dropped off at the museum.

First Prize winners for both contests (\$25.00 gift coupons) will be announced at a Teddy Bear's Party at the Antigonish Heritage Museum on August 27 at 2:00 p.m. Children are invited to bring their teddy bears. Cake and ice-cream will be served.

Heritage Association of Antigonish & Antigonish Heritage Museum Raffle



A raffle will be held on February 29, 2012.

Prize #1 – Limited Edition Framed Print by Brian Thompson – *Main Street, Antigonish, Early 1900s.*

Prize #2 – Framed Print – *Highland Hunt.*

(Winners need not be present to win.)

Tickets are \$5.00 each or 3 for \$10.00.

Shown with the two framed prints is museum summer student, Elizabeth O'Brien.

Antigonish Highland Society Pioneer Caravan

In August, the Antigonish Highland Society will be hosting a Pioneer Caravan to celebrate the history of Highland settlement in north-eastern Nova Scotia. The caravan will begin at the university and then head out to various communities in the county where presentations on Scottish culture will take place. The event culminates in St. Josephs with a dinner and ceilidh. Watch for further details.

The Federation of Music Festivals of Nova Scotia

On August 8, this important national event is taking place right here in Antigonish. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity to take in concerts and to see some rising talent. Jocelyn Gillis, our museum curator, will provide a guided walking tour of Antigonish for participants of the festival.

Fire of '47

The Cape George Heritage Project is working on a stage production to commemorate the 1947 forest fire at The Cape. This event is scheduled for later this summer. Watch for details.

Church Service at Town Point

On July 24th, there will be an Anglican Church service at Town Point. This event will be followed by a picnic and a walk. Time: 11:00 a.m. All are welcome! (Notice courtesy of Pauline Liengme.)

Heritage Association of Antigonish

"Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow."

Message from the Chair

The membership in our Association continues to increase with people from near and far taking the time to complete a membership form and pay the related membership dues. This is extremely rewarding to the undersigned and it indicates that we are on the right path to making your Association stronger.

At our recent Board of Directors meeting for the Association, there were several new standing Committees of the Association created. These Committees are the Membership Committee, the Programs/Events Committee, the Projects Committee and the Finance Committee. A member of the Board of Directors chairs each Committee. We are in need of volunteers to serve on these Committees. If you have some free time and wish to support your Association directly, please contact the undersigned at the email provided.

I have agreed to serve as chair of the Finance Committee. The other members of the Committee at this time are Catherine MacGillivray and Ron McConnell. We recently met and drafted a mandate for the committee and are moving ahead with several fundraising events.

Your financial support through donations and participation in our fundraising events allows your Association to expand the learning events program and even undertake larger projects like preserving the oral traditions of the inhabitants of the town and county and the reflections of some of the older residents of our community.

In closing, I would like to wish everyone a safe enjoyable summer.

Angus MacGillivray, BBA FCGA

angus.macgillivray@ns.sympatico.ca

Antigonish Heritage Association Membership

We'd like to welcome the following new members: **George Duggan**, St. Andrews; **Gail Large**, Halifax County; **Rev. James O'Neil**, Korea; and **Anna Whitebird Perales**, of Columbus, Ohio.

Upcoming Guest Speakers

Paul Bennett, our guest speaker for June, had to reschedule his talk for September 12. Topic: *The Antigonish Consolidators and Their Impact on Nova Scotia Education*.

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