

# The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #42

August 2012

When our family arrived in Antigonish in the spring of 1960, we settled at Lanark for about six years. The first house we lived in is long gone – the property a spectacular field of golden wheat right now. We lived in a second house for another three years, one within sight of the old Lanark School. My older brother and sister attended that two-room schoolhouse but I missed out on that unique experience. I was only eight years old when we left Lanark but I have fond memories of that place and I can still recall some of the neighbours and a few of the local characters. One of those colorful folk was Ruby Cameron, a well-known local artist in her day. Hers is a most interesting story.

Ruby was born in Scotland while the clouds of war were gathering over Europe. When it was all said and done, Ruby's family was aboard a ship and heading for Halifax. Somewhere along the way, Ruby's mother, Georgina, had met a Canadian soldier. He was a forty year old widower and she was a thirty-two year old widow. He had one daughter; she had a son and a daughter. In the wake of the Great War, both were, no doubt, anxious to leave the past behind and start anew. At any rate, Georgina (Robertson) Skeet and John Angus MacIsaac were married on January 27, 1920.



The newlyweds settled on Main Street with their ready-made family which now included his daughter, Violet, and her children, Ruby and Harry. He opened a barber shop and she started her own confectionary store next door. John Angus was an active member of the Highland Society. He and Georgina both had a great interest in Scottish music. In a brief account found on the *Pier 21* website, Georgina's son, Harry, wrote that John Angus "played a very good Old Time Fiddle. He and my mother were much in demand for the country dances of the day, being picked up in the winter by horse and sleigh. Mother played the piano and I the drums. [John Angus] played what I call the mainland style similar to that of Don Messer." Apparently, Georgina was an accomplished musician.

In the early 1920s, the Highland Society was anxious to start up Scottish dancing classes. Georgina had been a Highland dancer in her youth and her children, Ruby and Harry, had been students of Highland dancing in Scotland and so the three of them started to teach classes at the old Celtic Hall. For a number of years, Georgina helped to organize and judge the Highland dancing at the Highland Games.

On December 6, 1928, John Angus, unexpectedly, passed away. His obituary reveals that he had gone overseas with the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade in 1916 and “saw hard service in France with the 85<sup>th</sup>. He was gassed at the front, and, probably as a result, suffered from a weak heart.” John Angus was forty-nine when he passed away. Once again, Georgina was left to pick up the pieces but now she had two more mouths to feed as this marriage had produced two more daughters, Catherine and Frances.

In 1933, Georgina married for the *third* time and became the wife of Samuel Allicon of Tracadie. Her son, Harry, wrote that his mother “became quite the entrepreneur” in that community. She started up Seaview Cabins at Tracadie and was “well known for operating a dining room”; she was an active member of St. Peter’s Church and “headed a committee for catering to the Eucharistic Congress held there in the early 40s”; and she helped to organize the annual picnics for the Augustinian Monks when they came to restore the old Trappist Monastery back in 1938. Georgina was obviously a capable woman and her son was noticeably proud of her. Her obituary notes that she was a well-known businesswoman in Antigonish and Halifax. Georgina’s third husband passed away in Halifax in 1959; she passed away at her daughter’s home in Lanark in 1967.

While there is lots of evidence to prove that Ruby’s upbringing had been rather unsettling what with the war, losing her father, immigrating to Canada, her mother’s second marriage, new siblings, her step-father’s death and, a few years later, her mother’s third marriage – details of her adult life are vague and disconnected. “When I first knew her she went under the name of Ruby MacIsaac of Brookline, Massachusetts,” Donald MacLellan of Boston wrote to me. “She taught her nieces the Sword Dance in Massachusetts,” wrote Marie Terese Redican of Philadelphia. A couple of sources indicated that, for some time, Ruby may have worked for a cruise line that operated out of New York. Another story has it that she was an expert bargain hunter. She would bus down to Boston and scour the bargain stores for merchandise which would then go back on the bus with her to Antigonish. What for? No doubt to stock her mother’s dry goods store.



Somewhere along the way, Ruby met up with Jim Cameron from Lanark. Jim was working for the Allen Edmonds Shoe Company, an upscale shoe manufacturing and retail business that had gained popularity by providing shoes to the Army and Navy during World War II. According to his obituary, Jim had served with the Canadian forces in World War I. During World War II, he had served with the United States Navy as an inspector in charge of the major shoe plants of the eastern seaboard. After the war, he was made superintendent of the Allen Edmonds Shoe Company in Wisconsin, a position he held until his retirement in 1959. *(Photos of Ruby and Jim compliments of Donald MacLellan)*



Jim was an eligible bachelor about twenty years Ruby’s senior. They had an extended (and sometimes long-distance) courtship but eventually married. “She and Jim seemed to hit it off well enough and so everything turned

out pretty nicely in the end,” Donald MacLellan explains. “Jim had transferred from being the head of sales in New England for the Allen Edmonds shoe company [in Belgium, Wisconsin]. The company soon relocated to Port Washington and Jim fairly quickly became the general manager (or president, or something) of the whole Allen Edmonds enterprise. This explains Ruby’s studying art in Milwaukee, not too far away. All in all, Jim had a very successful career.”

In the late forties, Ruby and Jim would create quite a stir when they’d come home to Lanark for a summer holiday. “She was different from the folks around here,” Sarah Carty told me when I asked her about Ruby. “She was kind of exotic.” Sarah recalls one time when a big car swung into their driveway on Cemetery Road. No one had a car back in those days except, of course, the priest and Bishop John R. MacDonald. You can well imagine the panic that ensued – until they saw Ruby and Jim get out.

“Jim always brought nice shoes,” Sarah remembers. Joe Stewart of Terra Tory Drive remembers those shoes too. “Now and again, he’d send you down into the basement to see if you could find a pair of shoes that would fit you. There were hundreds of shoes down there. Stylish shoes too.”



Jim drove a great big car. Joe Stewart remembers that big stylish blue Buick with all the latest technology. After Jim passed away in 1973, Ruby would drive that big car into town at about ten miles per hour. She was just a little woman and that vehicle was just too much car for her.

When Jim retired from the shoe company, he and Ruby moved back to Lanark. There they built a house where John and Florence Kennedy live today. “That was the first new house on this road in about a hundred years,” Joe told me recently. It was there in the garage that Ruby created her studio. “She had her easels set up near the window,” and there she would paint. That magnificent view of the harbour must have inspired many of her seascapes – like these two that grace the walls of Pat’s Bed and Breakfast down at Terra Tory Drive.



My older brother, Peter, in Iowa, recalls Ruby’s lovely flowerbeds. Donald MacLellan, Jim Cameron’s nephew and godson, assures me that Ruby was, indeed, a proficient gardener. Those colorful dahlia and gladioli blooms were, of course, an inspiration for her many floral paintings.



Local artist, Gerry MacGillivray, distinctly remembers Ruby Cameron in his adult night school classes. “She was a noble lady and her paintings were excellent. She was very self-sufficient and she possessed an enthusiasm that carried over to others in the classroom.” Gerry was quite fond of Ruby. “She was older than the teacher but she was definitely the teacher’s pet!” (Pictured here is one of those class paintings that Ruby presented to Gerry upon completion.)

Winnie MacDonald of Lanark notes that Ruby painted in oils and that she was very talented, as we can well see. Ruby died in 1985 at the age of seventy-three. Today, examples of her paintings are scattered around the town and county. “It was a big deal for us to have her painting,” one source told me. “Back then, we didn’t know any artists.” Thankfully, that is no longer the case.

Catherine MacGillivray

[cjmmacgillivray@eastlink.ca](mailto:cjmmacgillivray@eastlink.ca)



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## Recent Acquisitions



This month the museum received an interesting donation from **Ronald Chisholm** of Truro and Antigonish. These large portraits of Ron’s great grandparents, Mary MacDonal and John R. MacDonal of South Side Harbour, were probably completed by an itinerant artist – something quite common for that early 1880s time period.

Mary and John R. had five children, one of whom was Judge Alan MacDonal of Antigonish. A grand-daughter, Florence MacDonal, was highly decorated in the United States Army for her contribution to the war effort. An article was featured on her in the *Boston Sunday Post* on May 31, 1942. The headlines read: “Brockton Nurse One of War’s Heroines.”

What is significant about this donation is the fact that Ron’s father, Ronald Chisholm, had carefully documented the history of his grandparents some years ago. That critical piece of information puts the portraits into context. Too often, information gets lost, leaving the item with little historical value.



Thank-you to **Bernadette Gillis** for the cobalt blue whimsies pictured here. These miniature novelty items were created by workers at a glass factory (from left-over molten glass) at the end of the day – and then brought home to their families. This decorative glass was typical of what you might see as a whimsie. Where did Bernadette get these pieces? Well, Bernadette has a keen eye and a knack for recognizing something unusual or special. She simply picked them up at a yard sale!

- **Ken McChesney** of Bayfield donated a series of documents related to his grandmother, Lillian Taylor McChesney. Lillian, who lived in the Bayfield area, was a school teacher in various rural schools. This collection includes certificates, licenses and report cards related to academic achievements dating 1902 – 1909.
- **Mary Reid** of Halifax sent in a photo of the St. Ninian’s Street School students of 1909.
- **Harriet MacMillan** of Lochaber gave a photo of Alexander “Squire” Cameron (1844 – 1930) that came from the Muriel MacDonald collection. (Squire Cameron was the grandfather of Muriel MacDonald.) Greatly respected in the community, he was often approached to help handle legal disputes.

## New Website!

Check out our new website: <http://www.heritageantigonish.ca/>

## Book Sale

The museum has received a donation of books that are related to this area of Atlantic Canada. Come in and check out our Sale Table.

 <p>Real Estate Purchases &amp; Sales James C. MacIntosh • Meghan E. MacGillivray Case jim@macintosh.ca    meg@macgillivray.ca</p> <p><b>MacIntosh &amp; MacGillivray</b> Real Estate ~ Incorporations ~ Wills Estates ~ Family Law 33 Greening Dr. Antigonish 863-4805</p> <p><small>Notaries Public</small></p>	 <p><b>ANTIGONISH</b> 35 Market Street Antigonish, NS B2G 3B5</p> <p>Phone: (902) 863-6882 Fax: (902) 863-5142</p>	<p>Commercial Insurance Specialists</p> <p><b>FRASER &amp; HOYT</b> <b>INSURANCE</b></p> <p>Whatever it takes.®</p> <p>1.800.565.4786 www.fraserhoyt.com/insurance</p>
<p><b>RON MacGILLIVRAY</b> CHEVROLET GMC</p>   <p>75 St. Andrews Street, Antigonish 863-2803 www.romacgillivraychev.com</p>	<p><b>Please patronize our supporters.</b></p>  <p>Antigonish Heritage Museum</p>	

## The Memory Project

This summer the museum hired a summer student to conduct interviews with some of the seniors of the town and county to record their life experiences and their memories. Marie Hanifen, a graduate student from the University of Kings College, has worked diligently all summer – recruiting, organizing, interviewing and recording. A few clips of her work can be found on the museum’s facebook site: <http://www.facebook.com/TheAntigonishHeritageMuseum?ref=ts> . Marie will be furthering her studies this fall but I’m happy to report that she’ll continue with this valuable project on a part-time basis. Now, here are a few words from Marie.

*Before I began working on the Antigonish Memory Project, I had never heard the term, ‘sauced and blowed’. I didn’t know that, in 1945, a teaching degree from the Normal College in Truro would only take you six weeks to earn. I would never have guessed that local musician Lenny Mason had toured with Joni Mitchell as a young man, or that construction and mining guru, John “Nova” Chisholm had a brush with the mafia during a New York business trip. I couldn’t hazard a guess at the proper pronunciation of Paq’tnkek, or tell you the decade that the major wave of Dutch immigrant farmers came to Antigonish, making their way from a countryside chewed up by war to their new, rugged and rocky homes in Nova Scotia. I couldn’t tell you what Havre Boucher was like during the great depression, properly explain the significance of the Antigonish Movement or find Frasers Mills on a map.*



*I’m happy to report, that’s all changed.*

*Over the last four months I’ve researched topics, met with seniors and performed interviews. All of this was done in the name of the Antigonish Memory Project, a Heritage Association of Antigonish initiative designed to protect and preserve the memories of seniors in Antigonish. So far I’ve interviewed 25 seniors, edited hours upon hours of audio and video footage and learned a lot about this town. I feel honoured to have been involved with this project, and as my full-time work winds down to a close, I am pleased to say that I will be continuing my research in a part-time capacity during the school year.*

*Beginning in mid-September, the Antigonish Memory Project interviews will become publically available at the Antigonish Heritage Museum for the first time. I encourage you to head down and take a look. You might just learn something too.*

## Correspondence: Donald MacLellan of Boston

*As a young child I traveled from Boston to Antigonish/Lanark with my mother in 1937 to see her mother as she lay dying. My uncle Willie met us at the station with the horse and trap and I thought the whole adventure was just grand. In those days there was an overnight ferry between Boston and Halifax with the train up to Antigonish just across the street from the ferry pier. So it was really easy to get back and forth from the "Boston" States. In fact, people from Nova Scotia had better access to Boston than did most people in Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.*

*Later on, in 1945, aged 12, I spent 5-6 summer weeks in Nova Scotia, first with Willie and Eliza in Lanark and then with my father's brother (Uncle "Lauchie") in Dunvegan – just north of Inverness on Cape Breton. Willie put me on the "Judique Flyer" at the bustling (to me) train station and Lauchie picked me up in Inverness. After a few weeks the process was reversed. The train even crossed the straits of Canso on a ferry which was wondrous. It was only many years later that I reflected on the fact that I had been allowed to travel down east all by myself on the non-stop Boston to Antigonish bus line. It was an innocent time. (I'm sure there were plenty of helpful strangers keeping an eye on me).*

**Thank-you to Donald MacLellan for his contribution to our newsletter. We want to hear from you.**

## Heritage Association of Antigonish

### Patrons Program

The Heritage Association of Antigonish recently adopted a Patrons Program to raise money needed to support our important work. Monies raised will go towards projects such as the promotion and preservation of our shared culture and heritage, the preservation of historical records and documents, and the delivery of quality learning events. Donations are greatly appreciated.

The Patrons Program offers three levels of support: Silver (\$100), Gold (\$250) and Platinum (\$500). All patrons become "Friends of the Association"; their names and levels of support are placed on our Friendship Board and their sponsorship is acknowledged on a yearly basis. All patrons receive a one-year membership to the Heritage Association of Antigonish. Gold Patrons receive admission for two to the Antigonish Highland Games *Concert Under the Stars*. Platinum Patrons receive admission for one to all events of the Antigonish Highland Games. The Heritage Association of Antigonish is a registered charity so income tax receipts are provided.

Why become a patron? Your greatest reward will probably be the pride that you will feel for being a partner in our work. You will be helping us preserve our shared heritage here in Antigonish. Why not show your support for the Heritage Association of Antigonish and the Antigonish Heritage Museum?

A special thank-you to the following patrons:

#### **Platinum**

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha  
Dr. John Hamilton  
Bell Canada  
Angus MacGillivray

#### **Silver**

Hilda MacGillivray  
Doug MacLellan  
Hugh and Fran Haley  
Irene Brown  
Chisholm & Gillies Law Corporation Inc.  
High Crest Enterprises Ltd.

## Guest Speakers for the Fall

- On October 1, 2012, **Herb MacDonald** will be speaking on “Antigonish in the Railway Age”.
- **Sister Peggy MacFarlane** will be giving a talk on the influence of the Sisters of Saint Martha in the Antigonish community. Date to be announced.
- **Ian Cameron** of Sherbrooke will speak on “The Pictou Cattle Disease at the Cloverville Experimental Farm”. Date to be announced.

## Antigonish Heritage Association Membership

By joining the Heritage Museum Association, you will be doing your part to help preserve our local heritage. This month we would like to welcome the following new member.

- **Christina Smith-MacDonald** of Oakville, Ontario

## Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish

(Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)

August has been an excellent month for the renovations and capital improvements project planned for the building that houses our Museum. We were recently advised that the Municipality of the County of Antigonish has matched the Town of Antigonish’s contribution of twenty thousand dollars.

The Treasurer of the Heritage Association of Antigonish, John Dickie, and I are currently working closely to determine the maximum amount of financial support our Association can contribute.

As a member of the building committee for the Antigonish Heritage Museum Board, I am very busy getting the paperwork in place to apply for matching dollars from the federal government. This application will be completed shortly. At that time we have to advise of the total dollars amount that we have identified and secured for this project. Thus the more dollars we have identified and secured prior to the submission of this application, the better since we are applying for matching dollars.

As advised in my message last month, if you can and plan to support the Heritage Association of Antigonish financially this year, now is the time to do it. A tax receipt will be provided. Please mail your financial support to the Museum or drop by for a visit. All donations received will be used for this project. Please note: no donation is too small!

We are nearing the end of August and I must advise that the heat and humidity from the “dog days of August” are wearing me down. Looking forward to some cooler weather. We have had a beautiful summer and hoping our fall will be beautiful also.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

Angus MacGillivray, BBA FCGA     [angus.macgillivray@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:angus.macgillivray@ns.sympatico.ca)