



The Old Train Station News



What was the talk around town in the summer of 1917? The war in Europe? Probably. Letters from the front? No doubt. The casualty list of the week? For sure. The war was on everyone's mind but, just for a little, an incident at McKenna's Drug Store on Main Street provided a welcome reprieve from all the worrisome news from overseas. "Last Friday," *The Casket* reported on July 19th of that year, "a horse dashed through the show window of McKenna's Drug Store, Antigonish, and fell in a heap on the floor." Of course, by the time this amazing story came out in the local paper, most folks in town would already have heard it through the grapevine. News travels fast in small communities.

So what happened? Well, according to the newspaper report, the horse was in town "to undergo training." At the time of "the accident", it was in the charge of a horse trainer from New Glasgow, a Mr. Jimmie Cameron, who claimed that "a woman getting out of a waggon frightened the horse." Did her movements alarm the horse? Did she deliberately startle the horse? Or was her appearance such that it spooked the horse? Mr. Cameron didn't specify.

The above photo shows an unpaved (and thus pre 1925) Main Street with McKenna's Drug Store at its original location next to the Presbyterian Church (today's St. James United Church) on the site now occupied by the Professional Centre. The structure on the extreme left of the photo was J. P. Gorman's Shoe Store. The sign on the adjacent building reads "McKenna's". Careful examination reveals the considerable size of the display window – the one through which the horse made its grand entrance.

Other details of the incident are not entirely clear either. Apparently, the woman getting out of the wagon somehow frightened the horse “causing it to dash to the sidewalk and through the window, notwithstanding [the horse trainer’s] efforts to keep it clear of the building.” Can we assume then that Mr. Cameron was leading the horse down the street? Was he heading east or west? Of greater importance still – was *the horse trainer* distracted by the woman getting out of the wagon? Whatever the case, the unchecked horse created quite a ruckus. By the time they regained control of the animal, it had caused considerable damage. “A fine show case, some window fittings, a lot of gramophone records, perfumery, and other drug store goods were destroyed. Mr. McKenna’s loss is upwards of \$200.” McKenna wasn’t the only one to flinch; the poor horse was badly cut by the window glass.



When John Patrick McKenna opened his drug store on Main Street in December of 1912, *The Casket* reported that Mr. McKenna “should make the new business a success.” At the time, Copeland’s Drug Store was carrying out its business at our Down to Earth Art Gallery location, Foster Brothers Drug Store was operating at The Plum Tree Gift Shoppe, and C. M. Henry was in the drug store business at another location in town – but that didn’t stop McKenna.

J. P. had spent eight years working at Foster Brothers before leaving to take his course at the Halifax School of Pharmacy. Graduating in the spring of 1912, the newly minted chemist and druggist opened up his own “attractive drug store,” on Main Street – in the same building where the famous Dr. J. J. Cameron had his office. “The fittings are modern and handsome, giving the store a pretty and up-to-date appearance,” *The Casket* wrote back then. “With considerable experience in

dispensing, in Antigonish and in Halifax, and with a store well stocked with the numerous requirements of the drug trade,” McKenna was bound to succeed. But prescriptions weren’t the only products J. P. sold; his shelves were well stocked with a wide variety of toilet articles, household products, gift items and veterinary medicines. (*Photo of J. P. McKenna compliments of Bart Sears*)

Success doesn’t come without determination and hard work but, at the same time, J. P. McKenna wasn’t afraid of competition. At the time of the horse incident, McKenna was advertising regularly in the local paper. To market his Victrola in the fall of that year, he announced, “You’ll hardly need a fire this winter if you have a Victrola and good records in your home.” Before Christmas he was pushing that same product with a new line: “Buy your Christmas Victrola and records at McKenna’s.” Knowing that everyone was thinking of their beloved sons, husbands and fathers overseas at Christmas time, J. P. cleverly advertised: “Pipes for the boys at the front. Pipes for everybody at McKenna’s,” “Davis cigars, cased pipes, military brushes, etc., etc., at McKenna’s,” and “Large assortment of best chocolates in Canada at McKenna’s.” A few months later, J. P. was advertising “Colorite in all colors” for the ladies to color their new and old straw hats in time for spring. Soon he was selling cameras and films with a new jingle – “Perfect developing and printing done at McKenna’s.” To sweeten a sale, he advertised: “Palm olive soap given away free at McKenna’s Pharmacy.” It seems that J. P. McKenna already understood advertising and the power of persuasion.

Tidbits of recorded history indicate that McKenna was a likeable chap. “His acquaintance was wide, and all who knew him liked him, for he was obliging, friendly, upright, and charitable. A keen sense of humor brought him a lot of fun out of the common affairs of life, and his quips and stories were the delight of his friends.” As a young man, he was active in sports; in later years, he got involved in local organizations and took up fishing. With his winning personality, McKenna established a loyal customer base from around the town and county and then reached out to folks in Guysborough, Inverness and Richmond counties with his mail-order business.

Little did McKenna realize in 1912 that his business would last for a total of seventy-two years. With his untimely death in 1946, the pharmacy passed down to members of his family who continued to run it until 1984. By then McKenna’s Drug Store was located further up Main Street, in the heart of the business section.

One can only imagine how often, over the years, J. P. MacKenna told and retold the story of the horse “dropping in” at the shop. While the incident was serious at the time, it certainly provided fabulous fodder for the tales he loved to spin to entertain his friends and acquaintances. Sure, the competition had their share of loyal customers here in Antigonish and the surrounding areas – but J. P. had a compelling story that helped to set his business apart.

Catherine MacGillivray



cjmmacgillivray@eastlink.ca

Book Launch



On Thursday, May 15, at 6:30 p.m., the Antigonish Heritage Museum will host a book launch. **Bart Sears of Antigonish** has compiled and edited a volume called *Sporting Memories: Selected sports articles by Dr. Cecil MacLean from the Antigonish Casket*. The book will be available for \$19.95. Everyone is invited!

Heritage Association of Antigonish

Learning Events

- On May 5, at 7:00 p.m., local Gaelic teacher, **Mairi Parr**, will speak about her trip to Scotland with a group of students from Antigonish. Remember, May is Gaelic Awareness Month.

- Gaelic Affairs is organizing a **visit from Gaelic journalist, broadcaster and educator Ruairidh MacIleathain (Roddy MacLean)**. Mr. MacLean, the Scottish Government's Gaelic Ambassador for 2012-13, has been developing a greater understanding with Scotland's Gaelic-speaking population of the relationship between Gaelic language and culture and the local environment. The Gaelic interpretation of nature is unique as Gaels have their own names for native species of plants and animals. In many cases, these plants have unique and fascinating stories and heritage attached to them. Mr. MacLean will be at the Museum on Sunday, **May 18, 2014 from 1:00 – 3:00 pm**. He will speak for 30 to 45 minutes and then go outside to do an interactive walking tour on the Antigonish Landing trail.
- For June, we're planning an outing to the **Fraser's Mills Fish Hatchery**. Stephen Thibodeau will provide a history and a tour of the fish hatchery. This will be a car pooling event. Details to follow.
- On October 6, **Bruce MacDonald** will give a talk on **The Nova Scotian Units in The Great War**.
- Look forward to our **Summer Ceilidh with Karen Beaton** (and guest performers) each Thursday evening during July and August. Admission \$8.00. Limited seating. Details to follow.



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In Acknowledgement

Patrons Program

- Silver: **Dorothy Lander and Dr. John Graham Pole, Clydesdale**
- Gold: **Leo and Cathy MacDonald, Brierly Brook**

Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish

(Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)

Recently, I was speaking to someone with a long history of service in municipal government. We discussed the levels and importance of funding for our Museum and heritage preservation in general. One comment made was “that not everyone involved in governance at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels have the same appreciation for heritage preservation and its importance.”

I was a little taken aback with this comment and have been reflecting on it for several weeks. Having worked for many years with the Federal Government, I have a full appreciation of the finite nature of the resources various levels of governments have and the demands on these resources.

I think it is important that we highlight this discussion and consider why preserving heritage and supporting our Museum is important to this community. Heritage enriches, educates and enhances our cultural life; it encourages tourism and provides opportunity for public service and volunteerism.

I am certain we all could offer many valid reasons why heritage is important. I would like to offer my thoughts as to why I think it is important. Many years ago I walked by a poster hanging in a building window in Halifax. I stopped and read the message. It stated that a tree is only as strong as its roots. This message has stayed with me all these years and has resulted in me having a greater appreciation of our forefathers who built this great country. Their hard work and dedication has built a nation that we are all proud of and is the envy of many in the world. I see preserving our shared history as a way of recognizing their hard work and a way to say thanks.

You, as readers, may demonstrate your support for the Museum by visiting. When friends and family are home for the summer, encourage them to drop in. They may be surprised that there is something for everyone to discover.

March 31, 2014 marked the fiscal year end for the Heritage Association of Antigonish. It was another banner year for our organization as we provided significant financial resources to the Museum’s renovation project. This month we replaced a number of the computers and printers used at the Museum. This was all made possible because of the generous financial support of our Patrons and friends. On behalf of the Association’s Board of Directors, I would like to say thank you. We are starting fiscal 2014-2015 on a solid financial foundation.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

Angus MacGillivray, BBA FCGA angus.macgillivray@ns.sympatico.ca