

The Old Train Station News

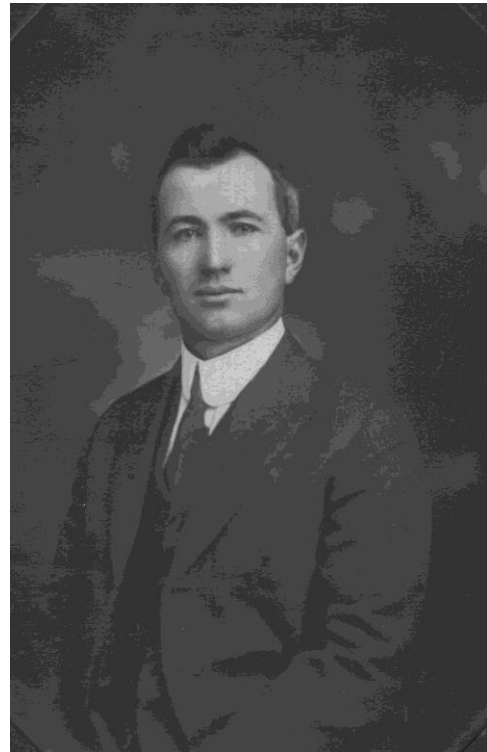
Newsletter #66

August 2014

The First World War: letters home

Archibald MacPhee was born in North Lochaber in 1888. He joined the 106 Overseas Battalion, Nova Scotia Rifles, in March 1916. After being stationed in Pictou for four months, he was moved to England to await deployment in France. He saw active duty at the front, and in June 1918 was injured and returned to Canada. After taking a course in Saskatoon, he returned home and married Edith MacGregor. He worked as a farmer and died in 1967.

Canadian involvement in the First World War grew slowly over the first few years of conflict. This chain of correspondence sent by Archie MacPhee to his sister and mother is a window into a period of tense preparation as Canada readied itself for total commitment to the war effort.



Archie MacPhee (1888-1967)

Pictou. March 20, 1916.

Dear Winnie:

I must try and write and describe the military life in Pictou. I don't know much about the barracks for I am still boarding out. But the barracks is not what I pictured it to be.

There doesn't seem to be much discipline. Most everyone seems to enjoy themselves in spite of military etiquette.

Lieutenant O'Brien asked me what I thought of it. I said it was not at all what I imagined. "Well" he says "The boys are having a good time and they may enjoy themselves. I'm clear of the responsibility".

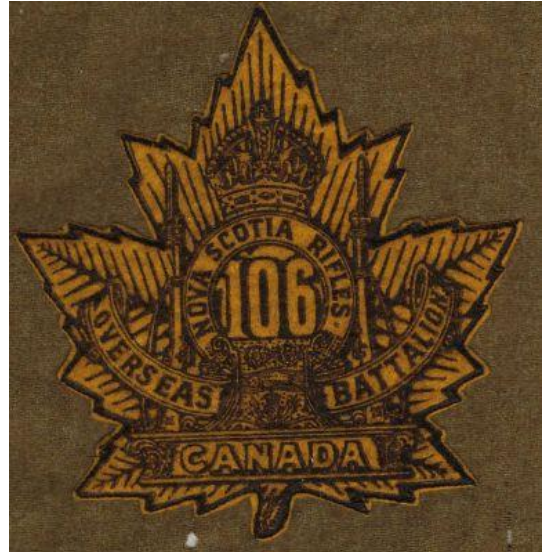
O'Brien's squad is the best drilled in the company and they (the Pictou crowd) had all the advantage of company drill since last November.

Did you hear and see Colonel Borden today in Antigonish? He arrived here Saturday. I was one of his guard of honor, so you see the Antigonish bunch is second to none in the 106th.

Speaking of the 106th they have three kinds of brooches here. One is the regular color that the soldiers wear, the other is burnished somewhat, and the third is gold plated. Which kind will I get?

Coming back to military life, one of the boys died of appendicitis and was buried with full military honours yesterday. The funeral was very imposing. The firing squad of twelve men went ahead with arms reversed, the pallbearers followed. Then came the hearse with the casket draped in a large Union Jack, then the clergyman; after him the major and officers, and rank and file.

The cemetery was two miles out of town but one hundred fifty men marching in twos makes a long file. Arriving at the grave the body was lowered. The firing squad presented arms, fired three volleys then the bugle sounded the Last Post. The squad again presented arms and marched away. It was my first military funeral. As Johnny Hurley would say "I thought it very impressive".



I'm getting a little weary about those notes. I'm afraid that you can't raise the money in time and if the notes are sent to the major it will queer me for good here. I hope that you will have no trouble in getting the money. I am going in barracks before the last of the month, measles or no measles, in order to draw the full separation allowance. Then forty dollars will be some help to keep things running. Did Jewel get over her lameness? Try to get Albert to fix that snap but if he can't do it, send to town to get a tie rope like the old one, they cost twenty-five cents. I hope the heifer is getting reconciled to being milked and that she is doing better than was expected.



Tell Ma not to work too hard at outside work, for it is better to leave work undone than to hurt herself.

I didn't get a line from anyone since I came up. Don't forget to write and keep me posted on the Lochaber news and don't forget the R.C. and where each meeting is, and how much they make.

Don't forget to let me know what pin you choose so I can buy them. They didn't issue anything to us yet. Of course they don't issue the 106th badges anyway. This is the badge on the paper only, the rifles on the sides don't show plain on the paper. You will be tired reading this stuff so I'll ring off.

Your affectionate brother,

Archie

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Truro. July 2, 1916.

Dear Mother:

Just a line tonight to let you know that we are still here and all well. That is, all of B Company are well and I guess that all the others are. We are drilling pretty hard these days but that is what we have enlisted for. I don't believe that we will go under canvas at all.

A sudden break in that last line. The fire bells began to ring and I followed the crowd and got a ducking holding the hose. Served me right, I had no business at the fire anyway.

I'm glad to hear that you disposed of Jewel for some time. It will be much better both ways, the work will do her good and you will be relieved of the care of her. Say, try to get that lower stable cleared out - you know that part under the hatch in the barn - so that it can be filled up with hay. You remember how I told you how I wanted it, and you can put a lot of hay on the oat scaffold. You might want to send me one of each of those snaps of me taken at home. I am sending the proofs of two more that I did not yet finish.

Tell Winnie I didn't get those gold badges but I got silver ones in the canteen. There are sort of oxidized, they had no gold ones. Symonds said that he gave one of the gold ones to his sister last winter and it is all tarnished now, so probably the others are better after all. I'll send them as soon as I get time to. I also got a pennant for Bertha, and I am going to send you one of the company pictures. You would not know one in it, I will have to mark it.

Archie

Truro. July 4, 1916.

Dear Winnie:

Just a line tonight - we are kept pretty busy and do not have much time for writing. We sail from Halifax soon, probably on Friday. The rumor was going around for some time that we would leave Truro on the 6th but the C. O. announced today that we were sailing within a few days and if we want to see our friends that they must come to Truro at once. Now I don't think it wise that Mother should know anything about our sailing for she will only worry about submarines all the time we are on the water I will write to her just before we leave and tell her not to be surprised if I don't write often for we are so busy and the next thing she will know is that the 106th has arrived in England. Then I don't think she would mind it so much. If you think it best to tell her though, you can use your own judgment. General Benson inspected us yesterday and said that we were the best Batn' in the Maritime Provinces and No. 8 Platoon (Antigonish) was the best. What do you think of that? It is something for Antigonish to be proud of. I expect a letter from you before we sail. I'll write to Mother soon. I would sure like to have seen you all before sailing but it can't be helped now. I wrote to Bertha on Sunday telling her to come to Truro but she won't have time. I must wire her that we are leaving. I also have that parcel to send home, and Mother's picture will follow. The bat'n will send it as I have put in the order so if she don't get it let me know. Your affectionate brother, Archie.

(Undated)

Dear Winnie:

Still here, but can't say for how long. It may be hours and it may be weeks. We are under sailing orders, and are ready on half an hours notice. Perhaps it will be like the 64th going every day for the winter. We may be going all summer. There was a muster parade this afternoon, and all were present, the sick, lame, halt, the blind for final roll call. Wish you and mother could be here but I know you can't leave. Hope you will have no trouble getting the hay made. Don't hire the mower to Milton. He's got money enough to buy one if he wants one. I got no sympathy for such people. I won't need any sox for some time so don't worry - I've got five good pairs yet. Give my love to Nettie and children.

With love, Archie

Am a little short of money going across but will get it from Bertha and she will get it at home. A.

Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow

Our summer is coming to a close and I am looking forward to our fall which is my favourite season. You got to love those fresh Gravenstein apples and local corn!

The Museum was fortunate to secure a grant under the Community Facilities Improvement Program to assist with insulating the basement area. Work is currently ongoing and should be completed soon. A special thanks to the Province of Nova Scotia and our MLA Randy Delorey for their financial support and assistance.

During the past number of weeks Karen Beaton and the Museum have hosted a series of weekly Ceilidhs which have been popular with locals and visitors alike. One need identified was for additional seating. The Association decided to address this need and purchased thirty six good quality stacking chairs. The total cost was in excess of \$2500.

The Heritage Association of Antigonish will hold their annual general meeting in September. At this time is we will elect the directors for the Board of the Heritage Association of Antigonish, as well as the Association representatives for the body that manages the Museum. We are in need of a number of good volunteers wishing to serve on the Board of Directors. If you want to take on a leadership role in our Association please email the undersigned.

The Heritage Association's summer employee finishes his summer employ at the end of August. I would like to say a special thanks to Matt for his dedication and hard work. Further I want to wish him all the best with his studies.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

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

Happenings

- August 28** Ceilidh at the Museum with Karen Beaton and Joey Beaton
 - CD Launch: Karen Beaton's *Once Upon a Time*
 - 7:30 – 9:00pm
 - \$8 admission. All ages are welcome!
- September 8** Bruce MacDonald: "Nova Scotia Infantry Units in the Great War"
 • Particular emphasis on the 25th and 85th
- October 20** Bruce MacDonald: "NS Non-Combat Units in the Great War"
 • Forestry Unit, Construction Unit, Hospital Units (St. F.X. No. 9 and Dal.)
- November 10** Fraser Dunn: "A Tribute to the Sisters of St. Martha"



Geocachers attend a Cache In/Trash Out event at the museum

Recent Acquisitions

- New Publication
 "These Were My People", by Vince MacLean
- New Artefact
 Milk Bottle produced for M. P. Mikkelson Dairy



Guests mill about after a Thursday night Ceilidh at the Museum.

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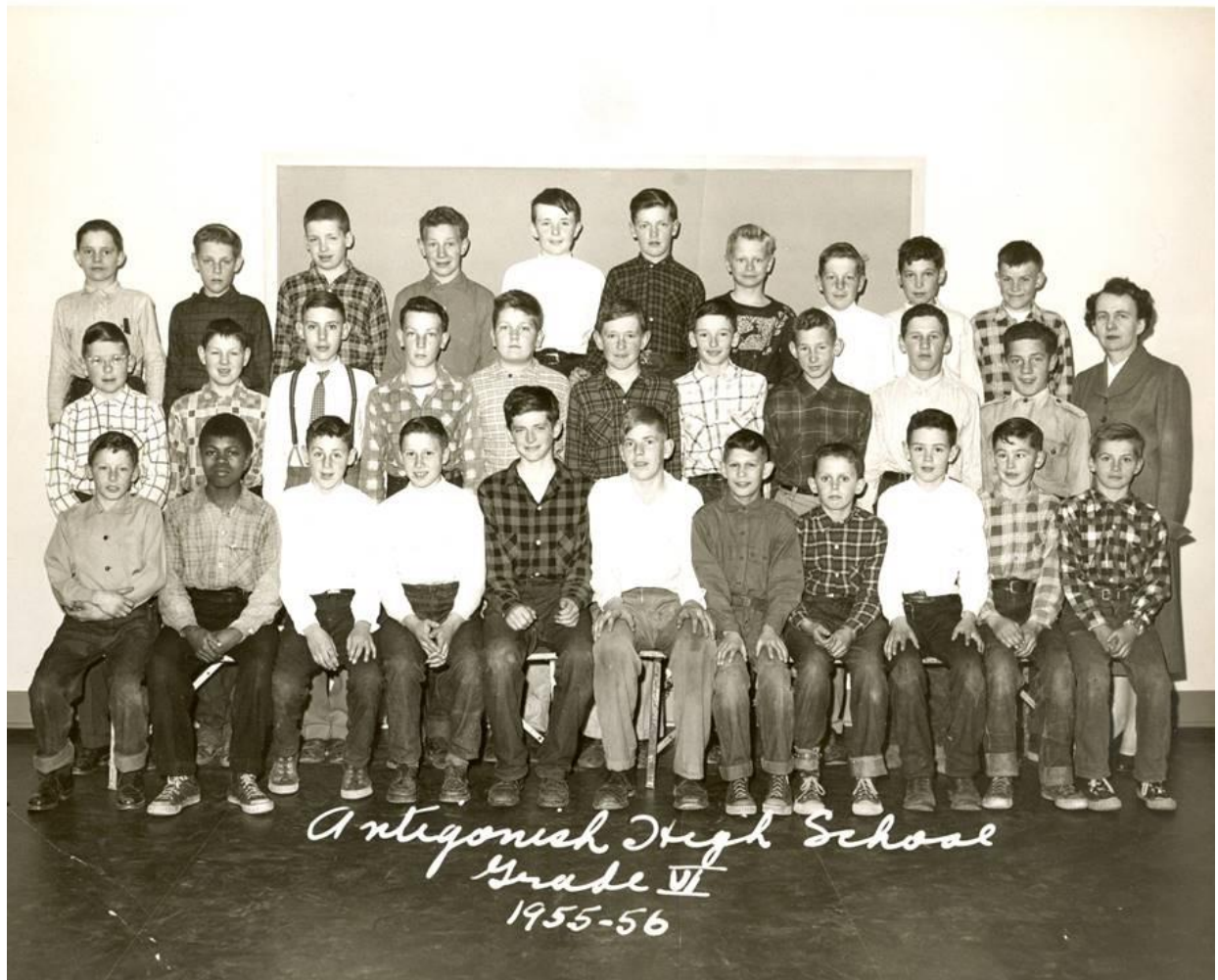
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Recently rediscovered



This photo was recently found in an old school ledger housed at the museum. Can you help us identify the students pictured?

New members

- Judy Z. Flynn, Duxbury, MA
- Ray Wong, West Vancouver, BC
- Rhoda Briggs, Danvers, MA
- James MacIntosh, Antigonish
- Lyghtsome Gallery (Beth & Jeff Parker), Antigonish
- Gail MacDonnell, Delta, BC