



# The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #68

October 2014



It's that time of year again – the season of ghosts, goblins, ghouls and mayhem. Everyone loves a good ghost story but this year for Halloween we've decided to address an unusual discovery brought to our attention by one of our readers, a teacher at the St. Andrew Junior School here in Antigonish. Back in January, Brian MacDonald told us about a gravestone unearthed by his neighbour out at Dunmore. "Likely story", thought Brian when Jerry Ten Brinke told him about finding the stone marker under his basement doorstep. Still, curiosity got the best of him; the next time he saw Jerry outside in his yard, Brian went right over to investigate and, sure enough, there in his barn stood an honest-to-goodness headstone – names, dates and all.

Knowing that this story would undoubtedly capture his students' attention, Brian assigned his grade seven Social Studies classes to write their version of why his neighbour might have found a tombstone under his step. Needless to say, he got some very imaginative responses. "It was the easiest writing assignment I ever gave because they couldn't wait to develop a good story around it." Well, this clever instructor has piqued our curiosity too. It's not every day that one stumbles (or that one wants to stumble) across a gravestone on their premises!

So, how did Brian's neighbour actually find this stone under his doorstep? Well, apparently, Mr. Ten Brinke had been searching for the source of a water leak in his foundation when he realized that the leak was in a part of the basement under his step. He dug down under the stoop and that's where he found the headstone. It had been a threshold to a basement entrance for many years.

Interestingly, the stone is perfectly intact and clearly legible. The fact that it had been placed face down was likely the key to its preservation says Jocelyn Gillis, curator of the museum. "Because it was tipped over on its writing, the engraving was protected."

The stone in question was carved for Catherine, wife of Malcolm Livingstone, of Upper South River. Mrs. Livingstone died in the winter of 1866 at the age of thirty-eight. The burial records for Upper South River give her maiden name as Cummings. The *Presbyterian Witness*, a Halifax newspaper, published her death announcement on February 24<sup>th</sup> of that year and revealed that Catherine was survived by a husband and four young children. The 1871 Census shows just how young those children would have been at the time – ranging in age from infancy to seven years. Was Catherine's death a result of childbirth complications? We'll never know for sure but we do know that maternal deaths were a common occurrence back then.

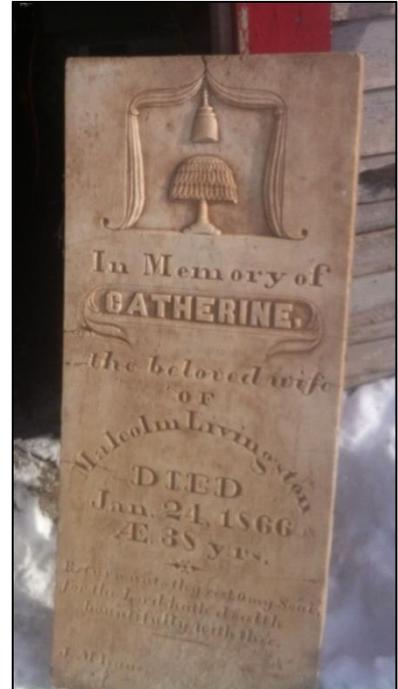
Contact Information: Antigonish Heritage Museum [antheritage@parl.ns.ca](mailto:antheritage@parl.ns.ca) or 902-863-6160

The 1871 Census reveals one more relevant piece of information – Malcolm married a second time. His children would have needed a mother and so in 1870, according to civil records, Malcolm married Catherine Hunter of Hollowell Grant who was living in the Antigonish Village at the time of her betrothal. She was forty-nine years of age and past her childbearing years.

Catherine’s stone is tastefully embellished with two popular gravestone designs from that particular time period: drapes (complete with tassel), an ancient symbol of mortality, and a willow tree, a standard symbol of mourning. Psalm 116:7 graces the bottom of the stone: “Return unto thy rest O my Soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.” This soothing inscription was clearly for the benefit of the living, not the dead.

One further significant detail must be examined and that is the name of the stone carver found at the very bottom of the stone. Many old stones bear no signature – but that’s not the case with Catherine’s stone. J. Mclsaac’s name is clearly legible.

John Mclsaac was from the St. Andrews area – or, as the book *Drummer on Foot* says, “the West Side of the South River at what is now known as Dunmore.” John, the son of Donald and Catherine Mclsaac, came from what the aforementioned source describes as a “very interesting and singularity progressive family of 15.” Two brothers, Angus and Colin Francis, went down in history for representing Antigonish in the House of Commons but John should be remembered too – not for political aspirations but for his fine artistic talents as a sculptor and for carving the two Gaelic words, *Tigh Dhe* (House of God), on the fascia of the cathedral between its two stone towers. (Photo credits: Brian MacDonald)



Mclsaac was one of a number of skilled stone carvers in the area. In an online site, *Stony Silences: Headstones of Antigonish*, St. F. X. History professor, Dr. Laurie Stanley-Blackwell, notes that in both Pictou and Antigonish Counties, “Scottish immigrant stone cutters formed a core of skilled artisans who adeptly carved freestone, marble and granite. Evidence of their skill can be seen in the multitude of rosettes, flowers and thistles that adorn early tombstones in the region. Their names, however, are lost to an ill-deserved obscurity.” Thankfully, we can still piece together a brief sketch for Mclsaac.

His obituary in 1914 reveals that John took up “the art of marble working” at quite a young age and that “with scarcely any apprenticeship,” but with “the assiduous application of his exceptional ingenuity,” he became “the leading sculptor” in eastern Nova Scotia. It noted: “Scarcely a cemetery in the diocese that is not decorated by his handiwork, from the tasty marble slab to the most costly monument.” (Our cemetery in Maryvale has one of his stones. Does yours?)

Research confirms that, back in his day, John was clearly recognized for his talents. An article in an 1898 edition of *The Casket* reports a monument erected at Glendale, Inverness County. Lauded as a “beautiful structure of marble” and “an ornament to our cemetery,” it was reported to be “finished in the exquisite style for which the maker is justly famed.” The following year, the local paper once again sang Mclsaac’s praises when two “very fine” monuments were placed at St. Ninian’s cemetery to mark the graves of two old pioneers of the town. Both nine-foot monuments were acknowledged as “splendid specimens of the sculptor’s art.” Note the admiration in the reporter’s words:

“The pedestals are of white marble, the columns of polished grey granite, and the tops of polished marble. The carving and lettering are done with the utmost care and precision, and the whole work speaks highly of the superior skill of the designer and sculptor, John Mclsaac, Esq., Dunmore. These memorials besides being lasting tributes of respect to the departed, add greatly to the appearance of the Cathedral cemetery.”

A 1904 article in *The Casket* reveals that Mclsaac provided designs for other stone carvers too. The monument to Father James Fraser at St. Andrew’s was completed by Epps & Dodd of St. Georges granite quarries in New Brunswick – from a design provided by John Mclsaac “who may feel justly proud,” reported the paper, “as it is considered by good judges to be one of the finest and, in relation to its parts, most perfectly proportioned products of the chisel in the diocese.” Even though well renowned, in the fall of 1909, Mclsaac regularly advertised in the local paper. (*Advertisement credit: The Casket*)

Now, all that being said, how did Catherine’s stone, carved by the famous sculptor John Mclsaac, come to be the threshold of a basement entrance to Jerry Ten Brinke’s house? Well, a little more research reveals that Jerry’s house was once the home of John Mclsaac and his family. It is suspected that the sculptor built the house on a parcel of land received from his brother, Angus; nevertheless, the home was in his possession from 1887 to 1920.

One more question remains. Why was Catherine’s stone discarded? Well, Catherine’s husband passed away in 1889 and her son died ten years later in Boston. A new stone was then needed to include the names of Malcolm Livingstone, his two wives and his son, John. Sure enough, a modest headstone stands at Cummings Cemetery at Upper South River to commemorate all four. The front of the stone contains Catherine Cumming’s and Malcolm’s names and dates. No psalm adorns this pedestal – just a simple “Gone Home” on Catherine and Malcolm’s side of the stone. Catherine Hunter’s name is inscribed on one side of the stone and John is remembered on the other side. The carver’s name was not included.

With the placement of this new marker, the old stone was no longer necessary. Was it returned to sculptor John Mclsaac? We can only speculate that it was because years later it was uncovered by Jerry Ten Brinke while trying to mend a water leak in his foundation. What more can we say?



Catherine MacGillivray



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## Early Anglican Congregation in Antigonish

The museum is looking for two artefacts from the early Anglican congregation in Antigonish. The first is a photo of the first Anglican Church on Church Street. The second is a mortar and pestle that was used as a bell by the Anglican congregation at Town Point during the Hierlihy times to call people to service. This mortar and pestle “bell”, documented in *Timothy Hierlihy and His Times* by C. J. MacGillivray, was in the possession of Clara (Cunningham) Seaman for some time. Clara and her daughter, Marion, lived on Court Street. Much of the Cunningham material eventually came to the museum – but where did the “bell” go?

## Recent Acquisitions



A special thank-you to **Lynn Connolly of Boylston and Maryvale** for donating this (pictured) medicine bottle and thus helping the museum identify a previously unknown (or long forgotten) druggist in the town of Antigonish. The bottle was found by her husband, Pius, while diving off the shores of Guysborough.

Wendell MacLean, Druggist, doesn't appear on any census documents for Antigonish but he does appear on the Voter's List for 1886 where he can be seen living on Main Street. We can only assume that MacLean lived and worked in the town for a short period of time.



**Iain MacEachern, farrier, of Glen Road** has kindly donated the blacksmith's tongs he created in 1972 while learning the blacksmithing trade in Sperry, Oklahoma.

- With Remembrance Day coming up, people are sharing some of their stories and photos. Thank you to **Betty Cameron** for the photo of her grandfather, John Joseph Gillis, a military medal winner “for supreme gallantry and devotion to duty” while on the front line at Passchendale.
- **Iain Cameron of Sherbrooke** brought in a published article on the St. F. X. Hospital Unit.
- **John Glen of St. Andrews** (currently living up north) donated a letter written by Alexander MacNaughton of Springfield and Antigonish to his father, J. C. MacNaughton. The letter is dated March 8, 1917. (*Alexander did come home from the war. According to his obituary, Alexander MacNaughton served with distinction in the 23<sup>rd</sup> battery C.F.A., rising to the rank of sergeant and winning the military medal. He was severely wounded while on service and never fully recovered from the effects of the war. He died in Kamloops in 1927.*)

## The Great War Project

This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of World War I. To ensure that our local soldiers will never be forgotten, the museum is collecting information (photos, obituaries and whatnot) on Antigonish soldiers who fought in the war and especially those who fought and died in that war. We're sincerely hoping that our readers and the local community will help us with this endeavor.

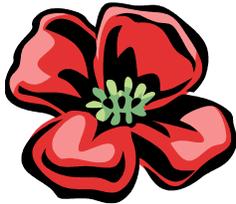
## Nursing Sisters in the First World War

A professor at York University is researching nursing matrons of the First World War. "We are currently seeking photo albums, single photographs, diaries, letters, and other similar material for this project, which is looking at Canadian nursing sisters' overseas experiences." We would like to help York University with their research and it would also be nice to add to our own collection here at the museum. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

## Pa Rum Pa Pum Pum

Throughout the fall and winter months, drummers from the local pipe band will be having their practice sessions on Saturdays at the museum.

## Ceilidh at the Museum



During the summer months we hosted a series of ceilidhs that proved to be quite popular. For the fall and winter we intend to offer periodic ceilidhs. This Thursday, October 30, we will be presenting our Remembrance Ceilidh at 7:00 p.m. Entertainment will be by Karen Beaton on fiddle, Joey Beaton on piano, and vocals by Joanne Bouchard. Seating is limited. To ensure a seat, pick up your advanced ticket at the museum. Tickets are \$8.00.

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## “About Witches and Tea Leaves”

To celebrate both Halloween and Remembrance Day, we'd like to share part of an article written by **Kingsley Brown Sr.** for *The Casket* back in 1978.



*Once upon a time I knew a genuine witch, whose prophetic powers were beyond all doubt.*

*She was not a professional. We knew her as “Aunt Jimmie.” Her real name was Jemima Jennix, and she was a widow who lived in a little cottage by the shore of Rum Point, in the Nova Scotia harbour of Jeddore. Aunt Jimmie, who is long since dead, had seen much of the world. Her husband had been a sergeant-major in the British Army, and she had met him when the British regiments, prior to 1905, formed the garrison at Halifax.*

*Aunt Jimmie read teacups, and local people frequently made up little parties to visit her, and find out what was in store for them. She enjoyed their company, most of the time, and usually her “clients” came away happy. “I tell them what I see,” she told me once in confidence, “but if I see anything really terrible, like they are going to die, I just skip that part!”*

*Aunt Jimmie looked into my teacup one evening in the summer of 1936. That was three years before the war, and a year before I even thought about joining the flying club and becoming a pilot. But Aunt Jimmie saw it all, and it all came out clear as a bell.*

*“All I can see are aeroplanes,” she said. “Not one. . . Hundreds of aeroplanes. And you are right in the middle of them. . . And I see a crown. I see you in the service of the King.*

*“But there is something else. I see you in a strange land where people speak a strange tongue. And you are going to live with those people for a long time. . . But there is something here I don’t understand. I can see you arriving in that strange country, but I can’t understand what kind of thing you are travelling in.*

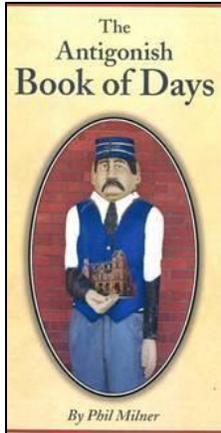
*“No, it’s not a ship. . . And it is not an aeroplane.”*

*I laughed and said, “A submarine, perhaps?” It was all very much of an evening’s fun.*

*“No,” said Aunt Jimmie. “I don’t know what it is, because it is something I have never seen before. But it is a strange contraption in which you will arrive in that strange land.”*

*Six years later I found out what it was.*

*It was night, and I was floating down to enemy territory in a parachute. And I suddenly remembered Aunt Jimmie. The thing she had seen in those tea leaves was a parachute, and I was in it.*



## Book Launch

Fans of Phil Milner's column in *The Casket* and his online blog will agree that it's been too long since the publication of *The Yankee Professor's Guide to Life in Nova Scotia*. Good news! Phil has a new book out. Like his first volume, this one also follows an Antigonish year.

The book launch for *The Antigonish Book of Days* will be held on Wednesday, November 5, at 7:00 pm at the Royal Canadian Legion in Antigonish. With music, munchies and more, it should be an evening to remember.

By the way, that's our station master right there on the cover of Phil's book.

## Heritage Association of Antigonish

### Learning Events

- On Monday, November 10, at 7:00 pm, **Fraser Dunn** will present "A Tribute to the Sisters of St. Martha."
- In the spring of 2015, **Zane deNoncourt** will talk about the Latvian immigrants to Antigonish and their contribution to agriculture in Antigonish.
- In June of next year, **Allan Marble** will give a biographical sketch of Dr. J. W. MacDonald.

### Patrons Program

- **Silver Patron:** Anonymous

### Monetary contributions:

- **Terry and Joan Murphy, Summerside, P.E.I.**
- **Marlene Hubley, South River Road**

## Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish

(Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)

As I sit writing this month's message, I can look out my living room window and witness Mother Nature's annual display of fall colors. I think this year's foliage and weather are the best in recent memory. The

combination provides us with a unique opportunity to appreciate this show. Hope you can take some time to enjoy it!

Near the end of last month, I took in a participatory theatrical walk sponsored Arts Health Antigonish (AHA!). This was a dress rehearsal. It related to the times of Hierlihy and the founding of Town Point. Recognizing the educational value of sharing and promoting our shared history, the Heritage Association of Antigonish will be working closely with AHA! over the next number of years in the roll out of these productions.

Recently, we held our AGM and elected some new members on the Heritage Association of Antigonish Board. I am pleased to advise that Neil MacIsaac and Dr. John Graham-Pole have agreed to serve. I am looking forward to working with the new board and mapping out our future plans.

Mag Lowe has decided to retire from the Board and pursue other interests. Mag has worked for many years to build our organization into the success it is. Mag will be missed by all and we wish her all the best. Mag, on behalf of the Heritage Association of Antigonish, I want to say a huge “thank you” for your many years of support and dedication.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

Angus MacGillivray, BBA FCGA

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***Heritage Association of Antigonish Board: Fraser Dunn, Catherine MacGillivray, Dr. John Graham-Pole, John Dickie, Angus MacGillivray (in back), Bart Sears, Donnie Beaton and Neil MacIsaac.***