

The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #69

November 2014

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I. To ensure that our soldiers, nursing sisters and other service members will never be forgotten, the museum is calling on our readers (and the local community) to help us collect photos, obituaries, articles and whatnot on local Antigonishers who participated in the Great War and especially those who fought and died in that war. Bill Landry, author of this month's featured article, has been doing his part to help with this project.

Standing on Parade with the Antigonish Town Fire Department

on Remembrance Day

By Bill Landry

I joined the Antigonish Town Fire Department in 1991 and now have more than twenty years with the organization. After about a year, I was issued a Fire Department uniform. The Chief at the time always requested as many members as possible to attend the Remembrance Day parade. I don't believe



I marched with the department that first year due to being very busy with work. When I did start attending the parade from time to time with the Antigonish Town Fire Department, we used to march behind the veterans. (We are now behind the legion cadets.) From our position in the parade, I remember looking ahead at the veterans as they turned left behind the federal building and I was always amazed at how well they marched. They were always in step and we were lucky if we kept our rows straight.

While lined up each year during the Remembrance Day ceremony, our view of the cenotaph was always at its west side. There I could read all the engraved names of veterans on its west face. Always interested in my family genealogy, one year I noticed the names of Thomas Kenna and Alex Landry who had served in World War I. They were listed together.

I knew from family research that my great grandmother was Ellen (Kenna) Landry and that Thomas Kenna was her nephew. Ellen was married to William J. Landry from Court Street in Antigonish. It took me a few more years before learning some details about Alex Landry.

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Ellen's husband, William J. Landry, moved to Antigonish from Pomquet in 1870 and became an apprentice blacksmith to John F. Cunningham on Court Street. William J. Landry boarded with the Cunningham family for a few years. He was the first policeman in Antigonish Town and still later he was a contractor. In time, he built a house on Court Street. Thomas Kenna's father, James Kenna, lived across the street from him.

Today, with the magic of the Internet, I have been looking into more facts about Thomas Kenna and Alex Landry and some of the circumstances between Thomas and Alex began to amaze me.

Thomas Kenna was the adopted son of James Kenna who lived on Court Street in Antigonish. The house no longer stands. It would today be on the grassy area behind the present Irving Garage. James moved to Antigonish with his family from Merland, Antigonish County. He married Christina MacDonald, daughter of Judge Hugh MacDonald from South River.

James Kenna, Thomas's father, was a leading member of the committee to establish St. Martha's Hospital in Antigonish. This was the six-bed house on St. Ninian Street. James and Christina adopted Thomas and they also had a daughter, Martha. James Kenna died in Antigonish before World War I. William J. Landry also died before World War I and the two widows continued to live across from each other.

Thomas Kenna was born May 23, 1897. When he turned eighteen, he listed himself on his military attestation papers as living in Halifax. He traveled to Sussex, New Brunswick, and there enlisted in the army on August 23, 1915 in the 64th overseas battalion.

The 64th overseas battalion was authorized in Halifax on June 17, 1915 and moved to Sussex New Brunswick on Aug 18, 1915 to begin recruiting under Lieutenant Colonel H. Montgomery Campbell. The battalion moved back to Halifax in November 1915, with strength of 1200 men. It was now associated with the Prince Louise Fusiliers of Halifax.

Thomas Kenna listed his occupation as labourer. On the attestation papers, Tommy swore an oath to King George V. The approving officer who signed the papers is listed as Capt. L.C. Corey. Thomas was assigned regimental number 469147. On the back of the form the medical officer considered him fit. He was listed as 5'9" tall with a 32-inch chest, blue eyes and fair hair. His age is listed as 18 years, 8 months. Also listed on the paper is his closest living relative, his mother Christina Kenna of Court Street in Antigonish. The commanding officer of the 64th battalion, a Lt. Colonel, signed the back of the form.

I investigated Alex Landry's name a few years later and confirmed that he was the son of Pierre J. Landry and Caroline DeCoste from Pomquet. Pierre J. Landry was a brother to William J. Landry, of Court Street. Thomas Kenna and Alex Landry were considered first cousins even though Thomas was adopted.

Alex Landry was born in Pomquet to Pierre Joseph Landry and Caroline DeCoste on August 8, 1893. Peter Joe, as he was called, operated a small farm and was the Post Master in Pomquet. Peter Joe's grandfather was born in France, the son of an exiled Acadian and his great grandfather was born in Pisquid (Windsor, N.S.). Both father and son returned to Nova Scotia from exile in France. The house in which Peter Joe Landry lived still stands today. It is in Pomquet on the West Side of the Pomquet Chapel Road.

Alex Landry enlisted in the 64th battalion in Sussex, New Brunswick, on Sept 15, 1915, less than a month after Tommy Kenna did the same. Alex was listed as 22 years and one month old, 5'8" in height, with gray eyes, brown hair and a medium complexion. Alex Landry could not read or write so he marked his "X" on the attestation form. Alex was assigned regimental number 470249. The clerk who recorded the information was so hazy on the location of Pomquet that he listed the village as in Cape Breton.

The 64th battalion was shipped overseas on March 31, 1916 on the SS Adriatic which left from Halifax and arrived in Liverpool, England, on April 9, 1916. The battalion's first camp was in Bramshott, where they arrived on April 10, 1916. On May 1, 1916 the battalion moved to Otterpool, in Kent.

In June 1916 the 64th battalion was disbanded (as were so many before them) and its personnel were assigned to other Canadian battalions already in the field in France. Thomas Kenna was assigned to the 25th Nova Scotia Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) and Alex Landry was assigned to the 26th Battalion (New Brunswick). While I may never know why Alex was not sent to the 25th Battalion as a Nova Scotian, it may have been because he could not read or write. Due to his first language being French, he may have been assigned to a company in the New Brunswick battalion which had Acadian men as a component.

The 25th Battalion and the 26th Battalion were assigned to the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade in the 2nd Canadian Division. That brigade was also made up of two other battalions: the 22nd Battalion (Quebec), which became the famous Vandoos, and the 24th Battalion (Victoria Rifles) of Montreal.

The 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) was authorized in Nov 7, 1914 and was raised in Halifax. It arrived in France on Sept 15, 1915.

The 26th battalion (New Brunswick) left Saint John N.B. on June 13, 1915. As they loaded the transport ship, Caledonia, with great fanfare, the Mayor of Saint John gave a speech to the assembled crowd which included the Lieutenant Governor, members of the legislative and other civic authorities.

In the latter half of June 1916, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division was in the line on the front at Ypres and had just gone through the Battle of Sorrel, or Hill 62. This battle was a German feint attack on the position to draw off the buildup of the British Army on the Somme. That buildup had not gone unnoticed by the German Army but their attack in response to it failed despite the many casualties, which totaled about 8,000 Canadians and 6,000 Germans.

The Canadian Corps, which included the 2nd division, was pulled out of the line after this battle and rested. Then it was reinforced with members of the disbanded 64th battalion, including Tommy and Alex.

The British Army, which had expanded to well beyond a million men, was now ready to take the offensive. Field Marshall Douglas Haig had presided over the buildup in France. With this "new army" he wanted to wait for a few more weeks; however, the German Army had long since started an offensive in February at Verdun and the pressure was on from the French headquarters to relieve the strain on the French Army.

The British Army opened its Somme offensive on July 1, 1916. While this article will not go into all the details of the Somme battles, July 1, 1916 is a famous day in Newfoundland history as the Newfoundland Regiment, serving under the British 29th Division, was nearly wiped out on that one day. The Battle of the Somme, however, was just starting. It would go on into November 1916 and before it

was over there would be a combined total of over one million battlefield casualties. The battles in July were the first phase of the Somme Offensive and the second phase was in August.

In the third phase of the Somme offensive, the Canadian Corps was pulled from the line in Ypres and was put on the Left or North flank of a 12 km front in the Somme River area. A new attack was slated for September 15, 1916 and would involve 12 divisions. The attack objective for the second Canadian Division was the fortified town of Courcellette. It was a small town on the left of the road from Albert to Bapaume. In front of the town was a trench line anchored by a position known as the Sugar Factory, which was located in the middle, with the Sugar trench on the left and the Candy trench on the right.

Lined up for the attack on these trenches, from right to left, were the 4th infantry brigade and the 6th infantry brigade, both from the 2nd Canadian Division. The 4th brigade had battalions 18th, 20th and 21st aiming for the Candy Trench, and to the left was the 6th brigade with battalions 27th, and 28th aiming for the Sugar Trench. The 5th brigade from the same division was in reserve.

Zero hour for the attack on September 15th was 6:20 a.m. These two brigades moved forward and by 9:00 a.m. were in the trenches called Sugar and Candy. With these trenches taken, the 5th brigade was leapfrogged through the lines of the 4th and 6th brigades and assigned to a position immediately in front of the town.

The 5th Brigade attacked in the evening around 5:35 p.m., with the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) on the left side of the town and the 22nd battalion (French Canadians) on the right. The dividing line between them was the main village street, marked by the church steeple. The 26th New Brunswick Battalion was in reserve along with the 24th battalion (Victoria Rifles). A message reached 2nd Canadian division headquarters at 7:35 p.m. from an officer of the 22nd (Vandoos) that the whole town of Courcellette was in their hands along with 200 German prisoners.

The 5th Brigade and the whole division had considerable success with an advance of two miles, taking the Candy and Sugar trenches, and clearing the town taking over 1000 German prisoners. Then, they had to endure four days of German counterattacks without much food and water being brought up to the new lines.

This attack is notable for it is the first time in the history of warfare that tanks were deployed in action. Seven of the new tanks were assigned to the Canadian attack but the tanks did not achieve the success that had been hoped because most of the tanks broke down or got stuck in the mud. Only one tank made it to the Sugar trench but it did succeed in doing its job.

War Diary Battlefield Report about the tanks:

The performance of the tanks was patchy. Of the 49 ordered only 32 were able to reach their assigned start positions on the battlefield and of them, seven failed to start - leaving 25 moving forward at the commencement of the attack. In the end, the tanks proved to be largely a psychological asset, emboldening the attackers and intimidating the defenders where they moved forward. Tactically however, they provided little advantage or support to the attackers with most breaking down or becoming immobilized in the terrain of the battlefield and only nine actually reaching and penetrating the German lines. Even where they were successful they were hard pressed to advance across the cratered battlefield faster than a soldier's walking pace.

An entry in the 2nd Canadian Division War Diary at 5:25 p.m. said, in conjunction with reporting on prisoners captured, that: *“Prisoners opinions of tanks say that it was not war but bloody butchery. One tank got astride their front trenches and enfiladed it both ways.”*

The attack by the 25th battalion was costly. It was even more costly to hold the position taken. German Military doctrine called for immediate counterattacks when ground was lost, on the theory that the enemy while he had advanced had not fortified his position and would be still disorganized. The 45th Reserve Division (German) did just that with heavy artillery fire.

Diary entries from the attack by the 25th battalion:

Sept 15---Fifth Brigade attacked and captured the town of Courcellette (report from brigade attached). The 25th moved forward as though on General inspection, the new soldiers behaving like veterans going through heavy artillery barrages without a quiver. Colonel Hillarm DSO led the battalion and inspired all ranks with his courage and coolness. The report of the commanding officer is attached herewith. Capt Adj. A.H. Hickey died of wounds in the field ambulance, Major E.T. Brooks killed, Capt T.C. Spears killed, Lieut C.H. Holkirk killed, Lieut Hiltz wounded, Lieut Craig missing, Lieuts F.G. McDonald, Ripen, D Stairs, Adams, Dollery, Major Flowers, Major Hilton wounded. Colonel Hilliam wounded in hand but remains on duty. Lieut Deyoung wounded.

Sept 16---Day spent in consolidating our new line, the battalion being under extremely heavy shellfire day and night. Casualties cannot be estimated.

Sept 17---The battalion was subjected to the heaviest artillery fire anyone among its lot had seen, but all ranks worked like beavers consolidating and making the new lines tenable. Major Tupper killed and Lieutenant Wetmore wounded.

Sept 18---Battalion relieved during the night of 17/18 by 31st Canadian Battalion, after handing over lines that were fortified. Total casualties now killed were: officers 5, other ranks 31. Wounded were: 8 officers, other ranks 183. Missing: 4 officers and 73 other ranks. Battalion proceeded to dugouts on the Lappairie Road.

Tommy Kenna was killed in this attack on Sept 15, 1916. His body was never found. He could have been killed by any number of means, and his body could have been buried under earth from the shellfire. Tommy would be listed in the Sept 18th diary entry about the 73 missing in other ranks. His name is inscribed on the Vimy Ridge Memorial.

Alex Landry's battalion (the 26th) supported this attack behind the 25th and 22nd Battalions in what the war diary calls mopping up operations. Then they took a place in the line on the right flank and endured heavy shelling. In three days the battalion had 5 officers and 41 other ranks killed, plus 6 officers and 219 other ranks wounded. In addition, there were 30 soldiers missing. Alex Landry survived the battle for the town of Courcellette.

The 5th Brigade war diary recorded that it pulled back behind the Canadian lines to rest, after the 31st battalion of the 6th Brigade relieved it. It was a very short rest.

Beyond the town of Courcellette on a low ridge was a trench to which the Germans had retreated. It acquired the name “Regina Trench” and was one of the longest trench systems the German Army had on the western Front. The first line of trenches on the Western Front, including those of the

enemy, was usually backed up by a second and even a third line of trenches to make sure there was defense in depth.

The British High Command noted the previous success of the Canadians and now hoped for a successful breakthrough against the Regina and Kenora trenches. The 26th (New Brunswick) and the 24th (Victoria Rifles) moved through the town and got ready to attack the Regina and Kenora trench lines. The attack on the Regina Trench on Sept 28th was another bloody business. The attacks started at 5:00 a.m.

Entries in the 26th battalion war diaries for the two days of this action:

Sept 27, 1916---Marched at 6 AM to the USNA Valley. Battalion and company commanders were ordered forward to 6th brigade HQ. Battalion marched at 4:00 PM to a position near the SAUSAGE VALLEY. Battalion received orders to attack the part of the enemy lines in front of 6th brigade trench. Later cancelled and battalion ordered to Courcellette in immediate support of 31st battalion. Owing to darkness and an inexperienced guide, battalion did not arrive at Courcellette till 5:00 AM.

Sept 28, 1916---At 5:00 AM Battalion (26th) received orders to seize and hold Hill 130. The Hill was about 1500 yards from our front lines and on the other side of Regina Trench, which trench was strongly held by the Germans. The idea was to get to objective before daybreak if possible. The Battalion moved forward by E Miramont Road but had only gone about 600 yards when, after exposing the different companies to view, the enemy immediately opened up with three MG (machine guns) inflicting some 40 casualties instantly and causing our men to lie down on what cover they could find on a sunken road.

Later an attempt to get to the Regina Trench, a trench between our main objective and our then position, failed owing to any attempt at movement drew heavy MG (machine gun) fire. A second attempt was made about 3:00 PM to get to Regina Trench. The attack was much as above and men were forced back. At 8:50 PM a bold attempt to rush Regina Trench was attempted but after the battalion, which at this time was only 200 men, delivered strong bombing (hand grenades), our men were forced to fall back after being held up as before by strong MG (Machine Gun) and heavy bombing. Regina Trench proved to be strongly garrisoned. Our casualties were Officers 2 killed and 3 wounded; Other Ranks 25 killed, 128 wounded and 24 missing. Total Casualties 182.

Alex Landry was killed on Sept 28, 1916 in the attacks on the Kenora and Regina trenches. His body was found and he is buried in the Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt France. His grave is listed at 1V A 28.

The Kennas in Antigonish and the Landrys in Pomquet both lost sons in the same month, in the same battle, and in the same infantry brigade. They both joined up in the same town with the same battalion. They both went overseas on the same ship, and they are listed, one after the other, on the Antigonish World War I Cenotaph. Alex Landry was a first cousin to my grandfather on his father's side and Tommy Kenna was first cousin to Alex on his mother's side.

When Remembrance Day next rolls around again, I will once again march with the Fire Department and when we say, "We will remember them," I will remember Tommy Kenna and Alex Landry as I now know some of their life story.

I have not felt war and I live in a safe country so I feel I owe them that small gesture.

Recent Acquisitions



What is it?

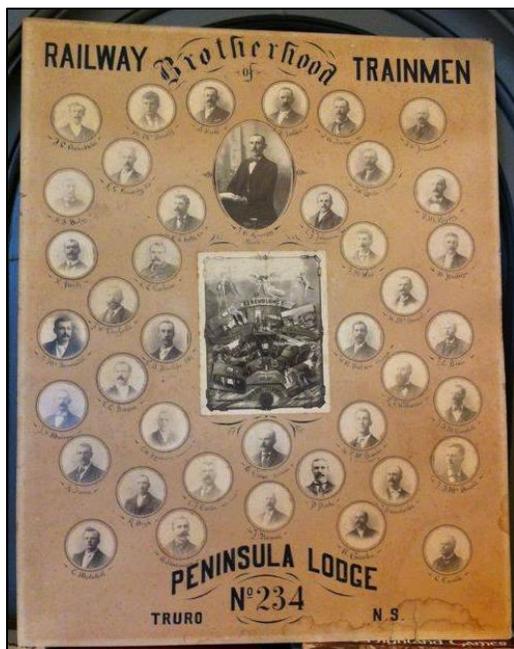
This curiosity came to us from the **R. K. MacDonald Nursing Home**. It's a brass vessel and cover and it stands about eighteen inches tall. Unfortunately, it came with no information.

One visitor to the museum suggested that it might have been a wood stove accessory – possibly a receptacle of sorts.

Someone else wondered if it might have been utilized in a sick room as a container for water.

Here's hoping that one of our readers will be able to help us identify this object.

Railway Brotherhood Trainmen of Peninsula Lodge, No. 234, Truro, N.S.



Joan Blackman from down in the United States, brought in an interesting poster that was found in the old Kinney house at Linwood. (She is a relative of the Kinney family.)

Pictured top, center, is Joseph Alfred Kinney (1873 – 1960) of Linwood. He is identified as “master” of the Railway Brotherhood Trainmen. (Kinney had a life-long career with the railway.) Other members are labelled as vice master, chaplain, inner guard, outer guard, journal agent, warden and secretary. The poster contains some local names but also many that are not familiar to this area.

The picture in the center displays the words “Benevolence,” “Sobriety” and “Industry.”

Does this piece have Antigonish connections? The Museum is hoping that railway enthusiasts may be able to tell us a little more about this organization.

- Special thanks to **Debbi Helm of Antigonish** for a WWI Memorial Plaque. Popularly known as the “Dead Man’s Penny,” this medallion was issued to commemorate those who died as a consequence of the war. Debbi’s plaque was in recognition of her granduncle, Alexander Fraser, who was killed in action near Courcellete, France, on November 18, 1916 while serving with the 54th Battalion. Fraser’s family had first settled at Lower South River (near the site of the new highway construction) and then relocated to Port Hastings.

- Thank you to **Donnie and Betty MacNeil of Antigonish** for a World War II photograph of the Forestry Corps. Ronald Peter MacNeil was identified in the photo.
- A signed Don Loney print was brought in by **Garry Fleuran of Cloverville Road**.
- **Mary Veinotte of Antigonish** donated an assortment of books.
- Thanks to **Barbara MacNeil of Bay Street** for a variety of bottles, including a Felix J. Quinn bottle. Quinn was a soda water manufacturer in Halifax in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

August Newsletter Photo

Back in August we posted a photo of the 1955-56 Antigonish High School Grade VI class that was discovered in an old school ledger housed at the museum. We're happy to report that **Ron Fraser from Pasadena, Newfoundland**, stopped by while visiting the area and identified the students.

Ceilidh at the Museum

Our next ceilidh will be held on Sunday, December 7, 2014. Entertainers for this event are: Karen Beaton on the fiddle, Margaret MacGregor MacDonald on piano and Fr. Andrew Boyd, vocals.

Lochaber Christmas Festival

Don't miss the Lochaber Christmas Festival on Saturday, December 6, 2014. Check the link for more information: <http://www.lochaber.ca/christmas-tree-festival/>

Antigonish Highland Society AGM and St. Andrew's Night Banquet

The St. Andrew's Night banquet will be held on November 30, 2014 at the Prissy Pig. AGM meeting at 5:00. Meet and greet at 6:30. Dinner at 7:00. Remember to pick up your tickets at the museum. Tickets are \$30 per person.

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Heritage Association of Antigonish

Learning Events

- 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.

New Members

- **Margaret Ellen MacKinnon**, North Grant

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

Near the end of last month the Heritage Association of Antigonish, working with the Museum, hosted a Remembrance Day Ceilidh. This event was well received and we are planning to host a Christmas Ceilidh on the afternoon of December 7, 2014. We would love to see a large crowd for this event. Please plan to attend. Tickets can be purchased in advance at the Museum. The cost is \$8.00 per ticket.

In November our own Fraser Dunn lead a learning event called "A Tribute to the Sisters of St Martha". There was a large crowd in attendance including the undersigned. The contribution these good sisters have made to our community was huge and their collective efforts have made our community the great place it is today. A special debt of gratitude is owed to the Sister of St Martha by all of us.

Also in November the Association rolled out a Remembrance Booklet in honour of the 100th anniversary of the start of WW1. The booklet was given to students in grades 7 and 8 of Antigonish County. The booklet provided details and facts concerning the war effort and Antigonish and different parts of the Remembrance Day Service. A special thanks to Bart Sears and Jocelyn Gillis for their dedication and efforts to bring this project to reality. It is hoped that we can make this a yearly project for Remembrance Day.

As we approach the end of 2014 it is hoped that you will include the Heritage Association of Antigonish in your giving plans for this year. The Heritage Association of Antigonish is a registered charity and tax receipts will be provided. Please call Jocelyn Gillis at 863-6160. Your financial support allows us to do the important work relating to promoting and preserving our shared history.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

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