

# The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #82

December 2015

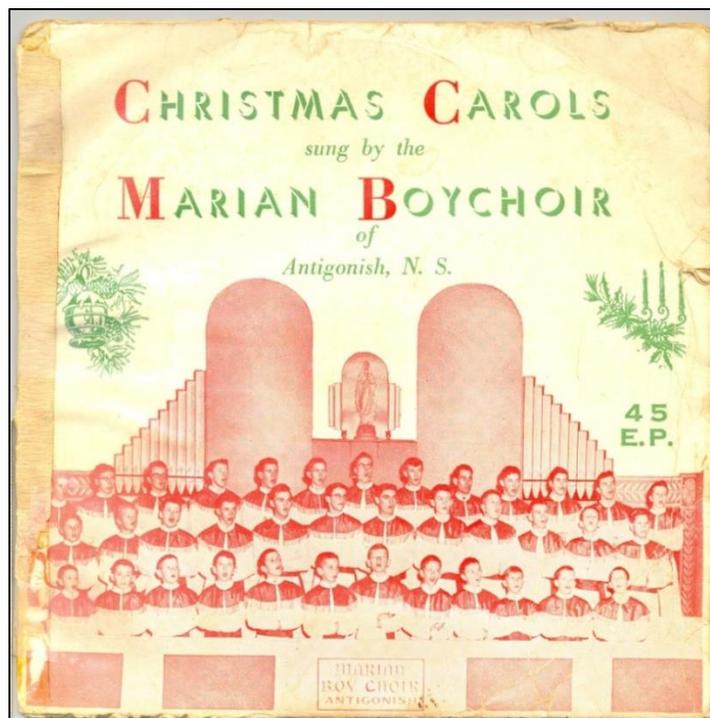
Eleanor Belland couldn't possibly have known the stir she'd create at the Museum when, earlier this fall, she donated a 45 extended play record of Christmas carols by the Marian Boychoir. That group of local boys and one young priest's dream of a magnificent choir was a rich chapter in our local history. Thanks to Eleanor, we're now able to treat our readers to a heartwarming rendition of *Adeste Fideles* as performed by the very talented Marian Boychoir. Soloist for this selection was ten-year-old John Hanrahan. Descant was sung by fourteen-year-old Neil McKenna. (Yes, Emily, this was your well-loved uncle, Father Neil McKenna, singing descant back in 1963. Wow! Could he sing!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBGLQ7Hro4k>

For the benefit of our younger readers and those not familiar with the area, the Marian Boychoir was just that – a choir of young boys whose voices had retained their high pitch. Established by Father Terence Lynch of St. Ninian's Cathedral back in 1951, the Marian Boychoir performed liturgical and classical music, folk songs, old standards and popular music to crowded venues across Nova Scotia until 1965 when ill health forced Lynch to retire.

Kindly note, this was no ordinary choir. "At 5:30 each weekday evening, when most young boys are enjoying a hearty supper, a little group with dulcet voices can be seen making their way to choir school," wrote Theresa MacDonald in *The Xaverian Weekly* and *The Casket* back in 1953. The choir was already rapidly becoming recognized as one of the more famous choirs in eastern Canada.

That same year, the choir expanded to accommodate the changing voices of the boys. Young baritone, tenor and bass voices soon mingled with the sopranos and altos.



The Antigonish Heritage Museum [antiheritage@parl.ns.ca](mailto:antiheritage@parl.ns.ca) or 902-863-6160

Newspapers across the province published rave reviews. “It was an unusually memorable concert, a concert to be cherished in memory,” wrote the *Cape Breton Post* back in 1960. “The little soprano lads sang with pure, even angelic goodness, and several of them were sensational in the best respect.” That same year, a New Glasgow paper reported, “The choir has been lauded for its wonderful performances at every public appearance for some years and recently presented a concert in Sydney where high praise was given, not only for their musical ability but their absolute attention to detail and close attention to direction.”

The first edition of the *Marian Boychoir Bulletin*, dated December 1954, reveals that the choir produced a special half-hour Christmas program that year to be broadcast over Halifax, Charlottetown, New Glasgow, Antigonish, Sydney and St. John’s, Newfoundland, radio stations. The *Cape Breton Post* reported the choir’s television debut on CJC-B-TV in 1959. “They won wide acclaim for high caliber of performances,” conveyed *The 4-County Citizen* soon after.

Eileen Cameron Henry may have described the choir best when she wrote in *The Casket*: “They look angelic in their cream poplin soutanes with blue satin capes fringed with gold, blue sashes, also fringed, blue slippers, and blue caps, and they sing with the sincerity of small angels. We watched their intent, and innocent faces as they followed the direction of Father Lynch – and we found it hard to believe that lads, loud and strong at play, could be so quiet and so, well, angelic. We found it hard, for we know some of the Marian Boys when they’re just being boys.”

Robert Basset of Victoria, British Columbia, was one of those boys. Back in 1954, *The Morrisonian* reported that Bob had been elected Secretary-Treasurer of the Marian Boychoir Executive. Today, he recalls choir practice in the rehearsal room of the Marian Boychoir building just off Main Street and the Christmas Midnight Mass. It was “a culmination of sorts with Redmond Power, a soloist, singing ‘*Oh Holy Night*’ and after that, Ed Brassett singing ‘*Laudate Dominum*’ and Johnny Dagle with ‘*Pie Jesu*’ (from Duruflé’s Mass in Jubilation) before the Offertory. With the first notes of Tallis’ ‘*Spem in Alium*,’ the choir took flight.”

“The Christmas season was joyful,” Bob wrote in response to my inquiry. “There were the pond hockey days. Father Lynch would pick us up with our skates and hockey sticks. We’d have afternoons of skating, hockey, bonfires and roasted wieners. Ronny D. D., Johnny Dagle, Greg Belland, Billy Kiley, Berkley Cameron and others were all participants in these sporting events. In the evening, there would be Father Lynch leading us with Christmas carols on the street corners. I remember caroling at the corner of College Street and St. Ninian’s, then on to Main Street in front of the Brigadoon Restaurant and on down to St. James United Church. These were some of the very best [of times].”

Since our receipt of Eleanor Belland’s Christmas record, the Marian Boychoir has received some well-deserved attention from local writer Len MacDonald who recently met and reminisced with former choir members. To read Len’s articles, visit <http://www.week45.com/oh-how-they-could-sing/> and <http://www.week45.com/friday-free-for-all-2/>.

Warm wishes from all of us here at the Museum.

Catherine MacGillivray

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## Christmas with Max Haines

The following Max Haines story, from the column “That’s Life,” came to us as a crumpled clipping with the extensive “Doris Flikke Collection.” Doris was one of the founders of the Antigonish Heritage Museum. Thanks to the vision, passion and diligence of Doris and her colleagues, we’re able to enjoy the facility and the collections that we have today.

As for Max Haines, he's best known for his “Crime Flashback” column which first appeared in the *Toronto Sun* back in 1972. A syndicated crime columnist, he reported on terrible tales of murder and mayhem from around the world.

Born in Antigonish, Max was the son of Jewish Lithuanian immigrants. His father, Alex Haines, was a local businessman who dealt in scrap metal, batteries, and hides of all sorts. The family lived on Court Street and Max attended Morrison High School. “Maxie,” as Ron McConnell remembers him, had no desire to attend college but he loved to write. “After finishing school, he went to Charlottetown and began a career with the *Charlottetown Guardian*. Eventually, he moved to Toronto and worked for newspapers there.” Max Haines’ book, *The Spitting Champion of the World: Memories of Antigonish*, is a delightful collection of stories about characters and happenings from around Antigonish in the late thirties, forties and fifties.

### ***The Week of Hockey Marathons (1980)***

*It’s that lull between Christmas and New Years when you work, but not really. Tummies have expanded due to the consumption of turkey, eggnog and other beverages. Christmas is now remembered with smiles between indigestion pains. But never fear, New Years is practically upon us and we adults will overindulge once again.*

*This week really belongs to the children. Schools are closed and new skates are under Christmas trees, just begging to be tried on by aspiring Gretzkys.*

*It’s only natural for us long in the tooth gang to remember Christmas breaks of long ago. Back in my hometown of Antigonish, we knew of only one activity during the Christmas recess – hockey.*

*I could put on my skates in the kitchen of my house and skate down Court St. A snowball against Daniel Fraser’s door would bring Daniel out suitably attired for a 10 hour game on the Salt Ponds. A rap on the Kennedy’s door farther down the street reminded Donny that all the gang from Church St. was already there.*

*We skated in the frozen ruts left by John Bonner’s delivery wagon down to the river. Across the river we made our way over Reuben Gunn’s frozen field and on to the Salt Ponds. Courtney Henry was there with his new stick, a CCM Special with the blade varnished and shining in the sun. God, how I longed for a CCM Special.*

### ***Pockets Full of Tape***

*My pockets were stuffed with two rolls of tape purchased from Eaton’s catalogue. I waited until Pat MacKinnon and Tommy Sears showed up before I rolled the tape around the end of my stick, just as Neil MacKenna had taught me the year before.*

*Courtney pointed out the ice wasn't safe far down the river, but that didn't matter. We used Pat's boots for goals at one end of our improvised rink and John Landry's overshoes at the other end.*

*The bigger boys picked sides, about 20 to each team. Toy MacLean made two new boys in town play goals. With the temperature below zero, goalie was the least preferred position to be filled. Actually, it was the only real position on each team. In addition, they had to keep score.*

*The new boys kept score perfectly until it got to be around 29 to 28. Then they sort of lost count. No one cared. We played through lunch. We played all afternoon. We played all evening. There were several incidents. Sandy Bray shot high and struck one of the new boys in the knee, forcing him to limp off the ice crying, all the while threatening that his father would come down and beat us all up. No one paid attention. After all, he was new in town.*

### **Soaked to the Thighs**

*Butch MacLean's ears froze. Harold MacKenna skated too close to the river. The weak ice gave way and he fell in. Louis the painter (his real name was MacDonald, but all MacDonalds have nicknames in Antigonish) let him hold on to his hockey stick and pulled him out of the water. Harold was soaked up to his thighs but kept on playing until he complained that he couldn't feel his feet any more. His older brother made him go home.*

*As darkness fell, it became difficult to see the puck. Some of the older boys went home. No one announced that they were leaving. They just sort of faded into the cold frozen fields to the streets which lay beyond the embankment around the Salt Ponds.*

*When you couldn't see the puck at all, Daniel and Donny and I would trudge home on our skates. My mother admonished me when she saw my blotched white feet. I was made to rest them on the open oven door and let them thaw. They ached and tingled and felt ticklish.*

*Soon, it was time for the Maple Leaf game. My mother and father and I gathered beside our mantle radio right under the framed picture of Syl Apps. I took my mint condition Turk Broda bubble gum picture out of its hiding place in an upstairs drawer and gingerly placed it on the radio.*

*My mother poured heaping mugs of Frys cocoa just about the time Foster Hewitt said, "Hello hockey fans." [This was Foster Hewitt's opening line for all the Hockey Night in Canada games.]*

*All was right with the world.*

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## Recent Acquisitions

- **The Town of Antigonish** donated some Minutes books and documents related to activities of the town. The books are pre 1935.
- Thank-you to **Martin and Brenda Swinkles of Bayfield** for several LP record albums under the *Celtic Music* label.
- **Margaret Brown of Antigonish** brought in some back issues of the Beaver Magazine from the 1990s to the 2000s.



Thanks to **Alan McCaig of Antigonish**, the Museum is now in possession of a ten-inch, seven-pronged brass menorah – a lovely reminder of the first and only Jewish family who lived in Antigonish for many years.

According to family tradition, the menorah originally belonged to Alex and Augusta Haines, Jewish Lithuanian immigrants who came to Antigonish around 1921. The couple lived at 35 Court Street. Alex made a living as a fur trader and dealer. The couple had three children: Shirley, Lukey and the famous Max Haines.

When Augusta left Antigonish, sometime after her husband's death in 1961, she gave the menorah to Sarah (Bernasconi) Wheaton, her friend and neighbour on Court Street. Sarah was the grandmother of Alan McCaig's wife, Marion.

It's touching that Augusta Haines left this ancient symbol of the Jewish faith with someone in Antigonish and that the menorah has finally returned back to the local community.



**Martin MacDonald of Bay Street** recently stopped by with an interesting poster dating back to 1908. At the time, his grandfather, Angus J. MacDonald, was making his stallion available for breeding to mares around the town and county. A single service cost \$5.00 (payable at the time of service). Payment for a season was \$8.00. The stallion's pedigree is carefully listed.

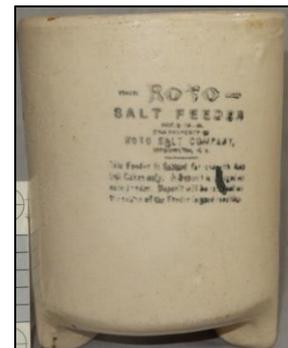
Horses were indispensable back then. They provided transportation, entertainment (by way of races and drives), and facilitated a great deal of manual labour. Breeding was an essential element of the horse industry as stud services could only improve the quality of animals.

This poster clearly reveals the importance of the horse to a different generation.

**Hugh Webb of Antigonish** brought in several interesting items. Shown here is a circa 1920s salt lick from the T. J. Sears Stables on College Street.

An old swivel office chair from the former Goodman store in Antigonish dates back to the 1920s or 1930s. Armless and rather dainty, it is clearly a lady's chair. Goodman Company closed its doors in Antigonish in the early 1980s. Does anyone have photos of the local Goodman store?

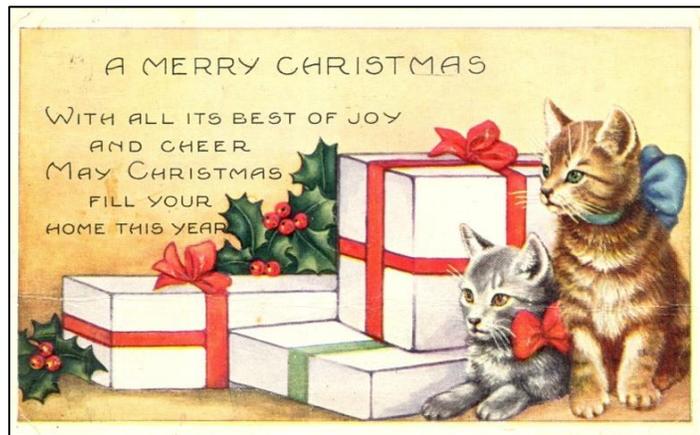
Hugh also donated a cribbage board that once belonged to his grandmother, Annie O'Brien.



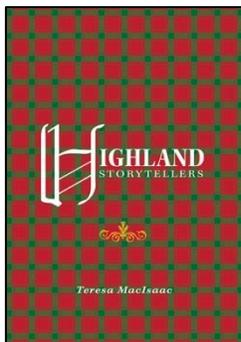
- **Harriet MacMillan of Lochaber** gave us a photograph of the schoolchildren of West River School (dated about 1915).
- **Brenda MacKinnon of Lakevale** came in with a small publication by the Maritime Co-Operator and a manuscript entitled *Compassion on the Multitude* by P. J. MacKenzie Campbell (1966).
- **Dave Brown of Lochaber** donated two antique fishing rods dating back to the 1940s. Dave recalls that the rods were used by family members to catch speckled trout on the Lochaber Lake.

We're grateful to all who contribute to the Museum collections.

This charming pre WWII Christmas postcard came to us as part of an assortment of materials donated by **Martin and Brenda Swinkles of Bayfield.**



### *Highland Storytellers* by Teresa Maclsaac



Congratulations to Teresa Maclsaac on the publication of her new book, *Highland Storytellers*. Her book launch was held at the Museum earlier this month. Based on Highland Immigration, this story reveals the hardships and challenges of one particular family and their endurance through it all.

This book would make a great Christmas gift. It can be purchased at local outlets, at the Museum and online.

Thank-you to Teresa Maclsaac for donating a copy of *Highland Storytellers* to the Museum.

### Fabric Sale Postponed until the New Year

The fabric sale has been rescheduled for Friday, January 15, from 3:00 – 6:00 p.m. Stock up on your crafting and quilting supplies with yard goods, cottons (VIP, Peter Pan, Cranston, etc.), thread, books, ribbon, notions and more.

Thank You

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## Arts Health Antigonish

Arts Health Antigonish (AHA) and the Heritage Association of Antigonish launched a campaign to support the development of an educational film, Truth and Reconciliation 101, complete with a Guide for Facilitators and Learners, based on the theatrical pilgrimage of 1784: (Un)Settling Antigonish, which was performed five times during the Summer of 2015.

CLICK here for details, images of the Antigonish performers in period costume, and to give your support.  
<http://igg.me/at/truthandreconciliation101/x/53519>

The theatrical pilgrimage to Antigonish Harbour was a departure point on the path of Truth and Reconciliation – a Nation-to-Nation dialogue between European Settler Nations, First Nations, African and Acadian Nations. This is a modest first response to some of the recommendations in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report on residential schools. Only with support from the Antigonish community and beyond, will we be able to create a participatory educational resource for use in schools, churches, and community settings in Antigonish and throughout North America. This resource will invite teachers and learners to engage in their own theatrical pilgrimage of truth and reconciliation. With your support, we aim to have the premiere of Truth and Reconciliation 101 in time for the Antigonish International Film Festival (AIFF) in October 2016.

## Heritage Association of Antigonish

### Patrons Program

- **Colin MacLean, Bedford** – Silver Patron

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

The year 2015 is drawing to a close and as I reflect on the past year I feel we had a very good productive year. Our community is better for the contribution our Association has made and we should be proud of this fact.

I would like to thank our many volunteers, patrons and members of the Association for their support in 2015. A special thank you to Catherine and Jocelyn for the work they put in to making the monthly newsletter a pleasure to read.

In closing, I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and every happiness in 2016. Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

Angus MacGillivray, BBA, FCPA - FCGA  
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## THE CLAN'S CORNER

### The Clan MacGillivray Association of Canada



We're continuing to build our Association's website and invite readers to visit our site.  
Link: <http://clanmacgillivraycanada.com>



To you and yours, prosperity and good cheer throughout the New Year!

### Congratulations!

Congratulations to the new president of the Antigonish Highland Society! Seen here is Paul Boyd with wife Lauren and daughter Laura. We wish Paul well in his new role as president.

