

The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #86

April 2016

We're only too happy to bring you another Max Haines story from the Museum archives. As you may recall from a previous edition of the newsletter, this renowned crime columnist was born in Antigonish to Jewish-Lithuanian immigrant parents who settled here in about 1921. Fresh out of Morrison High School, Max started writing, first for the *Charlottetown Guardian* and then for various papers in Toronto. His book, *The Spitting Champion of the World*, is a delightful collection of tales regarding characters and happenings from around Antigonish during the late 1930s to the 1950s.

Disasters Always Brewing

By: Max Haines

I certainly sympathize with those folks down in Pennsylvania not knowing if their nuclear plant is going to blow up or not. I have never experienced such a dangerous event but I do remember a nerve-racking incident which took place in my home town of Antigonish, N.S., when I was a kid.

The railway station was located at the east end of town. Now and then hobos would build fires down by the station to keep warm. One cold March evening a chilly hobo built a fire under a boxcar parked on a siding. The fire roared out of control and ignited the underside of the boxcar. Soon the flames spread up the side of the car.

Someone spotted the flames and called the fire station. Our distinctive firebell sounded its warning throughout the town. Well, folks, a fire in Antigonish was a social event. It brought forth the whole town.

Everyone headed east toward the station at a slow trot. For some reason, in Antigonish, most people seemed to arrive at the scene of a fire before the firetruck.

Len MacDonald, who worked for the CNR, was standing guard beside the railway car, protecting the contents.

I don't know who was the first to whisper, "She's a whole railway car of Oland's Beer."

The rumor spread through the crowd faster than old Boom-Boom Geoffrion's slapshot. The crowd separated to let the firetruck through. Our volunteer fire department was informed of the car's contents. They set a world record for hooking up a hose to a fire hydrant.

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In 10 seconds Jimmy Landry declared, "She's out for sure now, boys."

The crowd roared its approval.

MacDonald swung the car door open. A great stream of water poured onto the ground. Len gingerly passed down the first four water-soaked cases. You could tell from the sound the contents of the cases were broken.

Archie Chisholm started to cry.

The fifth case was intact. That's when the crowd held its breath. What would happen to this whole railway car of damaged water-soaked, delicious beer?

To his everlasting credit, MacDonald asserted his God-given leadership abilities. "No question about it, boys, she's bubbling from the heat and could explode any time. Warm cases to the left and cold cases to the right."

With that proclamation, he started passing down the cases from the smoky, seam-filled car.

Chisholm stopped crying.

Next day the damaged car was lugged away for repairs. Neatly stacked in one corner were four cases of broken beer bottles.

I sure hope everything works out as well for the folks down in Pennsylvania. Everyone in Antigonish had a great spring the year of our big scare.

Most of our readers will recall that concerning nuclear meltdown at Three Mile Island, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, back in late March of 1979. Rated five on the seven-point International Nuclear Event Scale and reported to be the "most serious accident in U.S. nuclear power plant operating history," the disaster quickly halted the growth of the U.S. nuclear power industry. Of course, the incident down at the railway station in Antigonish pales in comparison but Max Haines' analogy clearly exemplifies his brilliant humor.

Unfortunately, we were unable to locate the newspaper report of the fire to corroborate Mr. Haines' entertaining version of the account but local volunteer fireman Bill Landry allows that this same story is "legendary . . . in the history of the Fire Department. . . . This was a story passed around the fire hall when I was a kid and also when I joined." Like us, Bill has not been able to date that particular fire. "I did look for it in old minutes but they only reflect what happened in the meetings, not what happened on the fire ground." We suspect it took place sometime in the 1940s.

Len MacDonald, the C.N.R. employee who was supposedly "standing guard beside the railway car, protecting the contents," was the station baggage master. Living at the East End, "Long Len" had been a well-known athlete in his youth, having won many trophies and medals in track and field. He retired in 1950 after thirty-four years of service with the railways and passed away in 1969.

Volunteer fireman Jimmie Landry, who deemed the fire "out," joined the Fire Department in the late 1930s (according to Bill Landry) and was active until about 1985. Jimmie, a long-time employee with Eastern Automobile, Ltd., served as local Fire Chief for a period of time. He passed away in 2010.

What about Archie Chisholm who mourned the possible loss of that whole railcar of “delicious” beer? Who was he? According to one of Bill Landry’s sources, Archie was also a volunteer fireman and the caretaker of the old wooden fire hall on Sydney Street for some time. Apparently, he went by the name of “Archie Italian.” Surely one of our readers can help us identify him now.

Anyway, thanks to Mr. Haines for recording our local “disaster” – even if it is a bit of a spoof. Right now, it’s the only written record we have. Besides, to quote Mr. Shakespeare, “All’s well that ends well.”

Recent Acquisitions



Bruce MacDonald of Antigonish brought in a wonderful collage commemorating Wendell MacHattie of Copper Lake, a WWI veteran who died on the first day of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. **Jessie (Mason) MacHattie of Copper Lake** has held this artefact in her husband's family collection until recently when she decided to donate it to the Museum efforts.

Alexander Wendell MacHattie was born at South River Lake in 1881, the son of Alexander John and Janet (nee Hattie) MacHattie. Wendell’s mother died when he was about two years of age and so he was raised by his father’s second wife, Isabel MacGregor. Siblings of Wendell were: Libbie, Cassie, Minne, George and Lousie.

MacHattie enlisted with the 193rd Field battery at Antigonish on March 31, 1916. He died on April 9, 1917, during the first hours of the battle at Vimy Ridge and is memorialized on the Canadian War Monument, Pas de Calais, France.

Some brief excerpts from a letter to his mother:

France Jan 5th 1917

My Dear Mother:

Last night the mail was brought up and I got four letters the first for over a month so you may imagine I would be longing for word from home and how glad I was to get them. I got Libbie's letter and one from Minnie and Alma as well.

In my will I left my personal property to you. I hope you will never have to claim it little as it is. We get good grub and fairly comfortable quarters, and that is all that is required out here. Trust this find you all well. There is no more to write so good bye and God bless you all.

From your boy. Wendell

P S Could send a couple of pr. of socks sometime.

Sheila Redden of Lakevale brought in an assortment of items including wooden knitting needles, one large (foot long) needle for sewing grain sacks and a lovely trivet for a small iron.



Nancy Halsall of Osgoode, Ontario, donated a book entitled *The Descendants of Donald Cameron* by James M. Cameron (1957). Nancy included cemetery inscriptions and headstone photographs from around Nova Scotia and the United States as well as many notations relating to her branch of the family.

John A. MacGillivray of Morristown gave permission to copy a photo that depicts the Cribbons Wharf Lobster Factory c. 1940.

Thanks to **Lynn Delorey**, we have been able to positively identify a portrait recently donated by Roderick Landry of Antigonish. Lynn brought in a comparison photo and, sure enough, it is local blacksmith Rod “Rory” MacDonald (1853-1922) of College Street. Trained by his father, Rod “Rory”, in turn, trained his son, Hughie Rod, in the blacksmithing trade.



Dedication of Display Cabinets – All Are Invited to Attend

A dedication will be held on April 30, 2016 at 2:00 p.m. to thank the following donors:

- Bernadette (and Gerry) Gillis
- Sharon and Guy MacGillivray (in Memory of Louie Mattie)
- MacGillivray family (Honoring the 75th Wedding Anniversary of Hilda and Bill MacGillivray)

Thank You

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Heritage Association of Antigonish



Brigh an Orain: A Story in Every Song

Archivist **Fiona MacKenzie of Scotland** will be presenting at the Museum on Saturday, May 7, 2016. **Brigh an Orain: A Story in Every Song** will look at the life and works of folklorists John Lorne Campbell and his wife, Margaret Fay Shaw. Ms. MacKenzie will use photographs (many of them unseen by audiences until now) taken by Margaret on her trip with John to Nova Scotia in 1937. Fiona will include clips of some of John's original archive sound collection recorded in 1937. The time for this presentation is 2:00 p.m.

Summer Ceilidhs

A series of ceilidhs will begin on June 30 and continue until September 1. Performances will be on Thursday evenings at 7:30. Plan to attend at least one during the summertime.

It is Membership Renewal Time!

http://www.heritageantigonish.ca/images/pdf/Membership_application_renewal.pdf

Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish

(Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)

During the fiscal year that ended on March 31, 2016, we used our financial resources for the following items:

- We provided financial resources to assist with required repairs to the Culloden Cairn located at Knoydart, Nova Scotia.
- We co-hosted the participatory theatrical and musical pilgrimage entitled *1784: (Un)Settled Antigonish* and we provided financial resources to assist with a documentary film relating to this event.
- We provided the financial resource to acquire the three new display units for the Antigonish Heritage Museum at a cost in excess of eleven thousand dollars.
- We hired two summer student to work on the Memories Project and another special research project

- We delivered a number of learning events.
- We delivered a number of free Ceilidhs.

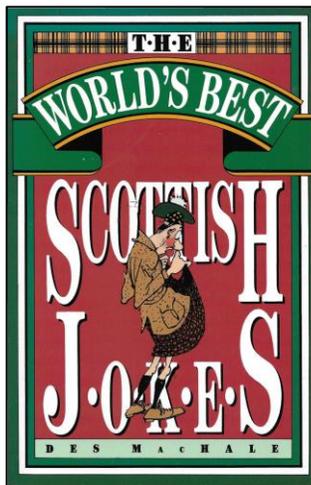
While completing all the above, we were able to have an operating profit of five thousand two hundred and fifty seven dollars. This profit will place our Association in a strong financial position as we move into the future.

We are certain you are impressed with our good work and responsible stewardship of our financial resources.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

Angus MacGillivray, BBA FCGA

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Last fall, when Ron and I were travelling Scotland, I popped into a used book store located not far from one of the majestic castles we had just visited. There, tucked alongside of many other “treasures”, I found an entertaining little volume of Scottish jokes. Being married into this fine class of folk, I think I can share a few selections with our readers.

- *Every week four Scotsmen got together to drink a bottle of whiskey. One night, after many years of meeting, Jock said, ‘I got some bad news today: I’m not long for this world, but when I pass on I’d like to think that when you meet you all keep me a dram and pour it over my grave.’*

After a moment’s silence one of the others asked, ‘Would it not be better, Jock, if we gave it a swill round our kidneys first?’

- *An old Scotsman was watching a game of golf for the first time. ‘What do you think of it?’ asked a friend. ‘It looks to me,’ was the reply, ‘like a harmless little ball chased by men too old to chase anything else.’*

- *A man called at Jock’s door one evening collecting for the Home for Chronic Alcoholics. Jock’s wife answered the door. ‘Call back after closing time,’ she told the man, ‘and you can have my husband.’*

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