

The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #97

April 2017

ALFRED JAMES “LORD” MACDONALD: IN THE WORDS OF HIS DAUGHTER

When this family of MacDonald's first settled in Glassburn they received word from cousins in Australia of the death of a relative and the settlement of his “estate”. The word got around and folks said, “Those MacDonald's they think they are Lords from Scotland.” Thereafter, they were known as the “Lord” MacDonald's. Some family members took it in stride but others didn't like it at all.

Alfred James “Lord” MacDonald was born May 6, 1883 in Glassburn and died Apr 6, 1945 in Halifax. Alfred's parent's, Thomas and Mary Mahoney were unmarried and he was lovingly raised by his aunt Elizabeth and uncle James, and elderly grandparents, William and Mary MacDonald. When Alfred was a young boy, he and his cousins were attending a funeral in New France. At the wake, everyone was saying the rosary in French. The boys were reciting the following in Gaelic, “*Many the rabbit you ever killed, many the rabbit you ever ate*”. All the older folk at the wake were commenting on those “very pious young boys.” Gaelic was spoken at home and it was often said that “*if you tied their hands behind their backs they'd be speechless*”.

After leaving home, Alfred worked for a time as a laborer in Sydney before heading to St. John, NB to work for the Western Union Telegraph Company as a lineman. It was there that he would meet his future wife, Mary Lillian P White. Mary, born in Edinburgh, was on her way from Glasgow, Scotland to Winnipeg to help her sister, who was expecting a child. Mary landed in St. John by ship and was waiting for a train connection on to Winnipeg. According to his daughter, Norah, Mary was curious about the area and “she marched up to three men working on the “line” to ask them a question.” Six foot one Alfred MacDonald, was quite taken with the diminutive young Scottish lass. She never did catch the train and they were soon married in St. John. She wrote her father saying she wasn't going to Winnipeg but had married a man in St. John. Her father, Charles, was on the next ship from Scotland.

After getting married on November 2, 1911, Alfred and Mary settled in Edmunston, NB where Norah Elizabeth (named for her White grandmother) was born in 1913 and Finlay in 1915. Although she was always called Norah, the priest who baptized her felt that wasn't a proper name for a Saint so Honora was put on her baptismal certificate. When Norah was 3, the family moved to Antigonish where they lived in the “Payne House”, near the railroad station. In 1867, Robert Payne purchased a ½ acre lot from R. N. Henry, and built the house the following year on a stone foundation. As Norah recalled, “*between the house and the Station, there was an orchard with a fairly large house among the trees occupied by the Dexter family. On the morning of Alfred's (her brother) home birth (1917), Art Dexter, knowing I would be feeling neglected, brought me over an egg that he said his black hen had laid specially for my breakfast.*” Some years later, when she was 10, they visited relatives in Lanark, and they went to Mass in Antigonish. After Mass, they went to a “*small shop on the other side of the house to buy penny candy.*”

Alfred (Reg. # 902002) enlisted in the 1st World War on March 23rd, 1916 and served with the 193rd Battalion. He was described as having dark hair and complexion with brown eyes and weighed in at 175 pounds. He was not home for the birth of his youngest son, who was named after him, but Mary had a picture taken of the family in the doorway of their home and had it sent to Alfred as a reminder of his young family at home. Young Alfred was just 7 months old at the time.



Later, after Alfred returned from the war, they moved to the family farm in Glassburn where they lived until about 1927 when they moved to Halifax. Alfred was employed installing telephone switchboards for Maritime Tel & Tel. and later, as a mechanic with the Dept. of Highways.

Norah had completed Grade 8 in the local Glassburn school, and “since she had gone to a one-room rural school” they insisted she write an entrance exam. She aced the exam and they thought she was a “little genius”. Although she struggled that first year in the big school, she was soon “top of the class” once again. She completed grade 12 and was approached to teach school which she did for a year for \$60 per month.

Norah then got a job with the provincial government as a secretary. She rose through the ranks to become the private secretary to seven Ministers starting with G. I. Smith and ending with Dr. Sheehee. On one occasion, she was turned down for a job that was given to a man who was given his own secretary. She questioned why she didn’t get the job and was told “if you were a man you could have the job.”

That experience got her involved in the establishment of a Union. She was the first woman in Canada to be an officer in a Union. She traveled to all the provincial capitals on the first Monday of every month for national meetings. They passed a motion that she be called an “honorary gentleman” so they wouldn’t have to say, “ladies and gentlemen”. She was very active in employee organization, spearheaded pensions and benefits for women. She recalled, “While Scott Brison was in University he was her office boy. He was very bright and always thinking up an angle to make a dollar. He sold refrigerators to fellow students and made a tidy profit.”

Norah married Alan Philip Stephen of Halifax in 1941 and managed to have 6 children while continuing her many Union and work duties. When Alfred was hospitalized, Mary moved in with them to care for the children. Alan was very supportive of Norah’s busy career and varied interests including being one time president of the Poetry Society of Nova Scotia. Norah’s brother, Alfred C. served in the 2nd World War and died in Sydney. Finlay J. who was a hard rock miner, died in a boating accident in Northern Ontario in the 1950s. A sister died in infancy. Norah, a delightful and remarkable woman, last visited Antigonish on August 24, 2007. She passed away in 2008 and is buried in Gate of Heaven Cemetery alongside her husband.

Norah’s father, Alfred J. “Lord” MacDonald died at Camp Hill Hospital, Halifax on April 6, 1945 at the age of 62. His wife, Mary L. died December 23, 1974 and was buried beside her husband in Gate of Heaven Cemetery.

- Marleen MacDonald-Hubley

Material for this article was taken from Marleen’s interview with Norah Stephen on August 24, 2007 and a letter from Norah at the Antigonish Heritage Museum on Oct 4, 2000 and other sources

Recent Acquisitions:

Isabel Tramble donated this photo of the Cubs Hockey Team. She believes that her father is in the photo. His name was Roderick “Oddie” MacDonald. We would like your input in trying to identify members of this team. If you can help, let us know... **Did you notice the prize?**



Martha Brown, Lochaber donated a number of family items including a handmade checker board set, a milking stool, calendar, branding iron used by her grandfather—William Brown; shipping label, receipt book and account book of the Lochaber Strawberry Exchange c. 1951. A cooperative was formed in the early fifties with over 50 Lochaber area farms participating in the venture selling locally grown strawberries to businesses near and far. A sword was part of the collection and we will have more information on that in the near future.

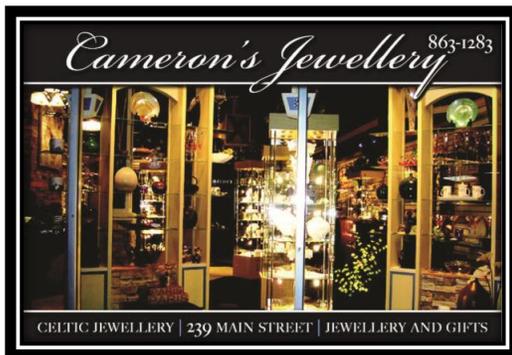
Rick Grace, Heatherton brought in some interesting photos showing the railway and other scenes in the Heatherton district. **Jolene Chisholm** also shared some photos of Heatherton’s Chisholm pioneers.

Bruce MacDonald brought in books of local historical interest.

Corey Hartling, New Glasgow contributed a 1916 Xaverian . **Marion Alex** gave copies of school yearbooks from St Andrews Rural High School 1969 and 1970.

HERITAGE ASSOCIATION LEARNING EVENT:

“ANTIGONISH: THE MAKING OF A TOWN BY EXPLORING EARLY TOWN MINUTES”
GUEST SPEAKER: MARLEEN HUBLEY
TIME AND DATE: MONDAY MAY 8TH 7PM





Anecdotes for Gaelic Awareness Month in Nova Scotia

Alexander MacDonald AKA The Klondike King in an 1899 interview for the Denver Mountain Rocky News... “My mother taught me Gaelic. I hardly know English when I went to Colorado. You see I have a difficulty in expressing myself. I have no desire for books, pictures, plays, Oh, I like horses. I had fifty-eight on my ranch in Colorado before I went broke in silver mines. I still have horses, but I am not going to think of other things than to work mines. It is a sport.” The article also states that, “Oh, I intend to have a comfortable home in the West. It will not be a palace. What would I do with a palace? I have no desire to live in London or Paris. I like the American people, their government, their manners”. “I advise poor men to go to the Klondyke, but not to take their wives. Women without plenty of money will suffer terribly”.

Mar 25 1943 marked the opening of CJFX Radio. Dan Joe MacEachern, President of the Antigonish Highland Society, gave his remarks in Gaelic.

Sep 14 1871 The Antigonish Highland Society awarded \$4.00 prize for original Gaelic Poetry to Alex MacDonald AKA Bard na Capeach. Norman MacDonald also received \$4.00 for his composition which he donated to the fund raising effort of St Ninian’s Cathedral.

What would we do without the volunteer? Quite simply, the Museum would not exist without these important individuals. They are the backbone of our organization. They bring skills and talent from a variety of backgrounds to help build, maintain and promote the objective of ensuring preservation of our heritage for years to come. They sit on our Boards of Directors, they work to enhance our facility, they contribute to our newsletter, they assist with collections projects, they maintain our planters and so much more. Some work on site, while others are quietly in the background. Thank you volunteers for all that you do—it is very much appreciated. If you think that you can offer time, please let us know; we would love to hear from you!!

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Yes—it is membership renewal time!

**HERITAGE ASSOCIATION OF ANTIGONISH
20 East Main Street
ANTIGONISH, NOVA SCOTIA
B2G 2E9**

Membership is open to any interested residents of the Town or County, former residents, or persons who have roots in Antigonish, upon annual payment of dues.

Membership Types:

Individual	\$ 10.00 per year	_____	\$ 25 for 3 years	_____
Family	\$ 15.00 per year	_____	\$ 40 for 3 years	_____
High School Student - Grade 10, 11 & 12				_____
Student – Grades 1 to 9 inclusive				_____

(Students join for free. Students in grade 9 or below are honorary members.
Please note: for students less than 16 years of age we will require the signature of a parent or guardian.)

Name:

If taking family rate, please list names of children

Address:

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Note: Membership Dues are due with the completed application.

Important Notice

Please check here _____ if you wish to become a member of the Antigonish Highland Society. There is no extra charge. Members can be those who actively promote the objectives of the Antigonish Highland Society whose mission is to preserve the Scottish culture and traditions and to perpetuate the language, literature and athletics of the Gaels.

www.antigonishhighlandsociety.ca

