

# The Old Train Station News

Newsletter # 115

September 2019

Dear Friends,

Growing up in rural Nova Scotia, most of us looked pretty-much the same. Other than our Black and Mi'kmaq neighbours, we were seldom exposed to other nationalities. When I moved west in the early sixties, I was exposed to Eastern Europeans who had arrived there in the early 1900s and to cultural differences like those of the Hutterites, Mennonites and Doukhobors. I experienced different foods, different clothing, different religions and different ways of life. It opened my eyes and broadened my perspectives.

Eventually, I understood that we are a nation of immigrants; a nation of transplanted people – “settlers”. In recent years I have felt uneasy with the word “settler” because my family has been here for almost 230 years – certainly not a CFA or a settler. I belonged! My unease really began when my granddaughter – who claims her paternal Manitoba Metis status – refers to our side of the family as “settlers”. I found that very discomfoting. In other words, I squirmed and felt somewhat defensive.

Last winter I went to a lecture to listen to a presentation by a man I admire as learned and a terrific speaker. At the end several Mi'kmaq students asked some uncomfortable questions. One young student remarked to the lecturer that it was good to feel uncomfortable because it was an opportunity to think about things differently. Hmmm!



It brought me back to thinking about the settlement of this country and especially why people from other countries have come here to make a life for themselves. The biggest reason has been the result of wars, ethnic cleansing and religious persecution. Humanity never seems to learn the toll that is the result of war. None of our ancestors would have crossed the Atlantic in wooden boats full of disease to face the daunting task of carving out a life in the wilderness if the alternative offered any hope for the future. Wherever there is a humanitarian crisis we can be sure people will try to escape to a place where they can make a better life for their children.

In the words of Charles Dunn, *“Whatever the trials besetting the pioneer as he cleared, built and planted, he was consoled by the realization that he was clearing, building and planting for himself and for his family. He appreciated the luxury of independence after his experiences in his homeland, and he gloried in the possession of land of his own.”*

Over the years many have come to settle in Antigonish; some have stayed to integrate into the community, some have left to explore other opportunities, and some have returned to their native country for various reasons. But I'm sure they came in the hope of a better life than they left behind – whatever the cost. And yes, we displaced a people in the process!

*The Epistolarian*

## The Neima Family: A Jewelry Tradition



Main Street, Antigonish

David W Neima (1852-1933) and wife, Rogena Basha (1861-1942) were both born in Syria and probably left their homeland seeking religious freedom and economic prosperity. They immigrated to Amherst, NS in 1902 with their two sons, George D and Michael W and one daughter, Sophia. Leon Luis Neima was born to the family in 1904 in Amherst and died in 1976 in Halifax. The family had established in New Glasgow by 1921 where David was listed as a jewelry merchant. David and his father, Ashram were jewelers in Syria and the tradition was carried on by the family in Nova Scotia.

In September 1924, Leon visited family members who had immigrated to Fargo, ND and there, worked as a jeweler. He returned to Nova Scotia to marry Gertrude Bertha Brown (1906-1994) of Charlottetown, PE on Jan 9, 1926 in New Glasgow. They returned to Fargo where they had two children, Lorraine Hazel (1927-2007) and Robert G (1928-2015) before deciding to come back to New Glasgow where Richard Jerome (1931-2018) was born.

After the death of his father, Leon Neima moved his family from New Glasgow to Antigonish where they built a house on Hawthorne Street and raised their children. They established Leon Neima Limited jewelry store on the south side of Main Street which operated for several years until it was destroyed by fire. They moved across the street but were never able to regain their previous success, so they moved to Halifax where they re-opened and grew to own two locations and one in Dartmouth.

Their daughter, Lorraine trained as a nurse and worked at St. Mary's Hospital in Montreal. Robert "Bud" was trained in watch repair in Trois Riviere, Quebec and began his career working with his father in Antigonish. In 1948, Richard "Richie" graduated from Neil MacKay's watch making school in Moncton, N.B. and was the youngest accredited watchmaker in Canada. In 1961, the brothers opened Neima Brother's Jewelry Store in Dartmouth. A second store, Neima's Credit Jewelers was later operated in Truro by Lorraine and her husband, William R Deagle. Both Robert and Richard were active members of their community, church and career organizations.

**NFCUS**  
is proud to announce that  
**Leon Neima, Ltd.**  
has granted a 20% discount on all cash  
sales to Dalhousie students.

Dalhousie Gazette, Jan 30, 1957

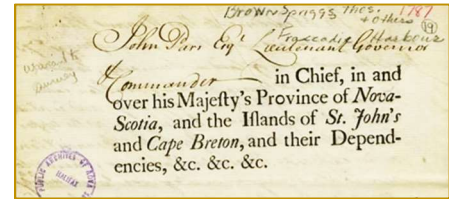
## Bringing a Piece of Home to Antigonish

The Bert and Drieka Bekkers family immigrated from St. Oedenrode, Brabant, Netherlands in 1952 along with several other young Dutch families seeking farmland. They brought all of their possessions with them although quality items were hard to get after the war in the Netherlands. The Bekker family donated a set of orange kitchenware to the Museum. One interesting item in the set is a utility tray used for cleaning materials named "Zand, Zeep, Soda." The Zand (sand) was used as an abrasive for particularly stubborn dirt; the Zeep (soap) was used for cleaning everything from dishes, to floors. When the Zeep was mixed with Soda, it was a more effective cleaner. Mien Bekkers recalled cleaning the wooden shoes in Holland; the everyday shoes were white and subject to lots of dirt and appreciated a good cleaning with the Zand, Zeep, Soda.



## Promises Broken

In 1787, Black Loyalist **Thomas Brownspriggs** and others were granted 3000 acres of land at Tracadie Harbour by Governor Parr. Sadly, after being settled on the land, the government regranted most of the land to Acadian settlers and most of the 74 Black families were forced to move to Rear Monastery, Upper Big Tracadie and Lincolnville.



### Home

No one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as  
well  
your neighbors running faster than you  
breath bloody in their throats  
the boy you went to school with  
who kissed you dizzy behind the old  
tin factory  
is holding a gun bigger than his body  
you only leave home  
when home won't let you stay,  
no one leaves home unless home  
chases you  
fire under feet  
hot blood in your belly  
it's not something you ever thought of  
doing  
until the blade burnt threats into  
your neck  
and even then you carried the anthem  
under  
your breath  
only tearing up your passport in an  
airport toilet  
sobbing as each mouthful of paper  
made it clear that you wouldn't be  
going back.  
you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a  
boat  
unless the water is safer than the land

*Part of a poem by a Somali woman  
- Warsan Shire*



### The Origins of Labour Day

**Labour Day** or *Fête du Travail* in Quebec has been celebrated in Canada on the first Monday in September since the 1880s.

The origins in Canada can be traced back to December 1872 when a parade was staged in support of the Toronto Typographical Union's strike for a 58-hour workweek. George Brown, Canadian politician and editor of the *Toronto Globe* hit back at his striking employees, pressing police to charge the Typographical Union with "conspiracy."

The laws criminalizing union activity were still on the books in Canada and police arrested 24 leaders of the Typographical Union. As a result, labour leaders decided to call another similar demonstration on 3 September to protest the arrests. Seven unions marched in Ottawa, prompting a promise by Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald to repeal the "barbarous" anti-union laws.

Parliament passed the Trade Union Act on June 14, 1873, and soon all unions were seeking a **54-hour** workweek. Labour Day, the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday in September, was made an official holiday on July 23, 1894.

## The Rigors of Early Immigrant Travel

Dr. James McGregor in July 1786 travelled from Halifax to Truro and onward to Pictou on horseback. “There was something like a road for eleven miles from Halifax, but beyond that there was only a narrow avenue through the woods on which the trees had been cut down and sometimes cut across and rolled to one side. The ground was generally so soft that even in mid-summer . . . the horses sank to their knees in mud and water . . . such as one might see in a road recently made in deep snow.”

### CLAN MACGILLIVRAY NEWS!

The new chief of Clan MacGillivray, **Iain MacGillivray** of Scotland will be in Antigonish for a

#### Meet & Greet

Antigonish Heritage Museum

October 14, 2019

2 – 4pm

Please mark your calendars

### AT THE MUSEUM

#### From our Displays:

**September:** If you haven't been visiting the Museum, our summer student, **Ocean** arranged a new and very nice display of vintage cameras and associated items.

#### Staff!

With the fall season upon us, **Marleen** has volunteered to come in a couple of days a week to fill-in where needed. There are always a few volunteers around handling the many important tasks needed to keep the Museum open for the community.

Many thanks to **Ocean** who was an invaluable addition this summer in a number of capacities: love those computed skills. We may see her on occasion in the future as time allows.

Thanks to **Yvonne** for volunteering to keep the gardens in great shape and keeping the deer fed with plenty of flowers to munch.

#### FYI:

We now have up-to-the-minute weather reports here in Antigonish. If you want to know if it is really as hot or cold as it seems check it out and be sure to “bookmark” this site!

<http://www.capebretonweather.ca/Antigonish/Current.html>

#### Great News!

Due to the amazing work of a couple of volunteers, we have been given the **Baptismal (1856-1918) and Marriage (1859-1944) records from St. Columba's Church in Lakevale**. The records cover the areas of Georgeville, Lakevale, Maryvale and Ballantyne's Cove. Death records will come at some future date.

**Museum Support:** There are many ways to support the work that goes on here at the Museum. If you have some time and an interest in our history and culture, come in and speak with Jocelyn about how you can help. Remember us when making a donation as it helps us make the Museum a better experience for the public. Have you become a **member of the Museum** or remembered to renew your membership? Your continued support is important to us and our work.