

The Old Train Station News

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“And just as spiders don't have to think, consciously and deliberately, about how to spin their webs, and just as beavers ... do not consciously and deliberately plan the structures they build, we do not consciously and deliberately figure out what narratives to tell and how to tell them. Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source.”

- F. Vollmer, in The Narrative Self

Dear Friends,

If you have been following my writing over the past months, you have read many stories that are glimpses into my life. They are not detailed but the product of reflecting on a particular subject – like watching the snow falling outside on this particular winter day. Those big fluffy flakes dropping silently can take me back . . . to a place, a time, an experience, a feeling. The same can be said for the roar of the wind that piles those fluffy flakes into huge drifts of snow. Remember the time . . .

Our story is unique. It is a lived experience of our time on this earth, formed and forged in the world where we were born. It is connected to our place in our birth family, to our parents and their experience, to the generations who came before and the culture we inherited. It is also the loss of any or all of these things. It is rooted in time and place and can never be repeated.

Each person's story is extraordinary! It does not matter if we are rich or poor, whether we have grade six or a PhD, it is the experience we have gained by living this life that fills out our stories. We need not to have won a medal or been lauded in the local media to have a story to tell.

We need to capture our lived stories, or they will be lost. Our oldest daughter and her city-born husband spent some time in the valley last spring and while out walking one evening, he asked what those little flashing lights were everywhere. They are fireflies she said and proceeded to tell him stories of seeing them as a child and trying to capture them in her hand and in a jar. It is ordinary but also extraordinary.

All we really need to start is a little book and a pen to begin to write our story. A few lines when something reminds us of a story. Think of the conversations with friends and how one story sparks another. Now some people are gifted storytellers and we all tend to compare ourselves to them. But what is important is to tell your story in the way you tend to speak – write as it comes to mind. Afterall, you are writing for your children and grandchildren not for a publisher.

Now is the time when we can still remember the times of our life. I hope you will give it a try. If you have already put pen to paper – way to go!

The Epistolarion

Personal Reflections . . .

Christina Connors reflecting on her mother, Katie

My mother was a great pioneer; resourceful, compassionate and a very hard worker. She knew the land well and Christina remembered going with her to plant potatoes. It was always done in the woods. Her mother claimed that the cradle hills were the best place to plant as the land was most fertile in those spots and they always received a tremendous yield. My mother did all the farm chores; looking after the pigs, cows, horses, sheep and hens. In those days, it was unheard of for men to do women's work, especially milking the cows. The family had plenty of food, lots of salt cod, herring and pork. Nothing went to waste as it was used to prepare pothead, tripe, haggis and sausage. They prepared berries for jams and preserves; pumpkins and apples were plentiful.

Anna J MacLauchlan on winter cold

Our house furniture was very plain. Our beds were wooden, no springs. Our mattresses were made of canvas, open down the middle, and the girls filled them with straw from the barn. It was clean. The house was too cold for sheets, we had to use blankets. Some real cold nights we would heat bricks in the oven and put them in our beds, about an hour before we went to sleep. The house was so cold, the windows were covered with frost. We used to press our fingers on the windows to melt the frost so we could look out. We had no heat in our bedrooms, just in the kitchen and dining room, and those were wood stoves. In the wintertime, our washing was done by washing on a scrub board. We had to take in snow and put it in pots on the stove to make soft water for washing, as water in the brook was very hard. When we had rain, we got the water from our drainpipes in two large barrels (we called the barrels "punshins", the town used them to store molasses, and we used to get them for nothing.) I can't remember just how much water they would hold but the wash would be clean and soft.

Max Haines remembers boyhood pond-hockey

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 Street. 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. 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.

Catherine McCallum remembers neighbourhood dances

Mama and Papa took in a lot of dances around the country. They were held almost every night at different houses throughout the country areas. Papa along with other young people from the (North) Grant would travel by horse and wagon to get to the dances. Dougald MacDonald, Gramma MacPherson's brother would play for them. He was considered a very good violin player. Seeing him pass by their homes carrying his fiddle was usually enough to get people out to the dance. The dances lasted until three or four in the morning. Mama would be just getting to bed when it would be time for her to get up to go to work.

Alfred Landry on spearing eels

I was a blacksmith before 1947, for ten years. I made two spears for spearing eels, one for Cyril Benoit and one for Albert Benoit. Albert and his son, George, used it many times to go eeling, especially in the wintertime, through a hole in the ice. George Benoit, as a boy, would try his luck with the spear while Albert had a smoke. I also made a harpoon for Peter Dewolf for harpooning eels and flat fish. I made mountings for bob sleighs and put tires on wheels for wagons. I also put new rims on buggy wheels. I also replaced broken spokes on wagon wheels, fixed different kinds of chains and shod a few horses.

John Landry, my brother, went for eels one day. He caught 12 big ones which he cleaned and salted in a wooden bucket. A few days later my mother, Elizabeth went down in the cellar to get some eels for supper and to her surprise not one eel was left in the bucket. I decided to investigate this mysterious matter. I searched the whole cellar. I went as far as tearing up the floor under the potato bin and there were the twelve missing eels in a nice circle with 10 big rats in the middle of them. I couldn't kill them all at once but finally got them all by setting rat traps.

Capt. John and Mary Catherine MacIsaac



John MacIsaac was born in Inverness, CB to Alexander MacIsaac & Mary Rankin on Aug 14, 1882. He joined the military in 1913 and served 2 ½ years before his war service from 1916 - 1919. On August 8, 1916 he married Mary Catherine MacDonald, daughter of John A. MacDonald & Johanna Hanrahan in Antigonish. Capt. John MacIsaac wrote to his wife while serving in WW I and the family preserved these letters along with their pictures. Capt. John owned the Antigonish Wholesalers. His wife, Aug 21, 1883-Apr 23, 1965 was employed as a milliner at Kennedy and MacDonald Store in Antigonish. Capt. John Alexander MacIsaac died May 31, 1942.

William Carrigan was a son of William and Elizabeth (Fuller) who were both born in Waterford, Ireland. He was born at Donnybrook on Nov 7, 1846 and married Mary Stewart, daughter of Hugh and Mary of Birch Brook, Pictou County on Nov 25, 1879. During his lifetime he made 170 caskets for the deceased in the Crossroads Ohio area. William never accepted payment for his diligent work of providing caskets for his community.

Being old and infirm, he had one last request of his wife, he wanted to be buried in a homemade casket. Mary turned to her nephew, Ronald Stewart of College Grant to grant his dying last wish. When William was laid to rest at the old Ohio Cemetery, it was in the last homemade casket used at the Ohio. Mary born May 4, 1867, was laid beside him on Sep 26, 1946.

The Tree of Life with its roots in the earth and branches in the sky, was called *crann bethadh* by the Ancient Celts, who believed that it had magical powers. Celtic people honored the Tree of Life by leaving one big tree in the middle of their fields when they cleared their land. Underneath the branches of this tree, the Celts held gatherings and appointed their chiefs. The tree was able to provide shelter, food, and medicine, leading the Celts to believe that it had enough power to care for all life. Chopping down the tree was considered a serious crime meaning that the biggest triumph one would be able to achieve over their enemy was to chop down their Tree of Life.



AT THE MUSEUM

March:

The Heritage Museum has acquired access to *Property Online* for **genealogical purposes** only. This has been exciting for those of us who have mourned the loss of local access when the land records were moved to Amherst. Access will be by **appointment only** at a cost of **\$6 per half day**. Please call in advance because Jocelyn must be available to provide access.

Check out the newest addition to the sports blog. <https://antigonishsportsheritage.blogspot.com/>

We will be at **The Antigonish Winter Market** on **March 21st**. Drop by our table at the entrance, say hello and see what we have on display.

Recent Interesting Research Project: "*Inscribing Ethnicity: A Preliminary Analysis of Gaelic Headstone Inscriptions in Eastern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton*" with a supplementary file of images contained in a PDF document which must be downloaded separately. Please visit . . . <https://www.mdpi.com/2313-5778/2/3/29>

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.