



# The Old Train Station News

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Newsletter #3

May 2009

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The recent swine flu outbreak and its subsequent comparison to the dreadful Spanish Influenza of 1918 left me wondering how that particular pandemic actually affected the town and county of Antigonish. To satisfy my curiosity, I headed over to the St. F. X. Library to peruse some old editions of **The Casket**. It wasn't long before I was transported back in time. I could feel the unease that had settled into the local community with the October 17<sup>th</sup> report that there were now "numerous" cases of the flu in the town and county; however, it was believed that it was but a mild strain of the flu. No deaths had been reported yet. Doctors cautioned the public to avoid all flu patients and encouraged the isolation of anyone displaying flu symptoms. Those nursing the sick must wear masks. As a precaution, schools, churches and other places of amusement had been closed. A ban was placed on public meetings and all restaurants had to be closed by 8:00 p.m. each evening.

The next edition of **The Casket** informed its readers that the flu situation had worsened and that there were now 150 cases in the town and county. The following week, local Health Officer, Dr. Cameron, reported that the situation was now "serious enough" to insist on the co-operation of all citizens to help suppress the illness. He stressed the importance of educating the public to recognize, acknowledge, and quarantine influenza patients. Ignorance was a major factor in the spread of the disease and one could clearly sense the frustration of the medical personnel. In fact, some folks felt it inconvenient to quarantine the infected while others tried to hide the fact that a family member had acquired the infectious disease for fear of public embarrassment. To top it all off, Dr. Cameron had received an anonymous letter "from one of the Antigonish Cardinals" accusing him of "being in league with his satanic majesty" for closing the local churches! Consequently, the local paper became a medium for educating the masses in curbing the spread of the flu.

While much was known about the symptoms and the spread of this flu, little was known about its cause. In late October, Dr. Cameron stated, "It may be but a coincidence but many cases give a history of exposure to wet and many seem to have contracted it from working in the soil, as digging potatoes, trenches, etc. Others claim that the dust from the threshing mill is a pre-disposing factor." The good doctor concluded that a few days of sunlight or a heavy frost would probably curb the spread of the disease.

At about this time, an ad appeared in **The Casket** for a "liniment" to guard its users against the influenza. A mixture of Johnson's Anodyne Liniment and water could be used as a gargle or as a nasal

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spray. Even an occasional mouthful “may” safeguard the user from “serious results” and “halt the evil” in its initial stages. Talk about the power of advertising!

By the third week of November, the first deaths in the county were being reported. By early December, a few more deaths were listed. Havre Boucher and Tracadie seemed to be hardest hit. Restrictions had been relaxed when it first appeared that the flu was somewhat under control but now, with renewed outbreaks, it had reached epidemic proportions. At the same time, the town was still reporting mild cases only. The Christmas holidays were fast approaching and health officials were warning the public that the traditional visiting and spreading of good cheer must be discouraged as it would only further enhance the spread the influenza infection. Christmas of 1918 was not to be a holly jolly Christmas!

December 26<sup>th</sup> brought a report that residents of the county were being extremely careless with regards to the epidemic. Those recovering from the disease were mixing freely with the public. The flu was being transported by railway from the Tracadie area to the railway communities on route to the town of Antigonish. Heatherton and the surrounding areas were now seriously troubled by the disease. A few had died and many more were sick. Once more the public was being cautioned to exercise prudence.

All through the month of January there was little reference to the influenza outbreak. On February 6<sup>th</sup>, **The Casket** reported that the flu wasn't causing any serious trouble, yet one mustn't throw caution to the wind. Sound advice indeed! In late February the flu returned with a vengeance! This strain of the flu appeared to be much more serious and resulted in the town's first death. The eastern portion of the county received another sound wallop and, once again, folks were asked to be vigilant. In late March, the paper still reported cases of severe sickness, hospital overcrowding, and another death but, after that, the weekly play by play seemed to die out and little more was heard.

According to the weekly newspaper reports, the Spanish Influenza settled into the local community for about a six month period. Throughout the duration, medical officials remained watchful and persistently tried to educate the public with regards to their duty to protect themselves, their families, and their neighbors. Folks must safeguard themselves by wearing warm clothing, exercising, and ventilating their homes. Those with colds should avoid crowds and use handkerchiefs when blowing their nose or sneezing. Anyone suffering symptoms must remain in quarantine for a one week period. Those recovering from the flu must be wary of the dangers of a relapse. Even as late as January of 1920, the Nova Scotia Public Health Department continued to warn folks about the possible recurrence of the influenza epidemic.

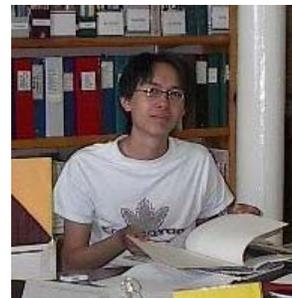
While **The Casket** kept its readers up-to-date on the influenza situation in this county, it also carried regular updates and reports on how the pandemic was playing out on the larger stage. As a result, local readers were fairly well informed as to the spread, the severity, and the statistics associated with this world-wide epidemic. Thanks to our small town weekly.

Until the next time,

Catherine MacGillivray

## Introducing our Summer Student ...

The Heritage Museum has hired Leslie Chu as its summer student assistant. Leslie, who is from Antigonish, is a fourth year Canadian History/Art History student at St. F. X. University. This summer he hopes to build experience with hands-on research using primary resources. After graduating from university, he would like to pursue museum studies.



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## Upcoming Events ...

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The *Heritage Association of Antigonish* meeting will be held on Monday, June 8, at 7:00 p.m. Guest speaker for this event is Blair Morrow with his talk "*Iron Bridges: 1883 – 1915.*" He will identify some of our local bridges, tell us why they were constructed, where they were located, and who built them.

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On June 27<sup>th</sup>, we are celebrating "Trains and Tunes" with "*Blue Wing*", a local band, who will delight us with an afternoon of train songs. Come and join us at 2:00 p.m. for this afternoon of fun.

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## Please Note ...

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Folks at the Havre Boucher Community Center are looking for information on the history of Havre Boucher shipbuilding and, of course, photos of this industry. Please contact Bobby King or Len Robertson.

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Owen McVicar is looking for a copy of *Life and Adventures of Detective Peter Owen Carrol*.

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Richard Smith, an Architectural Studies student in Ottawa, is searching for examples/case studies where fragments of boat building techniques are incorporated into architecture. (i.e. "ships knees" used to support beams) If anyone is able to help, please contact Jocelyn at the museum.

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## The Genealogy Nook ...

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Bonnie Elsten from California will be passing through Antigonish sometime in June. She is looking for information on her great-grandmother, Elizabeth Slattery, of Antigonish. Elizabeth married Andrew MacGillivray in 1896. Bonnie remembers hearing about "Red Archie" MacGillivray as a relative. Now she is trying to find that connection to her family. If anyone has any information, please contact Jocelyn at the museum.

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