



# The Old Train Station News

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Newsletter #5

July 2009

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Summer ushered in the strawberry season, much to the delight of folks, like me, who live in the countryside. Strawberries are, after all, the first sweet taste of summer. This year I patiently waited for the berries in our back pasture to ripen. At one time, this was a favourite berry picking location for some of the neighbourhood ladies. When we built our house twenty-some years ago, Ron cleared what wood remained and turned the area into pasture for his beef cattle. Now the cattle are gone and slowly Mother Nature has taken back what was hers. This year, the berries outdid themselves; not only were they extremely plentiful, they were also quite large for the simple wild strawberry that they are!

The indigenous peoples used to experiment with wild plants and berries and the strawberry was well known to them. Today we know that the leaves and berries are rich in Vitamin C but the native peoples were aware of that long, long ago. In fact, they ate the berries to help fight colds. Wild strawberries were also crushed into a paste and used to clean teeth and remove tartar as well as soothe a toothache. While hunting and fishing were a necessary part of the Mi'kmaq way of life, so too was the gathering of berries; some were eaten fresh and others were dried and set aside for winter.

Strawberries were popular with the early Highland women as well. Teresa MacIsaac speaks of this on several occasions in her book *A Better Life: A Portrait of Highland Women in Nova Scotia*. Entire families would go by horse and wagon to a berry-picking location in the countryside and spend the whole day filling their many buckets and baskets with berries. These tasty little morsels were then eaten fresh, baked into goods, or preserved to be enjoyed during the long winter months.

In among some old cookbooks at The Antigonish Heritage Museum, I discovered a copy of *The Family Herald Cook-Book* dated about 1920. It includes a recipe for Preserved Strawberries that is probably quite similar to what women were using to preserve their berries at the turn of the century. Note the exactness with which the recipe must be executed and the time it took to complete the process.

**"This beautiful and delicious preserve is within the reach of all who carry out each detail patiently and intelligently. Procure large, firm berries which do not need washing. Remove the hulls. Weigh the fruit and for every pound weigh three-quarters of a pound of sugar. Arrange berries and sugar in an enameled preserving kettle in layers, beginning with the berries. Let stand in a cool place all night or from morning till late afternoon. At the end of the period bring very slowly to the boiling point, skimming, if necessary. Simmer exactly fifteen minutes. Remove from the fire, cover with a thin cloth and let stand all night without disturbing. In the morning, heat again and skim. Simmer for exactly ten minutes and remove from the fire. Drain off the juice and boil it for exactly five minutes, put the berries in and seal. The berries will be whole. This preserve is a delicious addition to ice cream or molded desserts."**

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**Contact Information:** The Antigonish Heritage Museum [antheitage@parl.ns.ca](mailto:antheitage@parl.ns.ca) or 902-863-6160

Today's women are not quite as interested in picking the wild strawberry and preserving it as the Mi'kmaq people, the Highland women, or even women fifty years ago. A quick trip to the supermarket provides all the large cultivated strawberries, freshly picked, that any woman could possibly want -- yet there is nothing quite like a little bottle of old fashioned wild strawberry jam.



What about the berries in our back pasture? Did I get to pick and preserve some of them? Well, I had certainly intended to but a great big mother bear moved into the quiet hollow of the back field with her three little cubs just when the berries were ripe for the picking. On sunny days I would watch them from a safe distance while they made themselves perfectly at home in among the tall grasses and the wild strawberries – totally oblivious to the lens of my camera.

Until the next time,

Catherine MacGillivray



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## The Genealogy Nook...

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Denyse Butler is interested in learning a bit more about the **Yvonne Hat and Dress Shop** that existed on Main Street in Antigonish in the 1930s. Anyone with any information can contact the museum.

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Mary Jancie MacDonald-Spence is looking for information on her father, Charles MacDonald, who once lived in the St. Joseph's /Ashdale area. The 1901 Census indicates that his birth date was June 8, 1896 but his army papers state the year to be 1898. He seems to have some connection to The Klondike King. If anyone is able to help, please contact the museum.

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Lawrence Edwin Eadie, of Little Neck, Long Island, is searching for information on a John Eadie and an Edwin Eadie, Clydesdale. If anyone has any information, please contact the museum.

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## "Among the Advertisers" – *The Casket*

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"We still have a few of those heavy felt slippers for women – 19c a pair, Chisholm, Sweet & Co.'s. – February 21, 1907

## Notices....

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Jocelyn is interested in holding a brain storming session to come up with some fresh new ideas for the museum. Anyone with any suggestions or ideas for potential projects is invited to attend a meeting on August 12, at 2:00 p.m. or simply contact Jocelyn at the museum.

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**New for the Fall:** At regular meetings, Jocelyn would like to include a little time for a "photo gallery." During this time, folks can present old photographs from their personal collection for study or they can examine unidentified photos belonging to the museum.

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Laurie Stanley-Blackwell is researching the strongman tradition and looking for stories that tell of acts of strength and endurance (both men and women). She is mainly interested in earlier material. Anyone with any stories or information, please contact Jocelyn.

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Available now: Part 1 of the St. Ninian's Cemetery Inscriptions. Price is \$25.00. Anyone interested can call the museum.

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Bud Paquin from Boston was in to visit the museum recently. Bud, who has roots in Antigonish, is a goodwill ambassador for the Antigonish Heritage Museum.

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The museum is hosting an Elderhostel on July 30<sup>th</sup>. Jocelyn will be giving a presentation on coastal communities. While in town, the group will visit the cathedral and the university before they move on to other communities.

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## A Step Back in Time...

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This wonderful 1920s photo shows a couple of gentlemen clamming at Tracadie Harbour. The photo is courtesy of Brad Myette of Kentville.

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From *The Casket*-- July 16, 1908

"The Telephone System in Antigonish has just been greatly improved, and the most modern facilities in the telephone world are now employed here, so that the service must necessarily be very good. The improvement and changes have all been made under the capable foremanship of Ronald McDonald of Heatherton. The old exposed and unsightly outside wires have been replaced by a cable, new long-distance telephones and a new switch-board have been installed. With the new appliances the old method of calling central by ringing is abolished. To get central now, all that is required is merely to take the receiver from the hook."

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