



The Old Train Station News

Newsletter 10

December 2009



From the Archives . . .

The following story was contributed by Margaret McCurrach of Victoria, British Columbia. Margaret, a retired school teacher who enjoyed writing, sent this narrative to the museum about ten years ago. Her ancestors were the Cunninghams of Antigonish. Margaret tells the story of her grandfather, Norman Cunningham, who first became a teacher and then went on to study medicine. Dartmouth was developing at that time so he settled there and served the town and the fishing villages nearby.

Keepers of Christmas

The last load was stored in the car and now just one more dash back to my classroom to be sure no unclaimed child was still there, for long years in my profession had taught me the wisdom of checking. Finally my weary body slid into the car and I started for home. This had been my last Christmas concert before my retirement in June and I heartily wished that could start the next day! Like Scrooge, I was ready to say, "Christmas! Humbug!" Furthermore I was through with the nonsense of putting up any decorations in my home. The weariness also took away my sense of humor and I could not laugh at one event of the evening when two six year old boys lustily sand, "Once in Roy and David's

City!" Those two hearties were sure that carol was meant for them! Perhaps it was thinking about those scamps that jogged my memory because my mind suddenly went back to a story of another little boy – one who later became my grandfather.

Grandfather lived in the Nova Scotian town of Antigonish which had been settled by a group of Highland Scots, still loyal Roman Catholics, and by other Scots who were mostly Presbyterians. The two groups lived harmoniously together and each attended to his own religion. At the time of this story, about 1850, Norman, (my grandfather) was only a small boy of five years and he was very excited by the stories his Catholic playmates told him about Christmas.

He came home and with a five year old's directness, demanded that his family should keep Christmas too! With great rapture he described the special treats his friends had and some even received a present! To this hopeful exposition he was informed that his family, being Presbyterians, considered Christmas celebrations a Popish idea and he could forget it. He still tried to wear them down with other arguments but Papa, an ex sea captain, gave him a certain stern look and he knew his pleas were in vain. Later, as he climbed the back stairs to the bedroom which he shared with his three brothers, he thought what a pity it was that his family were not keepers of Christmas, but he did not say it.

Norman had only been asleep a short time when he was suddenly awakened by a sound. He listened intently and there it was again – someone was laughing and it came from the kitchen! Carefully he slipped out of bed and crept across the room to the door where he lifted the latch with his fingers and quietly let it down when he got to the other side. The door to the boys' room was just beside the back stairs so in a moment he was sitting on the top step and able to see what was happening down below.

To his surprise he saw his father chasing their mother around the kitchen table and she was laughing because Papa had a streak of flour down one cheek. Suddenly she could run no longer so he grabbed her and promptly put a streak of flour on one of her cheeks. Then they both stood laughing at each other and suddenly, to the boy's shocked amazement, Papa gently took their Mother in his arms and kissed her on the lips! This the child had never seen anyone do because Papa only showed what was proper in front of the children. He always escorted his wife to and from church with her arm in his and occasionally he gave a little peck on one cheek but never anything like the present action!

The lad watched as the couple slowly parted and holding hands, laughingly they approached the kitchen table. Now he saw what they were doing and suddenly all thought about the strange kiss vanished, to be replaced by wonder and joy – for Papa was helping his wife to cut out gingerbread men! Quietly the little boy let himself back into the bedroom and as he snuggled once more into bed he greatly rejoiced because he knew his family were keepers of Christmas after all!

By the time this reverie was over my car was sliding into the garage and I was getting out. Keepers of Christmas! Drat this ancestry which seems to haunt us! But I opened a cupboard, pulled out the box of Christmas decorations and with it firmly under my arm, I went happily upstairs!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Early Christmas in Antigonish...



This delightful old photo is part of the museum collection. Dated about 1920, it shows an early Christmas tree that once decorated the home of the William Snow Archibald family on Church Street in Antigonish. Notice the natural simplicity of the tree. Note the gifts underneath the evergreen. The little boy on the right is either Ross or his brother, Charlie Archibald. The wonder of Christmas is obvious in this old photograph.



A Special Thank-you for Recent Acquisitions...

** Hugh Webb recently donated five tiny little ornamental Christmas Santas on wooden sticks. They are currently on display at the museum.

** Agnes MacKinnon, Fatima Street, donated two portraits – one of Sir John David Sparrow Thompson who represented Antigonish and served as Prime Minister of Canada. The second portrait is of Lady Annie Affleck Thompson. These items were donated by the MacKinnon family in memory of William Francis MacKinnon.

** Recent acquisitions include histories compiled by St. Mary's Parish, Lismore, in celebration of their 175th Anniversary this past summer. This donation was made by Don Butler.

** Berkley Cameron graciously donated the vest that he wore while he was a member of the Marion Boys Choir in Antigonish. This choir was quite active between 1951 and 1966.

Attention: The Antigonish Dutch Community...

Sarah ten Brinke, senior History student at St. Francis Xavier University, has chosen as her thesis topic "Dutch immigration to Antigonish in the 1950s and the impact of this migration on the local community." For her study, Sarah is interested in interviewing folks from the Dutch community. Anyone willing to co-operate is kindly asked to contact the museum or call Sarah at 870-1415.

Contact information: Antigonish Heritage Museum @parl.ns.ca or 902-863-6160