



The Old Train Station News

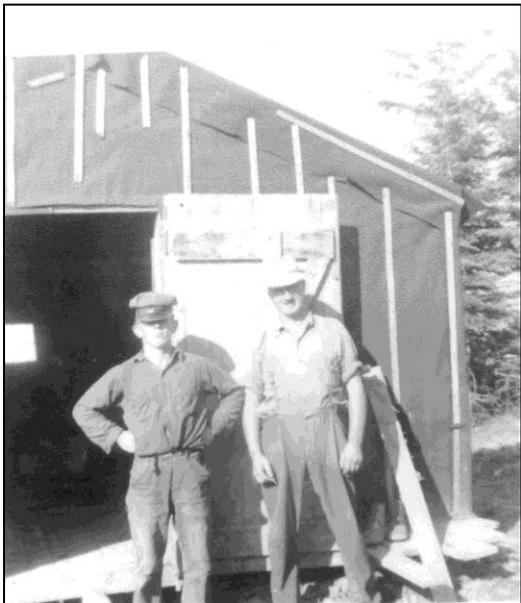
Newsletter #19

September 2010

Special thanks to Cordis MacDonald for the following article on lumber camps in Antigonish County. Cordis was born in Antigonish but grew up at Giant's Lake. The mother of six children and the grandmother of nine, she has always been interested in local history and family genealogy. Her memories are a valuable contribution to our local history here in Antigonish.

That beautiful time of year is here when our Nova Scotia hardwood trees put on their best show of colour for all to enjoy. For some, that stroll through the woods to enjoy the scenery just might turn up some relics of the old lumber camps which once occupied many of our woodlots. Some of these relics could be an old sawdust pile, an unusually large number of old rusty tin cans in one spot, or a moss and weed covered corduroy road. A corduroy road was one built of trees laid horizontally in a row over a swampy or mossy area so the cut lots could be more easily removed from the woods.

Prior to the introduction of the two large pulp mills in our area, there were lumber camps in such local communities as Merland, Alder River, Marydale, Giant's Lake and Fraser Mills, to name a few. They were usually located close to a source of fresh water such as local rivers or lakes, both as a water supply for the camp and sometimes as a means of transportation for the logs in the springtime. These camps provided employment for many who went from mill to mill.



The mill sites consisted of the main sawmill, a cookhouse, an office building, one or more bunkhouses and a barn for the horses, referred to as a "hobble." The bunkhouse was a humble place to sleep. Constructed of rough lumber, covered in black tar paper which was held in place by narrow pieces of board strapping, it held up to twenty men at a time in one room. The bunks for sleeping were along the two side walls, two tiers high. Straw-filled mattresses and rough grey wool camp blankets

were the bedding of the time. Windows were few and a round wood stove centered near the middle of the room provided heat for the building.

The cookhouse was the heart of the camp. It was equipped with a large wood stove and a capable woman who could turn out large pans of biscuits, cinnamon rolls, homemade bread, molasses cookies and lemon pies. The smell of fresh baked goods emitting from the cookhouse greeted the men at meal times as well as anyone who entered the area. Usually the cook had an assistant referred to as the "cookee." The cook had her own accommodations at the camp – usually a room at the back of the cookhouse.

Long rows of tables graced the interior of the cookhouse. These were covered in large vinyl tablecloths and long wooden benches were placed alongside. Each man had his regular seating place at the table. Mail for the workers would be placed beside each man's plate at the table. Supplies for the kitchen arrived in bulk; shortening in large tin buckets, carnation milk by the caseload. The tin cans were disposed of in large piles at the back of the cookhouse.



Entertainment for the camps included such things as playing cards or darts by the light of an oil lamp. Music was popular, with the fiddle and guitar being the favourites. One camp worker used to travel home to see his family on horseback with his guitar slung over his shoulder. He had nearly twenty miles to travel!

The camp horses were well fed and cared for as this photo shows. Their thirst quenched after a long day of snigging logs out to the mill, they were covered with a blanket and returned to their stalls to rest.



The lumber mill itself was a large operation. It consisted of a huge saw and a long chain-covered conveyor belt that removed the bark from the logs and placed them in a pile at the end of the mill. A side chute removed the sawdust into what could, and often did, become huge mounds of sawdust. In the years

following the demise of one of these mills, those sawdust piles made great places for children to slide down year-round. It also became home to Kingfishers who dug tunnels into its sides for their nests.

The sawn lumber was stacked into triangular piles so that it could dry out. It too made a great place to play, climbing over the top and into the centre of the triangle.

So when you go for that autumn walk to see all the fall colours, remember there is a lot of history in those woods.



This wonderful old photo is of a woods work crew at Barney's River.

Recently, Jocelyn Gillis, our Museum curator, had an interesting little chat with Hughie "Hedges" MacDonald of Hawthorne Street. Hughie's father, John Angus MacDonald, was a blacksmith at Lochaber. There, at his shop, he shod horses and repaired wagons and sleds. At one time, he had a contract with a lumber company at Giant's Lake, repairing their "long sleds". Often he would work late into the night, until ten or eleven o'clock, to complete a job.

Catherine MacGillivray



Recent Acquisitions



Laura Franchville of Guysborough recently donated an interesting pair of homemade shoes. These high-topped moccasins, dated to about the 1930s, were made by her brother, Lester Kinney of Linwood, with leather that he tanned from his own beef hides. Lester was a bachelor who did a bit of farming and fishing. He died in 1949 at the early age of 32.

A gentleman by the name of John Joe Fitzgerald taught Lester how to make moccasins. Close examination reveals that Lester was quite adept with a needle and thread; still, he only made shoes

for his own personal use. (Laura noted that these moccasins were only used in cooler weather.) While the stitching is still neatly secure, the leather on the bottom of the shoes is clearly worn, proving that they must have been a well used.

Guest Speaker in November!

On November 22nd, at 7:00 p.m., Doug Hunter will give a talk on his tool collection. He will share with us how he got started with this unusual hobby and how you can care for your collection. If you have an unusual tool from days gone by, bring it along with you.

Lochaber Website

Many of you will be interested to learn that the community of Lochaber now has its own website. This year marks the 200th Anniversary of settlement in this beautiful district. In October, the community of Lochaber will be celebrating with a number of activities. Check their website for updates. <http://www.lochaber.ca/>

Handyman Needed!

The Museum is looking for someone with woodworking abilities to help assemble an old spinning wheel. We have all the parts but some gluing and a little repair work are necessary to complete the project. If you, or someone you know, can help with this museum project, please let us know.

The Genealogy Nook

- Patty Mahoney of Billerica, MA, is researching Benoit connections in the Pomquet area. She is a descendant of John Benoit (1885 – 1963) and Elizabeth DeYoung (1896 – 1973).
- Barry Forbes and his wife, Deanne, of Vancouver, BC, were investigating his connections to Beech Hill. His grandfather, John Patrick Forbes, left this area and never returned. Our own Joe MacDonald and his son, Bruce, were able to provide him with some family background.

Heritage Association of Antigonish

The Heritage Association of Antigonish was organized in 1982. It was formed with an objective - to establish a museum serving the Town of Antigonish and the Municipality, County of Antigonish.

The dream of a museum became a reality in June of 1991 when the Antigonish Heritage Museum was opened in the former CN Railway Station building located at 20 East Main Street. The museum features exhibits which tell of our rich history and material culture. Our resource room is open to researchers and offers a wealth of material on history of various churches, communities and families. We have census records, vital statistics, cemetery inscriptions and much, much more. The museum is open to visitors, school and community groups year round.

As a service to the community, the association offers a guest lecture program. Speakers present on topics ranging from natural history, biography, the social and cultural life of Antigonish. These lectures are free and are open to the public. Meetings are advertised in local media.

Your support of the Heritage Association of Antigonish is requested. We need your input to make the organization more responsive to the needs of our community. If you wish further information on how you may become involved, please phone 863-6160.

Membership Application

Annual Individual: \$7.00

Annual Family: \$10.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Cash or cheque may be made payable to:

Heritage Association of Antigonish

Attn: Memberships

20 East Main Street

Antigonish, Nova Scotia

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