

The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #45

November 2012

This month's feature article was written by museum curator Jocelyn Gillis as a tribute to Doris Flikke, one of the founding members of the Antigonish Heritage Museum.

We learned with sadness the passing of Doris Flikke on October 28th. The Heritage Association and Antigonish Heritage Museum lost one of its founders and greatest supporters.



Doris was born September 16, 1920, the daughter of Sidney and Hilda Knickle. Raised in Lunenburg, just a short distance from the port town's historic waterfront, she maintained a fascination for all things related to the sea. One of her favourite things to collect was lighthouses—calendars, books, models and more. She attended Lunenburg Academy and graduated in 1938. Looking through her graduation yearbook, *The Seagull*, you recognize Doris's interest in writing and history. She served on the Yearbook committee, composed entries for the Poetry section of the journal and documented a history of one of her community's important businesses, *Robin, Jones and Whitman*.

Upon graduation from high school, Doris worked in her hometown for *C H R Zwicker*, local bookseller and stationery supplier. This shop was where she came to meet her future husband, Elias Flikke, a Norwegian sailor. During World War II, Lunenburg became home to Camp Norway, a Norwegian Navy training field. Elias stopped by her bookstore and invited Doris to go for a walk. That was the beginning of their life together.

As the war continued, Doris enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force based in London. Elias was now stationed with the Norwegian navy in Scotland. Times together were few but memorable. They were married in London and spent part of their honeymoon in a bomb shelter. (*Doris, second from left, celebrating VE Day in London, May 1945.*)

With the end of the war, Doris and Elias moved to Lunenburg but soon the



couple decided to move to Norway where they resided for thirteen years. This was where Doris taught music and piano to local school children.

With the illness (and subsequent death) of Doris' mother, the couple returned to Lunenburg where Elias began work with *Power Brothers*, installing heating and ventilation systems. A contract brought Elias to Antigonish and eventually a job with *Silver and Hanifen*. Antigonish became the couple's new home.

In 1967 Doris was employed with the Municipality, County of Antigonish, in the Municipal Building on Court Street. At this time she worked with payroll and was the first to operate the Burroughs accounting machine which Doris said "eliminated a lot work which was once done by hand." Later that year, the Municipality moved to new quarters at 42 West Street. On October 21st 1975, by motion #156, the Municipal Council appointed Doris Flikke Clerk of the Municipality County of Antigonish. This position she held until her retirement.

It was Doris who in 1982 placed an ad in *The Casket* asking for interested individuals to attend a meeting at the Court House to discuss the preservation of local history and heritage. An early effort was made in the 1970's to begin a society but this was short lived. Doris, in her position as Municipal Clerk, was able to secure rooms in the Municipal building to collect and house artefacts. She was able to obtain funding for projects such as the documentation of cemetery inscriptions and the inventory of older properties in the Town and County of Antigonish. Doris spent many hours at the Registry of Deeds researching property of early settlers. Collecting for a resource library was a priority and many valuable books and reference materials were obtained. When the VIA Railway Station building became available, she worked tirelessly to ensure the museum found a home. June 21 1991, the Antigonish Heritage Museum opened to the public and Doris was there taking photos. Her camera was always nearby.

In the wider community, Doris worked on building historical collections. As a member of Arras Branch 59 Royal Canadian Legion, Doris established an archive to ensure records of local veterans would be preserved for future generations. She collected and documented the history of various churches including St James United and St Paul's Anglican.



Church Street Extension was home to Doris and Elias and home to anyone who dropped by. Hugh Webb tells of one stormy Christmas when he, Marilyn and their new baby got stuck in a snowbank in front of the Flikke home. They managed to trudge through the deep snow to the warmth of Christmas Day with Doris and Elias. On special occasions you could depend that there would be treats such as Doris's asparagus sandwiches, cream cake and Norweigan wedding cake. Good food, good company and great neighbours.

For those who knew Doris, she was broadminded, thoughtful and possessed a positive attitude. Hers was a life well lived. She will be remembered.

Please note! We apologize for the late arrival of our November edition of the newsletter but we were waiting for MP Peter MacKay's announcement for funding to the museum. See Angus' *Message from the Chair* below.

Christmas Stories from Antigonish County

With the holidays in the offing, our readers are, no doubt, eager for a Christmas story or two. Let it be known that there is scant information available on early Christmases in the town and county of Antigonish. Back then, Christmas wasn't really the holiday that it is today; however, our search does bring you a few church related Christmas stories.



The following narrative can be found in **Joe MacDonald's** book, *The Lonely Hills of Bantry*.

The early settlers of Giant's Lake were under the spiritual care of St. Andrews Parish and went there, often on foot and fasting, to attend Mass. The story is told of a group who walked to St. Andrews to attend a Christmas Eve Midnight Mass, including a pregnant woman whose time of deliverance arrived shortly after the group had set out on the return journey to Giant's Lake. She was delivered of her baby at a home in the St. Andrews area, where she stayed until she was able to continue her journey home.

This next anecdote comes from a letter written by **Rosemary MacLellan-Scanlon of Brooklyn, New York**.

From 1953 to 1955 I was the organist at the Maryvale Church, and with the help of my mother Agnes MacLellan, was also the choir director. I played the first Midnight Mass the Christmas Eve that I turned 13, which in those days was a High Mass sung in Latin. Our Christmas Carols were also mostly in Latin, except for 'Silent Night' and 'O Holy Night'.

I remember coming to choir practice at the end of the summer, opening up the roll-back cover for the keys on the old organ and beginning to pump the old air-driven pedals, to find the summer crop of little field mice scampering out of the foot pedals and lower back of the old organ, squealing in fear, (only to be out-squealed by the young singers, and your organist).

Our last tidbit comes from a **History of Heatherton** compiled by the **Heatherton 4-H children** in 1994.

In 1931, on Christmas Eve, the church [at Heatherton] was lit with electricity for the first time, thanks to the 100 men who volunteered to erect power poles from Pomquet to Heatherton.

Looking for a Volunteer

Jocelyn is looking for a volunteer to strip or paint an old chair. This task must be completed by the end of January. Interested persons can call the museum.

Lochaber Christmas Tree Festival

Join the folks at Lochaber for their Christmas Tree Festival. www.lochaber.ca

Recent Acquisitions



Thank you to **Betty MacNeil** from town for donating a ladies' dresser set dating back to the turn of the century. This case belonged to her grandmother Elizabeth Johnston of Red Island, Johnstown, Cape Breton. It was found in an old trunk along with a May 22, 1889 edition of *The Weekly Herald*, a Halifax newspaper. Because there are so few of these old newspapers still available, this is a valuable find.

NovaMuse

In a recent edition of the newsletter, we announced the recent launch of the NovaMuse website by the Association of Nova Scotia Museums. NovaMuse is a "collection of collections" from community museums all across the province. Take a few moments to browse this material culture collection at <http://www.novamuse.ca/index.php/About/Index> and discover new things about Antigonish.

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<p>RON MacGILLIVRAY SPECIALIST</p>    <p>75 St. Andrews Street, Antigonish 863-2803 www.ronmacgillivraychev.com</p>	<p>Please patronize our supporters.  <i>Antigonish Heritage Museum</i></p>	

Heritage Association of Antigonish

Patrons Program

Thank-you to the following patron:

Silver: **Donald C. MacLellan, Scituate, Massachusetts**

Heritage Association Membership

We'd like to welcome the following new members. Thank you to all of our members who have renewed their membership.

Charles MacDonald, St. Basile, New Brunswick
Bernard and Karen Centofanti, Hanover, Massachusetts
Tom and Lorraine Crawford, Orleans, Ontario
R. J. and Dianne MacDonald and family, Green Meadow
May Bouchard, Pomquet
Joanne Bouchard, Malignant Cove
Bart Wainwright, Lanark

Sister Peggy MacFarlane: *Relationship between the Sisters of Saint Martha and the People*

The lecture hall was packed last month for Sister Peggy MacFarlane's presentation on the relationship between the Sisters of St. Martha and the people of this area. That relationship is today one hundred and twelve years old, its beginnings stemming back to the 1890s when the St. F. X. College was expanding. As the college grew, so did the housekeeping concerns of the institution.



Sister Peggy is the oral historian for the Sisters of Saint Martha, a religious order that came into being because of a specific need right here in the town of Antigonish. She notes that in 1894, Dr. Daniel Chisholm, rector of the college, went to Bishop John Cameron to secure a community of sisters to tackle the growing housekeeping needs on campus. Bishop Cameron approached the Sisters of Charity in Halifax who agreed to train young women from the diocese of Antigonish in household management. A convent was built on campus and so, too, was a new kitchen/laundry/pharmacy/infirmary facility. College officials patiently awaited the arrival of the sisters. When they finally landed in 1897, it was in greatly diminished numbers. It was soon evident that there were simply not enough women to handle the work so Bishop Cameron made the decision to create a new congregation. During a silent retreat in July of 1900, the sisters were asked for volunteers who would become the founding members of a new order. Fifteen women stood up to accept the challenges of this new venture and the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha was born.



At St. F. X. College, the sisters cooked, cleaned, managed the laundry, mended and were present for the students – making for them (and the priests) a home away from home. “When basic needs are met, you can move on to other needs.”

“Service is an element of religious life,” Sister Peggy told the assembled crowd; but two other elements supported these early Marthas in their life of service – prayer and community. “They needed to help each other.” The congregation grew and matured.

In 1905, there was no hospital between New Glasgow and Sydney, only the college infirmary here in town. A cottage hospital was proposed for Antigonish and the sisters were approached to fundraise and manage the new hospital. Sister MacFarlane tells the story of sisters going door to door to raise money – sometimes going in shifts because they had to share a pair of shoes. By 1906, they had established a small six-bed hospital on St. Ninian’s Street to meet the health care needs of the local community.

By 1917, the sisters had matured to the point where they were ready to strike out on their own. The college was reluctant to relinquish control because of the wonderful service that the sisters provided on campus but an agreement was eventually struck. The sisters achieved autonomy and they continued to work on campus but now they began to look for a larger motherhouse – one that was off campus. In 1918, a campaign in the diocese raised \$40,000 for a new motherhouse. Bethany opened in 1921.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the sisters got involved in education, teaching in the small rural schools and running St. Martha’s School of Nursing. At St. F. X., they contributed to the work of the Antigonish Movement, the Extension Department and Coady International Institute. At St. Martha’s Hospital they worked in many capacities – from hospital administration to social work, nursing and domestic service. Wherever there was a need, they served.

In the 1950s, it was evident that there was a growing need for a permanent facility for the aging and infirmed residents of this area. Bishop John R. MacDonald organized a group but there was no money available. When local businessman R. K. MacDonald passed away, he left \$100,000 to help build a facility that would be run by the sisters. More donations came in and the R. K. MacDonald Guest House slowly became a reality – but the sisters first had to mortgage Bethany to obtain a loan to build the facility. Eventually it was sold to the town and county.

By the early 1970s there was still no home health service available in this area. It was believed that if seniors had some nursing care, they could stay at home – and so Martha Home Health Care came into being. Two decades later it evolved into Antigonish Home Health Care and then VON Antigonish.

There are today 129 Sisters of St. Martha. Many of them are elderly. Times have changed and the sisters no longer focus on many of the old concerns – but two sisters continue to work at Wellsprings Centre on the St. F. X. campus, one sister remains on staff at St. Martha’s Hospital and two sisters still make visits to the R. K. MacDonald Nursing Home. The original motherhouse on campus was integrated into the new Coady International Institute complex as a reminder of their longstanding presence there.

Today the sisters focus on spiritual development, social justice, environmental awareness and care of the elderly and the infirmed sisters, always living with integrity their way of life. “We feel at home here,” Sister Peggy concluded her presentation. We certainly hope so; their contribution to this community has been invaluable.

Dr. Ian Cameron: *Drs. William Osler and W. H. Pethick and the Pictou County Cattle Disease: The Antigonish Solution*



On November 19, Dr. Ian Cameron gave an informative presentation on the mysterious cattle disease that plagued farmers in Nova Scotia and neighbouring Prince Edward Island in the mid 1800s and the early 1900s. Significant numbers of cattle were wasting away and dying. Milk from diseased cattle was scant, bitter and smelly. Farmers were devastated and frustrated. News of the disease quickly spread. In 1880 a United States cattle commissioner was sent to determine if Nova Scotia livestock and hides were safe for trade. At the time, findings seemed to indicate that the disease was caused by a local weed – the Ragwort.

The suspected weed arrived in Pictou in ballast on a British ship. Sometimes known as Stinking Willie, this weed is most prolific. One plant can produce in excess of 150,000 seeds. These seeds can lie dormant on soil for four or five years. Buried seed can survive up to twenty years. Pictou County landowners were ordered to destroy all weeds growing on their property. Those who failed to comply were fined. Ironically, this nasty weed was fairly harmless in the old country but, here in Nova Scotia, it appeared to be a killer of livestock.

In 1880, Canadian government officials were sent to Pictou to interview farmers, carry out testing on cattle carcasses and analyze water, soil and plants on the farms where cattle had succumbed. To date, 1396 cattle had been reported lost to the inexplicable disease. Findings concluded that there were no abnormalities in the water but that there was a Ragwort plant that had spread and overtaken much of the pastureland.

Some experts suspected that the disease was contagious and related to malnutrition. Diseased animals should be burned or buried. Animals that had come in contact with the disease should be quarantined, buildings should be disinfected, farmers should be compensated – but further investigation was needed. Between 1893 and 1894, hundreds of cattle were slaughtered in Pictou County and the surrounding counties but no progress was made in determining the cause of the disease.

Dr. William Osler, professor at the Montreal Veterinary College, completed various experiments to determine the connection between the Ragwort weed and diseased cattle but his findings proved to be inconclusive too. Forced to conclude that experts were still in the dark with regards to the true nature of the disease, he proposed that an experimental station be established – but it wasn't until 1904, two decades later, that this finally came to fruition. The 200 acre Campbell farm at Cloverville, Antigonish County, was leased by the Department of Agriculture and an experimental station was set up. For two years Dr. W. H. Pethick carried out experiments to determine the connection between the Ragwort weed and what was now known as the Pictou County Cattle Disease, only to conclude what had been suspected all along – the Stinking Willie was causing the death of all the cattle. The slaughter and compensation programs were abandoned and weed eradication programs were quickly enforced. Animals seemed to avoid the Ragwort out in the fields but when found in their hay, they simply couldn't tell the difference.

Presenter Dr. Ian Cameron is retired from the faculty of Family Medicine at Dalhousie University so why would he be particularly interested in a veterinary topic? Well, Dr. Cameron is fascinated with the idea of quarantine. He noted that early studies done on the Pictou County Cattle Disease were done for only one season which was simply not long enough. At the Cloverville test station, Dr. Pethick

extended the period of quarantine and learned that it took seventeen months for the disease to take hold. Two months later, the animal was dead.

Dr. Cameron also noted that the disease seemed to move eastward – not westward. There was also a higher prevalence of it along the coastline. This made him wonder if the spread was wind or water borne.

One hundred years have passed since Dr. Pethick solved the Pictou County Cattle Disease at the Cloverville test station. Little remains of the old Dan Campbell farm but the well, part of an old foundation and a well-worn piece of the roof of an outbuilding. Little more could be found; however, there is a book written by Dan Campbell's granddaughter, *A Heart for Healing: A Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Campbell Bickford*, that makes mention of the cattle disease, the experimental farm and the "Tansy Ragwort" weed that was causing the death of all the cattle. "The cows were unable to tell if it was good to eat in the dried hay, but they could tell if it was in the fields. It fell on us to pick the weed out of the hay fields before it was mowed."

Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish (Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)

On November 22 we were advised by the Atlantic Canada Opportunity Agency that we were successful with our grant application to the federal government for matching dollars for the major renovation project planned for the Museum. The grant amount is \$100,000.

This grant with the other monies that were provided by the Town of Antigonish, The Municipality of the County of Antigonish, The Province of Nova Scotia, The Antigonish Heritage Museum Board and The Heritage Association of Antigonish will allow us to undertake much needed renovations.

We plan to keep everyone informed of the progress of the renovation project in future issues of the Newsletter.

The Heritage Association of Antigonish will be co-hosting the Saint Andrews Evening Gala on the 29th of November with the Antigonish Highland Society. The evening is expected to be an exciting event.

On a related note, the Heritage Association of Antigonish has agreed to cover the cost to provide one table (7 students and 1 teacher) at the Saint Andrews Evening Gala to the students in grades 10, 11 & 12 taking Gaelic at the Dr. John Hugh Gillis Regional High School. The only requirement we placed on these students is that they speak Gaelic the entire evening.

It is with your financial support that we can promote and preserve our shared heritage.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

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