



The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #50

April 2013

Between 1870 and 1930, more than 80,000 (some say more than 100,000) children and adolescents were collected from orphanages, workhouses and the streets of London and shipped to Canada by church groups and philanthropic organizations to solve Britain's problem of too many children. Kenneth Bagnell addresses this child emigration movement in his book, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada*. Many believed that by sending these surplus children to Canada – the orphaned, the abandoned and the impoverished – they would be “improving the life of London, the poor, and even the children themselves.” The thought that these unfortunate children would have a better life in rural Canada, where they would be distributed as cheap domestic help and farm labour, is rather appalling.

The story of the “British Home Children” is a dark chapter in British history but it's certainly not a bright light in Canadian history or even in our local history here in Nova Scotia. Many children were welcomed into homes and families across the province but many others lived with hardship, alienation, uncertainty and abuse. For Vic MacLellan of Big Marsh and Antigonish town, the story of the “Home Boys and Girls” strikes home. His mother, Nora MacLellan, was one of these children. According to records found at *Library and Archives Canada* online, Nora Clancy was only ten years old when she was shipped out of Liverpool, England, on the *Corsican* with thirty-two other girls on July 9, 1908. The girls ranged in age from six to seventeen; their average age was ten-and-a-half years old. After nine days at sea, they arrived in Quebec, still destined for Ottawa. The agency sending this group of girls was the *Catholic Emigration Association*. (Photos of Malcolm and Nora MacLellan compliments of Vic MacLellan)



“It must have been very scary for her,” Vic MacLellan observes. “She came alone as a child, separated from her parents and from her family.” It should be noted that Nora wasn't a street child or an orphan. “Her mother had passed away and her father couldn't care for his family.” Vic knows so little about his mother's young life. “She revealed very little, even when we asked her. She didn't talk about that to the children.” The 1911 Census shows Nora Clancy living with a

Cameron family at Lakevale. She was thirteen years old and listed as “adopted”. While Nora only allowed certain people to get close to her, Vic remembers that his Mom did remain close to some of the people in that area.

Nora was twenty-four when she married Malcolm William MacLellan at St. Columba Church in Lakevale on January 31, 1922. “Malcolm Billy” was a thirty-seven year old farmer from Big Marsh. Their marriage record reveals that she was born in England and that her parents were David and Agnes Clancy. Nora proudly signed her marriage certificate as “Miss Nora Agnes Clancy”.

According to Vic, “It’s incredible that she came through this experience [of being a Home Child] and still lived a good life.” And, clearly, she did. She raised her own family and then took in four other children – two for a short time and two more for an extended period of time. “You see, history was repeating itself.” Nora was in her fifties and Malcolm was in his sixties when they took Vic into the fold. “They gave me my beginnings,” he admits. He was only three years old.

Vic speaks fondly of his Mom and Papa. “He had a great heart and she had that feisty Irish spirit; he was laid back and she was all fire. She’d fight for her family too.” Vic recalls how, when he was a youngster going to school, his Mom took it upon herself to make sure that the school bus would turn down their road so that Vic would not have to endure a long walk to and from the bus each day.



He remembers arguing with his Mom when he was sixteen or so. One day she took him aside and said, “Vic, I’m not always right.” After that, things were good. They had an understanding. Nora insisted that he get educated. Not many foster children got educated back then. At one reunion of local foster children, Vic was one of only two students who had gotten to Grade 11 – and he didn’t stop there.

Vic perfectly understands what it was like for Nora Clancy to grow up as a Home Child. “You were a lesser person!” There was a stigma attached to being a Home Child. He likens it to being a second-class citizen. “There were Home Children on all the small farms around here,” Vic recalls but he’s grateful to Nora and Malcolm. “They gave me a wonderful start to have the ability to carry on.”

He speaks fondly of Mary, the oldest of Nora and Malcolm’s children. When Vic first came to Big Marsh as a little boy, he had a habit of running and hiding. Mary gradually made him see that he no longer had to hide. He was safe now. Mary looked out for him and demanded that the rest of her siblings treat Vic as one of the family. Vic was luckier than most. “People were quick to point fingers when Home Boys or foster boys went on to drink – but why did they drink? They were just trying to dull the pains inflicted on them.” Kenneth Bagnell addresses the abuse and neglect experienced by the British Home Children in his book, *The Little Immigrants*. Children as young as five were expected to earn their keep tending barns, milking cows, making hay or doing household chores. Once children were placed, the system too often failed to check on the welfare of their charges. Many lived on the margins of society, missing out on the most basic of needs – proper food and shelter, material goods, social integration and, most importantly, love. So many of these children grew up damaged, with low expectations from life, but Vic had aspirations – even as a very young child.

“Papa was a gentleman,” Vic told me. Like most country folk back in the forties and fifties, Malcolm had a small mixed farm. “It was the most beautiful farm in the county” but there was no extra cash. Malcolm sold eggs to the university for a little extra money. He sold beef whenever he could. He even grew strawberries for additional income. Vic recalls how people would come out to pick berries.

Unlike the system that had placed so many children but then failed to check on them, Malcolm once took the train down to New Waterford to look up one of the young fellows who had been placed with the MacLellans for an extended period of time. “John MacKeigan was a nice fellow. He was working in the coal mines then. Sometime after that, John came up with his family to visit.”

Vic also recalls the summer back in the late 1950s or early 1960s when Nora’s sister, Pheobe, came to visit from Capitol Heights, Maryland, a small town that borders Washington, D. C. “There was a whole car-load of them: Aunt Pheobe, her son, Charlie, and his girlfriend and her son, David, who liked to ride Queen, our mare.” Pheobe, also a Home Child, had been sent to Canada in 1910, two years after Nora had been shipped out. “Pheobe was more-easy going than Mom.” Vic is not sure where she grew up but the ladies, seen here with Queen at the farm in Big Marsh, did stay in touch over the years. “Mom [pictured right] went down to visit her once with one of her daughters. She loved to visit.” *(Photo compliments of Vic MacLellan)*



When Nora passed away in January of 1985, her obituary left no evidence of the fact that she was a British Home Child. It simply stated that she was born in London, England, the daughter of the late David and Agnes (Lewis) Clancy. Besides her children and grandchildren, she was survived by her sister, Pheobe, and a brother, David, in England. She was predeceased by her husband, Malcolm, and one sister, Elizabeth. Vic knew only of the existence of a brother and another sister. That’s all. It seems that Nora had not kept in touch with them or that she had simply lost track of them.

We can’t allow our history to be sanitized. We have to recognize that the British Home Children were a part of our local history. Premier Darrell Dexter recognized this when on September 28, 2011 he proclaimed that day to be “British Home Child Day” in Nova Scotia. On that occasion, he insisted that the Home Children “deserve to be recognized for their strength, courage and perseverance in the face of such adversity.” Of Nora, Vic says, “She was as tough as nails,” She had to be. “It [the experience of being a Home Child] must have been horrible for her. And then to get a hold of life and carry on.” That shows remarkable strength.

A special thank-you to Vic MacLellan for sharing his story with us. That shows courage too.

Catherine MacGillivray



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A Word from Our Readers

In response to our Highland Society notes last month, **Dr. Michael Newton** from the Celtic Studies Department at St. F. X. wrote: *I wanted to provide some background historical information for something you mention in the newsletter on p.8, about the wearing of tartan by AHS members. The idea of clan tartans was only invented in the 1840s, and the system of clan tartans wasn't fully elaborated until the early 1900s. So, it is no wonder that guidelines about what tartan to wear were so vague, as it was not a tradition that existed when the emigrants came, and even when the society was formed many clans did not have an "assigned tartan." For details, see the book Tartan by Hugh Cheape.*

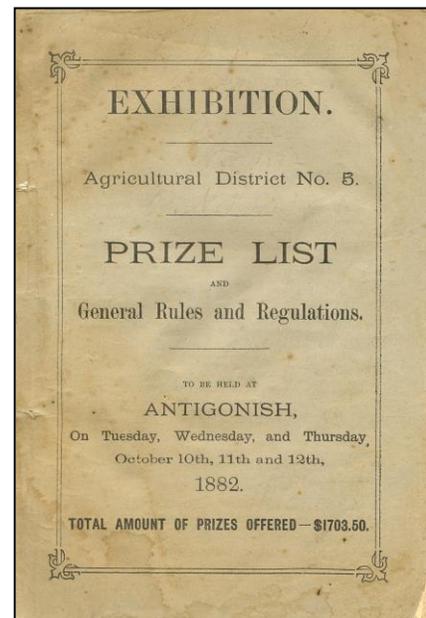
Mary MacLellan writes to us from up along the north shore: *"We are creating a Lobster Interpretive Center in the new building at Arisaig Wharf."* The committee is looking for information on the Arisaig Fishery. Any data, old photos, clippings and stories would be greatly appreciated.

Recent Acquisitions

The museum was the recipient of a small treasure this week when **Ed Taylor of Riverton, Pictou County**, donated an 1882 program from the Antigonish Exhibition. This program is particularly valuable because it is thirty years older than the oldest one previously housed at the museum. It is fascinating to note the potential exhibits and the various categories in each – whether it was livestock, implements, handwork, ladies work, produce or "Indian work".

The advertisements in the program are absolutely delightful. One particular ad posted by a certain carriage-maker proved to be especially entertaining for this chap practiced undertaking on the side – *and* he sold washing machines. He was obviously a firm believer in diversification.

This program is clearly an interesting study of a particular time period in our local history.



Thank you to **Alistair Hamilton of Antigonish** for his DVD compilation outlining the history of the Battle of Culloden in 1746 and the annual Culloden Memorial held at Lismore each year.

C. J. MacLellan Engineers donated three Antigonish maps:

- a 1948 map of Crystal Farm and its surroundings – indicating forest growth
- a 1976 informational map of the east end of town and surrounding area – displaying landmarks
- a hand-drawn Canal Plan map (1936) of the East End before the Wrights River was rerouted – illustrating the extensive nature of this endeavor.

150th Anniversary of the Highland Games

The museum has been sharing tidbits of local history to mark the 150th Anniversary of the Antigonish Highland Games. The following is a transcription from the Minutes of the Highland Society. What a party it was!

. . . on the evening of 16th Jany. 1877, the "Antigonishe Highland Society" in accordance with the resolutions passed at the Annual Meeting celebrated their 15th Anniversary by having a Grand Ball in their Hall at which over 110 persons – including members and guests – were present. The Ball was opened at 7 ½ pm by a Highland Reel led off by the Officers and members of the Society in Bonnets and Plaids and at 11 dancing was suspended for the purpose of partaking of luncheon which was sumptuously prepared by the Committee appointed for that purpose. During said interval the Antigonishe Brass Band discerned appropriate music. At 12 dancing was resumed and [continued] til 5 Am when all dispersed highly pleased with the festivities. The Hall was appropriately decorated with festoons, bunting and mottoes.

Calling all Retired Pipers and Drummers!

A special group of volunteers is organizing a reunion of bagpipers and drummers who have competed, played or marched in the Antigonish Highland Games. Check out their Facebook page, *Piper's Glen 150*, at <https://www.facebook.com/AHGPIPES150>.

Guysborough Historical Society

The Annual General Meeting of the Guysborough Historical Society is to be held at the Court House Museum on Sunday, April 28th, at 2 p.m. Guest Speaker for this event is **Eric Emery** of Mulgrave and New Brunswick. His topic: *The Loyalist Settlement of Guysborough by Duke of Cumberland Regiment and St Augustine Settlers*. This presentation may be of particular interest to Antigonish families of Pushie, Hulbert, Williams, Atwater and Taylor.

Stroll Down Memory Lane

May 8th is Nova Scotia Walk Day. Celebrate the joy of physical activity with a Heart&Stroke Walkabout. Join other participants at the People's Place Library at noon for a walk down Main Street to the Heritage Museum. Along the way, you will learn a bit about our local history.

Gaelic Awareness Month

May is Gaelic Awareness Month so it is only fitting that we include a word from the President of the Antigonish Gaelic Society.

*Since Gaelic has become increasingly relevant in our schools and community **Comunn Gaidhlig Antaiginis** (Antigonish Gaelic Society) was establish in 2011 to promote the Gaelic language and culture throughout the Antigonish town and county. Our goal is to provide learning opportunities for youth and adults to participate in step dancing, fiddle, highland dancing, piping and drumming and especially Gaelic language instruction. Currently there are four different classes of Gaelic language instruction offered at **Comunn Gaidhlig Antaiginis** at various levels. These classes are supported by local native*

Gaelic speakers and fluent Gaelic learners.

Comunn Gaidhlig Antaiginis has a convenient location downtown Antigonish because of the generosity of Brian and Irene MacLeod. Several groups and organizations use our location to promote Gaelic cultural activities. Some of these organizations include Scotia Dancers, Ships of 1801, Antigonish Highland Society School of Piping and Drumming, the Fundraising Committee for the Core Gaelic High School March Break trip to Scotland, and the Nova Scotia Gaelic Council.

Increasing numbers of people are learning Gaelic especially in our schools, we wish to make Gaelic more accessible to our community and to ensure that Gaelic continues for many more generations here in Antigonish where the language once thrived.

If you are interested in learning Gaelic or receiving any information about our programs or joining **Comunn Gaidhlig Antaiginis** please contact b.j.macdonald@ns.sympatico.ns
Le gach durachd,

Brian MacDonald, President, Comunn Gaidhlig Antaiginis

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Please patronize our supporters.

Heritage Association of Antigonish

New Members

The Delorey family from London, Ontario (Tom, Barb, Alex and Ben)

Barbara Goss and family from Tinton Falls, New Jersey (Maureen, Robert, Lawrence, William & Greta, and Jacqueline Good)

Fraser Dunn: The Life and Times of A. S. MacMillan



When Fraser Dunn speaks of the Honorable Alexander Stirling MacMillan, he laments the fact that most people in Antigonish have never heard of him. “He was one of the greatest men to come out of Antigonish County and he was one of the greatest premiers of Nova Scotia but very few local people know about him.” Fraser became interested in A. S. MacMillan when he was still a young boy travelling with his father on the cream truck. “One day my father introduced me to a gentleman from Upper South River and said that he was the Premier of Nova Scotia.” Fraser has been interested ever since.

MacMillan, a man of varied interests and accomplishments, was born on the family farm at Upper South River on October 31, 1871. Money was scarce in those days. “What they ate and what they wore came from the farm.” A. S. had a grade nine education— but *only* because the teacher had only a grade nine education. In later years he bemoaned the fact that he had been deprived of a proper education and subsequently fought hard so that others *would* have that privilege.



MacMillan left behind an extensive record of accomplishments. As a lumberman in the early 1900s, he was one of the largest employers in Antigonish County. In fact, he owned seven portable lumber mills. Fraser tells the story of men from Upper South River heading to work on Brown’s Mountain after a heavy winter storm. It took them three days to shovel the roads to Brown’s Mountain and seven days to shovel out the logs. That was two weeks of work! As a point of interest, much of that wood was being shipped to New York.

In 1901 there was no telephone service in the county so MacMillan initiated the first mutual telephone company in the area. He organized the Antigonish Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Company. He was warden for Antigonish County from 1904-1915. The county finances were in bad shape but A. S. turned them around and after that there was never another deficit.

In 1920, he ran for the Liberal leadership in Antigonish and lost. Noticing that the number of his votes did not add up to the number of his many, many employees, he vowed he would never again run for office in Antigonish. On subsequent occasions, he ran in Digby and Hants where he proved to be a capable and productive minister. Once he had established himself, he was much sought after by other districts.

In 1920, he was appointed chairman of the Nova Scotia Highways Board. At the time, there was a great deal of corruption on the highways board so he fired the entire lot and hired all new staff. He divided the province into divisions, reconstructed roads, and made the decision to change driving on the left side of the road to driving on the right. That was 1923. In 1925 he served as Minister of Highways.

From 1925 to 1928 he was a Liberal member of the Legislative Council. He held a seat in the Nova Scotia Assembly from 1928 to 1945. During this time he initiated a large scale paving project. From 1934 to 1939 one thousand miles of roads were paved in the province. MacMillan used engineers to develop an asphalt mix that actually stood up for twenty years. He believed that you needed a good

base to produce good pavement. In the winter of 1936-37 he introduced a snow clearing program. Before that, people had to shovel their own section of road.

From 1933 to 1942, while A. S. was the Minister of Tourism, he began advertising Nova Scotia as a holiday resort. He advertised this motto especially in the United States. In an effort to spruce up the appearance of the province, all eyesores and billboards were removed from the road sides.

In the early 1930s he brought electrical power to rural Nova Scotia. During this time, over 30,000 rural customers received power.

MacMillan was premier from 1940 to 1945. During the post-war period, he made great efforts to put the returning soldiers back to work. He maintained that everyone deserved employment. As Minister of Education, he built the first rural high schools in the province, the first two mechanic shops in the province, introduced agriculture into the schools and demanded more money and upgrading for teachers. He brought education to all school-age children and promoted advanced education. In fact, he increased spending on education by one hundred percent.

In 1945, A. S. MacMillan retired but not before he saw the building of the Victoria General Hospital and arranging financing for the Canso Causeway and the Angus L. MacDonald Bridge. As Provincial Treasurer, he was a meticulous book keeper and greatly reduced the debt.

MacMillan was a practical man who got the job done – whatever that job might be. He had a great capacity for public duty and he gave a great deal to his province. He died in 1955 and was buried at Upper South River. “He was one of the greatest premiers we ever had!” Sure, he represented Digby and Hants – but he came from Antigonish. “We should remember him!” And thus Fraser Dunn concluded his presentation.

Upcoming Guest Speakers

- On May 13, 2013, author **Joan Dawson** will do a reading from her new book, *Nova Scotia Roads and Rivers*. Joan has always been fascinated with the early cartography of Nova Scotia and has written extensively on maps and local history.
- On June 10, 2013, at 7:00 p.m., **Ruth Whitehead** will do a presentation on the Black Loyalists. Ruth, a well-known Mi'kmaw historian and ethnologist, worked at the Nova Scotia Museum for years. Her book, *Black Loyalists*, is coming out in June.
- On July 8, 2013, **Varis Rieksts of Big Marsh** will talk about his wartime Latvian experiences and his subsequent emigration.

Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish

(Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)

Not certain where the time is going. We are now in late April and it seems like I just wrote my monthly message yesterday.

On April 20, 2013, I attended the Culloden Ceremony. The weather cooperated and it was a pleasant 19 degrees at Knoydart on the water. After the service there was a meal and Ceilidh at the Lismore Hall. The meal and music were excellent.

This event is a beautiful opportunity to reflect and pray for the souls of forefathers who perished in this battle and the subsequent genocide and to offer prayers of forgiveness for the souls of those whom undertook the same.

This year the Antigonish Highland Society provided a bus to transport students out to this event. A large number of students took advantage of this service. It is really nice to see the youth participate and celebrate our shared heritage.

The Culloden Committee does an excellent job every year on this event and we wish them every success in the future. I encourage everyone to attend this event when it is celebrated next year.

Early in the month I attended a public meeting relating to keeping Gaelic alive as a living working language. It is hard to imagine that only a hundred years ago one in five Nova Scotians spoke Gaelic as their first language. Today, there are very few people who can speak this language. The good news is that there are people and organizations working extremely hard to insure that the language will survive in Nova Scotia. One such organization is the Antigonish Gaelic Society.

This organization offers Gaelic classes to beginners and those who speak the language. As May is Gaelic awareness month, you may want to consider taking a class. Please visit their Facebook site at the link below:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Comunn-Gaidhlig-Antaiginis-Antigonish-Gaelic-Society/275645282517727>

March 31, 2013 is the yearend date for the Heritage Association of Antigonish. It was a banner year for our Association. We provided significant resources to the Museum to allow them to undertake the needed renovations; we were able to start the Memories Project where we are preserving the memories of the older residents of Antigonish Town and County; and we were able to hold a number of excellent learning events at the Museum.

This was all made possible because of the generous financial support of our friends. On behalf of the Association's Board of Directors, we would like to say thank you. We are starting fiscal 2013-2014 on a good financial foundation.

I am happy to report that the museum has just received word of funding for a student – a Research/Fundraising Coordinator – for fourteen weeks this summer. This is good news.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

Angus MacGillivray, BBA FCGA angus.macgillivray@ns.sympatico.ca

Museum website: <http://www.heritageantigonish.ca/>