

The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #85

March 2016

Antigonish and the Wellington Disaster

By Marie Terese Redican

During the last week of February in 1910, Antigonish County was experiencing a typical weather pattern for the area. Many families could be found sitting in front of their fireplaces or drinking some tea around the kitchen table thinking and telling stories about the family members who had left the Antigonish area for employment in the States and other parts of Canada. The winter months can often bring news of lives lost due to severe snow storms and one such life was the third son born to Captain Angus (Bogainn) MacDonald and Margaret MacNeil. Augustine Angus MacDonald was born on January 16, 1887 at Ballantyne's Cove, Antigonish County.

Most likely he was named after his father's brother Augustine who had died young as well as for his father, another Bogainn MacDonald of note. Although my connection to Augustine is a distant one as he is my maternal 2nd cousin, 3x removed, his life is another family link shared by the descendants of Donald (Bogainn Pioneer) MacDonald and Anne MacDougall who settled in Rear Georgeville a few years after leaving the Isle of Eigg in 1791.

Augustine was known as Gus to his family and friends and spent his childhood in Ballantyne's Cove but yearned to see the world as many young men of his age. His railroad career would take him from the small town of Antigonish to the Cascade Mountains of the state of Washington where he would lose his life on March 1, 1910 in what today is known as the Wellington Disaster, the largest loss of life due to an avalanche to ever be recorded in the United States and possibility in North America.



Today all that marks his short life is a memorial stone found in the cemetery outside Holy Rosary Church in Ballantyne's Cove near where his parents as well as some of his siblings were laid to rest. It is believed that his body was actually placed in an unmarked grave in a Washington cemetery reserved for unidentified victims of the Wellington Disaster.

The Antigonish Heritage Museum antiheritage@parl.ns.ca or 902-863-6160

Word came to the family concerning the Wellington disaster in the early days of March 1910 where we find an account published in the March 10, 1910 edition of *The Casket*:

At Wellington, Wash., on Tuesday of last week ten acres of mountain side that towered above the Great Northern Railway's tracks became detached and carried with it snow, rocks, trees and earth. Two passenger trains were in the course of the avalanche and were swept along. Latest reports say 100 lives were lost. Already over sixty bodies have been recovered; many, as feared, will not be found for months yet. Among the dead is Augustus McDonald, son of Captain Angus MacDonald of Ballentine's Cove, Ant., a young lad who only left here last year to engage as telegraph operator, which business he learned at the I.C.R. Station, in Antigonish, and in which he became very proficient. He was a model young man in every sense of the word, and all will regret his untimely and sad death.

The circumstances behind this disaster began in the late days of February 1910. An extremely snowy winter was continuing and the Northern Pacific Railroad workers were in constant motion clearing the tracks from snow in order to allow the passenger and mail trains free access to the pacific coast. During most winters, the area where the tracks had been laid beginning in the 1870's suffered from abundant snow but the winter of 1910 was noted as a particularly brutal winter from all accounts. The Northern Pacific Railroad system began in Minnesota and continued through the northwestern states until it reached Seattle on the pacific coastline. Today, this system is part of the Burlington Northern Rail System. At the time of the Wellington Disaster, the Northern Pacific Railroad Company did everything in its power to remove the story of the disaster from the front pages of the newspapers. Within months, they changed the name of the town of Wellington to Tye in the hopes of living down the bad press. Today this area, filled with memories of the past, has been turned into a hiking trail and just a few pieces of the disaster remain for visitors to view.

Winter weather in the Cascade Mountains often caused train delays and in late February 1910, a storm settled into the region and the snow continued to fall turning days into a week where two trains were held at Wellington, WA, a small railroad town consisting of a small hotel and a few other buildings. On the morning of March 1, 1910, just after 1a.m., a lightning strike is said to have started the avalanche. It had been raining for a few hours prior to the avalanche. Some passengers had actually begun to walk to the next town. It was a trek through several feet of snow but many of the delayed passengers including young children were not physically able to make the trek and they had remained for the most part in the rail cars waiting for the rail tracks to open so they could continue on their way to the western cities.

The last body was recovered at the end of July in 1910 according to an article found in the July 30, 1910 edition of *The Wenatchee Daily World* stating that it appears that the body of young Augustine MacDonald who at the time of the avalanche was sleeping in a rail car with another railroad worker whose body was found just 10 feet from the location where MacDonald's body had been pulled from the Tye river valley. At the time of the avalanche, many of the railroad workers were sleeping in the railcars after long days and hours of clearing the snow packed tracks. The men had thought they were far safer in the railcars than in the wooden railroad worker shacks



along the tracks. The official number of dead was recorded at 96 but historians continue to believe that the actual number was much higher; the majority of the dead were railroad workers and mailman. There have been many books and articles written about this disaster but few mention young Augustine MacDonald by name, only the recovery of his body, as the last body found at the Wellington Disaster site appears in the occasional footnote.

Sadly the family of Captain Angus (Bogainn) MacDonald lost one of their own on this historic March day in 1910 but the perils of winter weather would revisit this family again in the years to come but that is a story for another day.

Photos credits: <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/1910-stevens-pass-avalanche-still-deadliest-in-us-history/>

Marie Terese Redican is a valuable member of the Museum community. Distance has not deterred her from assisting with various projects, especially the WWI Cenotaph Project. She's even attended a few meetings by phone. Needless to say, her contributions are greatly appreciated.

Marie Terese grew up in southern New Jersey, attended the University of Minnesota, and now lives in Pennsylvania where she has spent her career as a litigation paralegal, working on large lawsuits in both the States and Canada. You may wonder why someone living across the border would be interested in helping folks at a little museum in a little town like Antigonish. You guessed it! Marie Terese has roots here in Antigonish – many, many roots.

Marie Terese credits her mother for her love of our local history and genealogy. *“When I was a little girl, my mother (who was a Bogainn McDonald) began to compile our family history as she believed it was important for a family to know their roots. She could see that we were losing the family stories of our ancestors with each additional generation living further from Nova Scotia. There had been a storyteller in every generation of our family and my mother would eventually become her generation’s historian.*

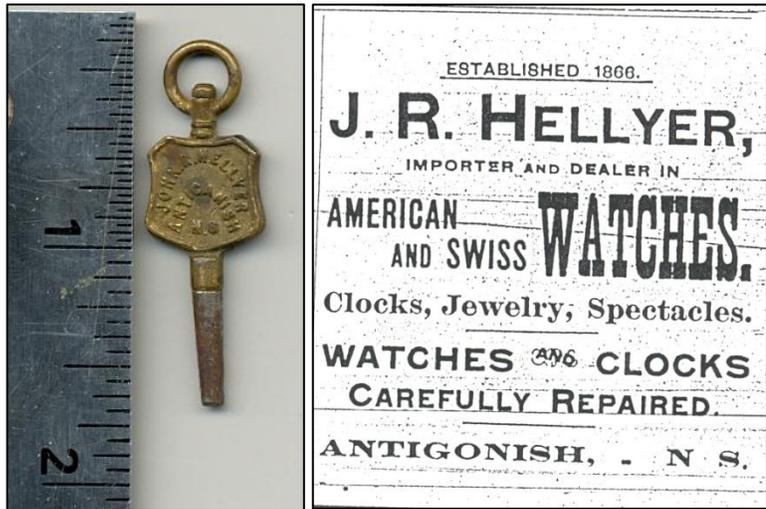
“She found a way to give her children a piece of their heritage with violin and dance lessons in a locality where Scottish cultural opportunities rarely existed. The sound of the fiddle and the pipers could always be heard at our grandparent’s house. She always hoped that one of her children would become interested enough in the family history to complete the work she had begun.

“She and her sister visited the museum in the first year it opened and they were thrilled that there would now be a center to keep the County’s history alive. My mother made many summer trips to Antigonish with her father, mother or her sister, tracking down information on the various families that make up our family. One summer, my sister and I came with our mother to experience Antigonish and Cape Breton as well as PEI. It was during this trip that I had my first genealogy find when I located my great great great grandfather Bogainn MacDonald’s obituary in an 1860 edition of The Casket and you could say the rest is history.

“After every summer genealogy trip, my mother would return to the States with additional books to scour for information. As we entered the computer age and as time permitted, I was able to assist her with further research. When age prevented her from visiting Nova Scotia and writing the numerous letters she posted each year, email became her new tool. Over time I would take on the adventure of completing her legacy as she had always wished.”

Recent Acquisitions

Laurie Stanley-Blackwell brought in a tiny key used for winding watches at the Watchmaker and Jewelry Store that once operated on Main Street (roughly where The Plum Tree Gift Shoppe is located today) by John Reval Hellyer. Hellyer came from St. John's, Newfoundland in about 1866 when he established his business in town. He lived with the Jocelin/Jocelyn family who ran the gaol/jail and took in boarders. In 1872, he married Annie Bridge Christie of Antigonish. They had two daughters, Linda and Stella. John Hellyer died in June of 1922.



- **Barbara MacNeil, Antigonish**, donated an unusual hook (whose use is unknown at this time), a net needle carved by Albert Livingstone, and a religious triptych.
- **Helen Layes of town** dropped off some old *Caskets* for our perusal.
- **Margaret LeBlanc, Heatherton**, provided copies of some old photographs.
- **Roderick Landry of Antigonish**, donated a portrait of local blacksmith, Roderick MacDonald.

Thank You

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Annual Memorial Culloden Event

Saturday, April 16, 2016 <http://www.culloden.ca>

KOC Fundraiser for CARE (Canadians Accepting Refugees Everywhere)

John Paul Centre: April 15 from 4-6pm
Shepherds Pie, Salad, Dessert, Tea/Coffee: \$15.00 (Take-out Available)

Heritage Association of Antigonish

Patrons Program

- Gold Patron: **Irene Brown**

Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish

(Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)

At the end of this month I will have completed six years as Chair for the Heritage Association of Antigonish. Over this time period we have seen the Association grow to become an important advocate for promoting and preserving our shared history. As with any leadership role, I think it is time for a change. I am hoping that some of our readers will take the decision to become active with the Board of Directors for the Heritage Association of Antigonish. Please contact the undersigned if you are interested!

The grant from Heritage Canada continues to be used to support the Antigonish Heritage Museum. The new isolation and cleaning station has been constructed and is a welcome addition to support the work at Museum.

Recently, I had the pleasure to present a check in the amount of five hundred dollars to Bill McVicar who is responsible for the ongoing maintenance and repairs of the Culloden Cairn located at Knoydart on behalf of the Heritage Association of Antigonish. Bill and their Committee host the public for an annual memorial service and dinner. This year the event takes place on April 16, 2016. Please see link below for details and please plan to attend! <http://www.culloden.ca>



Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

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

THE CLAN'S CORNER

The Clan MacGillivray Association of Canada

TAKE NOTICE that the Clan MacGillivray Family Convention will be held within the Robertson Room, Culloden Battlefield by Inverness, Scotland on Friday 15th April 2016 commencing at 4 pm for the purpose of nominating a Clan Commander. That nomination will then require to be approved by the Lord Lyon King of Arms of Scotland.



Those wishing to be considered for the position or those wishing to attend should immediately contact Elizabeth N McGillivray, Secretary of the Clan MacGillivray International Association, Bowmans, Solicitors, 27 Bank Street Dundee DD1 1RP or email her at enm@bowmansolicitors.co.uk so that she can provide further information.

Please visit the Clan MacGillivray Association of Canada for further details:
<http://clanmacgillivraycanada.com/clan-commander/>

Happy Easter! Happy Spring!



This card is from a collection donated by Edna Cunningham, long time resident of Church Street. It is dated 1909 but there is no message.