



The Old Train Station News

Newsletter # 98

October 2017

My Dear Friends,

It has been a busy summer with many guests, from near and far, being welcomed to our door here at the Museum. With the parking lot paved and new plantings of flowers and shrubs, we have brightened our outside space. It gives us great pleasure to welcome guests who have arrived for a variety of reasons; to learn more about our area, to do some family research and often to inquire about donating a treasured possession.

Now we all have “treasured possessions.” I have a few myself which my children may not be interested in inheriting. I have an old spinning wheel circa 1830s. Some parts look like petrified wood, it is unsigned but family lore says it was made by a family member who was a “turner”, it has had parts replaced and is no longer in usable condition. Would this be a suitable donation? It meets many of the requirements: it is old, it has provenance (a line of possession), it is local and it has a story. Sounds pretty good but the condition is terrible and it is not unique. The Museum has a fine example of a spinning wheel so I need to find a suitable home for mine, when the time comes. So, do you have a “treasured possession” and wonder if it might find a home at the Museum? As long as it is not a large piece of furniture, get in touch with Jocelyn and discuss whether it is the right fit.

Oh, you must come and see some of the wonderful new acquisitions that have found a home here over the past few months. With so many, it is difficult to properly acknowledge the generous donors, but please know we appreciate every one of you. And your gifts, either an acquisition or a monetary gift, help to build our legacy. We will, from time to time, highlight a few of those. They say a picture is worth a thousand words but seeing it in person is priceless, so drop by so you can view a piece of our past.

Michael Trainer brought in a collection of articles, written by his mother, **Dorothy Trainer**, about his grandfather, Michael Peter “M.P.” MacKinnon. He was considered one of the pioneers in the telephone business. “M.P.” (1876-1968) was born in East Bay, Cape Breton and went to work as a lineman for New England T & T in 1897. He returned home in 1901 and set up service in Glace Bay the following year. He moved to Amherst and then to Antigonish in 1911 and refused to move again. He retired in 1946, after 49 years in the telephone business. This is a wonderful account of the early days of bringing phone service to local communities.

Many of our recently acquired photos have been posted on our Facebook page for your enjoyment.

However, some interesting family photos were received from **Helga Mikkleson Beerman** whose grandparents, M.P. and Helga (Neilson) Mikkleson came from Mols, Denmark in 1929. He had an eclectic mix of occupations, being a dairy and fox farmer on Church Street Extension, an agent for farm machinery, and owned M.P. Mikkleson Deli on Main Street in Antigonish. They had three children; Eleanor, Henning “Henny the Dane”, and an adopted son, Harry. This is a great reminder of an immigrant business that might easily be overlooked.



An extensive but well-preserved collection of family artifacts were donated by **Martha Brown** of Lochaber, Antigonish County. Her grandfather, John Brown established an apple orchard on the family farm and won 1st Prize for his “variety of apples” collection in 1903 and 1905 at the Nova Scotia Exhibition. The farm, pictured here, was probably drawn by John’s brother, William, who was quite artistic. The family farm later went to John’s oldest son, William. During the depression, Martha’s father, John James (1898-1978), took the Harvest Train west and worked in the mines in Timmons. He ended up in Detroit where he took a course in tree pruning. For a number of years he worked as a tree surgeon for the City of Detroit. When he returned home to Lochaber, he purchased the adjoining farm and was instrumental in the formation of the Lochaber Strawberry Exchange Co-operative.



Our most unusual donation this summer was a carved folk-art lobster carved by amateur folk artist Robert Robertson from Pictou County. It belonged to the grandmother of our summer student, **Jasmine Cormier**. The lobster will find its home on our heritage lobster trap.

This is just a small selection of the wide variety of artifacts that have been donated this summer. We have been delighted to add them to our collection to be enjoyed by future generations. Remember to drop by and look around; you never know what treasure you’ll see.

Until next time,

*The Epistolarian**

*An epistolarian is a writer of letters which are directed to a group of people to provide insight into its efforts to promote and preserve an understanding of the culture of Antigonish Town and County.

Upcoming speakers and Events:

Nov 2 nd – 7pm	Overcoming Genealogical Research Obstacles by Marie Redican
Nov 4 th – 2pm	Historic Maps of Antigonish County by Simon Aucoin
Nov 25 th – TBA	Arts Health Antigonish Performance
Dec 3 rd – 2 – 4pm	Christmas Open House – Seasonal Entertainment/Light Refreshments

Sam Gero: Local Baseball Personality

The World Series is the focus for the baseball world and the dream of every young man who loves the sport and has shown some talent for the game. During the late 1940's and 50's, the calibre of ball played in Nova Scotia was very high. As an added bonus, players were also paid during this era.

Sam Gero, well known Antigonish personality, stopped by the Museum recently for a visit. We took the opportunity to ask him a few questions about his ball career. Sam, born at Amherst August 31st 1930, was the son of Ella (nee Cook) and Charlie Gero. He also had one sister Jennie, who married Robert Lee of New Glasgow. An athlete all his life, Sam had a particular facility on the ball diamond. He played Senior Ball with the Amherst Blue Jays, Memramcook Dodgers, Moncton Keith Cubs, and the St. John Dodgers throughout the late forties and fifties.



In 1950, Sam went to play with the Montreal Royals, farm team of the Brooklyn Dodgers. His experience there gave him the opportunity to sign a seven game tryout with the Brooklyn Dodgers. During his time there, he happened to meet **Jackie Robinson** who would go on to establish a career of great renown. It was a tough experience for Sam – the racial taunts were unrelenting.. He had high expectations of himself and his play and was greatly disappointed. After the tryout, Sam was discouraged

with this experience and returned to Nova Scotia on the train.

For one season, he played ball with the Sydney team and while there, he met Bob Brassett, an Antigonish native who was also playing senior ball in that city. Both players were looking for a change and Bob invited Sam to Antigonish to meet D. G. MacIsaac, coach of the Antigonish Bulldogs Baseball team. Sam signed with Antigonish in 1960. It was a competitive league with teams located in New Glasgow, Truro, Westville and Stellarton. Exhibition games were played at other locations, including Port Hood. Teammates included Billy MacVicar, Red Kennedy, Donnie MacNeil, Les MacIntyre, Jimmy MacIntyre,



Lauchie MacIsaac, Jimmy Hedges MacDonald, George Tellum, Andre Desjardins, and Billy MacPherson (Hollywood Bill). The management team included D.G. MacIsaac, George Grant and Frank McGibbon. All home games were played at Columbus Field and the team proved successful for many years.

During his first season in Antigonish, Sam attended a carnival where members of the work crew were from the Amherst area, Sam's hometown. An encounter at the carnival with Norm Phee resulted in an invitation to the Phee home. There, Sam was introduced to Norm's niece, Mary Ann. Sam was smitten. They were soon a couple that shared a love of baseball; Mary Ann too was a former member of a local women's ball team. Sam and Mary Ann had a family of four—two boys and two girls.

His work career was with the Eastern Automobile Company on Main Street. He did not give up baseball altogether, he continued to officiate at Little League ball tournaments particularly in the Amherst area. Many will remember Sam's face at the Antigonish Arena where he was a referee for many of the Bulldog games. After baseball he moved to fastball, softball and then lob ball. At age 79 he recalls being on the field in Pomquet and players from both teams taking a 'time out' to celebrate his birthday with cake and a candle, a fond memory. He left his ball career soon after that.

Today Sam is widowed and living in retirement at the Orchard Villa. He enjoys visits from his children and many grandchildren!

For Sale at the Museum:

- 1) "Heatherton Parish" by Rick Grace - \$20 – proceeds to Heatherton parish
- 2) "Glenalladale Settlers 1772 to P.E.I." by Nora MacDonald - \$20 – a few copies available
- 3) "Dr. John Hugh Gillis" by Sr. Loretta Gillis - \$10 - proceeds to bursary fund

Roderick Donald Fraser 1876 – 1946

Roderick D. Fraser was the son of Malcolm and Sarah (MacLean) Fraser of Antigonish. At an early age, he became associated with the Antigonish County business community. For a number of years, he managed cheese factories in different districts for L. C. Archibald and in Cape Breton for other interests. With the decline of the cheese industry, Mr. Fraser became a key employee of Thomas Somers, general merchant.

Branching out for himself, he successfully operated a local grocery, flour, feed and livestock business for a number of years until, in 1929, he sold his interests to John L. and Alexander J. MacDonald. For over twenty years, Mr. Fraser also served the town as an assessor and reviser of the civic electoral list.

In 1903, he married Margaret Ann MacNeil of Mabou and they had five sons and five daughters. Two of their sons, Joseph R. and Foch were operators of the Antigonish Meat Market. Foch's grandson, **Sandy Fraser** of Halifax donated a churn, beadle and darning egg to the Museum this summer.

Roderick was well-known and highly respected in the area. His many friends and acquaintances remember his ready wit and humorous stories.



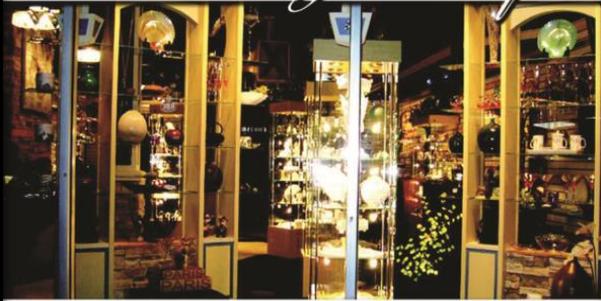
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Author Unknown