



The Old Train Station News

Newsletter # 100

February 2018

Dear Friends,

I do love the changing of the seasons but I'm not a great fan of winter. Perhaps it is because I've had my fingers and toes frost bitten – coming home from school and sitting with my feet propped up on the oven door of the wood stove and my hands tucked under my armpits waiting for the feeling to return.



In some ways, you felt you were not so far removed from the pioneers if you lived in an older home in the country during the 1940s and 1950s. We had a mud and stone cellar, a cistern and a wood furnace. The furnace was a big improvement over the central fireplace that was also the place where the cooking happened for our pioneers. They would have been happy to have the cistern rather than making a trip to the brook to break the ice or to the dug well. In her "Memories", Catherine (MacMillan) McCallam, recalled as a child in Antigonish just after the first war, *"We had no running water or electricity. I'd carry two buckets of water at a time up thirteen steps . . . except on wash days when I had to make five or six trips. We used a tub and glass washboard to scrub the clothes."* We considered ourselves lucky to have an indoor pump from which we could fill the tank on the stove for our hot water. It was a job keeping that full and there would be "hell to pay" if you forgot that chore. Many people, including us, didn't have indoor bathrooms and were faced with making that cold journey to the outhouse at record speed. No waiting around to read the Simpson's catalogue before you crumpled the pages between your hands to soften the sheets.



The pioneers worked very hard for most of the year. But, once winter settled in, it was time to take a bit of a break. For women, the only respite was from the outdoor chores. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, mending, spinning, weaving and child-bearing remained. Everything was made at home and very little was purchased. When it was, it was frequently done on the barter system. Too often, Mary had to take her eggs or cheese to the general store to pay for ribbon or the account for rum. Many shop keepers got wealthy from taking the farm to pay these accounts.



But despite the hardship the winter, from December though February, was the time for visiting. It was also the most common time for weddings (often lasting several days). The early pioneer homes were some distance apart and they carried a firebrand (later a kerosene lantern) to light their way. These get-togethers were mostly a time to keep others company, tell ghost stories, folklore, gossip, and enjoy some music, food, and dancing. It was not unusual to have some fun by playing a prank on an unsuspecting visitor. *"Angus MacInnis "Winter" (1819-1866) was visiting a neighbour one cold, frosty day complaining that his feet were cold. While having a cup of tea and warming his feet by the fire, his hospitable host took his shoes and added a good dose of itching powder. When ready to go, Angus quickly laced up his shoes and was off. It wasn't long before he had them off, scratching for all his worth. Before long he was running barefoot through the snow with his shoes and socks in his hands."*

Visiting carried a sense of obligation to return the visit at the earliest opportunity. The generosity of the welcome and participation in the visits was a mark of Highland hospitality.



Children played indoor games when the weather was bad, but they looked forward to getting outside into the fresh air (bet the parents did too) with family and friends. Each community had its own favourite spot for winter activities – Fran Nunn indicated *that the Radio Station Hill, in Antigonish had the best coasting; skating was on the salt ponds* (where the shopping mall is today). Margie Linkletter tells us *that the MacMillan hill at Livingstone’s Cove provided hours of coasting fun for siblings and neighbours*. Sharon Chisholm shared enthusiasm for *Bishop’s Bowl sledding and skiing*. Mary Helen Falt recalled, in the 1920s, *“if sledding was good, Taylors or*

Edgar Whidden would have a party. Each of us would be picked up at our homes for a hay ride. It was fun to snuggle down under the blankets. Usually, we sang good and loud, and after a long drive, finish up at the home of the host for a baked bean feed with hot chocolate, or maybe sandwiches and cake before being driven home.”



Out at St. Josephs, the best hill for sledding was at Donald MacLean’s farm and John R. MacInnis wrote of playing the great hockey match between St. Joseph’s and Cross Roads Ohio Schools around 1904. This was played on a 100 x 400 foot cleared section of icy swamp on Charles D. MacLean’s Farm near the border between the two communities. Skating had special challenges as he writes, *“A number of boys had no skates, but that did not keep them off the team. Those who had shoes for weekday use drove nails in the soles. Those with larrigans were denied the use of nails, but they had a technique of their own for quick stops and starts. The rest scampered over the ice in the popular socks known as “mogans”. While everyone was fresh the game was snappy, and the play shuttled up and down the rink. It was a good thing the puck was just a hardwood block, for very often it was driven into the open water at the sluice. Recovering it was a difficult piece of work, and before the game was over practically everyone had got a ducking, except the fellows with the “mogans”. These were like cats with their agility and also in their dislike of getting their feet wet.”* His description of this game certainly illustrates the ingenuity of young boys to fashion hockey equipment out of “whatever could be found”.



Times have certainly changed and many of us, of a certain age, wonder what the future brings. What will future generations remember about winter activities? Are we, who can still remember how we spent winters, telling our own stories for posterity?

The Epistolarion

In March we will have a display on the Dutch immigrants to Antigonish – make a note to attend

February is Black History Month

“The angel is in some way related to humankind, with our shape and our appetites. But angels lack our faults and our weaknesses; no spots, blemishes, not even the problems associated with gender. In practice, therefore, the representation of the angel should simply be the person each of us would like to be in our dreams.” – Trevor Phillips

In honour of Black History Month, the Museum will feature a collection of Black Angels from well-known local collector, **Joan Phee**. Joan has been collecting this wide variety of black angels for more than twenty years. Make sure to take in this opportunity to view this unique collection.

Opening: Feb. 2, 2018 Time: 2:00pm

“My Guardian Angel” - On display until March 2nd



The Origins of Valentine's Day



In pagan times, a brutal celebration known as Lupercalia (too distasteful to describe) included a matchmaking lottery, in which young men drew the names of women from a jar and they would be coupled for the duration of the festival (or longer if it worked out.)

In ancient Rome, the Emperor Claudius II executed two men named Valentine on February 14th in different years during the 3rd century. Their martyrdom was honoured by the Catholic Church with the celebration of St. Valentine's Day. In the 5th century, Pope Gelasius combined some of the pagan rituals with St Valentine's Day to “Christianize” the pagan aspects of the celebration. St. Valentine became the patron saint of lovers for his stand against the Emperor on marriage.

Chaucer and Shakespeare romanticized Valentine's Day and, by the Middle Ages, handmade paper cards became the tokens of love in Europe. The tradition was brought to North America and factory-made cards were introduced in the late 1800s and Hallmark began mass producing Valentine Cards in 1913. As for our modern-day celebrations, the “credit card” sets the limit – jewelry, wine, fancy dinners, exotic trips, chocolates – the sky's the limit.

Hmmm, if we only knew the history of the name Valentine Chisholm?



Would anyone be interested in a “Writing Your Story” group? If so, contact Jocelyn.

Our Thanks to the Patrons of the Antigonish Heritage Association

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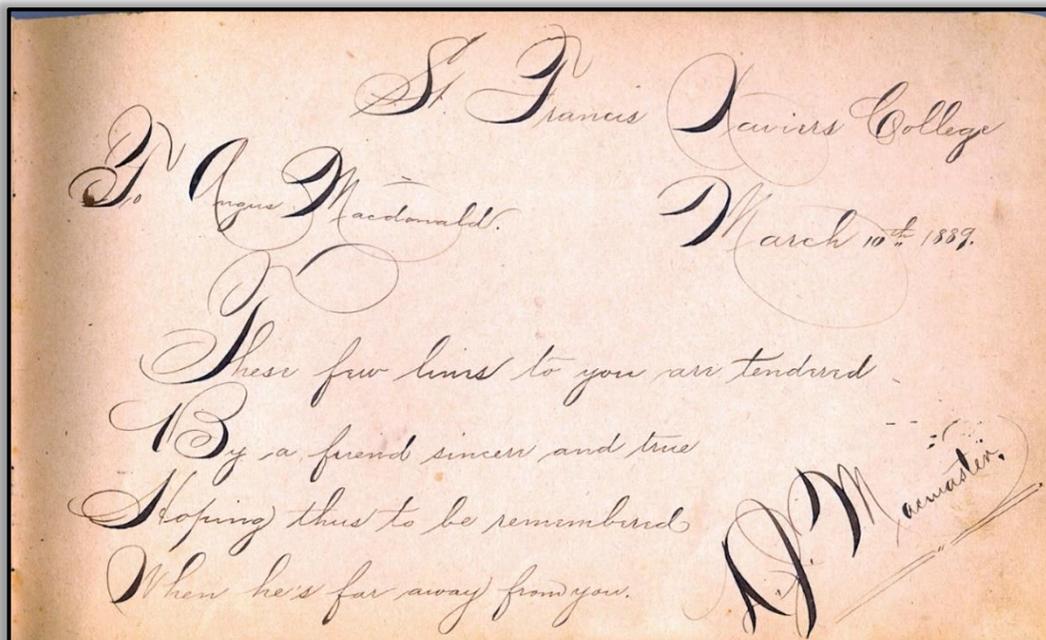
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In Memory of Bernadette Brow from

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- Eleanor Grant and Grant families



This page taken from a book of autographs written for Angus MacDonald of Cape Breton at his graduation on March 10th, 1889 from St. Francis College is reminiscent of the kind of messages that might have been sent in early Valentine Cards.

The Museum Wish List



1. We are looking for a photo of **Holy Kate** who sold religious articles. She was the daughter of Ronald "Breac" MacDonald of Cloverville.
2. We are looking for a picture of "**the tallest building in Antigonish**" which was located where the Oak Manor is located today – directly across from City Hall. The time period would be prior to the Stewart Building in 1937.

An in-law is someone who has married into your family;
an outlaw is an in-law who resists letting you do their genealogy!