



# The Old Train Station News

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**Newsletter # 105**

**September 2018**

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Dear Friends,

September is “Back to School” and time for new beginnings. Life gets back to order! And I, turn my mind back to beginning a new season of the Newsletter. I began by reflecting back on my own experience of school – the one-room schoolhouse – the two-room schoolhouse – the large modern high school (now gone). Later on, being a parent and moving from province to province, I experienced the latest, greatest innovations from new math, non-grading systems to windowless classrooms and open classrooms. In a recent article, Zack Churchill said that getting 4-year-olds into the classrooms has the most potential to improve future student performance than any other initiative (been there, did that too).

I began to wonder where it all started. Our records of very early formal education are almost non-existent, but we do know that most educators were clergymen. The Church (of all faiths) saw education as a way to ensure children were brought up in their faith and instilled with moral values. Along with that a rudimentary education in reading, writing and arithmetic was all that most rural children required. We know that Fr. Antoine Gaulin was a missionary to the Mi’kmaq from 1698 to 1732 here at Antigonish and we can only guess at what he may have achieved during this period. Also, the Church of England maintained a school in Tracadie between 1788 and 1792 for the education of Black children. Thomas Brownspriggs taught 23 Black children for a salary of £10 per year. It was reported the students were much improved having been previously reported as being “exceedingly indolent” and in “very wretched” condition. In an 1805 deed, the trustees of St James Church received land for a church, schoolhouse and cemetery on Main Street. It is not clear when the school was built but Rev. Trotter taught there about 1818. There may have also been a school at Town Point in 1814 and at South River in 1812.

In an Act of 1776 teachers had to be certified by an examination by a local clergyman and 2 Justices of the Peace along with a statement of character from 6 members of the community. Pioneer schools were organized by the clergy and a group of parents and children were taught in vacant buildings, homes or wherever space was available. These efforts were supported by subscribers – parents who wanted their children to acquire some education and were willing and able to pay for it.

It is not until 1829 that we get a picture of the situation in Antigonish County with the School Returns for that year. The school return lists the 30 schools in the county and students enrolled and lists the parent(s). This was no small accomplishment as children of local farming families were part of the farm work force, required to work alongside their parents to support the family. While winter was not as demanding for farm chores, the reality of winter storms could keep children out of school for days.

While small changes in education were made prior to 1864, information gained from the 1861 census of the province painted a sorry picture of the state of education. Only about one third of the children between ages 5 – 15 were in school. The Province was mostly rural with farmers and farm families making up the majority of the population. It was apparent to Joseph Howe and Premier Tupper that the economic growth

### Educational Dates

Charnisay's School at Port Royal	1645
Watt's S.P.G. School at Annapolis	1728
Soeurs de la Congregation at Louisburg	1733
Organized School System under S.P.G.	1749
Edward Holland, 1 <sup>st</sup> lay teacher	1750
School for the Poor at Halifax	1753
First Private Schools	1760
First Education Act	1766
First Grammar School	1780
King's College founded	1789
School Act throughout N.S.	1794
1 <sup>st</sup> Education Money Grant from Province	1811
Pictou Academy founded	1816
Dalhousie College founded	1818
1 <sup>st</sup> School Statistics published	1825
1 <sup>st</sup> provision for poor districts	1826
1 <sup>st</sup> female teachers authorized	1838
Acadia College founded	1838
St Mary's College founded	1841
1 <sup>st</sup> Act for educating Indians	1842
1 <sup>st</sup> Superintendent of Education	1850
School for the Deaf and Dumb founded	1851
St Francis Xavier College founded	1853
Normal School established	1854
Compulsory Assessment Act	1865
1 <sup>st</sup> Reformatory established	1865
School for the Blind founded	1867
School of Art and Design established	1887
College of Agriculture founded	1899
Manual Training Schools established	1900
Technical College founded	1907
Rural Science School established	1909

of the Province depended on the education of the population. Drastic steps had to be taken and they looked to other places (Europe, United States and Upper Canada) for advice and direction. In Halifax

“When the Board assumed charge of the schools in Halifax in November 1865, they found 700 children under the management of twenty-five teachers, and the schools supported by tuition fees from parents, or churches, or societies interested in education. In his report on 48 November 30, 1866, the Chairman of the Board stated that after investigation he had found the nine schools in the city capable of accommodating only about 2,000 pupils, so that twelve buildings with ninety-one rooms large enough to seat fifty-six pupils in each were needed to educate the 5,000 children who should be attending school.”

(where decisions are made), it was determined that four of the Halifax schools (St Mary's, St Patrick's Boys & Girl's Schools, Convent School) in operation were run by the Catholic Church and staffed by priests, nuns and Catholic lay persons.

After considerable discussion, the Bishop was assured that the hard won right to Catholic education would not be undermined, and room was made available for an integrated school system. Thus, the **first public education system in Canada came into being in Nova Scotia.**

The question of paying for student education was a bigger “hot potato”. The Free School Act of 1864 was

just that – Free! We all know nothing is free! It was not until a year later that the Compulsory Assessment Act was passed. There were demonstrations, riots, and schools burned but to no avail and eventually assessment was gradually accepted for the betterment of all.

While compulsory attendance was strongly argued by R.B. Smith, “*There are seasons in the year when it is impossible for the poor man's child to attend school. However, in the summer term exempting two weeks at seedtime; four at haying time and Harvest; and a week for potato digging, the remainder of the time might be made compulsory.*” However, compulsory attendance was not enacted until 1883. A look at the Antigonish Town Minutes indicates that it was seldom enforced into the 1930's.

The education system continued to evolve, as it still does today. There is no right answer, only experimentation but we have come a very long way. As I write this I acknowledge I am just skimming the surface and hope this inspires you to dig a little deeper.

*Inspector Macdonald M.S. visited the school Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> 1916. (9 pupils present).*

### Antigonish County School Inspectors

Roderick "Rory Denoon" MacDonald	1864 – 1868
Angus MacIsaac	1868 – 1879
Roderick "Rory Denoon" MacDonald	1879 – 1885
A.G. MacDonald	1885 – 1891
William MacIsaac	1891 – 1900
John D. Copeland (Acting)	1900
A.G. MacDonald	1900 – 1924
A.B. MacDonald	1925 – 1929
H.M. MacDonald	1930 – 1960

### West Lochaber

Inspector's visit

School Bell



### Things are always changing – drop by for a visit

In Honor of

#### AT THE MUSEUM

**Sept. 17<sup>th</sup>**, 7pm: Guest Speaker: **Theresa MacIsaac** on the "Early Settlement of the Arisaig District" - Social conditions of the people during the settlement period

**Sept. 26<sup>th</sup>**, 7pm: Guest: **Annette Assad** Topic: "Les Filles du Roi - The King's Daughters" - During the 17<sup>th</sup> Century there was an initiative to bring young women to New France to be marriage partners, have babies thereby strengthening and developing the population.

**Oct. 14<sup>th</sup>**, 2pm: Guest Presenter: **Barry Shears** Topic: Play It Like You Sing It: The Shears Collection of Bagpipe Culture and Dance Music from Nova Scotia

All are welcome, refreshments will be served

#### From our Displays:

**Textiles** donated by Christina (MacDonald) Smith, formerly of South Side Harbour. Weaving done by her great grandmother c. 1850s Mary MacDonald, Frasers Mills; a second piece from Christina unidentified, similar time period, also from the MacDonald home. Another of the woven pieces was from late Dr. John B. Stewart; weaving done by Catherine MacGregor c. 1885 Upper Springfield. Grain sack mid 1850s

#### Up-Coming:

**Repasts of the Past** Traditional foods; recipes; and cooking implements.

#### Grandma's Apron

Grandma wore an ample apron to cover her clean dress. She'd tell you what it was for if you asked her, I would guess.

But that apron had more uses than I could even count. It brought in eggs and vegetables and could hold a large amount.

I've seen her use that apron to wipe her dripping brow as she labored over the big range that's just an antique now.

Her apron could bring giggles in a game of peek-a-boo with her newest, sweet grandbaby as she hid her face from view.

When the kids were hurt or crying they'd run to find her lap. She'd the falling tears away with a bit of apron flap.

That apron dusted tables and shoed away the flies. It did just fine as oven mitts To take out bubbling pies.

But the greatest of the treasures That old apron could hold Was the endless love abiding in each fold.



### **Antigonish Brass Band**

Allan “Denoon” MacDonald, Antigonish merchant and resident of Jimtown was a locally well-known and noteworthy musician. In 1874 he opened a general store and music store in Antigonish. It was his love of music that led to the development of a small band of musicians, known as the Antigonish Band. They played at several venues and regular concerts at MacDonald Hall in the late 1870s. One such concert presented soloists, Mrs. W.H. MacDonald, Miss Grant and Mr. Walker.

In the 1880s, they were known as the Antigonish Brass Band and had been able to acquire some more instruments. There were calls for the band to play at events outside the area, particularly in Cape Breton. They played at a picnic in Baddeck in aid of St. Michael’s Church and at home, in the square in front of the new Post Office in honour of their former Bandmaster, Henderson. Another highlight was playing at the 1884 Leap Year Skate.

Having increased membership and engaged a teacher, the 1890s saw a big leap forward for the band now known as the Citizen’s Band Dramatic Company. They continued to travel, playing in Margaree, Mabou and St. Peters as well as a summer concert series and with the Cathedral Choir in Antigonish. W.G. Cunningham provided his “Tally-Ho” and 4 horses for a serenade through the streets of Antigonish. With the addition of the dramatic club, they put together full evenings of entertainment with music, singing and vaudeville-style performances which were held in high regard. Among those given mention for their work with the company in 1898 were Misses N. Floyd, N. Gray and M. MacDonald and J.H. MacDonald, Miss Florence Chisholm, Dr. Scott Newcombe, Mr. Grant and Mr. Dan MacDonald. Alex MacDonald was the President and James McCarroll was treasurer.

Sadly, out-migration was taking its toll and among their members that the Band saw off at the station were James McCarroll, Mardell Falt, Lionel Power, Hugh Chisholm and Hugh MacPherson. Allan “Denoon” could look back at many wonderful years of music and entertainment that came from his idea of opening a music store in Antigonish. His final farewell came on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1913.

