

# The Old Train Station News

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Newsletter #33

November 2011

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The shorter days and the longer nights have set me thinking about that old custom of storytelling that was once so much a part of the local entertainment. Before the advent of modern technology and all of its distractions and diversions, people visited one another on a regular basis, especially on those long winter nights. As far back as 1914, *Drummer on Foot* was already talking about those “good neighbourly visits” or the ceilidhs that were customary in the “olden days”. Back then, the only entertainment was the friendly interaction and conversation that took place during these visits. “It was nothing for one to visit another at night and travel several miles through the woods for that purpose. The other was then bound to return the visit, without fail, as soon as possible.” Visitors would come calling, lighting their way with a firebrand or, later, a lantern.

Just the anticipation of someone coming to visit must have been exhilarating. Imagine, then, the excitement when they’d see their guest coming from still a long way off. Oh boy! What was he bringing? Stories, of course, and news! One can easily imagine the atmosphere in the room as they awaited his arrival. The visitor would hardly need to knock. The door would be flung open and he would be welcomed in out of the inclement weather and escorted to the fire. Would he take his boots off first? Not a chance! The puddles on the floor would go entirely unnoticed. The host would take his coat, which was probably wet, and hang it up to dry. “Come in. Come in. Come in by the fire!” Seated comfortably by the hearth or the stove, on the best seat available, the guest would then remove his boots, which were, no doubt, wet too. Then with his feet up near the fire, he might pack and light his pipe and gently puff a few puffs. All would wait with breath, anxious for him to speak. Another puff or two and the storytelling would begin.

“Why all the fuss?” you may ask. To comprehend this scenario, you must understand the customs and social conditions of the time. Many of the early settlers were illiterate; however, as one historian put it, they were certainly not ignorant. Formal education was not widespread but these early Scots had an oral culture that taught them their history, ancestry, literature, folklore and culture. Everything was passed on by word of mouth. Without written historical records, these people were still able to preserve knowledge that would otherwise have been lost and thus they kept their culture alive.

In the oral tradition of the Scottish Highlands, the local *seanachaidh* or story-teller was the keeper of the clan’s oral history, traditions and laws and it was through his efforts that their culture was passed on from one generation to the next. This same oral tradition was brought over with the early

settlers and, here, the *seanachaidh* continued to play that significant role of clan historian, genealogist and, especially, story-teller. Since it was in the form of storytelling, this practice was popular recreation. Yet, tales of wee folk and the supernatural provided our early settlers as much enjoyment as the tales of long, long ago. In time, education was enforced and books gradually became a new source of recreation and knowledge. Each century brought change. In her 1930s book, *Folklore of Nova Scotia*, Mary L. Fraser lamented the disappearance of the ceilidh and that old custom of storytelling, placing the blame on the automobile, the telephone and the radio. Little did she know what forms of entertainment would follow! Still, she comforted herself with the fact that there were yet a few secluded spots unspoiled by modern inventions where the visions and dreams of the Celts lived on.



**Betty Wadlin MacDonald**

While that old custom of storytelling has clearly been replaced by countless mediums of entertainment, there are *still* a few of the old storytellers around. Meet “Grandma” Betty Wadlin MacDonald of Doctors Brook. Some of you may recognize her from her contributions to *The Casket’s* “County Chronicle” but folks along the shore at Malignant Cove, Doctor’s Brook and Arisaig know her as a spirited lady with a vivid imagination, a wonderful memory and a lot of spunk. “I’ve got lots of stories for you,” she told me on the phone. True to her word, Betty entertained with tales of ghosts, pranks and forerunners – all infused with a smattering of local history.

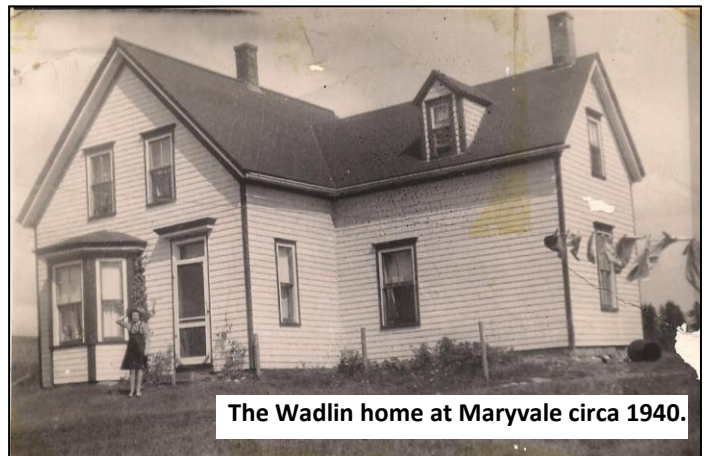
To set the tone for her stories, Betty reminded me that when she was growing up in the thirties and forties, folks had no television and so, for entertainment, they told stories, played cards and visited their neighbours. Betty still recalls Father Ross coming to visit the Wadlin home, right next to the church at Maryvale. Father Ross had served in the Diocese of Calgary until 1938 when he returned back to the old homestead in Maryvale to live out his retirement. When he’d drop by in the evenings, Betty’s mother would send the three little girls off to bed. Not to be outdone, Rita, Vera and Betty would simply park themselves next to the grate in the upstairs floor and listen to his stories of ghosts, devils and forerunners. Little wonder Betty has a steady supply of stories!

As in some of the popular folklore of the day, the devil appeared in Father Ross’ stories too. Back then, it was believed that “Lucifer” would take the bodily shape of a man, a baby or, more often than not, that of an animal, to do his work more effectively. One story Father Ross used to tell was of a time when he was heading out to administer the last rights to a scoundrel of sorts who lay on his deathbed. On the way, Father Ross met up with a dog that then proceeded to weave in and out through the spokes of the wheels of his wagon, obviously in an effort to delay the priest’s travels. (Betty can still see Father Ross describing the dog’s movements – in and out through the spokes.) Thankfully, the priest got to the poor wretch just in time to save his soul. But enough of Father Ross!

Betty’s mother’s people came from up the mountain at Rear Arisaig. When the family moved to Maryvale, they took not just their belongings but also the lumber for a new floor for the living room. This was long before roads were paved and when everyone travelled by horse and wagon. It was a dark, misty night when Betty’s father, Ernest Wadlin, travelled down the mountain towards Pleasant Valley

and then on to Maryvale with the load of lumber. Johnny Gillis, his helper, was sitting on the back of the wagon. Both men had their coats wrapped up around their necks in an effort to keep dry and warm while the horses picked their way down the mountain. The animals knew the route and they also knew where to stop for a drink of water. Carefully, they'd step down to the brook and then, when their thirst was quenched, they'd keep through the brook and up on to the other side. This time, however, the horses stopped dead in their tracks. Ernest grabbed the reins to control the horses when suddenly he spied someone standing on the road right by the brook. "Hey, there!" he cried out. "What do you want?" But then, just as quickly, there was no one there. Johnny Gillis reprimanded his friend. "Never say that! Say, *In the name of God*, what do you want?" It wasn't long afterwards that they realized that this had been a forerunner. Some chap had been travelling, "drunk as a lord", from town back up to the shore when his horses stopped at the brook for a drink. That's when the tippler lost his balance and fell into the water. The horses continued on their merry way and arrived home without their master. Without delay, folks went out to search for the old sot and, needless to say, found him drowned in the brook. "And that, of course, was the ghost my father saw right there near the brook that night."

Betty's family moved to Maryvale when she was just two. "Why did you move?" I asked her. "We had to move to civilization! We lived up on the mountain. There was an awful road up to the house with a fifty foot drop. Our mother wanted us to go to school. That's why we moved!" The new house at Maryvale was somewhat derelict and needed repairs and so the walls were plastered and the wood from the mountain provided them with a lovely new hardwood floor. In no time, this was home.



The Wadlin home at Maryvale circa 1940.

Shortly after they moved in, there was a knock on the front door. They went to answer the door but no one was there. Then there was a knock on the back door and, again, there was no one there. Once more there was a knock on the front door. When no one was there this time, Ernest went to investigate – only to discover that the elusive visitor was none other than a hungry woodpecker. Each time the door was opened, the woodpecker would fly off to the other side of the house.

Times weren't exactly easy when Betty was growing up. She tells the story of her sister, Rita, being anemic and needing iron pills but the family, like most families back then, had no money for medication. Her mother, Catherine, prayed for the money for the pills. What else could she do? One day she looked out the window and saw a man limping up the lane on two canes and then trying to open the gate at the bottom. It was Father Ross' uncle, John, home from a gold mining career in the western United States and Alaska. Older now and almost completely blind, he asked Mrs. Wadlin to take him in as a boarder for \$20.00 per month. This was, indeed, the answer to her prayers. She took care of John Ross until he died in 1940.

There was a furnacette in the hall of the Wadlin home. The pipe from the heater went upstairs to warm the second storey of the house. Before John Ross died, Betty's mother heard an awful bang in the stove. "It was a hell of a bang!" Betty told me. Ernest Wadlin assured his wife that it was only a piece of wood falling over in the stove but Mrs. Wadlin was convinced that it was a forerunner of someone's death. When they were taking John Ross out of the bedroom after he died, they had to maneuver the coffin around the furnacette in the hall, and in doing so, they hit the stove. The loud noise was the same as the one that was heard before.

Betty, herself, was witness to several forerunners. She remembers the time when she and one of her sisters were returning home from delivering a meal to Father Ross. It was a particularly dark night. As they scampered home, they could hear the sound of boots somewhere behind them but it was too dark to see. "Who is it?" they wondered. They waited by the gate at the bottom of their driveway but, still, they saw no one. Only the sound of the boots continued on by. It wasn't long after that they learned of the death of someone from the community. That same chap was known for train jumping but, this time, he had fallen off the train. It so happened that this fellow had always worn rubber boots!

"Did I ever tell you of the time that my sister, Vera, tripped over a rough box?" I assured Betty that she certainly had not. Across the road from the church, in what was, until recent years, Mack Wallace's house, there lived a fellow by the name of William MacIsaac. William had a store where he sold such things as kerosene, cigarettes and tobacco. One misty, rainy evening, Mrs. Wadlin sent Betty and Vera over to the store to purchase some kerosene. (Betty can still see the gallon can with the little spout that they used to fetch the kerosene.) In those days, Big Andrew MacDonald, from down the road, would drop off a rough box at the church gate if there was to be a funeral. Big Andrew went to town every day and so he would simply take the necessary wooden box out with him on his way home. (Need I remind you that Betty lived right next to the church and that both driveways had a gate at the bottom?) That particular evening, Big Andrew had dropped off a rough box at the church gate, as usual, but, in their haste to get to the store, the girls hadn't seen it. It was definitely there when they came back – for Vera tripped over the rough box. "I can still hear the noise of the tin can landing in the box." Frightened out of their wits, the girls sprinted home without the kerosene. "We were so scared of the dead!" Living right next to the graveyard, it was no wonder!

The following story may explain some of the girls' fears. There was a hill down in back of the Wadlin house that was perfect for coasting. In the wintertime, the girls would coast from the church fence, behind their house, to the brook near what was then Archie Jim's. Oh, the fun that they would have! One particular evening, Vera and Betty wouldn't come in from their play so their father took matters into his own hands. With a pillowcase and a flashlight in hand, he headed next door to the cemetery. There he stood on top of one of the gravestones, pillowcase over his head and flashlight shining behind him – a perfect ghost. It didn't take long for the girls to hightail it for home then.

Helen Creighton, one of Canada's pioneers in the collection of folklore, wrote that "It is not everyone who is gifted with seeing or hearing forerunners, just as ghostly visitants are only seen by certain people. . . . Certain individuals, families or dwellings seem to be particularly sensitive to these manifestations." Well, forerunners and ghosts were alive and well in the Wadlin neighbourhood but

some of these eerie visitors could be explained too. Betty remembers the time when an awful racket could be heard coming from the basement. They were sure that it was spooks – until, of course, they discovered that a groundhog had gotten into the cellar. It wasn't long before Ernest put a stop to the noises. Another night, while Grandma was taking care of the girls, they heard distinct scratching noises on the shingles of the house. Vera grabbed the flat iron and dropped it out of the upstairs dormer window at the back of the house. Thank God, she missed her aim for who was it, but Father Ross! For some reason, he went to great efforts to encourage the belief in ghosts.

“Do you think the present owners will be upset to learn that their house is haunted?” I assured Betty that I've heard the same remarks about many of the older homes in our neighbourhood. Spooks are part of the ambiance of older homes. Today, most folks are far too busy with their electronic gadgets to even notice a ghost. As Mary Fraser said back in the 1930s, “The honk of the automobile has frightened away the *bochdan*, and the glare of its lights has dulled the vision of the sights of the other world.” Still, folklore gives an old house a particular charm that can never be found in modern homes.

I suspect that Steve and Michelle will be much more interested to discover that Betty learned how to make moonshine – right down there in the basement of their lovely old home. But that's a story for another day.

Catherine MacGillivray

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## Recent Acquisitions



The museum is now the proud owner of a lobster trap – thanks to **Allan Roberts**. Allan informs us that this particular trap was built in the mid 1940s by Leo Roberts and/or Dougall MacEachern from Ballantynes Cove. The bows were made of ash by Alexander (Ranald Lewis) MacEachern from Cape George Point. The spindle was handmade from hardwood so as to hold the bait which was usually salt

herring. The hoops were handmade by natives from the Pictou Landing Reserve. The snood was of hemp rope and the headings, knit by hand, were made from cotton twine. In 2011, the trap was refurbished by John D. (Jackie) MacInnis.





It's really quite fascinating to follow all the atrefacts that come into the museum. This month we received a pin worn by the waitresses at the Brigadoon Restaurant on Main Street. Leslie Self and Art Holmes owned the Brigadoon which occupied the space that was once the Palace Clothing, where the Bank of Nova Scotia stands today.

**Mary MacDonald Simpson**, a native of Baileys Brook and the daughter of Agnes Bowie and John D. MacDonald, worked at the Brigadoon during the summer of 1962. "Each service employee was issued a Brigadoon pin. At the end of the summer, and the end of my employment, I laundered my uniform dresses and returned them to the restaurant. In preparation for laundering, I removed the pin from the uniform and inadvertently neglected to return it with the uniforms. I returned home to Pictou County and was not in Antigonish again until after the Brigadoon burned, sometime in the fall of 1962. The pin has traveled with me and my belongings for the last forty-nine years, back and forth across Canada and the United States. As an item of history of Antigonish, I thought this pin might have a place in the museum of the town and county."



- **Bernadette Gillis** donated an old pin cushion shoe dating back to the 1930s.
- **Hugh Webb** brought in the Antigonish Monopoly Game dating back to about 1982. A few pieces are missing. Maybe someone out there can help us complete our game.



## Wishing Bernadette Gillis a Speedy Recovery!

We're sad to report that Bernadette Gillis, a long-time volunteer here at the museum, fell and broke her leg recently. She is now recuperating from both the fall and the necessary surgery. We wish her a speedy recovery and hope that she will be back in tip top shape very soon.

Please Note: The museum contributed photos and information for the following documentary.

*Documentary: "Hockey: More Than a Game" airing on December 1, 2011*

After over a year of production, our documentary *Hockey: More Than a Game* will be airing on WNED-TV Buffalo/Toronto (PBS) on December 1 at 8:00 pm. I hope you're able to tune in and enjoy the program, which was produced and directed by Alan Aylward. I shared duties with Jeremy Major as associate producer, cinematographer, and editor. The program is running as a part of WNED's pledge drive and will run until 9:30 pm. Here's WNED's description of the documentary:

*WNED's brand new bi-national production celebrates one of the fastest, most challenging sports in the world and its role in Canadian life. "Hockey: More Than A Game" is an hour-long documentary that explores hockey history and culture and offers an insightful, intimate look at the game described as "Canada's gift to the world."*

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For those of you who are outside of the Greater Toronto Area, other PBS stations along the Canadian/U.S. border will also be airing the documentary either on December 1 or shortly thereafter (each affiliate station sets its own schedule), so consult your local listings for showtimes. I hope you enjoy the show!

**Aaron Lam**  
Producer

## Our readers contribute to the Lame Angus story

**Rod MacDonald from Oakville, Ontario**, wrote: *I had the occasion of meeting Lame Angus one morning a long time ago. My story fits right in with what you are talking about – Pleasant Valley was a peaceful loving place where no one locked their doors at night. One morning, when I came downstairs to the kitchen for breakfast, circa 1952, a stranger (to me) was having breakfast with my father Ronald (Rory) MacDonald. Later I asked, who was this person? My Dad said that it was Lame Angus; he was walking home late at night to Eigg Mountain when it got cold and started to rain. He knew he would be welcome at our place so he simply walked in the road to our house and came into the kitchen. Since our family was in bed, he took off his shoes and slept the night on our kitchen couch. After breakfast, he went on his way to Eigg Mountain.*

**Gwen MacEachern- Hanifen** sent the following note: *I love the picture of the old house; we used to have brunch there every Sunday in the summer when Dad's cousins were home from New York. I miss seeing the old place; it's a beautiful spot. I obviously don't remember when Lame Angus lived on the mountain but I do remember going to visit him with Dad at his house on Hawthorne St. He was Dad's godfather. Dad used to say he was cranky in his old age. We have that picture at home of him with the bear. Dad used to tell us that story all the time.*

**Keah Schurman** donated an original copy of the photo of Lame Angus and the bear. This photo was from the collection of her uncle, Alex “the Sailor” MacDonald.

**Ron McConnell** tells a delightful story about Lame Angus coming into town with the bear. It was an early spring evening and Ron and his friends were playing ball on their makeshift ball field on Hawthorne Street, where Dr. Howard’s house stands today. Angus was a bit of a character around town and so the boys knew him. Back then, some of Hawthorne Street was paved with concrete but this stopped just up from where the boys were playing. They could hear the horses coming from a long way off because their hooves made such a noise on the dirt road. In his haste to get to town, Angus was standing up on his wagon, hollering and lashing the horses. For the boys, it was like they had stepped into a movie. The horses were galloping, their shoes sending sparks flying off the concrete pavement. They were coming at such a clip that their hooves actually slipped when they hit the hard surface. It was only when Angus went by that the boys noticed the bear on the back of the wagon.

Bears were a rare sighting back then. From 1909 to 1966, there were various provincial and municipal bounties on black bears in Nova Scotia in an effort to reduce their numbers. They were considered a threat to agriculture, property and people – and a costly nuisance. The end of a bear’s snout would bring you \$25.00. That was a lot of money back then. “It could buy you a case of rum.”

Imagine, then, the boys’ excitement. Their ball game was entirely forgotten as they raced home with their incredible story. “We wanted to see the bear but, instead, we were locked up for the night! The next day we found the bear downtown, parked in an alleyway in behind Wongs Restaurant.” Parts of the bear were quite valuable to the Chinese.



## 2014 Homecoming in Scotland

**Marlene MacDonald Cheng** of Vancouver (the daughter of Robbie MacDonald of Antigonish) stopped by the museum for a visit recently with news of a Homecoming to Scotland that is being planned by the Arisaig Highland Games and promoted by the Scottish government for the year 2014. This year-long series of events aims to welcome home émigrés and descendants of those who have left. This new initiative is aimed at the heritage, history, genealogy and diaspora communities. For more information, check the following link. <http://genealogy.donnachaidhcarolinas.com/index.php/8-to-the-diaspora/2-an-diasporran>

### Heritage Association of Antigonish

#### NOTICE TO ALL READERS



Do you have someone on your Christmas list who is really difficult to shop for *or* do you simply dislike shopping? Maybe we can assist!

As a registered charity, we can take a tax-deductible donation from you. In exchange, we will mail your special person a beautiful handmade Christmas card advising them that you made a donation to the Heritage Association of Antigonish, on their behalf, to help us with our work. This handmade Christmas card can be mailed to any location in the world with postal service.

All we require is your mailing address and the name and mailing address of the special person to whom you want to send this homemade card.

To take advantage of this service, please contact Jocelyn Gillis at the Antigonish Heritage Museum via email or regular snail mail. Jocelyn can be reached at [antheritage@parl.ns.ca](mailto:antheritage@parl.ns.ca) or 20 East Main Street, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada B2G 2E9

### Message from the Chair of the Heritage Association of Antigonish

**(Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)**

As I am writing this message to you, I am looking out my living room window here at Williams Point and realizing how I have been blessed. My home is only a short distance from the ancestral farm of my

MacGillivrays. My view includes Antigonish Harbour and the entire west side of the harbour, including Sugar Loaf. The view can only be described as incredible!

November is a special month for me since I was born on All Saints Day, some fifty-seven years ago.

November is also the month of remembrance. I attended the Remembrance Day service in Antigonish. Due to a wild storm that day, the service was held in the gym at the Antigonish Regional High School. The number of Veterans from Antigonish Town and County who fought in World War II is reduced to a few dozen; however, the crowd attending the service was very large and there was a large number of youth. Canada's wars and peacekeeping efforts over the past decades have had a significant impact on our shared heritage. I was pleased and proud to be a party to this act of remembrance.

Early in November I attended a seminar that was sponsored by the ST. F. X. Human Rights and Equity Advisor's Office, the ST. F. X. Aboriginal Student Advisor's Office and the Aboriginal Rights Coalition Atlantic. The guest speaker was Dr. Daniel Paul. There was a large crowd that attended the seminar. Dr. Paul is a Mi'kmaw Elder, advocate, author and recipient of the Order of Canada (2005) and the Order of Nova Scotia (2002). I found the seminar informative and it provided the undersigned with many items to reflect upon.

I am attaching a link to Dr. Paul's web page and would encourage everyone to visit the same.

<http://www.danielnpaul.com>

As Chair of The Heritage Association of Antigonish, I received a special invitation to attend the above noted event. We took the required steps to ensure that the members of the Heritage of Antigonish were notified of the seminar and I did see a number of members in attendance. This highlights the importance of the various community groups working together to ensure planned seminars and events notification is circulated to as many people/organizations as possible. Your Association is committed to working with and partnering with all organizations that are working to preserve and promote our shared heritage.

The Board of the Association continues to work to building your organization. At our most recent Board meeting we elected following executive:

Chair – Angus MacGillivray  
Vice-Chair – Catherine MacGillivray  
Treasurer – John Dickie  
Secretary – Coleen O'Connell

In addition to the above, the Directors of the Association were assigned membership on the four standing committees of the Board. The standing committees of the Board are as follows:

Membership Committee  
Program/Events Committee

Finance Committee  
Projects Committee

We are seeking volunteers to work on these committees. If you are interested and wish to volunteer, please call Jocelyn at the museum (863-6160) or contact the undersigned at the email provided.

Also, at this Board meeting, the Treasurer advised us that we were in receipt of a one thousand dollar anonymous donation. This donation was given on the understanding that it would be used to record and preserve the oral history of older residents of Antigonish Town and County. As Chair of the Association, I would like to say thank you to the party that donated this money.

We are hopeful that we can accumulate the required resources in the next several months to move ahead with this project in 2012.

The Heritage Association of Antigonish always appreciates your tax-deductible donations as this funding allows your Association to complete its important work.


Until next , take care and God Bless.

Angus MacGillivray, BBA FCGA

[angus.macgillivray@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:angus.macgillivray@ns.sympatico.ca)

## Museum Raffle

Back in June we told you about the raffle that will be held on February 29, 2012. Anyone still wishing to purchase tickets on our raffle can simply clip the attached ballot and mail us a cheque or money order.

<b>HERITAGE ASSOCIATION OF ANTIGONISH</b>		Lottery № AGD00340711 Ticket # _____ Thank You!	
<b>ANTIGONISH HERITAGE MUSEUM</b>		Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.	
Raffle to be held Feb 29, 2012.			
Prizes include:			
Prize #1 – Limited Edition Framed Print by Brian Thompson – Main Street Antigonish Early 1900s			
Prize #2 – Framed Print Highland Hunt			
Winners need not be present to win.			
Ticket - \$ 5.00 each or 3 for \$ 10.00		Name: _____	
Lottery № AGD00340711		Address: _____	
		Phone: _____	

Contact Information: Antigonish Heritage Museum [antheritage@parl.ns.ca](mailto:antheritage@parl.ns.ca) or 902-863-6160