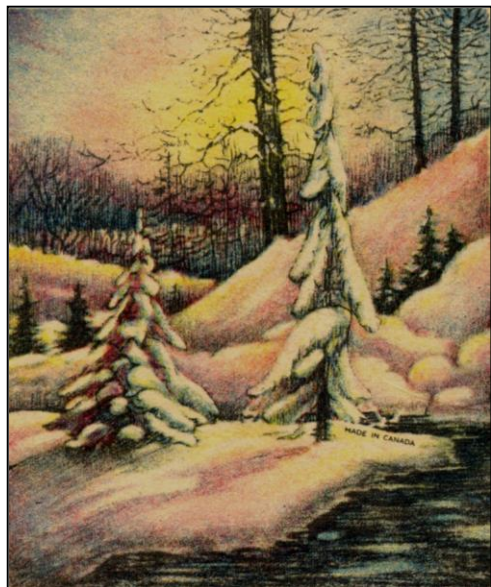


The Old Train Station News

Newsletter #58

December 2013



Despite the bitter cold, folks came out in droves for the Christmas tree lighting ceremony down at Columbus Field last month. I recall years when the tree stood decked out in all its finery next to the Post Office – a sight to behold as one descended Hawthorne Street after dusk. We're curious as to the beginnings of this yuletide tradition but no one seems to know. Determined to find out, we set off to see what old editions of *The Casket* might reveal.

Surely, the community's first Christmas tree was a noteworthy event. And, indeed, it was! Back in 1941, the first tree received lots of publicity. A lengthy article, placed in the top corner of page 11 of the December 18th edition of the paper, announced in big bold letters: **"Christmas Tree For Antigonish"**. Strategically placed, readers were bound to see the notice – if not for the print, then for the large sketch of Santa's head.

The accompanying article explained that, at a Board of Trade meeting in mid-December of that year, local jeweler, Leon Neima, had introduced the idea of a community tree during the Christmas week "to add a little color to the local scene." The downtown shopkeepers were called upon to make donations and the local paper was only too happy to report a long list of businesses and individuals who had willingly donated anything from fifty cents to five dollars. If enough money could be raised, a tree would be placed near Cyril Reddy's Red Indian Service Station on Main Street, where Kenny Farrell's Ultramar stands today. This tree would be "brilliantly lighted" and then, on Christmas Eve, it would be decorated with bags of candy which Santa would distribute to the children. "It is expected that Santa will be around town as soon as the tree is put up, just showing himself, to convince all beholders that the world war is not going to keep him away." It wasn't known if Santa would bring his fiddle but it was quite certain that he would have "gifts enough for every youngster in the town and county."

Norman K. Fee [Phee] was charged with the task of putting up the tree but *he* got a little carried away and ended up getting *three* "shapely firs" which he positioned around the town – one down at the east end, one at the end of West Street, and one near the Celtic Hall where Santa was scheduled to meet the children. Clearly, more than the children were excited about this community Christmas tree.

Santa certainly underestimated his popularity in Antigonish. Youngsters were so excited that not even Police Chief Archie MacGillivray could keep a semblance of order. After handing out 275 bags

Christmas Tree For Antigonish



of candy that afternoon, Santa ran out of treats and had to “make a hurried trip back to the North Pole for more.” When he returned a half-hour later, he had more than enough to placate the remaining one hundred or so overly excited children still gathered at the tree. What treats were left over, he sent up to St. Martha’s Hospital. “Santa then jumped into a taxi, told everybody he would be back next year, and set off for Sugar Loaf where his reindeer were parked.” No further mention was made of the fiddle but it was noted that Santa had the build of Angus MacIsaac, custodian of the county jail. Fancy that!

There is no evidence that Santa returned to the tree the following year, as promised. In fact, it wasn’t until the war was over, in 1946, that *The Casket* once again reported on a community tree. That year, the local branch of the Canadian Legion, the Gyro Club and the Rotary Club banded together to provide the children of the town and county with another Christmas tree celebration at the Red Indian Service Station grounds. A mid-December edition of the paper assured its readers that Santa would be piped to the tree, that the local brass band would be there to entertain with seasonal music, and that a public address system would introduce a program of Christmas carols. “Kids needn’t be disturbed that Santa comes along behind the bagpipes. He isn’t that kind of a Scot, and there should be plenty of gifts.” A second article in that edition of the paper noted that the tree, deemed “stately and shapely”, was already standing near the service station. “It is going to add brightness to the Main Street when trimmed and glowing with lights.” A third notice in that same edition, an advertisement, confirms the novelty of the community tree.

A subsequent edition of *The Casket* carried two more articles that season. These revealed that Santa had gone “modern” that year, trading his reindeer in for a splashy red jeep so that he could arrive in style. He was escorted down street and to the tree by members of the Rotary Club “who had their horns going loudly”. At the service station, he was greeted by several hundred enthusiastic kids, all anxious to receive an apple and a candy bar. (Some of the children got in the line-up more than once but, not to worry, there were plenty of treats for all.) After his a stop at the Christmas tree, Santa motored on to the hospital to visit the patients there and at the Annex. “Only those who have spent Christmas in a hospital can appreciate the fun and joy that the sight of Kris Kringle brought to all the patients.” Little wonder at the popularity of this event.

The following year brought a repeat performance – thanks again to the Rotarians, the Gyros and the Vets. Santa was assisted by members of the aforementioned clubs “who handed out the goodies with aplomb” and members of the local police force (Archie, Vic and Avery) who made every effort to “keep the big folk on their side of the fence and the horses from snitching the apples from the children who passed in front of their noses.” Santa was chauffeured to the tree by horse and sled, compliments of Bethany Motherhouse. Finished at the community tree, Santa took off for Bethany, St. Martha’s and the Annex to spread some more cheer, candy and apples “to the shut-ins on the hill”. The tree was a real hit. “This Community Christmas tree is a very fine thing to have in our town, and everyone, whether they have children, or not, derived a lot of pleasure from the wee ones greeted by [Santa],” *The Casket* reported.

CHRISTMAS · TREE

All children of the Antigonish community are invited to attend the Christmas Tree at Red Indian Service Station grounds

Tuesday, Dec. 24

Santa Claus will arrive at 3 p.m. if road and flying conditions permit.

Christmas carols will be played and gifts will be distributed to all children present as far as available.

CANADIAN LEGION
GYROS — ROTARY

By 1948, the community Christmas tree had become a yearly tradition. Now, just a brief notice in Eileen Cameron Henry's column, "Around the Town and County", and an equally short report in the local section of the paper revealed that the tree was, once again, located at Cyril Reddy's garage on Main Street. After handing out candy to the children, Santa had continued on to the hospital to spread a little more cheer. Eileen Henry concluded her piece with the following remark: "We know that this affair is very popular, not only with the little ones, but with the patients at St. Martha's on the hill."

The Casket dubbed it "the annual Christmas Tree for the children" in a terse write-up in 1949. The location, the time and the agenda were much the same as in other years. No mention was made of Santa's mode of transportation but it was noted that he would be handing out gifts of candy. In 1950, the tree was put up in front of the Capital Theatre, "especially for the children". That year, Santa came "dressed in traditional garb . . . in a sleigh, on a wagon that was drawn by horses, with sufficient noise and clatter of bells." Apparently, the light on Rudolph's nose had suffered a "relapse" just prior to departure, forcing Santa to leave all the reindeer at home. The next year, "The Big Event of the Season" was back at the Red Indian Service Station but this year Santa arrived in a downpour of rain. Thanks to Cyril Reddy, Santa and the children were able to take refuge in the garage.

And thus a community Christmas tradition was born in our town, thanks to a local jeweler attempting to bring a little happiness into the lives of children during the dark days of WWII *and* the consistent efforts of the local branch of the Canadian Legion, the Gyro Club and the Rotary Club for keeping the event going from year to year. Santa's visits and his simple gifts of candy and apples must have been a welcome treat for many of the local children – but those early trees, whether brilliantly lit or even sparsely lit, would have been nothing but magical.

Further research is required to determine when this afternoon celebration for children became an evening event for the entire family. No doubt, the tree was set up in various locations over the next sixty years or so but that, too, requires more research. Our goal this month was simply to discover the beginnings of this delightful community tradition – but now I'd like to know where folks back then got the notion that Santa was a Scot!

Warm holiday wishes from all of us here at the museum.

Catherine MacGillivray

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From Our Readers:



"Dr. Fabian Bates was inducted into the St. F.X. Sports Hall of Fame (in 1980). I bring this to your attention because Bill and I attended that event. I believe there were 5 or 6 to be inducted. I think Dr. Bates was one of the last that evening and he, being in his 80s, one almost felt this would be something to "endure". Well, how wrong a person could be! It was one of the most enjoyable speeches (about an hour and you didn't want him to stop) I ever heard discussing his medical practice in Glace Bay among the miners. It was priceless. I wonder if X ever recorded it or if someone has notes? I guess he was well respected and loved. My own first cousin was named after him." -- **Joan Gillis from Antigonish and Halifax**



New Year's Levee

*Wednesday, January 1, 2014
1:00 - 3:00pm*

Antigonish Heritage Museum

*Hosted by the
Antigonish Highland Society and
The Heritage Association of Antigonish*

*Entertainment: by Karen Beaton and
Margaret MacDonald.*

Light refreshments will be served.

Come one, come all!



Local Books Available at the Museum:

History of Antigonish, edited by Ray MacLean (\$25)

The Casket: From Gutenberg to Internet, by Ray MacLean (\$5)

Drummer on Foot, edited by D. MacFarlane and Ray MacLean (\$25)

The Highland Games, by Danny Gillis (\$30)

Cape Breton Railways, by Herb MacDonald (\$25)

Tokens of Grace, by Laurie Stanley-Blackwell

Please note: Mailing costs apply.

MacAonghaís a-rithíst

(MacInnes Again)

As the year draws to a close, we recall memorable gatherings with family and friends. During the celebrations to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Antigonish Highland Games, the Clan MacInnes arrived in town from all across Canada and many parts of the United States. An organizing committee of volunteers took on the task of planning a series of events to house, entertain, commemorate, and inform visitors during their visit.



A lasting legacy will be visible in our community for many generations with the installation of the Clan MacInnes cairn which now stands in the Cairn Park at West Main Street. The dedication ceremony took place on July 12th with over one hundred visitors and residents present. The International Association of Clan MacInnes spent two years and raised \$10,000 for the cairn which stands to honour the first MacInnes settlers of Antigonish and eastern Nova Scotia.

During their visit, a *Clan MacInnes Family Histories Book* was created for the Antigonish Heritage Museum and presented by Clan MacInnes during the 150th Anniversary Week. At present, fourteen clan histories are included and the Clan welcomes anyone of MacInnis descent to contribute a brief history of their particular branch of the family tree to this volume.

Special recognition was made for Antigonish resident Bonnie MacInnis who received the 2013 President's Award from the International Association of Clan MacInnes at its annual meeting July 12 for her outstanding service as IACM's Eastern Canada Commissioner. Due to her efforts, it was reported that record attendance was achieved for this gathering.


At the end of the day, we are assured that the Clan MacInnes members enjoyed a successful gathering and it is hoped that they will visit our area again to renew acquaintances. Congratulations to Clan MacInnes and all clan organizations for their efforts to promote family history and Scottish cultural identity. Anyone wishing to know more about Clan MacInnes and the work of this organization can visit the following website: www.macinnes.org



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Recent Acquisitions

Thank you to **Dave Brown from Lochaber** for a "little" collection of artefacts including this bookmark, a



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sealing wax – a variety
of interesting items.

Heritage Association of Antigonish

Donation

We'd like to acknowledge a donation of \$250 from *The Bell Employee Giving Program*. Irene Brown, who worked for Bell Canada for many years, has been an on-site volunteer at the museum for the past several years. Her current project involves re-housing photos in archival enclosures. She also continues to photograph artefacts for the database.

Message from the Chair – Heritage Association of Antigonish

(Working today to preserve yesterday for tomorrow.)

The year 2013 is drawing to a close and, as I reflect on the past year, I feel that we had a very good and productive year.

The Association continued to deliver numerous quality learning events in 2013.

The renovations to the Antigonish Heritage Museum, while not completed, have made the Museum a beautiful community asset.

The Heritage Association has built working relationships with like-minded community organizations (in particular, the Antigonish Highland Society) and this has been productive. One great example of this was the St Andrew's Evening Gala which we co-hosted. At this event, we provided a complimentary table to the Gaelic students from our local school, on the condition that they speak Gaelic for the entire evening. Pictured from left to right are: Kaitlin MacIsaac, Nicole Kennedy, Elisabeth Wallace, teacher Mairi Parr, Patrick Lyons, Brandon MacLeod and Jacob MacGillivray.



Our community is better for the contribution our Association has made and we should be proud of this fact. I would like to thank our many volunteers, patrons and members of the Association for their support in 2013. I would like to say a special thank you to Catherine and Jocelyn for the work they put into making the monthly newsletter a pleasure to read

In closing, I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and all the best in 2014.

Until next, Take Care and God Bless.

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