

# The Old Train Station News



Newsletter # 127

Winter 2026

Dear Friends,

Here we are in the midst of a traditional stormy winter, after a fall of unspeakable snarled traffic in Antigonish. A few hardy souls graced our Museum with their presence (when they could find parking or safely dodge vehicles when on foot) and we were very glad to see them.

During the fall, we certainly made a dent in cleaning up some of the accumulation of projects that always seem to proliferate faster than we can manage. It is remarkable how many steps it takes to move a collection of material that has been donated to its final resting place upstairs for storage. If the donation has several boxes, it means evaluating, sorting, organizing and sometimes cleaning and photocopying along with deciding what material may require transcribing. If there are numerous photographs, they need to be identified, scanned to the database, processed, numbered, enveloped, measured and information entered into the database. Material is then protected in acid-free folders or boxes for storage. All this takes considerable time and effort. Sometimes it can take us two or three years to complete a collection.

So, if the office space always looks like an overgrown pile of stuff, it is just organized confusion that gets replaced faster than we can process it. There is always hope!

*-The Epistolarion*

## The Chiniquy Riot, Antigonish 1873

The Antigonish Heritage Museum has in its Collections the transcript of the trial of persons involved in the riot that occurred in Antigonish on July 10, 1873. The riot occurred when some 300 Catholics objected to the appearance of Charles Chiniquy, a Presbyterian Evangelical Minister who spoke at St. James Presbyterian Church on Main Street in Antigonish that evening. Very little has been written about the riot, but we have the transcript of the trial and Charles Chiniquy wrote of it himself in a well-known book he published in 1886 that is still available today.



So, who was **Charles Paschal Telesphore Chiniquy**?

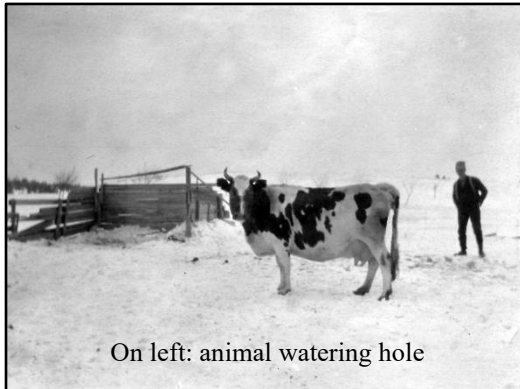
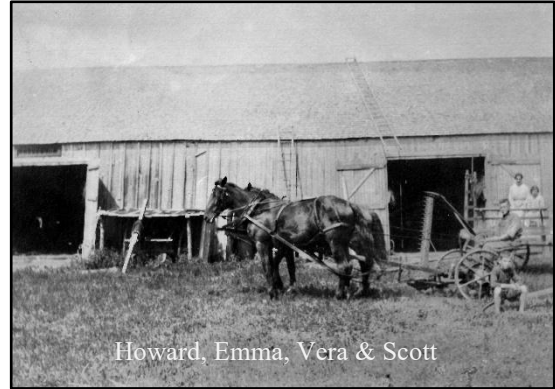
Charles Chiniquy 1809 – 1899 was a young Canadian Catholic priest from Quebec who was ordained in 1839 and travelled around Lower Canada preaching Temperance. His unorthodox teachings and arrogant manner were such that he was excommunicated in 1856 and converted to Protestantism, becoming a Presbyterian Evangelical minister. He travelled the lecture circuit in the United States and Canada, and he was known for his persuasive oratory and unrelenting attacks on the Catholic Church.

Photo credit: *Wikipedia*

## The Daniel Howard Williams Collection – Lower West River

The William's collection took more than two years to finish, but we just completed it in December. It began with the arrival of several books of written farm diaries by Daniel Howard Williams (1868-1959), who was a farmer at Lower West River; a farm started by his great-grandfather Zephaniah Williams. He began writing after getting married to Emma Chisholm of Salt Springs on October 6, 1906. Howard's parents had died; he built a new home for his intended bride and began a new chapter in life. His stated purpose was to "*record any particulars of rural life – tell of casual happenings of our humble existence.*" (Book 4, p. 1). He began this effort on January 1, 1908 and continued to write until mid-1942.

This valuable work spanning many changes and modernizations in farm life, has few breaks and only 2 missing books. It not only describes daily life in the home and community but tells us much about the man who wrote it.



Transcribing this series of diaries took a great deal of time as he wrote almost every day and although much of it was quite mundane, he showed a wonderful sense of humour and positive attitude during difficult times. There are moments of fear when Emma almost died, the joyful birth of his children, and the frustration of broken machinery and winter's intense cold. He took a great deal of pride in his family, the farm and in his animals. Howard was very community minded and a leader in St. James Church where he was an elder. A deep supporter of the Co-operative movement, he organized several groups of farmers in the West River Communities for the benefit of all.

Following the completed transcription of the diaries, the family brought in some family papers from Howard and Emma's children, Vera, Scott and Murray and Murray's son Scott Williams. Also, an identified collection of Williams and Chisholm family photographs to nicely complete the William's collection. We are grateful to Scott Williams and the William's family for this valuable collection.

From *The Casket*, Dec 11, 1890

The ill-fated schooner reported wrecked in our last issue at Pomquet Beach, and all hands lost was the "L.M. Lloyd" formerly owned in Lockport, N.S. but purchased by Capt. Munn, who ran her as a packet for two years between McNair's Cove, Cape George, Arisaig and Pictou.

In a recent transcription of deaths from *Holy Trinity Church* in Bayfield, we find the following . . . Captain William Munn was drowned at Bayfield on Dec 1, 1890. His body was found by Mi'kmaq in sand at the Bayfield ferry on April 6, 1891 and buried in the cemetery the same day.

First mate McKay from Cape Breton was drowned the same day and his body was found on June 11, 1891 and buried in the cemetery the same day.



## John James MacDonald Family Letters

The family of John Charles MacDonald (1816-1890) and Margaret MacLeod (1829-1901) were located on the Harbour Road at Antigonish Harbour. John James was the 7<sup>th</sup> child in a family of thirteen. The letters were collected between 1873 and 1943 and are between various family members as they connected with each other across the years. The letters refer to friends and neighbours in the Harbour area and elsewhere, the careers chosen by some members of the family, their struggles and marriages, and various illnesses and deaths.

In particular, the collection follows John James as he leaves home for the United States at 19 to find work to pay a debt he accrued in Antigonish. This group of letters span the years 1880 - 1885 when he is working in the United States. His letters, mostly to his sister Maggie, speak of the loneliness of being away from family and “Home” and the difficulty getting sustainable jobs with better wages in the Boston States. He appears to be somewhat estranged from his parents, and it is not until he goes to Colorado and the various mining operations that he can save enough money to erase the debt. John James died November 3, 1885 from serious injuries obtained while working alone after a cave-in at the Shelby Mine in Alma, Colorado on October 10, 1885 and he is buried in Fairplay Cemetery, Fairplay, Colorado.

Just another normal winter in Nova Scotia!

“Now it would be foolish and impossible to try and prevent the manufacture of films containing Canadian snow scenes; but there is no vestige of a doubt that when exhibited overseas they have a detrimental effect of immigration . . . Everything that can be done should be done, to encourage the circulation of screen pictures that demonstrate that snow scenes and dog-trains are but a minor phase in Canadian life.” —Charles F. Paul (1922)



## South River School Improvement Club

Margaret Ann MacDonald, former teacher, and one of the founding members of the South River School Improvement Club spoke in 1955 on the founding of the Club. Being a stranger in the section, she spoke with the Health nurse, the late Rebecca Kennedy, and expressed her disappointment in the school learning environment for children. It was then Rebecca suggested a School Improvement Club and “*advised me to speak to some of the women. And if I found them willing to be cooperative in doing some things by way of improvements for the school, we could call a meeting at which herself and Dr. Coady would attend.*”

*“I didn’t waste much time. I approached my boarding lady Mrs. Sadie Chisholm, she being one of the best souls in the world, supported my suggestions and encouraged me to see some of the other women. Next, I visited Flora MacIntosh, Mrs. Don Chisholm (Roddie’s mother), and Mrs. Jim Dunn. I’ll never forget the warm welcome I received from them all. To my great satisfaction they quickly understood the situation and willingly offered to do what they could to help out. We notified the remaining women of the section. This was the time when Dr. Coady was beginning to launch his big drive on Rural Development. I do not know who slipped, Miss Kennedy or myself, but Dr. Coady was disappointed the men of the section weren’t in attendance.”*

The outcome of this meeting was the formation of the School Improvement Club in September of 1924 which was very successful and later would become the South River Home and School Association. Margaret Ann died in 1965 at the age of 86.

Message from the Curator – Jan 2026

With unpredictable weather and a dearth of tourists this time of year, the most common question I get these days is “Is it busy at the Museum?” To most everyone’s surprise, my short answer to that question is always “Yes!” It’s a different sort of busy in the off season than it is between June and October, of course, but our days are no less full. As I often say, this is the time of year when we catch up on all of the things that don’t get done when our days are full of visitors!

Elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter, our editor talks a little bit about the various steps involved in processing a new collection of archival material when it comes through the door (or, more realistically, when we finally find time to process it!). The often-time-consuming process of cataloguing can be difficult to keep pace with during the summer and fall, but in the winter and early spring there’s a real sense of accomplishment in getting things done!

Before I first started to work at the Museum full-time in April 2022 (where have those years gone?!), I had the privilege of spending a couple of afternoons every week for about three months learning the ropes from my predecessor, Jocelyn Gillis. She taught me the ins and outs of running a community Museum, lessons she often had to learn on her own, by trial and error. I remain in awe of what she accomplished during her 30+ years at the helm.

One piece of wisdom Jocelyn shared early on, and to which I often have to return in order to keep my sanity, is to resign oneself to the knowledge that there will always be a backlog of work to do! One always starts off a new calendar year committing to ensure that everything gets processed and catalogued as soon as it comes in. The reality is that most of the time, January is spent trying to catch up on what didn’t get catalogued the year before! By the time that backlog is largely dealt with (which it really never is!), one is already looking at a growing pile of new material that’s come in since the new year!

Winter is also a time for genealogical pursuits for many researchers, so email inquiries and in-person visits from researchers serve to add some variety to each week. Add to this some snow removal, general maintenance and cleaning, grant writing, and other one-off projects that can really only happen in the off-season, and the combination of all of these keeps life full and interesting every day.

So, if you’re driving by the Museum and notice an empty parking lot, know that inside, all sorts of important stuff are happening behind the scenes! The door, as usual, is still open. Drop by sometime to say hello (and maybe to have a cup of tea!).

Thanks for your continued support,

Barry

A recent acquisition . . .

Bayfield School Bell.  
Incorporated 1815 and amalgamated in 1968.  
Presented to Terry Trenholm Boyd June 1968  
from grade teacher  
Isabel MacIsaac

