

# The Old Train Station News

Newsletter # 126

Fall 2025

Dear Friends,

It has been quite a while since I put fingers to the keyboard to revive the Museum newsletter, now in this somewhat new format. The hope is to produce four issues per year that will bring you some insight into our vast collection of archival materials. I have been back at the Museum for over two years now under the leadership of our wonderful Curator, Barry MacKenzie. He is always ready with a smile and a joyful greeting to all who enter the Museum.

Times have changed, and the Museum has had to make changes in its focus, bringing more community into the building, both young and old. There have been over-flow crowds at ceilidhs and a host of young and older folks willing to test their knowledge in the Escape Room. Folks are still bringing in their wonderful treasures to add to the Collections, and we are still accepting critical resources from the community making them available for those doing valuable genealogical and community research.

I have been involved in several varied projects since I came back, including a couple of large transcription projects. I hope I can share some interesting observations on what they tell us about the times and the community. There will be some brief stories of local interest interspersed with small tidbits to give you a smile or just a little “I didn’t know that.”

I hope you enjoy getting the Newsletter once again and if you have any ideas of things you would like to see or contribute, please let us know.

*The Epistolarion.*



In April 1919, after the end of First World War, Isaac Pedlow, MP introduced a motion in the House of Commons to institute an annual “Armistice Day” on the second Monday of November each year.

King George V sent out an appeal to the British Empire urging that the armistice be marked by the suspension of all activities and the observance of two minutes of silence at exactly 11 a.m. on 11<sup>th</sup> November, the day and time the armistice had been signed in 1918. Canadians commemorated Armistice Day on that day in 1919 and 1920.

In May 1921, an Act of Canada’s Parliament declared that an annual Armistice Day would be held on the Monday of the week in which 11 November fell. This angered veterans of the First World War, and in 1931 Armistice Day was changed back to November 11 and “on no other date.” Also, the name was changed to Remembrance Day which placed the emphasis more upon the soldiers whose deaths were being remembered. In 1970 it was recognized as a national holiday.

## MacIsaac's Funeral Home



About 1790 Donald MacIsaac, widower brought his entire family from Rudha Na Foachaig, Moidart, Scotland to Doctor's Brook where they received a Grant of 114 acres. His son, John, took over the land and the family flourished. John's son Ronald (1807-1875) had two sons Angus and Dougald (1843-1925) who came to Antigonish before 1871. It was Dougald's son John (1893-1972) who established MacIsaac's Funeral Home in 1926 on St. Mary's Street. In 1947, his son Vincent W. took over the business and moved the business to

Pleasant Street where his son and daughter continue to serve the community.

Recently, the Antigonish Heritage Museum received access to the MacIsaac Funeral Home records for transcription purposes and the records from 1929 to 1944 have been transcribed by the *Epistolarion* and are available at the Museum.

MacIsaac's Funeral Home served a large area encompassing Antigonish, Guysborough, Cape Breton, and also Pictou Island. In early years, John MacIsaac was known to have done embalming for a couple of people from Newfoundland. In one case, John received a letter from Ireland complementing him on the wonderful embalming work he had done on a woman who was being sent home to Ireland from Newfoundland for burial.

There are a significant number of deaths listed from "away" that were brought home to Antigonish for burial in their home communities. It is also of note that many deaths and burials were never recorded in the Vital Statistics or at least cannot be found. Some communities may have had someone local who did many of their own burials. For instance, Levangie & Sons appear to have provided that service in the Tracadie area. If anyone has information about them, or services provided in other communities, the Museum would be interested.

John MacIsaac recorded a number of Mi'kmaq burials during this period from Pictou Landing through Antigonish and also in Cape Breton. Many were listed under Indian Affairs and in one case John was reminded that the payment for "indian" burials was \$15 but more was allotted if they died in hospital. However, as time went on, most Mi'kmaq were paying for their own funerals. Unfortunately, there is a lot of missing information about many of them and their parents.

Not only are these records of interest to genealogists but they also give us insight into the changes in family names as the traditional names of the area moved away and are replaced by names that are often unfamiliar to local researchers. By the 40s, there was a significant migration to the Strait area for work in Port Hawkesbury, Point Tupper, Canso and in Mulgrave where the Army operated the Canso Military Defense Zone and many soldiers were recruited from Guysborough County to be trained there for the Army.

Important insights can be gathered into the hard economic times during the twenties and thirties as more affluent families paid their funerals in cash, but poorer folk were seen to pay in small amounts, often over a couple of years and sometimes with oats, chicken, turkey and eggs. This adds more evidence to other material in our possession about the impact of changes that were happening within our communities during the pre-war period.

Many thanks to the MacIsaac family for making these records accessible.

## Genealogical Fun – going down a rabbit hole.

What started as a Grant question posed by Paul MacDonald . . .

**John J. Grant**, his wife, **Elizabeth MacLean** (of Brierly Brook) and family left Antigonish about 1888 for work in the mines of Arizona. John died in 1915 and Elizabeth in 1925 in Bisbee, AZ. Their daughter Mary Ester married John Hector Grant, a native of Beaver Mountain, in Bisbee in 1897. They followed the mines in the west before landing in the Yukon in 1906, where he died in 1919 and Mary in 1921 leaving a young family of 9 children. I was able to trace all the children in the Yukon and in Vancouver, but what happened to their son, John Robert?

**As it turned out . . .**

**John Robert Grant**, son of John Hector and Mary Ester Grant was born Jan 22, 1912 in Dawson City, Yukon. In 1931 he was working as a miner in a dredging operation in the Yukon. With traditional gold mining phasing out, the Pato Consolidated Gold Dredging Ltd brought in dredgers from Alaska to mine in the Yukon. Searching the dredging company, I discovered they had mining operations in Columbia.

In 1940 John R. travelled with another mining couple from Cartagena, Columbia to California and then on to Canada. He was listed as a dredger operator for Pato Consolidated and made his home in Pato Antioquia, Columbia. In later trips home to Canada, he is also listed as agent for Pato subsidiary Placer Management Ltd and was living in Pato Antioquia, Columbia. He married Edna Genovive Dahlquist of North Vancouver about 1942, and they had three children: John Robert Sep 3, 1944, Barry Walter Mar 12, 1954 in Pato Antioquia, and Linda Irene May 6, 1946 in New Westminster, BC. John Robert probably died in Pato Antioquia, Columbia. Records show his sons remained in Columbia and made trips home to connect with family. (A Passport application with picture attached)

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SOLICITUD DE VISA NUMERO 77

Que el Cónsul debe hacer llenar al peticionario minuciosamente  
(Artículo 27 del Decreto número 1790 de 1941)

Yo Edna Genevive Grant

Nacido en North Vancouver, B. C., Canada

el 22 de septiembre de 1917

y naturalizado en --

Portador del pasaporte: Canadiense

Número C-196393

Expedido en Bogotá, Colombia

por Consul Inglés

Atentamente solicitado del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Colombia que no

### This poem was found in a diary kept by *Mary Ann MacDonald, Heatherton* in 1918

A girl will sing, and a girl will dance  
And a girl will work crochet.  
But a girl can't throw and hit a church,  
For she isn't built that way.

A girl may flirt, and a girl may sport,  
A girl may go to the play,  
But she'll not ride a bicycle into port  
For she's not built that way.



A girl will powder, a girl will paint,  
And keep it day by day  
But she'll not have hip pockets in her pants  
For she's not built that way.

The girls may do this, the girls may do that  
May be happy, jolly or gay  
But they all get married  
When they get a good chance  
Because they are built that way.

### **A message from the Curator . . .**

I've been thinking a little about the changing nature of Museums in 2025. To be sure, there has for some time been a movement among Museum professionals to reassess the roles we play in our nations/communities. Increasingly, we are trying to find ways to *serve* our communities as well as to *educate* them. Some have referred to this renewed direction as characterized by a shift from focusing on *objects to information*. That, too, is probably a bit too simplistic. More broadly, it is a re-envisioning of how we operate as much as anything else.

For all Museums – especially those, like ours, who are privileged enough to operate year-round – this presents exciting opportunities for growth. Moreover, we owe to the communities we serve (and not just by virtue of the taxpayer funding we receive) to respond to their needs. Granted, that might be easier for some Museums than for others. The consistent and generous funding we receive from the Town and County municipalities, and from the province, puts us in a somewhat privileged position. Full-time staff people have the luxury of time to plan and execute new ideas, and I continue to be in awe of Museum volunteers who do such amazing work in their communities.

One of the benefits of membership in the Association of Nova Scotia Museums is access to a number of webinars and training workshops throughout the year. One of the more interesting webinars I've attended in the last few years focused in part on mission statements. For reference, our existing mission statement is "The Antigonish Heritage Museum exists to promote and preserve a cultural understanding of the heritage of Antigonish Town and County." What participants in the webinar were invited to consider was how very little that tells us about *what we're really about*. To be sure, it's a perfectly apt definition of a community Museum. It does not, however, say much about what our mission – our purpose – really is.

In reflecting on this challenge, we're doing a bit of soul searching. I see the Antigonish Heritage Museum as having a three-pronged mission: as a place of discovery, a place of inclusion, and a place of hospitality. We will always collect, conserve, preserve, and interpret the material culture of our communities. However, we can – and we *must* – be so much more. - Barry MacKenzie

**And from the Board . . .** We are delighted with the re-launching of the Old Train Station News!

Thanks to the generous support of the Province of Nova Scotia and the St. Andrews Veterans committee, our summer student Maeve Ward worked to build an online database of veterans from the First and Second World Wars who hailed from the St. Andrews area. These can be accessed on our website by visiting <https://antigonishheritage.ca/antigonish-area-veterans/>

We are very pleased to be able to continue to support various programs and events at the Antigonish Heritage Museum, including lectures, ceilidhs, etc. This summer, proceeds from the ceilidh season were put towards the purchase of a new sound system for the Museum, which should be in place by the New Year. Earlier this year, we funded the purchase of a new flat-screen TV that is used for PowerPoint and video presentations at the Museum.

As the year draws to a close, we invite you to consider making a donation to the Association. These can be made anytime by cash or cheque at the museum or by mail, or via e-transfer to [donate@antigonishheritage.ca](mailto:donate@antigonishheritage.ca). A tax receipt can be issued for any amount.

New volunteers are always welcome. Contact Barry at [museum@antigonishheritage.ca](mailto:museum@antigonishheritage.ca) or (902) 863-6160 if you're interested in getting involved.

Thanks for your continued support! - Neil F. MacIsaac, President