



The Rucksack

Newsletter of the Friends of McNabs Island Society
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Spring 2017

McNabs Island Stands on Guard from Confederation to the Cold War

Join us for our 27th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and presentation on Wednesday, April 12 at 6:30 pm in the Small Craft Gallery of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, 1675 Lower Water Street, on the Halifax waterfront.

Special guest speaker will be Dr. Jay White, an historian specializing in Atlantic Canada, who has taught at several universities in the region. Professor White will look at the important role that McNabs Island has played in Canadian military history from Confederation to the Cold War.

As Canada celebrates its 150th birthday, Professor White's talk will reflect on the pivotal role McNabs Island played in the defence of Canada in two World Wars and in peacetime. He will also connect developments on McNabs Island to larger events on the world stage.

"McNabs Island was really a linchpin in Halifax's defence matrix, right up until the Cold War. Removing McNabs from the equation would have made the task of defending the Port of Halifax much more difficult," says Dr. White.



Dr Jay White – Guest Speaker
at our Annual Meeting

Around the time of Confederation, the island's Sherbrooke Tower lighthouse served as a sentry for those entering Halifax Harbour. Later, the many fortifications on McNabs equipped with powerful guns, searchlights and anti-submarine nets guarded the city during the two World Wars. Following the Halifax Explosion, the garrison on the island provided ready and able assistance when much of the city had been destroyed. After the war years and right up until the 1990s, the island played an important military role by monitored ship traffic in Halifax Harbour from the listening station at Hugonin Battery.

We are pleased that Jay can join us for our annual meeting. His presentation will give us some fascinating insight into how important McNabs Island is to Canadian history.

Hope to see you there!

Friends of McNabs Island Society The Rucksack

MEMBERSHIPS: Individual Membership or Newsletter Only is \$20 per year, Family Membership is \$25 per year, Supporting Membership is \$75 per year and Sustaining Membership is \$150 per year. We are a registered charity and accept donations.

Web address: <http://www.mcnabsisland.ca>

Contact address: **The Friends of McNabs Island**
PO Box 31240, Gladstone RPO
Halifax, NS B3K 5Y1

We welcome contributions, ideas and feedback.

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ISLAND UPDATES

Tour Guides Needed

We get lots of requests for guided tours from teachers and groups organizing trips to McNabs. If you're interested in McNabs history or the island's flora and fauna and want to share your knowledge with others – why not become an island tour guide! We'll be holding a training session later this spring.

Island Volunteers Needed

Want to help with some island projects? We've got plenty of work to do restoring the Victorian Gardens and installing more park benches. Get in touch by contacting info@mcnabsisland.ca or 902-434-2254



We can't wait for spring and the osprey to come back to its nest at Wreck Cove on McNabs Island.
Photo credit: Rochelle Owen

Descendants of Dutch emigrants place cross in memory of the 1866 cholera tragedy

By Brent King

It was fully 150 years ago that McNabs Island experienced its worst single tragedy since Europeans began fishing, farming and settling there. Today, scant evidence exists. No memorial, monument or marker remains for two hundred quarantine victims who died from the cholera outbreak of 1866 during the trans-Atlantic crossing of the S.S. England.

However, a simple yet respectful testimonial was placed on the island on October 14th. Craig and Nora Cottrill commemorated their connection with Dutch ancestors whose family was devastated by cholera, installing a 7-inch cast iron cross on Hugonin Point overlooking Maugers Beach and Findlays Cove.

Residents of Seattle, Washington, Craig and Nora Cottrill were passengers on Royal Caribbean's Serenade of the Seas whose itinerary out of Boston included a day's stopover in Halifax. The Cottrills had contacted the Friends of McNabs Island hoping to visit the island during their stopover in Halifax. They were particularly interested in any historical evidence of the SS England tragedy. Craig Cottrill is the great-great-grandson of Dutch emigrants Pieter DeJong Sr. and Gisbertje DeJong.

While Hugonin Point is now partially overgrown with alders at one end and disused metal fencing bordering the other, one photograph (circa 1890s) shows an expanse of cleared land well past the shoreline. "Here a large mound surrounded by a rail can be seen," wrote historian H.W. Hewitt in a June, 1901 article in the Dartmouth Patriot, referring to the cemetery which originated out of crisis. Hugonin Point, he added, is where the "greater part [of the cholera victims] are to be found."

Documentation and records of the time confirm that there were at least several emergency burial sites throughout the island. In addition to Hugonin Point, maps or personal accounts indicate that victims were buried in the southernmost parts of the island (Big Thrumcap and Little Thrumcap), up from the shoreline below Hugonin House and part way between Findlays Cove and Fort Ives.

The tragedy that killed many had its onset at sea before McNabs Island became the fatal epicentre. What author Steven Laffoley coined as the "death ship of Halifax Harbour" fatefully began on March 28, 1866 when the S.S. England left Liverpool for New York. After a stopover in Queenstown, Ireland, the vessel had 1,202 passengers, almost exclusively emigrants (mostly Irish and German), all travelling steerage class in confined, cramped, unsanitary conditions. Dozens of passengers perished en route from highly lethal Asiatic cholera once it had felled its first victim. The disease thrived as the emigrants experienced ever-growing distress; cholera's airborne nature readily enabled person-to-person infection among the lower decks. ►



Craig and Nora Cottrill

Descendants of Dutch emigrants place cross in memory of the 1866 cholera tragedy (Cont.)

Late on the day of April 8, the water off of McNabs Island became the anchorage for the diverted ship. Come daybreak, the S.S. England raised the Yellow Jack, or yellow flag, warning that it was under quarantine. A fear of cholera was already founded and entrenched in the city. Several decades earlier, in 1834, an outbreak of the disease had brought 600 fatalities to a population of 14,000. The cholera scare lasted for three weeks.

Along with the vessel's shipborne cholera came other drastic events. The disease transformed McNabs Island into a makeshift quarantine station. It alarmed Haligonians, many panic-stricken that the virulent disease would get transported across the harbour to citizens. And over 10 days of distress and chaos, it caused an enormous loss of life. There were hastened group burials—to confine the disease and to control contagion—in several of the most feasible, sometimes remote, sites around the island.

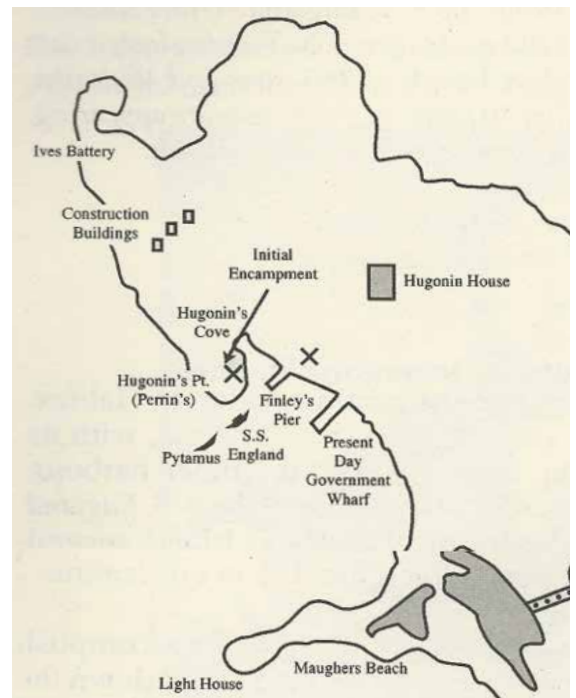
“The dead remained for days on the field, the number constantly increasing, a canvas sail thrown over the pile, until the labors of the doctors abated a little,” wrote Sister Mary Clare Connolly of the Sisters of Charity who volunteered with other Sisters to take care for the victims, especially the orphans. “Then they, each evening, covering themselves with disinfectants, buried the dead in one common grave or pit.”

On McNabs Island, what had been a painful and traumatic episode finally ended on the tenth day. The departure of the S.S. England, recalls H.W. Hewitt, was a joyous one for the fortunate survivors. “The healthy passengers were taken on board the England and as the yellow flag was hauled down three heartfelt cheers were given. On Wednesday [April] 18th at 7 o'clock the England sailed for New York with 875 steerage and 16 saloon passengers, besides a crew of 116 including the master, Capt. R. W. Grace. The steamer arrived at New York, April 27th, all were well.”

(See also Brian Kinsman's article on the Friends website, Steven Laffoley's Death Ship of Halifax Harbour and Dr. Ian Arthur Cameron's Quarantine: What is Old is New. Research specifically on the DeJong's heritage was published in 2002 by Mark A. DeJong in a book of family ancestry, Journey from the Three Bridges.)



Caring for the Sick on McNabs Island, 1866.
Painting by Sister Agnes Berchmans Landry
Image courtesy of Sisters of
Charity-Halifax Archives #320A)



Hugonin Point – location of the cholera
unmarked grave site
Map courtesy of Dr. Ian Cameron

Cottrill DeJong Family History

By Brent King

The ancestors of the Cottrills suffered substantial losses to their own family in 1866 during the cholera outbreak. Five members of the DeJong family died while on the voyage or while in quarantine. Pieter DeJong Sr. and Gisbertje lost three sons: Elbert (34), Neldus (21) and Dirk (24). As well, Dirk's wife, Kornelia (20), died a cholera victim. Dirk and Kornelia had been married for less than four months. A member of the expanded DeJong family died too. The fifth DeJong fatality was Arie (17 months), the son of Martinus and Grietje DeJong, who had been too young to travel with his parents when they had emigrated the year before.

Although heartbreaking tragedy befell the DeJong family (and many other emigrant families), the crossing had been intended to explore opportunities for the whole family in the United States. The DeJongs were not unique in leaving Europe around the mid-1860s to establish new lives.

Pieter Sr. and his wife Gisbertje migrated for reasons given as economic opportunity," Nora explains, "and to join family in Iowa originally. When choosing a destination, family depended on advice from family and friends already residing in the USA."

"Pieter Sr. was a farmer, or land bouman, in Arkel, Holland, where wheat and dairy were agricultural mainstays. "Generally the Dutch economy was stagnant," says Nora, "and did not accommodate the growing rural population. So subdividing farms was no longer an option because the farms were already small." Pieter Sr. bought a farm in Black Oak Township, Mahaska County, Iowa. He expanded his farm from 80 acres to 150 acres. In his lifetime he suffered the loss of his wife and most of his children; however, Pieter Sr. did see his many grandsons continue on with farming.

The 2016 Christmas Bird Count on McNabs Island

By Mike Crowell, Richard LaPaix and Jacqueline Halsey

Every year tens of thousands of people in Canada and the US take part in "The Christmas Bird Count." This citizen based scientific wildlife survey gathers bird numbers from all over the continent and collates them in the enormous Audubon Bird Society data base. Mike Crowell and Rich LaPaix have conducted a Christmas bird count on McNabs Island many times before. This year however their dedication was put to the test. Three of their team were unable to make it, the weather was diabolical, the ground conditions hazardous and the temperature so cold they couldn't take their gloves off to take photographs. In spite of this they hiked the island and counted 555 birds representing 34 species. This was an average count compared to other years, however there were no sightings of the Greater Scaup usually seen on the island. Detailed results are published in the Nova Scotia Bird Society magazine. Well done Mike and Rich.



Great Scaup – Not spotted this year

Remembering Marge (Cleveland) McKay

from Faye (Cleveland) Power and Janet Stacey

The Friends of McNabs Island offer our sincere condolences to Faye Power, on the recent loss of her sister Marge, on January 2, 2017 at the age of 93 years, in Los Angeles, California. Marge is survived by her husband "Mac" (Lyman McKay), as well as her sisters Faye Power and Joan McGregor (Nova Scotia); her brother Reg, (Bellingham, Washington); and Marge and Mac's five children, ten grandchildren and spouses, plus nine great-grandchildren.

Marge Cleveland was born on August 5, 1923, the daughter of Colin Cleveland, the lighthouse keeper of the McNabs Island Lighthouse located off the old Military Road. Marge grew up in that lighthouse. Marge married Mac (Lyman) McKay, on April 16, 1945. The newlyweds became caretakers of Fort Hugonin on McNabs Island and lived there until 1953, when they moved to Purcell's Cove Road. In 1959 Marge and Mac left Nova Scotia and moved to the Los Angeles area of California with their five children.



Marge and Mac McKay – early years

Colin MacLean – 1965-2017

The former Chair of the Waterfront Development was a keen supporter of the Friends of McNabs. A teacher and lover of Maritime history, Colin helped steer some provincial funding from the Crown Corporation to the island for new composting toilets, trail signs and floating docks at Garrison Pier. Sadly Colin passed away in February. We extend our sincere condolences to his family.



**Colin MacLean on Garrison Pier - October 2015
Photo credit: C McCarthy**

Friends of McNabs \$250 Prize Winner for Halifax Trail Challenge

By Brian Phelan

Our 2016 McNabs Fall Foliage Tour proved to be a winner for McNabs Island!

The October Trail Challenge hosted by Halifax Parks and Recreation aims to increase residents' awareness of the Halifax regional trails, greenways and parks. Thousands of residents participate each year. Halifax Parks & Recreation Active Living Coordinator Gabriel Gallagher attended the McNabs Fall Foliage Tour and spoke with a number of the tour guides. We were asked to complete the on-line survey to enter the draw for a Trail Challenge cash prize. "Lady Luck" was kind, and our entry was drawn as a prize winner in the Community Trail Challenge category.

There is a bit of irony here as the Friends of McNabs are a member of the Halifax Regional Trails Association and yet cannot get listed on the halifax.ca/trails web site nor get any trail funding from the municipality. The \$250 cash prize will be used to help offset the transportation costs to get to the island for either a school group activity or a volunteer work day. The resulting spin-off benefit for the Friends of McNabs is further promotion and awareness of the Island as a jewel to be enjoyed and treasured.

McNabs Island Fall Foliage Tours

by Jacqueline Halsey

Mild temperatures, a bright blue sky and a sun that sparkled on the water and glowed through the leaves made the 2016 Fall Foliage Tours event one of the best ever. After being welcomed by board member Royce Walker, approximately 200 participants began criss-crossing the island on the tour of their choice with their informative guides. This year, a new tour of the intertidal environment was added to the regular line-up.

I chose to join Brent King's tour to Fort McNab. About twenty of us headed south along Maugers Beach then hiked a wooded trail, brilliant in golds and reds, around McNabs Pond, along to the ocean and up to Fort McNab. Stops were made along the way to enable us to hear Brent talk about the history of the island and answer any questions. We ate our lunch sitting on the walls of the old fort looking out over the breathtaking views of the ocean.

The afternoon was a time for everyone to enjoy McNabs Island in their own way, be it exploring new paths, revisiting favorite spots, drawing sand pictures on Maugers Beach with the kids or just soaking up the ambience on one of the park benches, newly installed by CBC Information Morning's "Do-Crew." All too soon it was time to head back to the mainland.

For people interested in going next year; the day lasts from approximately 9:30 – 4:30. The guided tours are two to three hours long. Some are designed for the robust hiker, others go at a gentler pace. There are composting toilets on the island but no concessions.

Be warned - The tickets sell out quickly.



Visitors board the Captain's Pride for the trip back to Eastern Passage

McNabs Island Events

Fall Foliage Tours of McNabs Island

Sunday October 15 (rain date October 22) Time 10AM – 4PM

Join the Friends of McNabs Island Society for the annual Fall Foliage Tour of McNabs Island Provincial Park. See the island in its autumn splendour and participate in guided history and nature tours.

Two Departure Points: Halifax: Murphy's on the Water, Cable Wharf, on the Halifax Waterfront and Eastern Passage: A&M Sea Charters 87 Government Wharf Rd, Fisherman's Cove.

Cost: \$15 (members and children) \$20 (non-members). Tickets go on sale via Eventbrite.ca in the fall.

For more information on our events contact info@mcnabsisland.ca or fill out the contact us form on our website <http://www.mcnabsisland.ca/> or call Faye (902-443-1749) or Cathy (434-2254). For updates, follow us on <https://www.facebook.com/McNabsIsland> and Twitter [@mcnabsisland](https://twitter.com/mcnabsisland).

McNabs Island Events (Cont.)

McNabs Island Beach Cleanup

**Sunday June 4 (rain date- June 11)
Time: 9:30AM – 4PM**

Celebrate Environment Week and Oceans Day by helping us clean up McNabs Island Provincial Park! Over the past 27 years, our volunteers have collected more than 12,500 bags of garbage and recyclables from the beaches of McNabs and Lawlor Islands Provincial Park.

Two Departure Locations: Halifax: Murphy's on the Water, Cable Wharf or Eastern Passage: A&M Sea Charters 87 Government Wharf Rd, Fisherman's Cove.

This is a FREE event but EVERYONE must PRE-REGISTER via Eventbrite.ca or by calling 902-434-2254

Discover McNabs Island Summer Heritage Tours

**Sunday July 16 and August 13
Time: 10AM - 4PM**

Stroll through Canadian history on McNabs Island! Learn about the important role the Island played throughout our history from a Mi'kmaq First Nations summer encampment, to a French fishing station, and then protector of British North America. Discover what it was like to live on the island during the World Wars and in peacetime.

Departure from Eastern Passage: A&M Sea Charters, 87 Government Wharf Rd, Fisherman's Cove.

Cost: \$15 (members and children) \$20 (non-members). Space is limited; tickets go on sale via Eventbrite.ca later this spring.

Annual Membership to the Friends of McNabs Island Society runs on the calendar year and includes a year's subscription to the society's newsletter, The Rusksack and discounts at our island events

Renew Your Membership Now!

We thank you for your continued support and welcome your interest!

Renew you membership directly via our website:
mcnabsisland.ca/membership-application

or send a cheque payable to:
The Friends of McNabs Island Society
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