

Rucksack Winter 2000/2001

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1917 Halifax Explosion Claimed a Soldier Stationed at Fort Ives

by Janet Kitz

It was over fifteen years ago that I began what turned out to be my most engrossing work, cataloguing boxes of mortuary bags. These boxes had lain in the basement of Province House since the Mortuary Committee gave up its work after the Halifax Explosion of December 6, 1917.

Chebucto Road School was hastily organized as the official mortuary. Bodies were assembled there, awaiting identification. They were searched, and possessions placed in linen bags. These bags were numbered and itemized, and used to help identify the deceased. With as detailed information as possible, careful lists were maintained. Some victims were identified, others never, but all possessions remained unclaimed. No claims were ever filed as the owners were often among those who died in the explosion.

Sapper Claude Gaudet was one such case. Gaudet of the Royal Engineers (sapper was a term used to identify a bomb diffusing specialist) was stationed at the 1st Fortress at Ives Point on McNabs Island. His body had been identified by Sapper Titto, RCE and given the number 298.

No other identification was present. No effects were listed or present.

Number 466 was a very different case: an unidentified child who had been covered by an army great coat. The pockets in the coat contained letters written in French. These letters had been placed in the child's mortuary bag. One of the letters was addressed to Sapper Claude Gaudet, and written by

his brother Sylvani from a military hospital in England. In the letter, Sylvani advised Gaudet to stay in Canada. Another letter was from Gaudet's cousin Agathe from Boudreau Village, New Brunswick. Gaudet had intended to introduce Agathe to one of his friends, but she wished to pass the friend on to someone else as she replied " J'ai un garçon steady". She had joked that he might be dead, as it was so long since he had written. Agathe would never receive his reply, as it remained unmailed. His letter to her stated that he was far from dead, and felt most vigorous. Also found among Sapper Gaudet's letters was his pass to visit Halifax, which read:

**From 2nd boat 5-12-17
To last boat 6-12-17**

Janet Kitz is the author of several books on the Halifax Explosion, and is a long-time member of the Society.

CFIA Commences Beetle Related Tree Cutting on McNabs Island

On January 8th the Canadian Food Inspection Agency commenced two weeks of selective cutting and burning of about 130 trees on McNabs, in a continued effort to deal with the Brown Spruce Longhorn Beetle in Halifax. Friends of McNabs Island Society board members as well as members of the local press monitored the CFIA's activities on-island. Of particular concern were impacts to surrounding flora, hiking trails and wetlands.

Impact from these activities appears to be minimal.

The first wave of planned tree cutting is complete. FOMIS will continue to monitor CFIA plans and activities with interest. Various newspaper articles regarding the cutting can be found at the FOMIS Web site at "<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/environment/FOMIS>".

Teepee Lady Hosts Nature Visits for Student Tours

by Miriam Bell-Irving

Brought to McNabs Island to reconstruct the former Taylor cottage, Carla Silver and John Storm soon found themselves hosting groups of Halifax school children. Silver had brought a traditional Sioux teepee to the island

with the intention of erecting it beside the Taylor cottage. Constructed using traditional Native practices, it attracted the attention of the children out on field trips. Captain Mike "Redbeard" Tilley noticed the children's interest and arranged for Silver and the children to meet.

Silver and Storm were utilizing the teepee for traditional Native spiritual practices, and were happy to share some of the traditional teachings with the groups of children. She and Storm were planning on living in the teepee over the summer months, but when it became apparent that the children's visits were becoming a regular occurrence, they remained in the Taylor cottage, and turned the teepee into a nature interpretation centre.

Silver noticed that the teepee made a strong impression on the children. They would arrive at the house full of enthusiasm. But once brought into the teepee in traditional Native manner they fell quiet and listened to her explanation of the layout of the teepee. Silver explained the doorway faced the East in order to greet the dawn. She also went on to show the children the different berries she had gathered around the island, and shared her knowledge of them with the group.

She went on to explain that the prayer ribbons wound around the top of the teepee were meant to catch the wind, thereby sending the prayers out. She talked about sharing respect for the earth and earth awareness. Silver and the children sat in the teepee and would listen to the wind and the birds outside. She would demonstrate how the round shape of the teepee should act as a reminder of our interconnectedness. During these tours, Silver affectionately became known as the "Teepee Lady".

Silver and Storm spent the remaining time on the Island deconstructing the former Taylor cottage. They also practiced primitive living skills, relying heavily on the native vegetation of McNabs Island to supplement their food supply.

Carla Silver has a historic connection to McNabs. Her grandfather, Captain Vernon Lewis Duncan, was the assistant lighthouse keeper on Maughers Beach. From the age of four, Silver's grandfather used to take her on tours of the island. She remembered the days when both the church and the schoolhouse were still standing and fully intact. Silver spoke about stories of the bottle factory, and staying in the Conrad guesthouse. She remembered her grandmother sitting with Gladys Conrad, and helping her transcribe her diaries. Silver would bring one of Mrs. Conrad's famous cookies on walks with her grandfather, while the two women sat together and chatted.

Plans are underway for Silver and Storm to return to McNabs Island in the Spring of 2001 to complete work on the Taylor cottage, and to renovate the Jones cottage.

McNabs and Lawlor Islands Provincial Park Advisory Committee Update

by Cathy McCarthy

Advisory committee members have been meeting on a regular basis since July 2000. The committee's task is to assist the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources with the development of a park management plan for McNabs and Lawlor Islands. Committee members are Royce Walker, Patricia Manuel, Martin Willis on, Colin Stewart, Paul Macnab, Jay Meeuwig, Catherine McCarthy and Bob Horne. The committee is supported by government representatives from Parks Canada, Halifax Regional Municipality and Natural Resources.

The committee has spent considerable time gathering and sharing information on the islands. There have been presentations from Martin Willison, who spoke about the natural history and distinctive habitats on the islands, Brian Kinsman, who covered the islands' cultural history and Ron McDonald, who spoke of the islands' military history. All the cultural and natural resource features will be overlaid on working base maps to develop park zones and areas of interest for park visitors. Areas of the islands where access should be restricted will also be mapped. For example, old military installations, such as the WW II Strawberry Battery on McNabs, could pose a danger to the public. As well, sensitive areas, such as the Great Blue Heron nesting colonies on Lawlor Island should make Lawlor Island inaccessible to the public.

The committee is following the Vision and Management Objectives set out in the 1995 Land Use Strategy for the islands. The islands will to be developed as a Natural Environment Park as defined under the Provincial Parks Act. The advisory committee expects to make recommendations on the management plan by this summer.

Marguerite Harding's Through the Gates Book Recalls the War Years on McNabs

by Cathy McCarthy

On December 11, 2000, Friends of McNabs Island board members Carolyn Mont, A. Self, Victor Dingle and myself travelled to Bridgewater to attend the

book launch of fellow Friends of McNabs Island member, Marguerite Harding's book *Through the Gates*. We were warmly received by Marguerite Harding, her family and the people of Bridgewater who filled the Legion Hall to join Marguerite in her book launch celebration.

Marguerite had contacted me several years ago, telling me of her experiences on the island and asking for information on how to get to McNabs Island to further her research. She told me of her plans to write a book about the War Years with the focus on McNabs Island and the people stationed there. I arranged for her to travel to McNabs with Captain Mike Tilley and to be escorted on the island by McNabs Island caretaker, Dave Seaboyer.

The "Gates" in the title of Marguerite's book refer to the submarine net or "gates to Halifax" that traversed the main Harbour entrance from Strawberry Battery to York Redoubt. Mrs. Harding's husband Harold was stationed on McNabs Island for five years during WWII. He was responsible for the searchlight emplacements at Strawberry Battery and Fort McNab. Marguerite accompanied her husband to McNabs Island and lived there for fourteen months. During that time she watched the navy and merchant marine ships leave Halifax Harbour. Marguerite's book recalls the War Years on McNabs and features interviews with service men and women who travelled "Through the Gates" to the war in Europe.

The Friends of McNabs would like to congratulate Marguerite Harding for a job well done. Her book *Through the Gates* was published by the Bridgewater Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion as a millennium project. The first edition has already sold out, but the Legion plans to print a second edition in the near future.

Hidden Treasure on McNabs Island

by Bill Mont

Did lifetime McNabs resident Bill Lynch bury silver and gold on the island? According to local lore silver and gold coins were put into long cylinders by Mr. Lynch and sealed, and then brought to McNabs. But where were they hidden? I guess we will never know if it was found, or whether it still is somewhere on the island.

Bill Lynch was famous for his entertaining "midway" shows that ranged all over the Maritimes. McNabs Island was one of the first areas where he held his shows. These were held back in the days when families did not have the variety of recreational outlets to choose from that are available today. From

his shows, he had easy access to cash, such as coins and silver dollars, which he could hideaway.

Bill Lynch owned the house with beach stones on the exterior, next to the Davis-Conrad house (at the North end of McNabs Island, near Fort Ives). This house was located on the foundation of Peter McNab's former residence. An interesting aspect of this house was the basement. The main timber holding up the house was not your usual piece of lumber, but a mast from some ship, long since gone. (Perhaps from a wreck on McNabs Island?). No one seems to know where the mast came from. Imagine the stories it could tell.

McNabs Island *Beach Plum Jelly

- 2 quarts (2 litres) beach plums (a few red ones make better colour and flavour)
- 6 cups (1.4 litres) sugar
- 1/2 bottle commercial liquid fruit pectin
- Crush the beach plums, add 2-1/2 (600 ml) cups water.

Cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Place in cloth jelly bag and drain the juice. Combine juice and sugar and heat to boiling. Add liquid pectin. Boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from stove, skim, if necessary and pour into hot glasses. Cover with melted parafin.

*Note: Beach Plums grow in abundance all over McNabs, though this New England moniker might be more commonly recognized as "rose hips" in Atlantic Canada. Ed.

AGM: Collecting Oral History on McNabs Island

by Cathy McCarthy

The Friends of McNabs Island Society will be holding our Annual General Meeting on May 1, 2001 at 7 p.m. at the Findlay Community Centre, Elliot Street in Dartmouth (off Prince Albert Road across from Sullivan's Pond). The event will feature a brief business meeting, election of officers, followed by a presentation on the Collecting Oral History on McNabs Island.

Drs. Jim Morrison, Professor of History at Saint Mary's University and Ron McDonald, Curator of Historical Research with Parks Canada will discuss "Collecting Oral Research on McNabs Island". This is a project initiated by Parks Canada to collect information from people who have lived or worked on the Harbour Islands. Ron McDonald will discuss the importance of an oral

history project and what information relating to coastal defences and the fortifications on McNabs Island Parks Canada has already collected. Jim Morrison, who has been working on the oral history project with Parks Canada since 1998, will discuss recent oral history research and share some sample interviews with former McNabs islanders.

This is an opportune time for those who have information on their early experiences on McNabs Island to share it with others. Professor Morrison and Dr. McDonald plan to continue this oral history project and will be conducting further interviews. Parks Canada has a commitment to preserving our oral history, which is so important in helping us understanding the past.

How well do you know McNabs Island?

1. Captain Mike _____ Tilley (nickname)
2. Brand name of the soft and "not-so- soft" drinks bottled on McNabs Island _____
3. Another name for rose-hips _____
4. The name of the first fort constructed on McNabs Island _____
5. The name of the last McNab family member to be directly associated with the Island _____
6. A term used to describe rolling ships onto their sides for maintenance at low tide _____
7. The name of the only Canadian-built fortification on the island _____
8. The name of the first ferry employed by the Halifax Steamboat Company to transport passengers to and from McNabs Island _____
9. The family name of the Worcestershire Sauce entrepreneur who resided on McNabs Island _____
10. _____ Hugonin Battery was a station used for listening for _____

How well do you know Lawlor Island?

1. The year Lawlor Island was first named _____
2. Group of temporary visitors quarantined in 1901 on Lawlor Island for three weeks, led by Leo Tolstoy _____
3. Number of world war(s) Lawlor was used in for strategic purposes _____
4. The year in which all quarantine buildings were finally closed _____

5. Most prolific current residents of Lawlor Island _____

McNabs and Lawlors "I.Q. Tests"
courtesy of Miriam Bell-Irving

Answers can be found in Discover McNabs Island, available from FOMIS for
\$9.95