



The Rucksack

Newsletter of the Friends of McNabs Island Society

The Society is a Registered Charity

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Annual General Meeting – April 8, 2026

You are invited to the Friends of McNabs Island Society's 35th Annual General Meeting on Wednesday, April 8 in the Auditorium of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History at 1747 Summer Street in Halifax. Doors open at 6:30 pm and the meeting starts at 7:00 pm.

Join archeologist Vanessa Smith for an interesting and informative presentation on the early history of the McNab family on the island.

While there is a rich literary and folk tradition surrounding Peter McNab and his family and how they lived on the island, historical information is somewhat more piecemeal. However, archival sources, including maps, letters, newspapers, and artwork, as well as archaeological research offer us glimpses into this early period and highlight how the landscape of the island has changed since Peter I purchased the island.

This illustrated talk will explore the early colonial history of McNabs Island and the presence of Peter McNab I and his family on the island during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Vanessa Smith is an archaeologist and the Curator/Registrar of Archaeology for the Nova Scotia Museum. Her connection to McNabs Island began during her honours thesis work and an interest in Scottish settlement on the island. After finishing her undergraduate studies in anthropology at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Vanessa completed a master's degree in archaeology at the University of Glasgow. She also holds a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Her research interests include early colonial Halifax, particularly the lives of women and under-represented groups, as well as funerary archaeology, burial spaces and commemoration.



Vanessa Smith in the McNab Family Cemetery
Photo by Cathy McCarthy

Vanessa regularly participates in the Friends of McNabs Island Society's Fall Foliage event, lending an archaeological and historical perspective to the Hangman's Beach tour, and she tries to visit McNabs Island as often as she can!

Friends of McNabs Island Society
The Rucksack

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**We welcome contributions,
ideas and feedback.**

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Content is for members' interest only.

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2025 - 2026

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The Last Farm on McNabs Island Book Launch

by Jacqueline Halsey

Bruce Scott's launch party for his book, The Last Farm on McNabs Island, published by Nimbus Publishing, was held on a summer afternoon in the Fisherman's Cove Heritage Centre. The book is a personal account of his mother's memories of twentieth century life on McNabs Island and includes photographs and maps.

While Bruce Scott signed copies of his book, the audience enjoyed tea and treats and shared their own connections with McNabs Island.

Pictured at the book-signing table is Bruce Scott, his wife Sandra, and board member Faye Power, who grew up on McNabs Island.

Photo by Royce Walker





Annual Friends Of McNabs Volunteer Appreciation Event



Friends of McNabs Volunteers met at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic for our Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event on November 18, 2025. The objective for the day was to thank the volunteers for their efforts, celebrate our successes, review the events of 2025 and plan for 2026. We also discussed ways to improve our existing activities or develop new ones. We enjoyed a light lunch at breaktime.

One of our favourite parts of the day was hearing how people became involved with the Friends of McNabs and favourite “WOW” moments from their 2025 Friends’ experiences. Most people became involved because they have a friend that introduced them to the wonder of McNabs Island or were on a Beach Cleanup, Heritage Tour or Fall Foliage Tour. We are always looking for more volunteers, so please encourage your friends that may be interested in volunteering, to attend one of our events.

Some of the “WOW” moments discussed involved the natural beauty and peace on the Island at the forts, beaches, forests and trails - especially the newly refurbished Timmins Cove Trail. Two intriguing sights during the Fall Foliage event were the discovery of a whale carcass that had washed up on the beach and a porcupine currently using a cannon at Fort Ives for a home.

We provided 21 volunteer guide-supported events this year, down from 33 hosted in 2024. The numbers were down because of the Woods Travel Ban, no home school tours and no full day, on-island event as part of a corporate conference that occurred in 2024. With the reduction in events, we still had over 610 guests supported by 24 summer staff opportunities and 89 individual volunteer guide opportunities.

On-island events included three heritage tours, a shoreline tour, a forest bathing event, three Boys & Girls Club day trips and the tremendously popular Fall Foliage Tours. Volunteers, guides and participants were poised to assist with the June 1 Beach Clean up, however, weather precluded the landing of the Ambassatours boat so few people made it to the island on that day. Volunteer support was provided to the Ulnooweg youth group tour, an Alnass Family Day, a Volksmarch hike, a school presentation at Mount Edward School, a geneological trip made by Steven Stothers and a NS Young Naturalist field trip.

Off-island events were also attended by summer staff and volunteers: Oceans & You, at the Maritime Museum, Shearwater Bienvenue and the Association of Science Teachers Conference, to name a few.



Dachia Joudrey addresses the Volunteer event participants.
Photo by Cathy McCarthy

The other big volunteer activities this year were the maintenance work days. These scheduled work days resulted in an increase in work hours from 232 in 2024 to 413 in 2025. This volunteer work makes a big difference in the trails and Teahouse/Outdoor Education Centre and it vastly improves the experience of visitors to the island. Scheduling the work days was a great suggestion from last year’s Volunteer Appreciation Event.

This event gave us the opportunity to give thanks to all the volunteers that work so hard to promote and protect our favourite Island. Their generous efforts are necessary to have the positive impact on the Island that we do.

Article by Mike Winslow



Fall Foliage Tours Showcase 2025



What it's all about! Participants enjoying the gorgeous fall colours on Military Road.
Photo by Jacqueline Halsey

Military Interpreters Liam Caswell and Ben Thompson, from the Halifax Citadel Society, waiting to board the boat to McNabs Island. They greeted people at Fort McNab and brought history alive for the day. Photo by Peter Steeper



CBC reporter Jessie Bruce interviewing Cathy McCarthy about the newly opened Timmins Cove Trail. They stand at the site of the former soda pop factory on McNabs Island. Photo by Peter Steeper



Peter Landry as Dr. Slayter, displays a ginger beer bottle of "Pure McNab".
Photo by Peter Steeper

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Amelia Kennedy, Nova Scotia Natural Resources educator displaying her animal artifacts. Photo by Peter Steeper



Nature tour participants enjoyed meeting this American toad held by tour leader Mike Crowell. Photo by Kara Gordon-MacKay

A Curious Find by Kara Gordon-MacKay

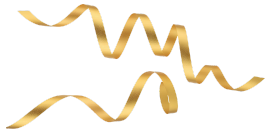
In October 2025, participants on the Fall Foliage Adventure Tour were both sad and fascinated to discover the carcass of a humpback whale near the south end of the island.

According to Tonya Wimmer of the Marine Animal Rescue Society (MARS), the 12-13 metre whale first washed ashore on August 14th, 2025 on the Cow Bay causeway. Its cause of death is unknown. Unfortunately, it was too decomposed to perform a necropsy.

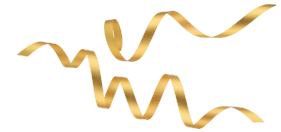
One of the humpback's vertebrae, weighing about 23 kilograms, was picked up by DNR.

You never know what you're going to find when you visit the island! Ian Smith, one of our dedicated volunteers, took great photos, including the one below.





Joyce's 80th Birthday Roast by her sister Joan
submitted by another sister, Faye Power



Note from Faye: I came across this missive that my sister Joan wrote to Joyce for her 80th birthday in 2008. There was a big celebration to honour Joyce, and Joan was asked to submit something.

JOYCE HENRIETTA HIGNETT, nee CLEVELAND

Congratulations JOYCE on your 80th BIRTHDAY - September 6, 2008.

When you arrived, Joyce, the Colin Cleveland household was already well-established, and you were welcomed to the growing family of Colin Watson Cleveland and his young wife, Glennie Harnish, who lived in the Cleveland household in Southwest Cove, Lunenburg County of Nova Scotia. Colin had been a fisherman, like his father before him, previous to serving in the Army during the First World War - 1914 to 1918. He fought at Vimy Ridge in France and he had been wounded in that war, but thankfully, returned home intact when the war ended in 1918.

Dad married Mom in 1920. She was born and grew up in Mill Cove, just a short horse-and-buggy ride from Dad's family homestead. Their first children were all born in that homestead. Sadly, their firstborn, Ethel Grace, did not survive her first year of life, and she lies buried in the Anglican churchyard at Northwest Cove. Then came Lester Sherman, Marjorie Evelyn, Belle Ruth, and you, Joyce, our guest-of-honour.

Mom and Dad decided about then to spread their wings, and they moved with their growing young family to Woodside, just outside Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. When Santa came at Christmas, 1929, with his sleigh full of toys for little Lester, Marjorie, Belle, and you - Joyce, there was some risk of a mid-air collision. The stork was already winging its way to this lively household, with another precious bundle. That would be me, Joan Josephine. Graciously I waited for two days so's the other children could enjoy their Christmas without my interference. Actually the stork may have been lost. It's regular route took it to South West Cove, and not The Grace Maternity Hospital in Halifax.

The family was not settled in at Woodside for very long when Dad was awarded the position of Lighthouse Keeper of the Ives Point Lighthouse on McNabs Island. We nestled in there for the next 25 years - 1932 to 1957. We used wood stoves for heat and for cooking. No electricity or running water, and for light, we used kerosene lamps. Even the lighthouse beacon was fueled by kerosene oil. Life was good.

Safe to say, Joyce, that neither you nor I had a worry in the world. Dad would give us our turns sitting on his lap as he read to us by lamplight from our colorful Bible story books. Bliss indeed! As we grew, you seemed to follow Mom around, learning to cook, bake, and clean house, etc. You also had Mom's flair for being sociable and welcoming to all visitors, be they family or friends. And you've never lost that attribute. I can vouch for that!

Well! Well! Well! Joyce, you really did fall in the well. It's your story so you're the best one to tell it. But I can still see you sitting majestically in the bucket as Dad pulled you up, making a grand entrance as you reached the top safely. You must have had some feelings of panic but, for myself, I liked the story's ending: You were safe and sound, and Dad did land a precious catch that day.

1935: Our Reg was born at The Grace Maternity Hospital, same as me. Then wartime happened, 1939 to 1945. On August 13, 1947, the last of our siblings was born, Carol "Faye" and she, too, was born at the Grace Maternity Hospital in Halifax.



FOMIS / McNabs Island Japanese Beetle Control Program – 2025 Report

Submitted by: Brian Phelan, FOMIS Board Member, ISA Certified Arborist

In 2023, the Friends of McNabs Island Society, with permission from NS Department of Natural Resources, implemented a Japanese Beetle Control Program at the former Hugonin-Perrin Estate and English Gardens. While the Japanese Beetle is not considered a Forestry Pest, many of the introduced plants within the English Gardens area are considered host plants for this very destructive pest. The Japanese Beetle Control Program included a pheromone trapping program in 2024 and 2025, and the application of beneficial nematodes in May of 2025. Four Japanese Beetle traps were placed in open / full sun locations just prior to the emergence of the adult stage. The traps were baited with a dual lure (floral and pheromone) to attract both male and female beetles. Trap monitoring was performed by trained summer staff and volunteers. The beneficial nematodes were applied to the lawn areas in and around the English Gardens, the Teahouse Outdoor Education Centre and the lower lawn.

The pheromone trapping program saw a total of 6500 adult beetles caught in 2024 and 5990 adult beetles caught in 2025. A significant reduction in catch numbers from 2024 to 2025 occurred in traps on the Hugonin-Perrin Estate. Those three traps were located near the beneficial nematode application areas. Given how problematic Japanese Beetle has been in Halifax over the last several years, it is reasonable to conclude that the lower catch numbers in 2025 were a result of the beneficial nematode application. The higher catch numbers in the fourth trap are attributed to the relocation of the trap from Colin Stewart Trail in 2024 to the Kiosk area in 2025. The plan for the continuing Japanese Beetle Control program on McNabs by the Friends in 2026, will include the pheromone traps as well as the application of the beneficial nematodes. This approach targets both adults and larval stages. The hope is to control the overall population and minimize the impact to introduced plants at the Hugonin-Perrin Estate and English Gardens.



In Memoriam - William (Bill) Mont) was a longtime member of the Friends of McNabs Island Society. He passed away on October 28, 2025 at the age of 96.

Bill used to bring his collection of 'Midway King' Bill Lynch photos to our Annual General Meetings and events. He had great knowledge of the history of Halifax and in particular McNabs Island. Our condolences to Bill's family and friends.

Bill did an interview in May 2025 which details his life; you can find it here:

https://youtu.be/_E98UHXYTdl?si=d1pLlImVMmbCWKXs



Bill Mont contributed the photo at left for inclusion in Stephen Kimber's book ***Sailor's Slackers and Blind Pigs: Halifax at War***. Bill didn't know the year it was taken or remember who took it. Many thanks to Stephen for allowing us to use the photo.

Upcoming Events for 2026

Annual General Meeting & McNab Family Presentation

Wednesday April 8, Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History

Doors open at 6:30 pm.

McNabs Island Beach Cleanup

Sunday June 7 (rain date June 14) Time 9:30 am to 4:00 pm.

McNabs Island Guided Tours

Sunday July 5, 12, 19, 26 and August 2, 9, 16, 23. Times 9:30 am to 4:00 pm.

McNabs Island Fall Foliage Tours

Sunday October 18 (rain date Oct. 25) Time 9:30 am to 4:00 pm.

Tickets go on sale via Eventbrite in the spring!

McNabs Island Work Party Trips

Saturdays May 23, June 20, July 18, August 22, September 19, October 17

Rain dates are the next day. Times 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. Registration is required.

Contact us at info@mcnabsisland.ca if you're able to help.



Annual membership to the Friends of McNabs Island Society runs on the calendar year. Your membership includes a year's subscription to the Rucksack newsletter and discount fares to our island events. Members support the ongoing care and development of the "Green Jewel" in Halifax Harbour.

The Friends advocate for funding to maintain the natural environment of the Island and participate in planning for its present and future well-being.

Renew Your Membership and/or Make a Donation!

Thank you for your much needed continued support.

Renew your membership with

e-transfer: info@mcnabsisland.ca

directly via our website:

<http://mcnabsisland.ca/join-friends-mcnabs-island-society>

send a cheque payable to:

The Friends of McNabs Island Society

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For updates, follow us on facebook.com/McNabsIsland, Twitter @mcnabsisland and Instagram @friendsofmcnabsisland

If you are already a member, please invite your friends & coworkers to join.

The more people become aware of and support McNabs Island, the better we will be able to take care of it.

This issue went to print in January 2026.