

## Rucksack Spring '97

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### **PLANNING FOR A HARBOUR ISLANDS PARK: AN UPDATE**

No, the federal and provincial governments have not released their long-awaited Land Use Strategy for McNabs and Lawlor Islands. It may appear on the surface that nothing has changed. However, much has changed on June 2. On that day Nova Scotians elected eleven opposition MPs, including four NDP members from Metro. Thus a de facto fourth level of government, the governing party MP, has been eliminated for the time being.

McNabs, Lawlor, and Devils Islands, and their two permanent residents, are now represented in Ottawa by New Democrat Peter Stoffer, formerly an employee of Canadian Airlines, known in environmental circles for his involvement in the Atlantic Earth Festival. The three islands, plus the neighbouring community of Eastern Passage, are now part of the new federal riding of Sackville-Eastern Shore.

Ron MacDonald, the influential former Liberal MP for Dartmouth, whose riding included the islands prior to redistribution, did not re-offer. Mr. MacDonald's exit from the political scene is highly significant. He was an early supporter of a park on McNabs and Lawlor Islands, and, while in the opposition, spoke up against the planned giant sewage treatment plant at Ives Point and Ives Cove in the early nineties. But his pro-development vision of an island park was not shared by the Friends of McNabs Island Society (FOMIS). He was opposed to a transfer of federal lands on the islands to the province, ostensibly because only the federal government has the resources to develop an operational park on the islands.

In the spring of 1995 Ron MacDonald successfully lobbied then Canadian Heritage minister Michel Dupuy, and blocked a scheduled transfer of the lands in question, blind siding both the Parks Canada bureaucracy and its Nova Scotian partner, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This action delayed the creation of a provincial park on the two islands by at least two years.

Joint federal-provincial public hearings on the fate of the two islands were held in the autumn of 1995, and a summary of the public's presentations (the Meltzer Report) was finally released last summer. But so far there has been no word on the two senior governments' plan for the island. The federal government didn't announce any plans for an island park during the recent election campaign. However, with the departure of Mr. MacDonald from the scene, it is clear that an agreement between the federal and provincial governments is closer to reality. Meanwhile, the situation on the ground is looking up. DNR has extended and rebuilt its service dock at Ives Cove last year, and this summer is focussing on repairs to the Lynch House. Meanwhile, Parks Canada is taking a well-deserved break, having made Fort Ives safe and presentable, after last year's stabilization work on Fort McNab, its pet fort on the island. Local staff have recently completed and received approval for a "commemorative integrity statement" for the Fort McNab National Historic Site, an important document summarizing the heritage resources of the site and Parks Canada objectives in their interpretation.

Again, this year the Friends of McNabs Island Society (FOMIS) will be assisting DNR and Parks Canada in looking after McNabs Island. Cans for garbage and recyclables have again been distributed throughout the island and are being checked regularly. Other projects include the erection of another outhouse at the head of Back (Wreck) Cove, maintenance of existing toilets, trail work, painting of the newly refurbished perimeter fence at Fort Ives, upkeep of the McNab Family Cemetery, and vegetation control at the two forts. The society's Trails Committee would appreciate your help. Have a great summer!

Dusan Soudek

## **DAL BEHAVIOUR AND ORNITHOLOGY CLASSES VISIT McNABS**

Two courses from Dalhousie University's new summer field institute (SEASIDE) used McNabs Island for field trips this May: Field Methods in Animal Behaviour (May 3) and Ornithology (May 13). Both trips had wonderful weather, in stark contrast to the hypothermia fest the behaviour course experienced last year.

This year, the behaviour students, led by Becky Whittam and me, wandered around the island looking for interesting behaviours in animals, from an ant to an eagle. They used whatever they happened on to go through the steps from casual observations to making scientifically testable predictions. For example, one group speculated on the possible functions of exaggerated,

fluttering flights that yellow-rumped warblers were making from tree to tree. Another mused over sky dances by osprey near the Cliff Trail.

Many lay in the sun on the Teahouse lawn, waiting for their instructor to bring the animals to them. When he obliged with a garter snake, they speculated on the function of the noxious smelling substance the snake released on their instructor's shirt.

On a brighter note, the ornithology class, led by Cindy Staicer and Andy Davis, checked off an admirable list of migrant birds. The island's many habitats yielded a wide range of bird species on which the students could hone their identification skills. They included a merlin (a small noisy falcon), many early-arriving warblers, and, on McNabs Pond, an Eurasian widgeon. The latter is an European duck that only rarely wanders over to North America. It is the latest addition to McNabs Island's list of over 200 resident bird species.

Andy Horn

## **A DUTCH GIRL'S MEMORIES OF McNABS ISLAND, 1952-1953**

Sitting on the crude boulders of this pier, I am staring at the ships that come and go on the Nieuwe Waterweg, the New Waterway, here in Rotterdam. The fog is moving in fast now. The stones are getting damp. I should leave now, but I can't, not yet. In the distance I hear the rusty sound of a foghorn, and, all of a sudden I am back to being a ten year old immigrant child. Back at the rocky beach of McNabs, a small stretch of an island near the coast of Halifax.

There were three foghorns there - one at the point; one at the lighthouse halfway down the island; one where we children were not allowed to go because it was on a navy training base. Foghorns were a part of my life.

There was a foghorn when we disembarked after a sea voyage of nine days in 1952. We were sent to a reception centre for immigrants and for sailors who had lost their ship. If we wanted to leave the premises to go to Halifax, we had to check in our passports at the desk at the office.

When we arrived, we desperately had to find a place to live as soon as possible. And we did. On McNabs Island. It was a small summer house, meaning it was primitive. Really primitive.

There was no cooking gas, no electricity, no plumbing, not even a waste pipe. To fetch water we had to go to the well and, on our knees, hoist it up with a bucket. "And don't forget to close the lid when you're finished, or the ponies will fall into it!"

Those ponies belonged to Mr. Lynch. The Lynch family owned a circus, plus half the island. They had electricity and a toilet that you didn't have to move around with you. Besides, their well was much deeper than ours and had a pump. Fortunately, for the Lynches were in their nineties. Mr. Lynch walked with a cane; he used it fervently to chase away snakes. All over the island you could hear his "Kill 'em, kill 'em!".

Most of the year his ponies grazed wherever they liked on the island. Mother called them a disaster, for when they were thirsty, they frequently pushed over our water barrel while trying to drink. Outraged, she would yell: "Krengen, dat was mijn waswater!!" (You bitches, that was my washing water.)

When the circus wasn't performing, a man lived in the log cabin to take care of the ponies. My, was he proud of his log cabin - built the original way without using any nails. What fascinated me, however, that the cabin resembled Hansel and Gretel's fairytale house, but one with a friendly fellow, rather than a horrible hag. The log cabin stood where trees had been cut and was surrounded by high grasses and lots of flowers. The caged child from the upper floor of an apartment building in Nijmegen found herself blissfully in paradise!

For my parents, on the other hand, it was a big change. My father, a tailor, found himself a job on the mainland. At night, when he came home in a small fishing boat, for McNabs Island had no regular ferry service then, he had to cut firewood for the huge stove my mother cooked on. In the wintertime I was allowed to carry the oil lamp so he could see what he was doing.

The word "primitive" had little meaning for a child, who accepted the world as it came. But Mother was used to a better life. She was! The luxury of a flush toilet, for instance! At a distance of about fifty metres from the house we had a hooske, as the Dutch called their outdoor toilet, a shed with a plank covering a hole in the ground. When the hole was filled it started to really stink and the shed had to be moved elsewhere.

Mother couldn't, as I did, go roving on the stony beaches to watch the baby shrimp and starfish that couldn't leave with the tide, remaining trapped in

mysterious puddles. You could also see small fish too weak to leave in time of low tide.

She did come to the beach after I fetched her when I found a log for our stove. Then Mother would hammer a long nail into the log and put a rope on it, so the three of us, including my five year old sister, could take it up the hill all the way to our house.

The prettiest lighthouse was on the grounds where we were not allowed to go. It was a very nice tower, painted red and white. The road leading to it was a long causeway built with big beige stones. To me it was like a fairytale.

Once we did go there secretly with Dad and Mother, very early on a Sunday morning. For we had heard that there were pieces of coal scattered over the island, a treat for our always hungry stove. It was a crime, and I fear it was one with premeditation, for Mother had bought herself an old pram in Halifax and had it shipped by duty boat to McNabs. Still, it was she who kept on nagging, "'t liekt wel oorlog!", it's just like during the war!

Much later I realized that, even in the worst time of the war there were more comforts and conveniences than we had on McNabs. At that time the island didn't even have a proper road, just a path made of large irregular stones on which a car could hardly drive.

For my exploratory rambling I needed no roads. I just went wherever I wished, looking for bilberries, blackberries, wild strawberries, and, of course, lady's-slippers. Most flowers were unknown to me, and most certainly never seen by me before. There was a swamp in the area where you jumped from stone to stone, stiff with fright when you spotted a snake swimming in the water.

I don't think my parents realised in advance how hard it would be for their children to become Canadians on McNabs. There couldn't have been more than fifteen families on the whole island. Some of them, like us, were immigrants hoping for a better life in a short while - hoping to be off and away before the winter came.

We children went to school in September. The school consisted of one classroom, no bigger than a living room, in which all students from age four to fourteen were taught by "Miss" at the same time. "Miss" didn't live on the island, but depended on the naval duty boat. "Miss" was very afraid of storms at sea, so we knew in advance when we were free from school. In stormy weather she just wouldn't come.

When she did come, she taught us her lessons standing on a small platform. On Sundays our classroom became the church, and the platform became the pulpit. Pencils went into the left-hand drawer, while hymn books appeared from the right-hand drawer, together with a lace cloth that was draped over the desks. When the weather was hot, both "church doors" stayed open.

Our school bordered on the meadow where Mr. Lynch's bull grazed. "Bull" was one of the first English words I learned, for quite regularly the animal escaped. Then my mother screamed her warning over the island, "Fienekoe€, , bull!!" Time to grab my little sister and bring the two of us to safety. There was a lot of fear of the bull, not just among the children but among the adults, too. As we were to find out one Sunday when the boys drove the bull toward the school and opened the gate. The bull rushed into the building through one entrance and the congregation rushed out through the other. Thank God there was a storm the next Monday, so "Miss" did not see the damage.

It became winter and, by Dutch standards, incredibly cold in the cottage. Dad had to go ashore to fetch blankets from the crate we still stored at the immigration depot. Time and again he had to take something out of it or put back into it. The first snow came so suddenly, that Mother had to make an extra trip to fetch our boots. The snow was up to my little sister's waist.

A few months later we finally got a house on the mainland, outside Halifax, with the aid of a Scotsman who had spent some time in Holland during the war and who had a soft spot for the Dutch.

For most of the Dutch immigrants Halifax was no more than a transit point. They soon left for Ontario, British Columbia, or Alberta. But my father, a skilled tailor, was having difficulty finding work. All in all, we moved eleven times during the five years I lived in Canada. Years in which, at school, I was introduced to the rich history of this great, rough, beautiful, expansive, new country. My parents saved every penny and eventually took the family back to Holland.

Sitting on the damp basalt rocks at the Nieuwe Waterweg, under the sad sounds of the foghorns, I went back, just for a little moment, back to McNabs Island. That moment was, for me, more precious and dearer than the most beautiful pictures and posters the travel agency can show me of Canada.

Fien Smid-de Jong

(Editor's note: The author, a FOMIS member, lives in Zevenaar, The Netherlands. Her return visit to McNabs Island last summer, after 44 years, was the subject of a story in The Chronicle-Herald on September 19, 1996.)

## **1997 SPRING BEACH SWEEP: A JOB WELL DONE!**

What a great day! To help kick off Environment Week the Friends of McNabs Island Society (FOMIS) held its semi-annual beach sweep on McNabs Island. Despite having to cancel due to rain on the original date set for the event, on a sunny Sunday on June 8 the Haligonian III loaded 113 ambitious people (and three lively dogs) for transportation to the island to collect beached ocean debris. Being a beginner beach-sweeper, I was impressed with the number of enthusiastic people who came out to work and with the effort everyone put into it.

It was amazing and unfortunate to see the amount of garbage washed up on the coast of the island after a long winter. Fortunately though, with a day's full of teamwork, 280 bags of garbage and 25 bags of recyclable material were collected bringing our total up to 4 000 bags collected since 1991! Garbage that is commonly collected, such as plastic tampon applicators, rope, and plastic bags, was in abundance again. However, many unusual items were collected as well. These included a dust pan, a Barbie doll, a lunch box, a skate, a kite, a football helmet, a surgical mask, needles, syringes, and Navy phosphorus flares.

Since 1991, FOMIS has organized semi-annual beach cleanups of McNabs and Lawlor Islands' shorelines in cooperation with The Clean Nova Scotia Foundation. Data of garbage collected is added to totals compiled for all the Maritimes as part of the Moosehead Maritimes Beach Sweep, the largest shoreline cleanup in North America.

This season's beach sweep was co-sponsored by Mountain Equipment Co-op of Vancouver, Murphy's on the Water, and Parks Canada, with material assistance by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. Other local businesses supporting the effort included the McNabs Island Ferry Company (transport of bags to mainland), BFI (free dumpster for collected garbage), and Schooner Supplies in Burnside (free work gloves). All contributions were greatly appreciated, thank you. Keen participants in the clean-up included FOMIS members and families, other volunteers, and a group of New Canadians from the YM-YWCA.

In past years a barbecue ended off the day; this year one was not organized in order to create less work for the organizers, led by Catherine McCarthy.

However, if an individual or a group is interested in running a barbecue after the next beach sweep, or with helping out with other aspects of the event, contact Catherine at 434-2254.

The Fall Beach Sweep will be held on September 28, with a rain date on October 5. Again, the boat will depart Murphy's on the Water at the cable Wharf in downtown Halifax at 10 am sharp. Thank you again to all Friends and other volunteers, whose efforts continue to preserve the beautiful and natural state of McNabs Island.

Nancy Simovic

## **NEWSBRIEFS**

Halifax native Munju Ravindra, a master's student at York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies, has completed a paper entitled Beyond Hangmans Beach: Planning and Implementation Issues for McNabs Island Park last winter. She has many nice things to say about FOMIS, "a true community group".

Have you camped on McNabs Island as a Boy Scout in the late 1930's? Mr. Joe Isaac of Dartmouth has many fond memories of those days, perhaps the most vivid one being of the case of whiskey -in mint condition- found on a beach there one day. Phone him at 463-7064 if you have any information about the scout camp.

FOMIS members have been active lately on the lecture circuit: Former president Royce Walker gave an illustrated lecture on McNabs Island in January to the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, whereas Alan Jean-Joyce represented us at an Environment Day at Millwood High School in Sackville on May 30. Dusan Soudek spoke about our society's goals at the AGM of the Nova Scotia Federation of Naturalists on June 14. The event included a field trip to McNabs Island, attended by more than 60 participants. Individual walks focused on topics such as history of the island, dragon flies, plants, and birds.

Parks Canada historian Ron McDonald gave a well- attended illustrated lecture on The Forts of McNabs Island: Their Past, Present, and Future following the FOMIS annual general meeting on April 24. Dr. McDonald's title is now Cultural Resource Manager, Mainland Nova Scotia Field Unit.

The harbour defence phase of the Canadian Navy's annual exercise, Marcot 1/97, took place on certain shorelines of McNabs Island June 13-21. It



appears that there was no conflict between the military and the visiting public; the exercise was barely noticed. FOMIS is not aware of any complaints.

On June 7, FOMIS member (and Projects Manager) Mike "Captain Redbeard" Tilley, a notorious wrecker and pirate, who also operates the McNabs Island Ferry Company, single-handedly rescued passengers of the Mar II, a harbour excursion sailboat full of Swedish travel writers, which got stuck on a sand bar while attempting to dock at the Fisherman's Cove wharf near Lawlor Island. The story made the following day's Daily News. It is not known whether Mike is claiming salvage rights...

The federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans recently posted notices on McNabs Island, again reminding visitors that the entire Halifax Harbour from Hartlen Point to Duncan Cove continues to be closed to shellfishing due to water pollution. Harvesting and possession of mussels, clams, oysters and all other shellfish is illegal.

In June, a dead adult minke whale fetched up on a beach near Eastern Passage. The carcass was subsequently towed out to sea and sunk. In 1993 another minke whale had washed up on Devils Island; some of its sun-bleached bones and patches of baleen were retrieved from the island the following spring by a FOMIS crew.