

# Rucksack Spring '98

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## NEWSBRIEFS

- The Friends of McNabs Island Society (FOMIS) has been successful in obtaining a \$750 grant from the **Conrad Memorial Fund**, established by well-known island residents, the late Gladys Conrad (Lynch) and the late Ralph Conrad, a veteran of the RCMP Marine Division. The fund is administered by the **RCMP Veterans' Association (N.S. Division)**. FOMIS member and RCMP veteran **Harold Vaughans** shepherded our society's application, while FOMIS board member **Dusan Soudek** accepted the cheque at a meeting of the association on April 16.
- FOMIS director **Nancy Simovic** gave an illustrated lecture on the plants and gardens of McNabs Island to the annual convention of the **Nova Scotia Association of Garden Clubs** on May 29. She was interviewed by CBC Radio prior to her talk.
- FOMIS beach sweep coordinator **Catherine McCarthy** was quoted extensively and McNabs Island was mentioned prominently in Jennifer Hatt's article in the Spring/Summer 1998 issue of **East Coast Living**. The article was entitled *Beachcombers: Beach sweep volunteers clean up our coast*.
- The board of directors of FOMIS was informed of the death on June 4 of FOMIS member **Arthur Meagher**, a well-known lawyer, law

professor, and sailor. Our sincere condolences go to Mr. Meagher's family.

- *Tainted mussels poison six*, informed us a headline in *The Daily News* on June 25, referring to suspected cases of **paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP)** in people who have eaten mussels illegally harvested from Halifax Harbour and Bedford Basin. The shellfish became poisonous after accumulating algal toxins, an occasional natural event unrelated to man-made pollution, the reason why the harbour waters are indefinitely closed to shellfish harvesting.
- **Gavin Manson**, a Master's student at **Dalhousie's Department of Earth Sciences**, is working on a thesis (*Rates and processes of the response of shorelines to sea-level transgression, McNabs Island area, Eastern Shore, Nova Scotia*) dealing with the **rate of erosion of cliffs** on both Lawlor and McNabs Islands and **sedimentation** in adjoining waters, both consequences of the 3.63 mm per year rise in sea level on the Eastern Shore. The work is carried under Parks Canada Permit No. HDC-9701 and involves the **Geological Survey of Canada- Atlantic**.
- **Revenue Canada** has changed all registered charities' registration numbers to business numbers. Effective September 30, 1998, all receipts for charitable donations will sport the Friends of McNabs Island Society's new business number (**88847 4194 RR0001**).
- Former FOMIS director and tourism consultant **Alan Jean-Joyce** gave an illustrated lecture on McNabs Island at a conference in Toronto on **Moving the Economy** in early July. He was interviewed on national CBC Radio.
- Over two hundred **RCMP Venturers** from across Canada descended upon McNabs Island for a weekend adventure in orienteering and mapping. The Venturers, aged 14-18, were in Halifax for their National

Jamboree on July 11-12. They experienced torrential rains while on the island.

- Mike Tilley of the McNabs Island Ferry Company reports that Back (Wreck) Cove on McNabs Island was recently the site of a film shoot of a Harlequin Romance. The film makers kept visitors away from the beach, having camouflaged the FOMIS outhouse and other structures.

## **RECENT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (APRIL 29/98)**

Our society's annual general meeting followed Bill Freedman's successful lecture on "The Natural History of McNabs Island" in the packed auditorium of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. In attendance were Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage MLA Kevin Deveaux, whose provincial riding includes the three outer harbour islands, and Halifax Regional Municipality Councillor Bob Harvey (Lower Sackville), and McNab descendant and FOMIS member Mary E. White (Thorne).

There were the usual annual report, financial report, membership report, and announcement of upcoming events. Two resolutions to amend our society's bylaws were passed. They are:

"Resolved, that the annual fee for individual memberships in the Society be raised from \$10 to \$15 and for family memberships from \$15 to \$20." and "Resolved, that directors of the Society who fail to attend three consecutive board meetings without a valid excuse be deemed to have resigned from the board of directors."

The following persons were elected unanimously to the 1998 board of director; their names are followed by their telephone numbers: Catherine McCarthy (434-2254), Du an Soudek (422-1045), Charlie Callaghan and Kathy Kelly (both 443-2261), Nancy Simovic (422-0268), Bill Mont (423-6042), and Judith Campbell (423-7686).

At the subsequent meeting of the board of directors on May 13, the following board responsibilities were assigned: Treasurer (Judith Campbell), Membership Secretary (Charlie Callaghan), and Newsletter Editor (Du an Soudek).

Victor Dingle (463-4761) was elected as chair of the Trails Committee, Catherine McCarthy of the Outdoor Education Committee, whereas Irene Arthur (455-0397), Dorothy McLeod, and Joanne Creelman are the Phone Committee. Mike Tilley (465-4563) will continue as the society's Project Manager.

Dusan Soudek

## **TOWARDS A PARK ON McNABS AND LAWLOR ISLANDS**

*It's a marathon, not a sprint.* I've heard this phrase often in Friends of McNabs Society (FOMIS) discussions about the speed, or its lack, with which the park planning process for McNabs Island and its smaller neighbour, Lawlor Island, is proceeding.

The two biggest players, i.e Parks Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), still haven't released their joint management plan for the two islands, the elusive Land Use Strategy. The document remains shelved, ready to be dusted off in time for the next election, next year's 250th anniversary of the founding of Halifax, or the millennium. The much advertised public consultations in the autumn of 1995 seem to be but a fading memory.

Until the two islands get a provincial park status, or an equivalent degree of protection, I will shudder every time the word "superport" is mentioned. As you know, Halifax is, officially or unofficially, in the race to become a host port for the new post-Panamax container ships. These ships, one of which visited Halifax on July 20, are intended to stop at only a limited number of large regional ports.

The older container terminals in the South End and in Fairview are too cramped for the 318-metre ships, and several other sites are considered for a new super-container port. They include the Fairview Cove/ Rockingham shore and Navy Island/ Wrights Cove in Bedford Basin, and Shearwater behind McNabs Island.

McNabs Island itself has so far not been formally suggested as a potential site for the new superterminal, but anyone watching the *Regina Maersk* -one of the new giant container ships- recently dock at Halterm, will have realized the difficulty the big ships will have negotiating the Narrows or Eastern Passage. Should McNabs Island, nearly bedrock-free and thus easily flattened to form the required new 1.8 km berth, ever be seriously proposed

as a site for a new container super-terminal, the idea will have to be fought and killed swiftly.

The Department of National Defence (DND) is in the midst of disposing of its Hugonin Point property and of the Garrison Pier water lot, the last two military holdings on McNabs Island. Work at Fort Hugonin includes identification and remediation of soils contaminated by spilled fuel oil and, to our great surprise, a cultural resource inventory. The latter involves largely a search for the mass grave of the victims of cholera outbreak on the steamship *England* in 1866.

Neither Parks Canada nor DNR have any new projects on McNabs Island this year. The former has a new agreement with FOMIS, who receives material and limited financial support from Parks Canada. Ongoing projects include trails and outhouse maintenance, grass mowing, and painting of perimeter fence at Fort Ives, not to mention its spring and fall beach sweeps and its summer garbage removal program.

On a happier note, cognoscenti of McNabs Island will be pleased to know that their favourite island has been chosen as one of the "Ten Top Hikes in the Maritimes", in an article by Paul Marriner in the October 1997 issue of *Outdoor Canada* ("*Get your fill of fall with ten of the best hikes in the Maritimes*", pp. 29-56). Of course, they have known this all along!

Of even more interest to lovers of McNabs Island is the recent appearance of McNab's Special Ale, produced by Garrison Brewing Company. The new mini-brewery's products are available -chilled- at its plant and store at 6300 Lady Hammond Rd. in Halifax and at local liquor stores. The English-style beer, according to company advertisements, possessing "*warm, copper colouring*" and "*fruity hop aroma with light bitterness*" and "*subtle malt flavouring from English Pale Malt*", can be purchased by the bottle or by the barrel.

It is clear that the mystique of McNab's is alive and well!

Dusan Soudek

## **SPRING BEACH SWEEP ON McNABS ISLAND**

Once again volunteers have combed the beaches of McNabs Island on June 7th for the 15th clean-up of the island. The event attracted 220 volunteers, necessitating two trips to the island for the *Haligonian III*. A change in the

legal capacity of the boat means that it can only take 147 passengers during the June and September beach sweeps, instead of 193 as in previous years.

The weather had been unsettled for several days prior to the beach sweep, and more rain, drizzle, and fog was in the forecast. But on the morning of the beach sweep strong northerly winds cleared the sky, helping to keep blackflies at bay. They also made docking the *Haligonian III* at Garrison Pier a challenge.

Everyone seemed to have a good time and worked hard at collecting other people's trash. Many familiar faces were among the volunteers, including the fellow who brings his bike to every beach sweep. This year's volunteers included about 35 Wolf Cubs from Port Wallace (Dartmouth), who scoured Mangers Beach for treasure and trash. Dartmouth United soccer players and New Canadians from YMCA-YWCA were among the energetic volunteers tackling Ives Cove, no doubt the filthiest beach on McNabs Island. The north end of the island collects not only debris from far away places, but catches the brunt of the city's trash discarded out of car windows on the bridges or flushed down city sewers.

This year we had help from BFI employees, who cleaned up trash along the shoreline to Ives Point. For many years BFI has donated the use of a dumpster for bags collected during the sweep, but this year BFI staff came along to help fill the dumpster. Staff from the Sable Offshore Energy Project also assisted with the clean-up, as well as paid for the second trip of the *Haligonian III*. Many of the Sable staff are new to Nova Scotia. They were quite impressed to discover McNabs Island and all its natural and historic resources right in the middle of Halifax Harbour.

Volunteers collected 375 bags of trash, including 30 bags of recyclables. Along with the normal junk were a few unusual items such as a bingo ball (B-9), an Eastern Bakeries bread tray, a weathered plastic toy soldier, a hospital name tag, a bicycle seat with a helmet, and a TV/VCR unit, found by Clean Nova Scotia Foundation volunteers at Ives Cove.

The abundance of Tim Horton's coffee cups on the beaches is a result of careless littering on the part of Tim's coffee drinkers. If the province imposed a deposit system on coffee cups similar to the beverage container tax, coffee cup littering would certainly decrease. Since the beverage container deposit has been in place, we have noticed fewer beer and pop cans among the recyclables collected from the island. Plastics such as fishing gear, motor oil containers, Styrofoam, and plastic tampon applicators were among the perennial items found on the beaches again this year.

The latter should be banned from all Maritime communities. As a seasoned beach sweeper, I can speak for all the volunteers who are tired of picking up "beach whistles" that had been flushed down the toilets of Metro and ended up in the harbour. Even when we finally do have a sewage treatment plant in Halifax some time in the next millennium, the plastic tampon applicators will clog its filters and end up in a landfill. These unnecessary products should be banned altogether or taxed heftily, to pay for their disposal.

Since 1991, when the Friends of McNabs Island Society (FOMIS) started cleaning up the beaches of McNabs and Lawlor Islands, a staggering 5000 bags of trash have been collected. There appears no end in sight, since on June 7 we collected 375 bags from areas that had been swept clean last September. Once again, we will be combing the beaches for more trash on September 27th (rain date October 4th). In the fall we hope to focus on Lawlor Island, which we ignored in June. Moreover, we are exploring the possibility of a separate clean-up of large truck and tractor tires, scattered on the beaches of both islands.

Thanks to Parks Canada for financial support of the clean-up effort and to David Seaboyer, the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources' resident caretaker on McNabs Island, for his technical assistance. A special "thank you" goes out to all the volunteers who spent the June 7 Sunday making McNabs Island beaches cleaner and more park-like. Hope to see you in September!

Catherine McCarthy

*(Editor's note: The writer has organized all of our society's fifteen (!!) beach sweeps. Bravo!)*

## **McNABS ISLAND PADDLE AND CLEAN-UP**

It rained for nearly a week and the weather forecast was not particularly encouraging; but Saturday, June 20, arrived. So did the sun, to the relief of paddlers gathered near Dooks Wharf in Shearwater for the first McNabs Island Paddle and Clean-Up, organized jointly by the Environment Committee of Canoe Nova Scotia and by the Friends of McNabs Island Society.

We started out shortly after ten o'clock, quickly crossing Eastern Passage and leaving the noisy traffic on the mainland behind. When we neared the wooded shore of McNabs Island we turned left towards Back (Wreck) Cove.

There was no wind and the Passage was totally calm; therefore we decided to take a slight detour and visit the abandoned Quarantine Station cemetery on nearby Lawlor Island.

After paying our respects we paddled to the head of Back Cove and the start of our first portage. We lost no time exploring Back Cove, but rather unloaded and carried our gear for 200 yards across McNabs Island. The trail is easily visible.

We carefully lowered our boats, all open canoes, down a steep embankment, and finally we were on freshwater McNabs Pond. We paddled past the site of the old McNab wharf, marked by a large horse-chestnut tree, towards the head of the pond. Here, at a footbridge, we established our temporary base. After a quick lunch we dispersed, collecting plastic blown in by winds and storms from a nearby exposed cobble beach.

After an hour's work we took a break: Some of us watched and fed the myriad of small fish in the pond and enjoyed the flowering vegetation, while others hiked to the top of an eroding drumlin near Fort McNab for a spectacular view of the outer harbour.

By this time a stiff sea breeze picked up, helping our heavily laden canoes across McNabs Pond towards its outlet. The view- a true Kodak moment- was simply spectacular, as the cool ocean air caused a thick fog to rise from the warm waters of the pond. We paddled down a narrow channel, the former tidal race, and unloaded the collected garbage at its end at a man-made causeway at Maugers Beach.

Again, we dispersed and collected litter in Hangmans Marsh, some on foot and others in boats. One crew helped to rescue a dog which had gotten lost, by ferrying it in a canoe across the marsh to where it could pick up its master's scent.

Here we were met by Mike Tilley of the McNabs Island Ferry Company, who later picked up our thirty or so bags of litter, including large chunks of styrofoam and tires, in his open boat for transport to the mainland.

The tide was now high, making our second portage across the causeway back into saltwater only four or five yards. We eagerly headed towards Hugonin Point and then Ives Point, the stiffening sea breeze pushing us along, while we watched the outline of Halifax's downtown ahead of us. Between Ives Point and Indian Point we were in the lee of McNabs Island, making for calm waters, while the paddle against the wind in the relatively sheltered Eastern Passage past Indian Point was not too difficult.



The only sour note of our outing sounded towards the very end of our paddle, when we crossed paths with a number of yahoos on speedboats, returning from the annual Poker Run. They made no attempt to slow down when going by us, and their huge wakes nearly swamped us.

The event was a success even though only four boats and nine paddlers, including two eleven year olds, showed up. The bad weather prior to the trip discouraged some, while the rare opportunity to paddle warm whitewater in the freshly swollen rivers seduced others. We did a piece of good work for the local environment and had a great time on the water.

Dusan Soudek

## **McNABS ISLAND IN WARTIME (as told by a young school teacher)**

The war had just begun in September, 1939, when my family left our familiar home in Guysborough to participate in the war effort. My father to Halifax to work in the Shipyards and my brothers James and Allan to enlist in the armed services, and me to teacher's college (Normal School) in Truro.

After graduation I taught a year in Port Shoreham, Guysborough County, and then wanted a school nearer Halifax. McNabs Island needed a teacher and after applying I was immediately hired. One of the trustees, Carl Fader, recognized my family name. I must stop here and say my father Jim Cant was a piper as well as my two brothers; and we all know how pipers seem to be a well known breed. So I was hired not because of my teaching ability but, as in politics today, because of knowing someone influential.

My next step was to get permission to ride to and from McNabs on the army duty boat. The Captain was a man with a caustic disposition by the name of Faulkner. He never spoke to me over the ten months period. Perhaps a girl on board was a superstitious omen. Later I became best friends with his niece, Esther Brister. Halifax is a small town!

The duty boat was quite a challenge for a nineteen year old girl who had never been out of Guysborough. We sat in an inside room, out of the wind and weather. The cabin had benches in a semi-circle and could seat 20 to 30 service men. Many of the men stayed outside. Usually there would be 50 men on board and one "green as grass" female teacher.

There was an army prison on the Island so I sat with prisoners who were let off at the pier before me. Then the boat continued on to Lawlor Island or Devils Island where contagious disease service men were taken.

When I disembarked, the ladies from the Island embarked, heading for Halifax to shop or to get medical attention. Therefore I never rode with the civilians for when they returned at 4 P.M., I would be leaving to travel back to Halifax.

Some mornings we would be delayed because of fog or a convoy leaving Bedford Basin, making its hazardous journey to Europe. I got so I could tell which troop ship was in port, the *Queen Elizabeth*, the *Queen Mary*, or the *Isle de France*. Their size and number of funnels gave them away, but no names were printed or spoken in wartime.

After I disembarked I had a lovely walk along a wooded path to my one room school which consisted of eighteen children of all grades, no electricity, outdoor toilets, and no water except a bucket of drinking water.

On the second day, Charlie chased a horse and got his leg caught in a barbed wire fence. We freed the horse but I told Charlie to stay in two recesses. He went home at noon and told his grandfather.

Grandfather immediately came to my door and told me Charlie was to be let out or I would answer to him. Well, I held my ground. The next day grandfather didn't come back. I won that round and Charlie became my best friend.

At Christmas we put on a concert. Someone brought me an old organ and I pumped out a march and the children did the most intricate flag drill. They never missed a beat. I am sure the Royal Canadian Mounted Police copied our flag drill for their famous "Musical Ride"! We performed songs, recitations, and plays. Many soldiers came to our concert as they were happy to have a little diversion.

After the Christmas concert I resigned as I hadn't been paid a cent of my \$300.00 yearly salary. However, the trustees scurried around and got me a little money, so I stayed. One delinquent taxpayer was Bill Lynch, who owned half the Island and Bill Lynch Fairs. I think he was too busy to remember a little thing like school taxes.

The parents held a Bingo night occasionally. Mostly service men would attend. Our prizes were a basket of blue grapes or a box of Moir's

Chocolates. I rarely attended Bingos as I had to go through a dark path at 10 P.M. to catch a late boat back to Halifax.

I seldom went up the hill. Our school was down near the water. The civilians lived up the hill and further up was out of bounds. I know the army had a piggery up there, for when the wind swept down the Island, the smell was very powerful.

I must say I had a wonderful year on McNabs and had children eager to learn and help me. One boy, Johnny, made the fire every morning so the school was warm and cosy. I wonder if they remember me reading them *Anne of Green Gables* books. When I finished one I bought another until I had read them the whole *Anne* series. I wonder how the little grade one reacted to a book beyond her age. Three lovely girls in final grade - Eileen, Joan, and Joyce- worked hard as they had to go to Halifax in June and write Provincial Exams. They all passed, which was my delight.

I must praise the service men, for in that year I never heard bad talk or swearing. I wonder today, if the same situation arose, would they be as discreet? Perhaps they felt sorry for me.

I wish I had pictures of my school and the children, but I had no camera in those days. And perhaps a camera on McNabs in wartime would be frowned upon. It was reported that U-boats were at the mouth of the Harbour and a safety net was installed. We didn't talk about convoys or ships even when a ship came in carrying service men or merchant seamen covered in oil. They had been picked up from the water.

Halifax was a wonderful and exciting place to be during the war, despite the V-E Day riot and the ammunition depot explosion. I only spent one year on McNabs. I met a man who was a school trustee in Halifax. Again, politics gave me a contract in Halifax! Ah politics! What a wonderful invention if you are on the right side and know the right people!

I have never been back to McNabs Island but I have sailed by it several times. I never went ashore. I'm sure it is not the same island that I knew and loved in 1942. The civilians, I heard, all left the Island. I wonder if the school still stands in that little wooded clump of trees under the hill and sheltered from the sea on one side and the hill on the other. I wonder how many children will read this and remember me. If they do, please let me know.

Alexina Jorgenson (Cant)

*(Editor's note: Mrs. Jorgenson can be reached at 620-1630 Henderson Highway, Winnipeg, Man., R2G 2B9.)*

## **McNAB'S ISLAND INTERPRETIVE MATERIALS PROJECT**

McNabs Island has an enormous potential for outdoor education due to its rich natural and cultural history. Many school groups visit the island on class field trips despite a lack of interpretive materials to guide them. In order to facilitate these field trips and to teach students about McNabs Island and its treasures, Barbara Mueller and Nancy Simovic created a summer job!

The two recent biology and marine biology graduates from Dalhousie University have just completed a project creating interpretive materials for school-aged island visitors. The project was funded by the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group (NSPIRG), Environmental Youth Challenge, Go Green, Canada Trust's Friends of the Environment, and, last but not least, The Friends of McNabs Island Society (FOMIS).

Initially, presentations were made to over 600 students in the Metro area in order to convey information about the island and to conduct surveys to research the students' particular interests. Using the survey results, the two biologists have prepared activities and worksheets focusing on various aspects of McNabs Island such as its animals, its habitats, and its military history. There are materials for both in-class and field use.

The McNabs Island Kit, consisting of three boxes of materials, is now available for loans to educators through the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. Barbara and Nancy feel that this project will give an important tool to educators to increase their students' appreciation and awareness of this natural wonder on our doorstep. Be sure to check out the McNabs Island Kit!

Nancy Simovic