

Wolfville Historical Society

Spring 2016

NEWSLETTER

Volume 16 Issue 2



**Join us and Mayor Jeff Cantwell
for the Official Opening May 28th
12:00 noon**

Randall House Museum

259 Main Street
Wolfville
Nova Scotia B4P 1C4
wolfvillehs.ednet.ne.ca

President's Message

As we look forward to what will be an eventful and stimulating season at our community museum, I feel it's also a good time to take a look at some of the challenges that we face as a Society – from the way we run Randall House to the long-term health of the Wolfville Historical Society as a volunteer organization.

As many of you already know, in 2017 the Town is proposing to halve its grant to the Society. It's important to know that the grant was first raised to its current level of \$10,000 in 2007, in response to the Society's efforts to put the management of the Randall House Museum on a more professional basis, in particular to support the hiring of a professionally-trained Curator. This annual grant was designated for a five-year period, so it must be acknowledged that the Town has generously maintained this level of support for another four years, during which time we have continued to hire qualified Curators to oversee the ongoing development of the Museum: its accessions, its collections, its community activities, and of course its annual exhibits that we feel have made a significant contribution to the vibrant cultural atmosphere in the Town. Thanks in large part to the continuing efforts of its volunteer Board, the Society has gradually built Randall House into a valuable community museum – but its future is by no means guaranteed.

We are grateful to the Town for its support, but we nevertheless are faced with a crisis. We need to find ways to replace the \$5,000 that we won't be receiving from the Town, so the Board will be placing new emphasis on fund-raising in the near future. It goes without saying that we welcome the advice and support of the membership as we tackle the problem! Ironically, this news coincides with the Board's decision to extend the museum's season, which means a longer contract for the Curator and, as I mentioned in my recent update, a need

President's Message (continued)

to recruit volunteers from the membership to assist the Curator at the end of the season, when our student employees will have returned to their studies. But there's also a wider role that volunteers can play in Society affairs, in that the WHS has become an organization of sufficient size and complexity for its Board to need assistance in areas such as publicity, communications, and research; active committees play a vital role in maintaining the health of a group such as ours.

Loss of funding is a setback, without question – but it is also a challenge to find new opportunities, and perhaps to improve on the way we do things in the process.

Martin Hallett

From the Collections Team at Randall House

Devon Thomas was our Assistant last year and did an amazing job photographing, scanning and cataloguing both new donations and backlogged material “in collection”. One hundred and fifty new object records were added to the database and over 1200 new images. Thank you, Devon! These images and the accompanying records have been uploaded to NovaMuse, our online database (<http://novamuse.ca>).



Among the donations offered was a single child's sandal found in the wall of an old house in Grand Pre. It is not in good condition and one might ask why we should accept it, but we think it may be an example of “*apotropaicos*”, items meant to ward off evil or to bring good luck. These have been found in many buildings of all kinds, so many of them shoes that the Northampton Museum in the UK maintains a Concealed Shoe Index which contains over 1900 reports of discoveries, mostly from Britain and almost

half from the 19th century. The overwhelming majority of shoes have been worn, and many have been repaired, often secreted near the chimney. Most finds are of single shoes, about half of them belonging to children. For those interested in reading more on the subject you can find more information on line, one site being <http://www.apotropaicos.co.uk>. The following quotation is from a lengthy article by June Swann on that site who gives extraordinary statistics on the various finds they have documented.

“...there is much recorded on other shoe superstitions, which are rife wherever shoes are traditionally worn. They are symbols of authority, as in the Old Testament. They are linked with fertility: we still tie them on the back of wedding cars. And they are generally associated with good luck (witness all the holiday souvenirs in the shape of shoes). But most of all they stand in for the person: it has been a common practice from at least the sixteenth century to at least 1966 to throw an old shoe after people ‘for luck’.” ...

We will be doing more investigation on the circumstances surrounding the discovery of this little sandal and perhaps we will be able to add it to the Concealed Shoe index!

Christine Lynch for the Collection Committee

The Garden at Randall House

If you walk or drive past the Randall House these sunny days, you will have seen that our daffodils are up and blooming – matching the colour of the house with their bright faces. Sue Bissix, in charge of our garden sub-committee, has already called her five volunteers together to rake, prune and tidy, and soon they will all head down the Valley, visiting the many growers and greenhouses on their annual plant buying expedition.

But what was the Randall House garden like before the Society took it over in 1947? We have a few clues – the huge iron pot which we use for planting on the south-east corner of the house, the concrete trough in the south flower border, and the very old lilac bushes that still bloom every year, attest to the semi-rural farm that Randall House once was. Local memoirs, Watson Kirkconnell's booklet on streets and Heather Davidson's history tell us more.

The land on which the museum stands was part of the division of farm lots made out for the first Planter settlers in 1761. From at least 1769 a house stood on it. The original 100 acre parcel changed hands many times, and was gradually reduced in size until 1808, when a 30 acre portion, to the east of Muddy Bridge Creek, was sold to Aaron Cleveland, a farmer and cooper. We think that Cleveland probably built the substantial house that we now own, replacing the earlier dwelling. The Society's early minute books and our first curator, May Rosina (Pratt) Starr, refer to it as the Cleveland House. Aaron sold it on in 1812 to Charles Randall. The farm land Randall bought, including woodland and pasture, stretched south from Main Street up to Pleasant, over what came to be known as Randall's Hill, and east from the harbour to Willow Avenue.

Three generations of Randalls lived there, farming the land, sometimes renting the house, and growing vegetables and a few flowers. We wish we knew more. Eardley Randall, the last of the family, certainly had a good orchard, a vegetable garden, and grew Jerusalem artichokes by his garden fence along Main Street. The vegetable garden was probably on the lower level (now Willow Park) because a lilac hedge is remembered in front of the house.

When Eardley and his invalid sister Annie grew old and ill, the garden lay overgrown and neglected for many years. Local children thought the property

was haunted. However, when Eardley Randall died in 1927 it was sold to the Charles Patriquin family and a transformation took place.



The Patriquins loved the old house, and they loved children, birds and animals. Local children were taught to care for wounded creatures whose cages and pens stood behind the house until their occupants recovered. Charles restarted the vegetable garden in the rich soil of the old harbour, and regularly wheeled

barrow loads of excellent vegetables to town for sale. He introduced ducks to what became the Duck Pond, and even owned two swans. The Patriquins told their children that after they had gone they would like the Randall House to remain unchanged as a reminder of the early homes of Wolfville.

Charles and Sarah Patriquin lived on and improved the Randall House property for 20 years. When they died their son Graham sold it to the Nova Scotia government which leased it back to the Wolfville Historical Society for use as a museum. In 1973 the Society was able to buy the museum from the government for \$1.

When the Society looked at the land around the house they found vestiges of earlier use. Two apple trees and a pear remained from Eardley's orchard and one of the Society's annual expenses was for maggot spray and the services of a man to spray and pick the fruit. The Wolfville Garden Club was asked to advise and help plant the flower beds but the club's members preferred their own garden behind the Post Office, so the Board reluctantly decided that an expanse of lawn with shrubs was the best solution. In recent years, as new volunteers declare an interest in gardening, more and more bulbs, roses, annuals and perennials are planted as well as prosperous vegetable beds, a variety of old fashioned fruit bushes and a herb garden. The theme is for plants, or modern

varieties of plants, that would have been available in Wolfville between 1840 and 1850 when Charles Dennison Randall bought the property from his father. There is a startling number.

In 2009 the land on the lower level, where Charles Patriquin and Erdley Randall gardened was returned to the Town, who had been using it as part of Willow Park for many years, Two years ago

we lost the last of the great elms around the Randall House to Dutch Elm disease, but the beautiful dark lilacs continue to bloom at the top of the bank and will be slowly renewed to ensure there will still be a trace of the early days. We hope you will walk around the garden in lilac time and enjoy them.

"JOE HOWE CHANGES TRAINS!"

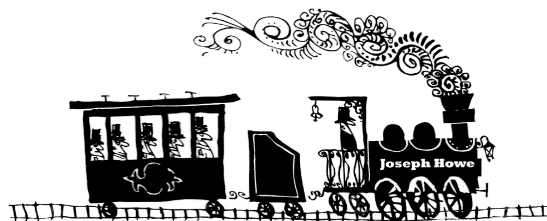
What's all this about?

Well, two years ago the Society mounted an ambitious experiment. The Randall House Museum was still the focus of our summer offerings. But for our project titled *War Comes to Wolfville*, commemorating the outbreak of WW1 and its effect on this small rural town, we branched out into the Town, so that the Town became an extension of our little Museum. We still mounted a special exhibit on the War at Randall House. But we also set up information panels outside four of the Town's major landmarks. We showed WW1 films and hosted talks. And we presented a performance of WW1 poetry and prose at the Festival Theatre.

The success of all this has led us to our 2016 project. Realising that the great 19th century Nova Scotian Joseph Howe had been selected as the Heritage Day 'person of the year', we decided this year to celebrate Joe's great contribution to our area: the championing of a railway connecting Halifax with the Annapolis Valley, and eventually reaching as far as Yarmouth. As early as 1835 (only 5 years after England opened its first public railway) Joe was calling for the connection. And in 1855 he resigned from his position as Provincial Secretary to become chairman of the Railway Board, which oversaw construction of the first stretch of the line, from Halifax to Windsor.

So the centrepiece of our summer will still be a special exhibit at Randall House, this time telling the story of the creation of our railway, first to Windsor, then through Wolfville to Annapolis, and finally connecting to Yarmouth in the 1890s, when it was taken over by the famed Dominion Atlantic Railway (D.A.R.), who ran it for nearly a century. But there will be much more. We realise that everyone loves trains. So we are presenting four great evening of train films at the Legion. We are hosting three talks about trains - one of them by our local train expert Gary Ness (author of 3 books on the D.A. R.). We are presenting a Model Train Weekend at the Legion as part of the Mud Creek festivities (July 23-4). And we are planning to present two performances of the ever-popular Train Show, with Gary Ness and the Mud Creek Boys.

So this is the plan. Enjoy our special summer logo:



And join us for as many of these events as you can take in! The dates so far:

May 28th: Randall House opens

June 25th: The special *Joe Howe Changes Trains* exhibit opens at Randall House

July 23-4 The Model Railway Weekend

And watch for details of our films and talks through July and August!