

Wolfville Historical Society

Spring 2019

Newsletter

Volume 19 Issue 1



Mr. and Mrs. Randall welcoming visitors to their Hallowe'en entertainments

President's Message

Martin Hallett

Once again we find ourselves in the thick of preparations for the new season at Randall House – and in many respects a new season for the Society as well. In July we will be visited by representatives from the provincial government's Community Museums Assistance Program, who will be conducting a periodic review of our museum. Led by our Curator, Krystal Tanner, we are working hard to ensure that the reviewers are fully satisfied with the way Randall House is run.

While we were sad to lose the wisdom and experience of Christine Lynch, Caroline Power and John Whidden from the Board of Directors (although John is continuing as the Society's historian), we are pleased to welcome Jasmine Renaud and Chris Gertridge to the Board. In our dual role as Historical Society on the one hand and owner of Randall House Museum on the other, we are constantly seeking ways to raise our profile in the local community, whether it be in exhibits or events at the museum, activities in cooperation with the Town, or talks and presentations at other locations. As you can see from this newsletter, our efforts are already bearing fruit: Hallowe'en and Christmas were both celebrated (albeit in rather different fashion!) at Randall House toward the end of last year, and we're planning a busy schedule for 2019 (see page 8).

Again this year we are having to put much thought and energy into our fundraising efforts. It is a simple fact of life that small museums like ours face a constant struggle to survive, so even as we expand our horizons, we can't lose sight of the fact that we are working with a deficit budget. However, we are confident that we can turn things around financially while improving both Society and Museum – but to achieve these goals, we need your support. If you agree that what we are doing adds something worthwhile to life in Wolfville, would you be interested in volunteering with us? As we develop our projects and activities, the need for hands-on-deck increases likewise. There are many different ways in which you could help – so if you're interested in finding out more, please get in touch with us at randallhouse@outlook.com or our Volunteer Coordinator, Jasmine Renaud, at wolfvillehsvolunteer@gmail.com

From the Archives...

I'm very happy to announce that I've been chosen as the Wolfville Historical Society's new archivist. I've been on the Society's board now for a year, and have really enjoyed getting to know everyone, and help out with our ever-growing list of events. I graduated from Acadia University three years ago from the history program, and wrote an archival thesis. Since then I've been working on the Council of Nova Scotia Archives' Core Curriculum workshop series, and I've worked as a research assistant and worked on collections processing at the archives at Acadia. I'm looking forward to using what I know about archives to help out our collection, and learn more along the way. In this column I hope to bring a few stories to light from our archival collection. For now, I am getting to know the collection, and seeing what exciting projects could be done!



We are looking for the following items at the museum if anyone has them to spare:

1. Cordless drill/battery pack
2. Toolbox
3. Coffee mugs
4. Teacups (to be used for gift shop sales)

Wolfville's Notorious Murder

Gordon Haliburton

The first family in this area in the 19th Century was the DeWolf family -- hence the name of our town, Wolfville. They were members of a Planter family (I have heard a question raised at one of our meetings -- "Who were the Planters?" The answer, very simply, is that the Planters were the families who came from New England to settle on the empty lands from which the Acadian population had been removed.) These people used to be referred to as "Pre-Loyalists", but obviously that was an appellation that did them a disservice, suggesting that they were Loyalists in heart and mind, even though the conditions that created the Loyalists was still years in the future.

The Planter grantees were true Yankees, and in fact many of them soon sold out their grants and returned home. However, the DeWolf brothers and cousins had come to stay, and were a strong social unit in the community that grew up around the muddy creek that constituted the harbor and centre of economic activity. Most of the professional men of the area, including the doctors, were DeWolfs in one degree or another, and so were the farmers.

One of the doctors was Albert DeWolf, born in 1840, who gained his M.D. from Edinburgh. He was the son of Dwight DeWolf, who owned the farm across the road from the Anglican Church, St. John's, and was a devoted worshipper there. The tragedy that overtook this family has been researched and recounted by Dr. Watson Kirkconnell, at a time when he lived in the house inhabited today by our friend Michael Bawtree, and is our best source for understanding it.¹

Albert married a young (teen-aged) woman, Bessie Harris, from New Ross, but was evidently doubtful that he had done the right thing, for he immediately rejected her. Two years later, in June 1878, he asked her to start living with him, but she refused. What emotions were being generated by these two, of love that had turned to hate!

Albert took a pistol and went down Main Street and, meeting Miss Harris² there, shot her through the neck, severing her spinal cord. She died a few minutes later, at around three o'clock, without saying a word. By this time, Albert had run home to his father's house and, climbing up onto the roof, threw the pistol down the chimney. It fell onto the hearthstone of the parlour fireplace and bounced out into the room.

Two hours later, Albert was arrested. He was happy to hear that the lady was dead, and seems to have been satisfied with the outcome. In jail in Kentville, he managed to commit suicide. As the church graveyard at St. John's was denied to him, his father and brother buried him in the orchard behind their house. Presumably his ghost continues to watch over the house and its tenants.

¹ Watson Kirkconnell *A Georgian House on the Post Road*, 1971

² She is referred to, in all accounts, as Miss Harris, not Mrs. DeWolf.

14 Acadia Street

John Whidden

Acadia Street was, and this is evident by looking at the houses still standing, the address of many of Wolfville's well-to-do citizens. Many of these have disappeared in the interest of education, for town schools and Acadia expansion, and most of the remaining houses are now divided into apartments.

Perhaps the most notable of these is 14 Acadia Street which resisted the inexorable tide of student apartmentization until very recently. It stands in a large lot

looking somewhat like a portly, white-suited, gentleman who has undergone several sessions of plastic surgery none of which have been completely successful.

The house was built in 1910 in the Queen Anne Revival style for Augusta Jane Dodge Churchill, widow of George Washington Churchill of the Hantsport shipbuilding family. The photo from 1912 shows Mrs. Churchill with her nieces and maid, sitting on the verandah in a proprietorial fashion typical of the age. It is a large, comfortable looking dwelling with more than enough room for the family and retainers.



The contemporary photo shows what too often befalls lovely old houses, when they need renovation, in the interests of economy and lack of concern for architectural integrity. (I must add here that it is sometimes hard to be critical, as heritage houses are expensive to maintain.)

The first blow was the tower roof which was removed more than 60 years ago and replaced with the completely incompatible low-slope one we see today. Then went the round verandah pillars, the wooden windows, and the clapboard siding covered by vinyl. The portly gentleman still sits there and draws the eye, but the reaction now is one of some dismay.

Krystal's Komments

Krystal Tanner, curator

Well here I find myself about to embark on what's promising to be a very busy and fun-filled 2019 season. When we open our doors for the season on May 20th it will officially mark the 70th year of operating as the only community museum here in Wolfville! I'm pleased to be back as the Curator/Manager to watch over the old house as it once again warmly welcomes guests from all over the world to hear the stories (and sometimes town gossip) that we have to tell.

One of the things I am most excited about this season is the extra exhibit space that we freed up by relocating the textile collection to the Wolfville Legion. We have really embraced this idea of "community museum" much as the sign on our front lawn reads. There are so many stories that we haven't yet explored or shared. The opening of these exhibit spaces allows us to do just that.



I am quite excited about being able to have a dedicated area to highlight our textiles. This year we will be showcasing some of our beautiful quilts and bedding that don't often make it on display. We will also be exploring the Gaspereau and the industries that have popped up over time (for example did you know that there was a pickle factory up on Slaytor Road? It absolutely blew my mind when I found that out). After doing some digitizing over the winter I came across some lovely photos of the Statue of Evangeline which inspired me to look at her



role in valley tourism. We will also still have the model of Wolfville in 1893 on display upstairs – it's too fun not to!

I sometimes get asked about the story of the house fits in where we are switching our focus away from the historic house model. For me the story of the house is perhaps one of the most important stories to tell. For over 200 years the house has stood at the eastern end of the community and watched as Wolfville has grown. Rest assured that we haven't forgotten the people who have called this place home.



ASSOCIATION OF
NOVA SCOTIA
MUSEUMS

Museum Evaluation
2019

Documentation Review

One of the more common topics that I get to educate visitors on is how our museum, and many like ours, is funded. One of ways we receive funding is through a provincial program called the Community Museums Assistance Program which is delivered through the Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage. One requirement to remain in the program is to participate in the Museum Evaluation Program every 4 years. The evaluation is delivered through the Association of Nova Scotia Museums [ANSM], a non-profit organization that provides support for museums across the province. ANSM partnered with the provincial government to oversee the evaluation program and since it was

launched in 2016 there have been 99 museums that have participated! The program is carried out in two parts – the first is a Documentation Review Form that addresses 7 main areas of a museum's operation: Governance, Management, Facility, Collection & Access to Information, Interpretation, Community, and Marketing & Revenue Generation. These are assessed through an extensive 170+ questionnaire along with accompanying documentation (policies, plans, by-laws, marketing materials, etc.). The second part of the program is a site visit where a qualified team comes to evaluate the museum and its operations in person. It is a lot of work but the evaluation is done for several reasons including providing essential feedback to museums for its successes and areas of improvement, it encourages participants to engage in learning opportunities within the heritage field, and it holds institutions, like Randall House Museum, accountable to their community and other stakeholders (i.e. members, donors, visitors). Over the winter months I have been working alongside members of the WHS Board to prepare the Documentation Review for submission by writing policies, plans, and gathering other documentation that will help us succeed in the program.

As many of you may know we have also been working hard over the past few years to enhance the profile of both the Wolfville Historical Society and Randall House Museum through offering new programs and events. The Planning Committee has an exciting calendar of events for the 2019 season that we hope you can join us for. You can find many of our summer events listed on the next page. For a complete list of events, and any events that will be added in the future, please visit our website <https://wolfvillehs.ednet.ns.ca/> or our Facebook page for all of the most up-to-date information.

Calendar of Confirmed Events and Programs

May 4th – Visit us at the Wolfville Farmer’s Market
May 19th – WHS Program
May 20th – Randall House Museum opens for the season
May 25th – Embroidery Workshop for Kids
June 8th – Blossom Time Afternoon Tea
June 10th, 17th, 24th – Rughooking Workshop with Lynn Denney
June 16th – WHS Program
July 1st – Canada Day BBQ
July 13th (raindate July 20th) – Randall House Regatta at Willow Park
July 27th – Mudley’s Birthday Bash
August 10th – Ice Cream and Blueberry Social
August 25th – Woodburning Workshop for Kids
September 14th – Wine and Cheese Soirée at Randall House Museum
September 22 – WHS Monthly Program
October 5th – Historic House Tour
October 26th to 27th – Randall’s Halloween House
October 31st – Trick or Treat at Randall House Museum
November 1st – Pumpkin Walk at Willow Park
November 10th – WHS Monthly Program
November 30th – WHS Holiday Gathering at Randall House Museum
December 7th – Wolfville Farmer’s Market

If you have any ideas or connections for exciting events that you think you would like to participate in but don’t see listed here please reach out and talk to us!



Contact us!

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<https://wolfvillehs.ednet.ns.ca>