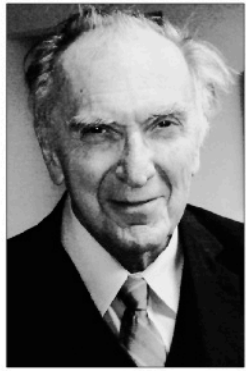


In Those Days in Victoria County

Abraham MacIntosh and his obstacles - 1856



by Jim St. Clair

It is the summer of 1856. From Englishtown to Big Harbour, from North Shore to the Big Glen of St. Ann's, and all along the St. Ann's Bay including North and South Gut, people were grieving the departure of the third ship

of emigrants bound for New Zealand - their neighbours, friends and usual congregants at the Big Church.

Rev. Norman McLeod has left the pulpit vacant nearly five years previously. No minister, no teacher, no authority figure throughout the large area, nearly 40 miles in length and 8 miles at its widest! And more people are already planning to leave as soon as possible on the fourth ship, the "Spray."

The potato blight seems to be over. But general uncertainty prevails as new people arrive in the communities to buy those farms left by the New Zealand bound "Normanites." Change all around!

Another grief lies heavily on the hearts of some people, particularly those in the area nearest Baddeck. James Edward MacDonald has died suddenly in Halifax while a student at the Free Presbyterian Church College. A middle-aged man, a former teacher in Baddeck, North Sydney and Whycocomagh, he had been encouraged by the people of the area to prepare for the ministry in the hope he might take on the responsibility of the large congregation. But his possible future career will never take place. As well, he has left behind a wife and six children in Baddeck. His prayer meetings and occasional services at the Big Church at Black Cove had been well received.

But now, good news is being communicated. A thirty year old graduate of the College in Halifax in 1854 has completed his two years of probationary service to Gaelic-speaking communities in Pictou County and Cape Breton. Abram (Abraham in later years) MacIntosh is ready to be called to a pastorate.

St. Ann's area is ready indeed. And so, the native of St. George's Channel, West Bay, a preacher, fluent in Gaelic (although with slightly different accent and vocabulary), is called to St. Ann's, to the Big Church. Under the auspices of the Presbytery of Cape Breton, he is ordained to the Presbyterian ministry, prepared to undertake the challenges of a community in change.

Thus, in this summer of 1856, people are talking about his arrival and the ceremony by which both he and the people recognize their membership in a recognized court of the Presbyterian Church, a new phenomenon in this group previously led by Norman McLeod who disavowed the authority of any local presbytery.

A single man, he has taken up residence at the home of the Robertsons, who purchased Norman McLeod's property. It is the house where the McLeods lived for thirty years, near Black Cove.

Without doubt, MacIntosh is well aware that he has many obstacles facing him as any newly ordained minister might. But his circumstances are particularly difficult.

As noted above, many people are preparing to leave for New Zealand as they hear from Norman McLeod and others about the opportunities there. So there is considerable upheaval through the region.

Furthermore, the congregation is now a member of and under the authority of the Cape Breton Presbytery, a circumstance which will require much explanation to people who throughout their lives had to be taught by McLeod to avoid such control.

One of the requirements of their calling a minister is that people are expected to provide the clergy with a salary, with actual money as well perhaps with farm goods in kind. McLeod had never expected money, in fact he thought such exchange of money inappropriate. He received labour on his farm or in the building of new structures as payment for his work. This new way of supporting a minister will be very difficult for the congregants.

MacIntosh is a graduate of the Munro School of Boularderie, an institution which McLeod and many of his followers refused to accept as suitable for their children as it received support from Scotland, from the work of the Isabella Gordon McKay and her group of women who raised money for people under the auspices of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. It may help, however, that one of MacIntosh's teachers in his earlier years at West Bay is Donald MacKenzie of Big Harbour who instructed MacIntosh in Latin. He is a member now of MacIntosh's congregation.

Perhaps the greatest problem facing the

recently ordained minister is that he is not McLeod, does not preach as McLeod did or exercise the kind of control that McLeod wielded over all his people. The reverence for their teacher/preacher/community organizer is still strong from one end of the congregation to the other. As well, some may still be lamenting the fact that James Edward MacDonald died while in training, a person whom they had helped with financial contributions to his education as a middle-aged man with a family undertaking a new career.

It comes as a surprise to most people that MacIntosh believes that Holy Communion should be celebrated regularly in the community - a practice in complete reversal of the stand taken by McLeod who it is said never celebrated that sacrament in the area as he believed people not worthy.

For many, there is a considerable discussion about the move of the Cape Breton Presbytery to become a member of the proposed Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces of British North America, thereby separating themselves from the structure of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. For many, this is a major stumbling block and may well alienate them from MacIntosh who espouses the new structure.

So for MacIntosh there are many obstacles

to be overcome as he begins his ministry in the St. Ann's congregation - some personal, some theological, some structural. But all in need of fairly immediate attention as he starts his career and assembles the first group of elders to assist and advise him.

Even at this early date, MacIntosh may well be anticipating the purchase of a property for his manse and small farm as no housing is provided for the minister. And he hopes that all will go well with his work and in providing his own housing so that he may marry Annie Ross of Pictou who has the qualities that he is looking for in a wife.

So the summer of 1856 - is a time of change, of growth, of new procedures, of economic recovery from the damage of the potato blight, of picking up the pieces left behind by Norman McLeod and of meeting the needs of so many parishioners in this large area.

And in the summer of 2010, we can look back and say MacIntosh met the many challenges for he remained in the St. Ann's Congregation until his death in March of 1889 at the age of sixty-nine. Respected for his leadership, some people named their sons Abraham for several generations and some years after his death, a group of people between South Gut and Big Hill created a postal area called for MacIntosh - Glen Tosh.

FIDDLER'S CORNER by Paul S. Cranford.

If you have a tune you would like to share with other Cape Breton fiddlers or a musical event that could be promoted in this column contact The Victoria Standard or Cranford Publications (www.cranfordpub.com). Email psc@cranfordpub.com

Jerry's Memories

march

Howie MacDonald & Brenda Stubbert



Next week it will be a year since **Jerry Holland** passed away. During his lifetime, by example, Jerry inspired an entire generation of fiddlers to live up to the traditions of humility, generosity and musicianship. He left a legacy of books and recordings - material which continues to share his memories of the music and people who inspired him. The tune above was written by of Jerry's two good friends who miss him dearly.

The Ceilidh Trail School of Celtic Music was founded by Jerry Holland. This week the school is holding a number of concerts :

- July 12th - Inverness Arts Centre, Inverness:7:30 PM The Master's Concert with Brenda Stubbert, Gillian Head, Mairi Rankin. Mike Hall and JP Cormier
 - Jul 14th - 8pm - The Normaway Inn, The Barn - Three fiddler concert and CD release for *Jerry Holland and Friends*. Concert includes JP Cormier, Howie MacDonald and Michael Hall.
 - July 16th, 2010 - Port Hawkesbury Civic Center (The Bear Head Room) 7 PM - Remembering Jerry Holland & CD Release *'Jerry Holland & Friends'* Concert to include Howie MacDonald, Brenda Stubbert, Michael Hall, Marc Boudreau, Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton, Rankin MacInnis, Kenneth MacKenzie, Robbie and Isaac Fraser, Patrick Gillis and more.
- As well over the next few weeks both Howie and Brenda have a number of engagements including
- July 20 - Celtic Tea Room, Indian Brook,7:30 PM - Brenda Stubbert and Howie MacDonald.
 - July 23 - SW Margaree Square Dance - 10 PM-1AM - Brenda Stubbert
 - July 24 - Belle Cote Day - Belle Cote Community Center - Howie MacDonald
 - July 24 - Ingonish St.John Parish Hall, The Fiddlers on the Hill - 8:15 PM - Paul Cranford, Mario Colosimo and Brenda Stubbert.
 - July 27 - Christmas Island Feis - Brenda Stubbert and many others
 - July 31 - Ingonish, St.John Parish Hall, The Fiddlers on the Hill - 8:15 PM - Paul Cranford, Howie MacDonald and Brenda Stubbert.

Victoria County's Residential Curbside Organics Collection



Residents can now put organic material such as vegetable peelings, table scraps, meat, fish, poultry, dairy, bones and soiled paper in transparent green bags to be collected weekly along with recyclables and garbage. Special transparent green bags for compost are now available in grocery & hardware stores in Victoria County.

For more information on Recycling or Composting Programs, call Cape Breton's **Recycling Hotline at 1-877-567-1337** or see "Recycling" in the Aliant Yellow Pages

