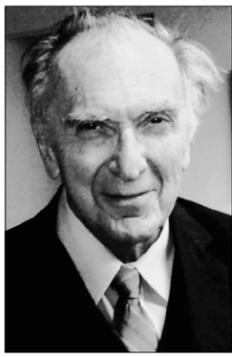


*In Those Days in Victoria County*

# McKeen Conversation - a visit to "Ardlaw"



by Jim St. Clair

Come along to the property with the name of "Ardlaw" on the outskirts of Baddeck in 1870. The home of Dr. Samuel George Archibald McKeen, the property would eventually

be the location of the medical office as well of his son Dr. George McKeen whose birth is anticipated in this year.

A graduate of Harvard Medical School in Massachusetts in 1849, Dr. S. G. A. McKeen has practised medicine in Baddeck for the past ten years. For several years after graduation and further study, he served the medical needs of people in Hillsborough-Mabou area of Inverness County.

Born in that community in 1827, he was the son of the miller Samuel McKeen and his wife Jane Higgins. The grist mill built by Sam McKeen with the help of his brothers and other relatives was a marvel of construction in the 1820s in the deep gorge of the Elgin Brook which flowed into the Mull (or Southeast Mabou) River.

In the household in 1870, we would have seen the half-grown children of Dr. McKeen by his first wife Rebecca Jane Hadley who had died in 1865. His second wife Jane Murphy whom he had married in 1867 is soon to give birth to their first child who will follow his father in the medical profession and will serve as a doctor overseas in World War One.

In our imaginary visit to Ardlaw, let us expect to see Dr. McKeen's sister Margaret McKeen Kidston, the wife of William Kidston. It was while visiting her brother shortly after his settling in Baddeck that she had met the son of William and Margaret (Duffus) Kidston. Perhaps several of their young children are at this gathering.

It is possible as well that present is Dr. McKeen's brother, Rev. David McKeen, a graduate of Acadia College and a Baptist minister in Athol, Cumberland County, Nova Scotia. He made many trips to Cape Breton where he was actively involved in the operation of the mill of his father along with his brother John McKeen. David was particularly engaged in the parcelling off of sections of his father's land and selling it to other people. As well, he oversaw the operation of a large farm in Cumberland Co.

In the family gathering, let us place Dr. McKeen's father, Samuel "the Miller" McKeen, a man of seventy-six, and still very active in the community and the business.

Their topics of conversation are quite varied. Samuel, the father, may once again tell the story of Dr. McKeen's astonishing recovery from a very serious illness when a child of nine. Apparently deceased, he had been placed in his coffin in preparation for burial when after two days of a deep coma, he sat up and left his casket behind.

Surely, the topic of the elder Samuel's forthcoming marriage to the widow Mary Ross of Margaree may well come up. Jane Higgins McKeen, the mother of Dr. S. G. A., and Rev. David, and Margaret Kidston had died in 1865 at the age of seventy. In addition, in May of that year, the Hon. William McKeen, Samuel McKeen's older brother and leading merchant and politician had died after a busy life of building a mill in Port Hood, establishing a major business at Mabou Harbour, bringing back from

Halifax the funds necessary to build the first bridge at Mabou and creating the village of Mabou.

That was the same year that Dr. McKeen's first wife had died. As well, in June of that year, the doctor had been exonerated at a court hearing concerning an alleged illegal operation which resulted in the death of a patient.

So much to talk about! So many events happening in the past few years! As well as their family sorrows and new joys, the establishment of Canada as a nation might well have been a topic of discussion.

And then there was the matter of the patent granted to the miller, Samuel McKeen, for his invention of an odometer. The mechanical device was a series of gears joined by a metal rod. The first gear was fitted to a pinion on the hub of the wheel of a carriage. As the horse-drawn vehicle moved along a road, the mechanism marked off on a dial the miles travelled. An intricate design provided for a hammer to strike a bell at the conclusion of each mile.

While the distance from Hillsborough to Baddeck was a good day's journey, perhaps the family members from Hillsborough had arrived in Baddeck in a buggy to which the patented odometer was attached. No doubt there was some conversation about the possibility of marketing the invention. Some may have questioned the senior Samuel if he had any more inventions to present.

There on the outskirts of the village in Baddeck, members of the family of Dr. S.

G. A. McKeen might have discussed many or all of the topics noted above. A family noted for such activity and so many contributions to Cape Breton life! Such were the people of Victoria County and Cape Breton and Nova Scotia in those days.

## Bookmobile Schedule

**Wednesday, February 23:** Baddeck Academy (9:30-10:45 am), North River at Church (11:45 am-12:15 pm), Barrachois Bridge at the Church (1-1:30 pm).

**Thursday, February 24:** Indian Brook at Leather Works (10:30-11:15 am), Little River at the Wharf Road (11:30-noon), Gaelic Singers Hall (noon-12:30 pm), Wreck Cove General Store (1-2 pm).

**Wednesday, March 2:** Middle River at the churches, (9:45-10:15 am), Middle River School (10:30-11:45 am), Wagmatcook Preschool & Head Start (12:15-12:45 pm).

**Thursday, March 3:** Boularderie East at the Highway Garage (9:30-9:45 am), Boularderie School (10-11:30 am), Boularderie at Grant's Store (11:45-noon), Ross Ferry (1-1:30 pm), Kempt Head (2-2:30 pm).

### 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](http://www.cranfordpub.com)). Email [psc@cranfordpub.com](mailto:psc@cranfordpub.com)

## Maynard Mackenzie's Strathspey & Reel

strathspey

Kelly Shaw



reel



Margaree fiddler Kelly Shaw is an active member of the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association. In the winter months he teaches fiddle and in the summer he performs at various local events including The Normaway Inn Dining Room and The Glenora Distillery. In 2009, another of Kelly's original strathspey and reel sets was recorded for the accompanying CD to a children's book titled *The ABC's of Cape Breton*.

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## Victoria County's Residential Curbside Organics Collection

### Garbage Shipped to Guysborough

For the month of January, 2011, **199.16 Tonnes** of garbage were shipped bringing the total to **14,376.87 Tonnes**

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.

### Organic Materials Collected

For the month of January, 2011, **5.62 Tonnes** of organics were collected bringing the total to **830.79 Tonnes**