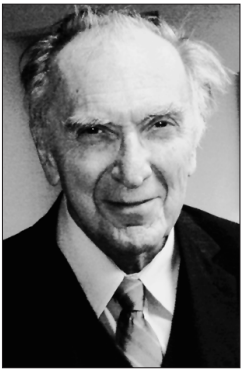


*In Those Days in Victoria County*

# A mystery on the other side of the mountain



by Jim St. Clair

The inland side of the ridge, Beinn Bhreagh, is well known to many viewers of the beauty of the hill behind Baddeck Bay. The other side of the mountain is less well known to most visitors or residents of the area.

But in the mid 1800s, a number of households lived along the road that paralleled the coast from Red Head to Big Harbour through Plaster. MacRaes, MacAulays, Morrisons, MacDonalds and even a family with a name usual for the area, the Manuals.

For most of the households, the census accounts show the customary occupation of "farmer," a small number of milk cows, a horse or two, a dozen or so sheep and some butter produced, some cloth woven and a supply of potatoes dug, enough to last the winter and some left over to sell.

But the schedules of the return for the MacDonald family on the 1871 census are quite atypical. To be sure, the household of John MacDonald, born in Scotland, about 1820, consists of a wife, Mary, and several sons, John, Christopher, Roderick, Donald and four daughters, Catherine, Sarah, Mary Ann, and Georgina – all born between 1850 and 1864 as per the ages given to the census taker.

Curiously, although the family states that it owns 160 acres, with fifteen under cultivation and three in pasture, there is only one milk cow and no young cattle or sheep listed – just one pig. The father and three oldest sons are listed as labourers, no farmers. No potatoes were apparently harvested. Only a small amount of hay and oats grown. No butter or cheese produced and no cloth woven.

The question arises as to where these men are working and how is this family supporting itself. To be sure, they live near the Christopher MacRae family, their relatives, for Mary MacDonald is the daughter of Christopher and Mary MacRae, early settlers along the back side of the mountain. Are the MacDonalds working for the MacRaes? A very atypical account for a time when most rural households were self-sustaining, or at least somewhat – and certainly the neighbouring MacAulays and MacRaes were just that.

But who was John MacDonald? How did he come to live on the back side of the mountain? Through the assistance of Joan MacInnes, it is ascertained that John was sold sixty acres of land by Christopher and Mary MacRae for the small amount of one pound sterling for Christopher and five shillings for Mary. He later acquired ninety-eight acres by a land grant in 1860 – confirmed on the Land Grant Map.

Family tradition maintains that John was a native of Loch Maddy, Isle of North Uist, Outer Hebrides, Scotland. On the 1901 census, it is stated that he was born in 1819 and arrived as an immigrant in 1834.

But no evidence exists for a sibling or a parent or two. No other MacDonalds live in the area of the back side of the mountain along the Red Head to Plaster

Road.

Both the 1861 and 1871 census records show no members of an older generation. Could he have come alone as a young man, really a teenager of fourteen or fifteen years of age? Certainly not a common pattern for a young person to emigrate by himself, apart from some extended family or at least neighbours from the old home.

Is it possible he was related to his next door neighbour Alexander MacAulay who is approximately the same age? MacAulay, who is listed as a sea captain in the occupation column, applied for and received a grant of land similar to that MacDonald acquired – in the same year.

And MacAulay is indeed a common North Uist name.

For many people in Baddeck area and in other parts of Victoria County and indeed across Nova Scotia, a grandson of John may be well known for he was the late Rev. J. D. Nelson MacDonald, United Church Minister and prominent worker in the development of the Coop Movement. Although J. D. N.'s father moved

from the back of the mountain farm and lived for a time both in Pennsylvania and in St. Esprit, Richmond County, the family left relatives on the original grant. One of pioneer John's daughters, Mary Ann, married James Manual of Newfoundland and Victoria County. The family lived on the other side of the mountain for some years.

J. D. Nelson did state one time that John was a relative of the MacDonalds of Stewartdale, of the family of the Rev. Glenn S. MacDonald of the Presbyterian Church. But how?

So not the usual story of an immigrant coming with a family group from the Old Country and establishing a farmstead which at least partially supported the household! What is the story of John MacDonald? Did his in-laws sell him land in 1841 to help him out? Where was he between 1834, his year of immigration, and 1841 and the time he married Mary MacRae?

In those days in Victoria County there were people who did not fit into the standard pattern and whose lives are a bit mysterious to us today.



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## Library Hours

Hours of operation for the Baddeck branch of the Cape Breton Regional Library, located at the Baddeck Fire Hall, are as follows:

- Tuesday:** Noon - 5 pm & 6 - 8 pm
- Wednesday:** Noon - 5 pm & 6 - 8 pm
- Thursday:** Noon - 5 pm & 6 - 8 pm
- Friday:** 10 am - 5 pm
- Saturday:** 10 am - 5 pm

Hours of operation for the Victoria North Regional Library in North Ingonish are as follows:

- Tuesday:** Noon - 5 pm & 6 - 8 pm
- Wednesday:** Noon - 5 pm & 6 - 8 pm
- Thursday:** Noon - 5 pm & 6 - 8 pm
- Friday:** 9 am - noon & 1 - 5 pm
- Saturday:** 10 am - noon, & 1 - 5 pm


The library personnel at all branches welcome your enquiries. Call Baddeck at 295-2055 and Ingonish at 285-2544.

**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)

**Germaine's Own** Lisa MacArthur

reel



Originally from Codroy Valley, fiddler **Lisa MacArthur** moved to Cape Breton in the '90s because of her love for fiddle music. About five years ago she made a marvellous CD which was particularly noticed by her fellow musicians. Today Lisa is living in Halifax where she plays fiddle for a touring band known as 'Da Rock' and teaches for Long & McQuade at both their Dartmouth and Bedford locations. Composed over a year ago, the above reel has yet to be recorded. Lisa played it recently at a Thursday night Rollie's Wharf session which she attended after making a trip to Newfoundland.

## Victoria County's Residential Curbside Organics Collection

**Garbage Shipped to Guysborough**

For the month of December, 2010, **197.8 Tonnes** of garbage were shipped bringing the total to **14,177.71 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 December, 2010, **6.80 Tonnes** of organics were collected bringing the total to **825.17 Tonnes**