

In Those Days in Victoria County

Simon Gibbons and Anglican History



by Jim St. Clair
The little white church at the side of the Shore Road in Baddeck and the building between Neil's Harbour and New Haven are reminders of the long history of

the Anglican Church in Nova Scotia, and more particularly of the ministry of Rev. Simon Gibbons in Victoria County.

Three hundred years ago this year at Port Royal, near Annapolis Royal,



Simon Gibbons (a photo from the book, *Simon Gibbons, First Eskimo Priest*, by Leonard Hatfield, published by Lancelot press in 1987).

the first church service in the Anglican tradition in Nova Scotia took place – a time of thanksgiving. This year, the people of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are celebrating the three centuries of continuation of the rites of the Church of England.

Both in local parishes and at a special time in June in Halifax, services are being held in commemoration. At Exhibition Park on the 6th of June, the theme of “A Journey Just Begun” will encourage people to look back and to be enthusiastic about the future.

Of all the many people who have served parishes in this diocese through the years, one of the most remarable is Simon Gibbons. Born in

Labrador in 1851, he was of aboriginal background. Apparently orphaned at an early age, he was identified as a very smart child and encouraged to pursue his education through the assistance of Anglican missionaries in Newfoundland-Labrador.

After a theological course at King's College, he was appointed to the Parish of Baddeck and as a travelling missionary to northern Cape Breton in 1877. For nearly eight years, he journeyed to Ingonish and on to Neil's Harbour and New Haven and then to Bay St. Lawrence. The many Anglicans in the area were mostly of Newfoundland origin. Often journeying by foot or on horseback or by sleigh, many times on snowshoes, he was renowned for his willingness to go where he was needed or called.

As well, he met the spiritual needs of the people of the small Anglican community in Big Baddeck as well as in the Village of Baddeck. In addition to his physical endurance, he was noted for his excellent sermons, his thorough education and also for his good humour. He was often required to speak to groups of people in the United States and in England on behalf of the people of his extended parish. Accounts of his preaching at places such as Westminster Abbey stress his eloquence and his ability to raise substantial funds.

Not only did he leave behind many faithful parishioners when he moved to Lockeport after seven and a half years, but his legacy also included two churches constructed during his time in Victoria County. The structure at New Haven-Neil's Harbour has been replaced, but the one in

Baddeck, dedicated in 1883, is much cherished by parishioners and adherents as well as by people interested in ecclesiastical architecture.

The church, which carries the name of St. Peter-St. John (the second name from the church in Big Baddeck), has the appearance of a small edifice in England with its late Gothic Revival style. The vertical siding of board and batten is quite unusual as is the baptismal font within which came from England where it once was in a Saxon church of the 11th century.

Items about Simon Gibbons may be found in the archives of the Anglican Church. As well, the short biography of Simon Gibbons as prepared by Bishop Leonard Hatfield, formerly Head of the Diocese of Nova Scotia

and Newfoundland is insightful – Simon Gibbons, First Eskimo Priest, The Life of a Unique Clergyman and Church Builder, published in 1987 by Lancelot Press.

Simon Gibbons died at the relatively young age of forty-five in Parrsboro where he had served for eight years after being in Lockeport for three years. His time in Victoria County was certainly well remembered for many years and will no doubt be part of the history recalled during this year of celebration of three hundred years of Anglicanism in Nova Scotia.

In those days in Victoria County, Rev. Simon Gibbons lived and worked for the well-being of the people of his communities.



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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

reel

Kayla and Brad’s

Allison Mombourquette

Allison Mombourquette is a student in her first year at L’Université Sainte-Anne. *Kayla and Brad’s* was composed last summer for a couple of good friends. Originally from L’Ardoise, Allison was home last weekend so that she could go to the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association practice at the Gaelic College. While there she got to see another old friend, her fiddle teacher, Eddie Rogers.

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.

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