2016

Glimpses Into Old New Ross

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Photo: courtesy of Dale Hennigar

Preamble:

If Trees Could Talk

Trees have a way of storing historical information though it is not easy to extract it from them. When settlers arrived in what was to become New Ross, someone decided that the first tree to be cut was significant. A large piece of the Rock Maple was used by the Lieutenant-Governor to make a dozen egg-cups that are still in the Governor's home. Another piece was used to make one egg-cup and a dining-table that are still in Rosebank Cottage. That tree represents a rich store of memories. We would hear wonderful stories and learn interesting facts if trees could talk.

When I was in grade school, history books confidently declared that Columbus discovered the new world in 1492 and Cabot did so again in 1497. More recent research shows that the Vikings, who were great sailors and adventurous explorers, had been in North America long before that. Confidant that the Vikings had arrived here as early as 1000 A.D, Helge Instad searched the east coast of North America, and in the 1960s found evidence of a settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in north-western Newfoundland. Instad found mounds and burnt trees that were later proven to be the remains of a Viking settlement dating from about 1000 A.D. What a story those trees could tell!

Legend has it that at the close of the 14th century (late 1300's), Prince Henry Sinclair, Earl of The Orkneys, headed a large expedition to the new world; some expedition members quickly returned and some remained for a few years. People in Guysborough County of eastern NS will assure you that Henry Sinclair made landfall there and stayed for a long time to explore inland. Claims have also been made that Prince Henry Sinclair established a

residence in what is now New Ross, and some believe that it was built on the site of an earlier (13th century) Viking settlement.

After I had grown up and gone from home a school-teacher moved into New Ross and became curious about a small sod area and had it uncovered. Among a few items that were found was a block of wood that was dated from four to six centuries earlier. That may be about the time that Henry Sinclair was supposed to have been in Guysborough. Is there a connection? Who knows? Did Prince Henry camp in New Ross on an overland trek to the Bay of Fundy? Or was the grassy spot a Mi'kmaq camp site? If only that piece of tree could talk!

When we talk about explorers and settlers we may forget that the Mi'kmaq have been here far longer than other people. The trees of NS know the Mi'kmaq people and it is interesting to think that in some future day a tree might reveal some of their history for us. In the meantime New Ross may or may not have a historic site, and may or may not have much of a story to tell about the years before its founding.

Right now I would be happy to settle for a summer's day under the maple tree that once stood proudly in front of grandfather's barn. It watched all the excitement of New Ross's Centennial in 1916. It also absorbed the many dreams of a barefoot boy who is blessed to live into the village's bicentennial year. That tree's story is recorded in my very bones.

- Introduction -

Welcome to the Village

Good history is the story of real people doing real things in the routine of their daily lives. My childhood between the two Great Wars was spent in the village of New Ross, and for two summers as a university student I

visited every home each week with an old van, delivering groceries for my uncle Basil. I came to know and love everyone, as a part of our daily lives. The few glimpses into this life reflected here are warm with loving memory. A spider-web of little roads held the scattered village together, remote, isolated, and very little changed from its pioneer beginning in 1816.

Pioneering in the western world meant intentionally populating vast areas with settlers from ancient, established societies. Pioneering had strong appeal to the settlers for reasons of personal freedom, land ownership and family life. Settlements began as small, remote, often persistently isolated, villages. A pioneer village has nothing whatever in common with Marshall McLuhan's 'global village'!

Old New Ross was a family of families scattered among the hills and hollows of the Atlantic Uplands, the backbone of southern Nova Scotia. Not far from the Atlantic coastline, not far from Annapolis Valley, not far from the university town of Wolfville, it was a tiny world unto itself, where everybody knew everybody, and knew everything about everybody. There was a natural balance between privacy and openness, freedom and responsibility, independence and mutual support – a good formula for keeping young through the years.

The village celebrated its first century a year before my birth, with a gala gathering and the erection of a centennial monument at The Cross which also became, at War's end, a memorial of fallen soldiers. Another celebration, at the age of 150 years included publication of Caroline Leopold's excellent history of the village. In 2016, its bi-centennial year, the village was not only celebrating history but also making history.

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At The Cross

Photo: courtesy of Larry Kedddy

Every village develops a natural focal point without the fuss of making precise decisions. Everyone in New Ross knew its centre was at The Cross. About 1775 a military road had been surveyed to connect Halifax with Annapolis Royal, and its straight line cut right along the southern slopes of the hills where New Ross still flourishes. In 1814 a much better survey was made and the roadway cleared, just in time for land grants to be made to disbanded militia soldiers following the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The

village came into being in 1816 along the newly cleared roadbed and was called Sherbrooke until it got its first post-office in the 1860's. Sherwood, The Forties, and East and West Dalhousie came into being along the same road at about the same time. Though the road was virtually a straight line, when it reached New Ross it had to do a quick zig in order to avoid Lake Lawson, then cross the river flat to start up a small hill before making a zag back onto its course again. The top of that zig-zag incline became and still remains the village centre. It was The Cross because a lane or side-road led easterly to Rose Bank, the lot on the lake assigned to Captain Ross. The side-road was later extended westerly towards another section of New Ross called Aaldersville. The Cross was a crossroads corner, the very heart of the village.

Within its first fifteen years the village had three functioning, wellorganized congregations: Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Baptist. If the crossroads is the heart of the village, the churches were the soul and moral fibre of the villagers. By 1824, Anglicans had erected Christ Church on the upper or northwest part of the crossroads corner; the Roman Catholics erected St. Patrick's diagonally opposite by about two years later.

When New Ross celebrated its centennial in 1916, an anniversary monument was erected at the very centre of the crossroads corner. Much later, with increased traffic and the need for wider roads, the monument was moved from the corner and placed on the Legion grounds where it is preserved by the New Ross Historical Society.

It is said that a pioneer resident who came from the vicinity of Charing Cross in London began to refer to this corner by the same name, Charing Cross. Then, when the Free School Act of 1855 required each community to be responsible for educating its own children and each school section adopted its own name, the local school became officially known as Charing Cross School. The Cross and Glengarry prudently shared a school situated half way between the two, and every child had to walk a half-mile twice every day to attend school! Hard on shoe leather but mostly on bare feet!

The walk is still the same in the twenty-first century. Charing Cross School is still the centre of several school sections that together constitute the New Ross community.

The little hill on the road's zig-zag is known as Prat's Hill, at least among local people. In recent years, with improvements in highways, that hill has almost disappeared and is hardly recognized as a hill at all, and nobody can quite remember why it is called Prat's Hill. At the top of the hill, the side road to Rose Bank Cottage became the School Road when a tworoom school was built near Ross Farm.

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Grandfather Oscar

By local rule he was O. S. Elliott, Stipendiary Magistrate. By common consent, he was Mr. Elliott when spoken to, even to his nearest neighbour Lincoln Meister. Whenever spoken about he was O. S., and in total discreet silence he was Oscar. To his grandson he was always Sir, and he always called me Son. Every community large or small has some universally recognized 'character' who unconsciously becomes a kind of flag-bearer for everyone. Oscar certainly filled that role, not only because he lived at The Cross, but also because in everything he was The Law, The Authority. Nothing happened without his approval.

Oscar, born in 1857, was a grandson of George Alexander Elliott, the 1816 grantee on the Mill Road. That lot was sold when Oscar's widowed mother remarried. Oscar Elliott and Linda Keddy were married in 1882, and two days later he bought the corner lot at The Cross where they started to raise their family. In the summer of 1895 that house burned to the ground; there had been eight Elliott children by that time, one an infant of a few months (two had died earlier). By winter Oscar had rebuilt and the family was living in the new home where the three youngest of the thirteen were born. This was the house familiar to everybody as the Elliott house, which was taken down in the 1970's, after Jennie Elliott's death in 1969.

In 1926, at the age of nine, I came to live with my grandparents in the home across from the church. Like most homes, ours included threegenerations. Oscar and Linda, Aunt Jennie (who remained single), Uncle Minto, and I lived there. Oscar was a strict Victorian who believed idle hands were the devil's game. Though we had a somewhat love-hate relationship he was always very fair and never lifted a hand in punishment. Though he limped his way into the twentieth century on an improperly

mended broken leg, he was upright in every other way. When I was given his honorary gold watch at his death I recalled that he never changed his watch or clock for Daylight Saving Time, remaining staunchly on God's Time year in and year out.

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Prat's Hill

The name is long gone. In fact, the hill itself, running up from the river flat to The Cross, then making a sharp turn towards the sunset, has almost disappeared. I remember it because I once (before I had a license) drove an old truck up the hill with a load of loose stones for a concrete floor in our barn. When I had to shift, the jerk made the stones slide back and the new weight on the rear lifted the front wheels off the road altogether!

Here is the full story of Prat's Hill. John M. Prat (1823-1900) and his wife Martha Amelia (who died in 1884), came from away and bought the corner lot from the original owner. He built a large barn and almost completed a new house, and then, for some reason, decided to move away. They had a son Charles Adams Prat (1857-1883), who married Mary Helen Christmas Moore (1857-1922). This is significant because Mary Moore was the daughter of Rev. David Christmas Moore (1825-1905), who had been rector of Christ Church in 1864 when the rectory was built. The Moores also had a son, David Brown H. Moore, who became a priest. The Prat name no longer continues in New Ross, but it is interesting to note that Charles Adams Prat and Mary Helen Christmas Prat had a grandson born in 1930 who was named John Martin Prat after the original Prat of Prat's Hill. The triptych-style stained-glass window over the altar in Christ Church, the window that faces the corner, has one panel that is dedicated to J. M. Prat. (The other two panels are dedicated to Mary Ross and Michael Keddy).

It was the Prat property that Oscar and Linda Elliott bought at their marriage, and it remains in Elliott hands. Bruce Elliott still has the original deed. Linda (Hannah was her other name and, though she would never admit it, her official name may have been Belinda!) started a little grocery business in their home. It was always in the name of O.S. Elliott Ltd.

because women had few legal rights in those days. It grew to include a double gas pump at the edge of the road in front of the house-store, and Aunt Jennie kept the business going into the second generation. When he came back to New Ross after a work stint in New England, Oscar's youngest son Basil married Marjorie Ernst of Mahone Bay and built his home and business next to his father's house on the corner. The property eventually came to his son Bruce, and so the Elliott name continues on Prat's Hill. The New Ross Historical Society received Bruce's gracious permission to erect a large stone at the corner that preserves The Cross's name of CHARING CROSS.

For many years, all automobiles had to shift to lower gears to make the grade and turn the corner at the top of Prat's Hill. Barkhouses and Elliotts constantly vied with each other about the quality of Ford versus Chevrolet automobiles, and Prat's Hill became the final test. It was in the 1930's that one automobile first made the grade and corner without shifting gears. I hope, for the sake of good neighbourliness, that nobody can remember whether it was a Ford or a Chevrolet that did it first!

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Whipsaws and Sawmills

Among the few hand tools assigned to land grantees was an occasional whipsaw. On winter Saturdays when grandfather took me to the woodlot to cut firewood I was on the other end of a crosscut saw with him, one that cut across the grain. A whipsaw is the opposite, a rip saw used to cut boards and planks lengthwise, not across the wood grain. Without water or steam power, boards had to be cut by two men, one standing on top of a log and the other standing in a pit dug below the log. In that way lumber was made for the first buildings, including Rose Bank, the very first cottage in the new village, which still stands as the centerpiece of the Ross Farm Museum.

A century later New Ross was deeply engaged in the apple-barrel industry as well as lumbering. By this time there were several modest steam and water mills operating. On a clear sunny day one could stand at The Cross and see smoke in the sky rising from as many as five stacks. One of these was on the river's edge at the foot of Prat's Hill. It was started by my grandfather with the assistance of his son Anson, my father. Not far from this mill was another owned by Alfred Barkhouse.

Early in the winter, logs were cut and hauled in to the mill on heavy double-runner sleds while the ground was frozen. Most homes had an oxteam that had to be well shod in order to hold back the load of logs on the downhill slide. Sometimes a special 'shoe' was used to help the oxen brake the sliding. The runners made hard smooth tracks in the snow that tempted every child into coasting on the hill. When they tired of coasting there was always the huge pile of fresh sawdust at the mill to play in. But it was not all play; it was a routine chore for children to collect and stack both stave edgings and long lumber edgings as kindling for fires in the kitchen stove at home.

It seems that a sawmill has always been there. Oscar's greatgrandson Eugene and his son and grandson still operate a modern one, powered by electricity that has been available since 1948. Apart from the lumber that was produced by several mills in the community, the primary product for a long time was staves and heads for the great apple barrel industry. The first apple barrels produced in New Ross were hand-made by Daniel O'Neil in 1864. New Ross led the province in that industry until the Second War brought apple-barrel production to a virtual standstill.

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The Elliot(t) Clan

Scots and Irish came with the original settlers in 1816, among them George Alexander Elliott, a Scot who grew up in Ireland where the name picked up an extra t. The Elliotts were a Scottish Border clan, short, wiry individuals as cocky as bantam roosters, with a questionable reputation. My grandmother, a Keddy, and my mother, a Russell, brought fresh blood that probably greatly improved the stock - only one of my eight siblings is noticeably Elliott. Nevertheless the traditional Elliott crest motto restores or at least reassures some reputation: The Latin *Fortiter et recte* translates loosely as 'bravely and correctly', or maybe as 'resolutely and righteously'.

It is reported that a visitor to the Middle March of the Border once stopped a native, remarking that there were no churches visible and asking: "Are there no Christians here?" The native, shaking his head, replied: "No, we're all Elliotts and Armstrongs here!" For a long time, life on the Border was indeed difficult. There may be some reality to the observation that they lived hard, fought hard, drank hard, loved hard, and died hard. Nova Scotia and all Canada owe a great deal to pioneering Scots, not only for their business and agricultural abilities, but also for their education, art, music, and religion. What Celtic culture has already done for the human spirit in this new land is a 'wealth of nations' that even Adam Smith could never have imagined or anticipated – and he could never have attached an adequate dollar value to such wealth. So much that is good and strong and beautiful has come to us from our Celtic heritage that it is unnecessary as well as deceitful to indulge in Brigadooning any of the darker or painful things that may also belong to that heritage.

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Real Historical Site?

What constitutes an historical site? What ingredients must be present? There was no such thing in New Ross in my day, but when a faint line under some thin sod, a flair for history, and a high-speed imagination come together there could easily be an historic site in the making or finding. This one was never proved to be authentic though it will probably never be proved entirely false. Some locals will be credulous and some will think it incredible, in varying degrees. So far it is almost a non-happening - almost, that is. A short distance off the Kentville road, on the edge of Charing Cross, is a small plot of land which local maps may identify with an X. It is not difficult to find although even most of the locals seem to know very little about where it is or what it means. True enough, the spot is not much to look at and it has very little to say to viewers – yet it may well indicate some European presence before Columbus and Cabot.

Coming upon it accidentally, one's quick thought flits to King James of England who, in 1621, wanted to make a New Scotland (*Nova Scotia*). He may even have hoped to build a camp or hunting lodge here for his son Charles. But it never happened, and the area remained Acadie for almost a century longer. A little more pondering may suggest a very early Viking presence, or maybe a somewhat later one from northern Europe.

Researchers like Helge Ingstad have been on the prowl for many years throughout the Atlantic Provinces. He studied the Norse Sagas and stories of the Vikings and then scanned the whole eastern coastline until he found hard evidence, in the mid-1970's, of a Viking community built around 1000 A.D, at L'Anse Aux Meadows in northwest Newfoundland. But when the faint line under the thin sod in New Ross was opened not much of a foundation

was found, and carbon testing of the three or four artifacts indicated a possible four to six centuries, not back to the eleventh century.

A third possibility has been put forward in support of the case for ancient ruins in New Ross. Some people believe that around the close of the fourteenth century Prince Henry Sinclair, Earl of the Orkney Islands, sponsored, financed, and headed a sizeable expedition to far western shores with the help of some of the Venetian Zeno family. This expedition is said to have touched the eastern shore of Nova Scotia and, while some returned quickly home, others settled on shore for some time, making trips over long distances inland. They may have stayed as long as fourteen years before returning home. Some people in Guysborough are quite convinced that the expedition made landfall near there.

The Mi'kmaq were the first people in Nova Scotia and New Ross. We could learn a great deal from a study of their oral traditions. One concerns a larger-than-life white or blond man coming and living among them, teaching them many things, and then sailing away with a promise to return. Could Glooscap have been Prince Henry? Could he have stopped a while in New Ross? See Mark Finnan's book, *The Sinclair Saga* (1999, Formac Publishing Company) for an exploration of this idea.

A fourth possibility is that it may be the site of a Mi'kmaq encampment. If there is any substance in the New Ross historical site it may well be locked in the history of the Mi'kmaq people, and there, many present-day citizens might wish to say: 'May it rest in peace'.

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Historical Horseshoe too?

New Ross does have an historic site, or maybe a small archeological find, or at least a spot of ground that attracts some minor curiosity. Three

or four artifacts found there include an old horseshoe. Examination indicates that there is little evidence to rouse wide speculation about a summer retreat for King James I of England, or a Viking camp or a temporary home for a Templar expeditionary group. Yet all this is included in some books, such as Mark Finnan's *The Sinclair Saga*, which has a picture that includes a horseshoe among a few artifacts that were unearthed and tested for age. Though I have no skills in archeological research and analysis I am pretty sure that I know something about that horseshoe. If so, the shoe is not very old. It may have been made at Cogley's blacksmith shop nearby, I probably had something to do with burying it, and that was all in the twentieth century.

I do not know if this site has historical value or not. If so, I may have once been treading on history. It is up to others to decide whether my memory is correct or far off the track when it tells me that the horseshoe almost certainly does not belong to any exotic world history that the site may hold, but it does belong to my own personal story and to Uncle Minto's story. It may be that our story and any ancient story just happen to belong to the same bit of pastureland.

It seems to me that this site was at one time part of a pasture owned by Frank Boylan. In the early 1930's Frank ran a grocery store along with his family farm. With a family of girls there was not much farming work done, and that was usually hired. Frank needed no horses of his own. But this was Depression time and normal local poverty was a bit worse than usual. This meant that storekeepers allowed families to run up unpaid debts on the books, and often these debts were either written off or were paid by some kind of barter. Perhaps some customer had offered Frank his horse as payment for a debt. Somehow Frank acquired a horse that he did not need and he put it in the pasture for the summer. Late in the season the horse died. Somewhat distraught, Frank came to Minto, asking him to dig a hole and bury the horse where it fell. There was no excavating equipment in the village and, considering the thin topsoil and hard and rocky deeper soil, hand-digging was necessary but also daunting. Minto was physically strong

and he accepted the task. I was a young teenager living with my grandparents and so I offered to help him.

Armed with two shovels, a pick and a crowbar, we arrived to study the situation, not realizing that we might be damaging a historic site, not imagining that we might confuse amateur archeologists of some forty or fifty years later. I knew all about oxen but neither of us had any experience with horses, especially dead ones. They are much larger than oxen and this dead one seemed to be much larger still, with its bloated barrel-stomach and its four long fence-post legs. The dead horse was lying on its right side, with its two left legs stiffly pointing to the afternoon sun. We did some measuring and decided to dig close to the body so that we could use those legs as levers to roll it over and drop it neatly into the grave. At least our calculations indicated that it would be the case.

Digging, shoveling, and using the crowbar to loosen large stones, the afternoon sun seemed to go down in the sky faster than we went down into that immense grave. Finally, either our tired muscles, the sun, the hard clay of the grave, or all three, told us that we had done enough. Straightening up to ease our aching backs we gingerly grasped the two legs pointing to the sun, testing their worth as levers. Then, with one great push on the legs, the body slowly rolled over into the grave. It was not as neatly done as undertakers do it today with their lowering equipment, and it would be more than a small falsehood to claim that the horse's body lay as neatly and comfortably as it should have. First of all, the other two legs were now on top and were just as defiantly protruding above the grave and pointing to the setting sun. Moreover, we had almost forgotten about the long neck and head when digging the grave. It was too late to think of anything like a pillow, and we could not even arrange to give any semblance of natural sleep so the horse could 'rest in peace'. We did discover that the neck would bend easily, so when we finally stood up again we could look down on a horse with its head bent around so that it rested firmly between the two front legs.

There was nothing left except to fill in the grave. However, it did not matter how much ground we used or how big the mound, those two protruding legs remained sticking out like two periscopes on a submerged submarine. After a couple of failed attempts we took off all the ground again. Somewhere in the pasture we found two large stones heavy enough to press each leg down against the body and hold it there. Finally, the ground made an acceptable mound without any searching periscopes working their way through the surface.

We picked up our tools and walked out to the road, looking back once to make sure all was in order. We never returned to that grave, and we hoped Frank would take our word that the job was done without visiting it himself. I do not remember whether that horse had a full set of shoes or if it had cast some while running around the pasture. Maybe there had been only one shoe at the time of the burial. In any case, when digging was undertaken sometime after 1972, only one shoe was found. I have no doubt in my mind that the shoe in question once belonged to Frank's horse, and that Uncle Minto and I had something to do with where that shoe was found. It is a not-so-ancient artifact that was found under the sod by the researchers.

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Behind the Rectory Door

Reaching the verandah she stopped, opened the door, turned, waved, and disappeared inside. The rectory door closed. I had caught up with her on the road from school, held her books while she tied her sneaker laces, and carried her books as we walked along. My own bare feet were already hardened to the spring ground. We were both eleven years old, and in the same grade. I stood as she walked around the corner onto the verandah and waved, and then I walked silently to my own home. She had three

younger brothers and one more on the way, so my aunt said. I had brothers and sisters too, but they were in another town, and now here I was living with my grandparents, alone among four adults.

There was something about that rectory door - I was not sure just what. It signified something intangible, something insubstantial, almost spiritual. Children ran in and out of our village backdoors all the time, treble voices raised in noisy, often wordless communication. But the rectory door remained discreetly closed until some polite knocking induced a gentle welcome. The rectory kids mixed and played with the village kids, looked the same, sounded the same, and scraped their knees and cut their fingers in the same way. But that door seemed to draw a line, make a distinction, and separate us. Yet it was not a bad or troublesome kind of discrimination or snobbishness by any means, almost the very opposite. The rectory family was different because they were special, people we took pride in, and looked up to, whom we honoured and wanted to bear our village banner for us. In some way we unconsciously invested our village character and prospects in the rectory family. We needed them.

If that family were not different, if they were exactly the same as every other family in the village, we would somehow have been confused and disoriented, because we would have had no touchstone by which to understand who or what we were ourselves. It was not that we set high standards for them or had high expectations of them but how could we know or understand what was natural or unnatural if we had only ourselves to judge from? We knew there was nothing mysterious or unusual going on behind that closed door; life there was very real, very normal, but that was the very reason it had an air of mystery and the extraordinary about it.

Her dad was the rector for Christ Church; the whole congregation was a family and he was its spiritual father, making the whole village an extended family, including Roman Catholic and Baptist families. The rector became a member of every Anglican family and his kids became our schoolmates. It was only natural that the rectory itself should be a symbol

and storehouse of the hopes and fears, pleasures and pains, of the whole village. This was not something the rectory assumed for itself; we invested it with its genteel character.

For me, entering the rectory doorway was a kind of privilege to be earned, and to treat it lightly was to misuse a sacred trust. The family at the rectory may or may not have sensed this, without quite knowing why they could or should be thought of as different while still being the same as everyone else. The door's mystique touched everyone. I was not curious about what the rectory family did or how they did things, but I really felt it was important to discover the quality of their living together, their attitudes and motivations, their hopes and outlooks, and their anxieties and fears. Their outward life must have been much like our own but it would stem from their inner life of beliefs and values; it was the quality of that inner life that we wanted to discover and hoped to emulate if we were to grow spiritually. How could we explain the significance of their door to the rectory kids when we did not fully understand it ourselves?

Between the two Great Wars, childhood in our subsistence village was a long period of relatively skimpy discoveries. Children nowadays discover so much so fast that they are unable to assimilate it all, organize and regulate it, weed and decontaminate it, and package it for later life issues while they are still young. There were distinct advantages in our learning that we only began to fully understand and appreciate many years later. Prominent among our discoveries was a rich knowledge of and respect for the world of nature. In three-generation families a child quickly acquires a deep sense of belonging to a family and an understanding that we are all responsible for one another in this world. In our village there were very few visible authority figures. Police from outside made infrequent trips over our questionable roads, and as a result we were obliged to learn how to trust each other. Doors were left unlocked, stray cattle were recognized and returned home, and malicious property damage was virtually unheard of. It would make a great research project in social psychology just to find out to what extent trust encourages and stimulates trust, and to what extent

enforced protections encourage people to break the rules. Our village could have been the subject of such a study!

By accident or by dictate of fate, or perhaps because of a lingering Scottish-Presbyterian belief in predestination, I did eventually come to know what went on behind the rectory door. I was able to absorb its essence, get to sense its feel, and make it a part of my own inner being after the rector asked me if I would like to be an acolyte, someone to assist him, to be his 'fellow-worker in the kingdom', as he said. The task proved to be a lot more than all the other boyhood farm chores that I was already doing. We were a team, man-to-man, and I was on the inside of things. In no time at all I began to feel I was where I belonged, where I needed to be, as far as life in the Church was concerned. Frequent opportunities to go behind the rectory door made it possible for me to become acquainted with the qualities of that place. Village life was a single experience shared by all, a single coin with the rectory being its obverse side. It was different but it was all the same coin.

Through the more than seventy-five years that have followed my own ordination I have cherished the significance of the rectory door and the rector behind that door in my childhood. The spiritual depth and power that I discovered have coloured each and every one of those years.

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The Bull and the Boy

It was a big beast. It seemed to grow bigger by the day, not just fat but big-boned, larger than any cow or ox around. I was afraid of it, not because of its size but because it was fierce, moving around in its yard without any social graces whatever, paying no attention to anyone, alone within its six-foot high two-by-four plank fence. Its horns were not long but

they protruded like a pair of sturdy well matched elephant tusks that dared anyone to get near enough to reach or near enough to catch on a run. I kept my distance, where I could talk firmly without a trembling voice. We respected each other but neither of us trusted the other.

The bull was the only purebred in the village, owned by a group of farmers but housed and maintained by Grandfather. Its one objective in life allowed no distractions. He was never tied, but had a whole room or stall to himself, one that opened onto the exercise pen that was his alone.

For more than a century our pioneer farmers had been content with home-raised cows coming from indiscriminate inbreeding and cross-breeding that did very little for milk production or for quality of beef. (That however was not the case with oxen; every man took great pride in how his oxen looked in the eyes of neighbours). My grandfather, though he was a true conservative in every way, was also a believer in progress, a great innovator and experimenter. He read John Young, known as *Agricola*. He experimented with cement, with tar, with home electricity, and now with breeding cows. Purebred cows were preferred and the Red Durham breed was good for both milk and beef production. Moreover, there was some public assistance available for purchasing a purebred bull.

Our village, a collection of small, independent, subsistence family farms, depended on very limited growth and production potential of the thin soil and rocky hillsides. But the families had a long-standing sense of independence and self-sufficiency that kept them strong and hardy. The provincial government had always encouraged independent farmers to work together locally to share production costs. Grandfather Oscar urged a local farmers' association to purchase a bull for the whole village with the aim of improving the breeding stock. With government chipping in, the association agreed to obtain a bull. Who would maintain the animal? Nobody else wanted the responsibility and once again Oscar stepped in. Hence the connection between the bull and the barefoot boy.

A part of the barn space once used for pigs was partitioned as a stall for the bull. A hole was cut into the north wall of the barn for a large door that led into the bull's exercise ground. Another door, always kept securely fastened, led to an inner area where cows were brought for servicing. Oscar, and only Oscar, held the bull under control and led him to this inner chamber using a long bar snapped into a large iron ring permanently fixed into the bull's nose.

I could feed the bull, bravely working around his manger because his head could get no closer. I also had to clean his stable daily, and I could only do that when he was out at the far end of his exercise pen. When I finished the cleaning I sometimes stood outside where he could see me, taunting him until he began to run back. Then I rushed through his manger, getting safely beyond reach just as his head thrust itself into the manger.

In due course that Red Durham bull also became prime beef, but I had learned a lot from him. We came to understand each other and respect each other. He lived under grandfather's control and so did I. Both of us understood the limits of our bravery and cowardliness. I came to understand that testing the level of temptation in someone else by taunting also measured the level of my own cowardliness!

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Flights, Fact and Fancy

The nine-year-old boy, bare-footed with bushy blond hair already bleached white by the sun, stood looking up at the May afternoon sky. He was in the middle of the newly plowed and harrowed house garden and was holding his hoe with both hands. His ears had caught a distant and unfamiliar sound. It seemed to be high in the sky, moving from the west towards the east. He searched the blue sky and thought he could see

something, but was not sure, though he kept scanning upwards long after the sound had completely faded away. He knew about airplanes, from the still very fresh war stories, but he had never seen one, and this was a long distance from where any plane would be flying. Was it really a plane?

It was 1927 and New Ross was still a village that was a long distance from anything else, worlds away from airplanes. Our garden was near the corner at the top of Prat's hill and this was my first year living with my grandparents. It was also my first spring at garden work. Today I was making rows in the loose soil, hoeing straight lines up one side and down the other and then leveling the long mound with a garden rake. We planted rows of peas, onions, carrots, beets and corn; beans would be planted next week. Potatoes and turnips were planted in separate fields, in long rows. I was absorbed in the garden work, planting and growing things, but at the same time my mind was also absorbed by that blue sky: what might be going on up there, what might the world be trying to do away up in the air?

A few days later my grandfather, lying on the kitchen couch one evening, smoking his pipe and reading *The Halifax Herald*, announced to us that an American, Charles Lindberg, had made a solo non-stop flight from New York to Paris, in his *Spirit of St. Louis*. It took more than thirty hours to cross the Atlantic, the first such flight ever! Was it his plane that I had heard? Who else could it have been? Was I that close to touching a page of world history? I will never know, but ever since May of 1927, Lindberg's accomplishment was the beginning of a host of flights of fact and fancy in the minds of kids all over the world. Air travel never ceased to be first page news. Occasionally we would be reminded that it all began when Orville Wright and his brother made the first heavier than air motored flight in the USA back in 1903. And, of course, we had our own romantic event in February 1909, when Alexander Graham Bell's *Silver Dart* made the first powered flight in Canada and in the British Empire from the ice of Baddeck Bay. Then, in the 1920's, in Lindberg's own time, there were the huge, exotic Zeppelins, but they were soon outclassed by greater inventions.

Residents of New Ross had their own way of life that dated from pioneer days. They looked after each other and expected little from the outside world. We had no electricity or paved roads or railways, but we had fertile soil for dreams and imaginations, for flights of fancy beyond flights of fact. It seemed easy to see God and to understand His ways in our village in the 1920's and 1930's. The Second War changed all that and we were unceremoniously deposited into the outside world with all its woes and flights from God. Very quickly we had to learn how to swim, how to keep our dreams and flights of imagination above the drowning depths. God had not left us, but the world seemed to be trying to expel Him.

The world soon went from propellers and air to jets and upper air, with Lindberg's travel time cut to a mere fraction. In 1961 Russia's Yuri Gagarin was the first man in outer space, and in 1969 the United States' Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. A child born at the time of the Wright brothers would be only 66 years old when he watched Neil take that giant step for all mankind. What wonders had burst upon us in only 66 years! It still goes on. Cameras are probing outer space and sending back pictures of Mars as if it were a mere Sunday walk away. Just as I am trying to get accustomed to the possibility that my geometric straight line is probably a cosmic curve, the people who know about such things are suggesting that it is more likely that it is still a straight line!

God was very close and personal in our village when I was growing up, a Good Shepherd holding me like a lamb in His arms. When the whole world became a global village God was still very close and personal, and I could join everyone in singing 'He's got the whole world in His hands'. Now that there are worlds upon worlds out there and space is endless, the image changes again. Our created world used to be one round ball but now it seems more like a basket of small balls instead of one alone. God is big enough to handle that too; the Psalmist says (No.115) that all the whole heavens belong to God, though it seems that He has given the earth to us to care for. There are other images of God that may be a bit more relevant, like the Good Shepherd's fold with ninety-nine sheep safely gathered in, or

our Lord weeping over Jerusalem and exclaiming how often He had longed to gather her children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. Whatever image, the Creator breathes gently over His creation like a blower breathes over his soap bubble. For all its extensive substantiality our world is as tenuous as a soap bubble.

New Ross has never had an airport, not even an emergency landing runway for planes in distress. Yet, within a few years of Lindberg's historic flight, I remember a small plane with skids coming in from somewhere on the Atlantic shore one Saturday afternoon and landing on the ice of Lake Lawson. Everybody gathered around from near and far, and for a price the pilot took people up one at a time for a fly over the village. I say everybody, but my grandfather, Minto, and I were not there. We were nearby cutting firewood in our pasture, and grandfather would let no idle pleasure, however historic, interfere with important work. Now, some eighty-five years after, I still find it difficult to forgive him that one occasion. If he were alive today he too would be filled with awe by the changes. Jules Verne was writing adventure stories at about the time that grandfather was born, so he, like myself, must have dreamed dreams and watched some of his flights of fancy become flights of fact.

Long lamp-lit evenings and nights in New Ross provided rich soil for the imagination. Moreover, living into old age in New Ross was a magic carpet that could carry one to heights where dreams really do come true, day after day.

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My Yoke of Steer

Early in the spring one of our four cows gave birth to twins. They were both males, fathered by the society's purebred Red Durham bull that we maintained in our barn. Within a short time the twins were weaned from their mother and I taught them to drink from a bucket of milk by keeping my hand in the warm milk while also putting my thumb into their mouths, until finally they stopped sucking and began to drink on their own. Grandfather was pleased and said: "Son, you may have the calves and raise them as a team, if you wish. They will be your sole responsibility, caring for them, cleaning, carding, feeding, exercising and eventually training them too." I was proud and excited, and for two full years the work continued without interruption. A third year completed the maturing process and intensive training was begun.

The twins were a deep, solid red colour like their father, except that one had a white spot on the centre of its forehead, the one touch of inheritance from its mother. We soon developed a good level of trust and friendship and I could easily keep up with their frisky antics when they were running loose outdoors. At an appropriate time the two were castrated; I stayed away because I did not want them to think that I had anything to do with that indignity. Their horns began to grow, always a bit of a concern because horns may not be healthy and may curve awkwardly for a team yoke. Both sets of horns grew strong and with their own gentle curve,

without the need of my direction. But even before the appearance of horns there was the need to begin team development.

We began with a lightweight neck yoke. The steers regularly stood beside each-other in the stable and I had long ago decided which should be the nigh (left) one and the off (right) one. They usually stood that way in their stalls. I found a neck yoke among the storage stuff, one that my uncles probably used in the same way a generation before. It needed no lengths of homemade black leather such as usually found on horn yokes. This yoke was long enough to reach across the two slim necks of the young steers. It had two carved spaces that made the yoke sit comfortably on the necks of the steers. At the edges of each curve there was a hole to hold the neckpiece. A skilled yoke maker (there were several in the village) made the neckpieces himself, soaking and shaping a fresh sapling into its U-shape. When the yoke was resting on a neck the U was slipped up from under the neck, the ends were pushed through holes in the yoke to protrude above, and then a wooden pin was put in place to hold the neckpiece securely into the yoke. In the centre of the yoke an iron ring hung down to hold a wagon tongue or sled tongue that the young steers had to learn to haul.

It's a long journey to good team work. Simply getting the two into the yoke and training them to walk together and to follow directions seemed to take a lifetime in itself. Each one threw its rump in all directions, its head from side to side, and tried to escape from the yoke altogether. Often they would stamp on my toes and, when they tried to run I had to lie back over the yoke and let them carry me. I had a whip, which is essential for every teamster. It is not used to punish or to force obedience, but a gentle flick on a rump or a gentle tap on the nose by its haft communicates what to do or not to do much better than a loud voice. Eventually a quiet voice giving short commands in unvarying words is all that is necessary. It indicates that the steers (or mature oxen) and teamster together have finally become a single team of three.

In a large area of the barn floor, under a haymow where farm machinery was stored when not in use, I found a small faded-red wagon.

Hanging on the wall near it was a set of double-sleds, also obviously made for steers. I placed them both on the open floor to clean them, check them out for repairs, and grease them after a generation of idleness. Although farm machinery in early days was often home-made, this wagon and the sleds were factory made. I wondered how many frozen snared rabbits my uncles had to sell in order to raise that much cash. Fortunately for me, like the Israelites crossing the Jordan, I was entering into someone else's heritage. Long after my training stint and long after I had left home for other things, these two treasures were presented by other relatives to the Ross Farm Museum when Ron Barkhouse brought his dream into reality. Steers and oxen are also becoming museum pieces.

I recall the wonder and magic of training the steers to be wagon-wise and sled-wise. Little by little they became accustomed to pulling a weight, though sometimes getting a toot across the wagon-tongue. Then I added more weight and increased distances. We went down Prat's hill to the sawmill and brought home some long lumber edgings. In due course we went to the woodlot across the flat to haul home firewood I had cut. This was chancy because icy roads were a real danger for unshod steers. Wagons or sleds not only had to be pulled but often had to be held back on slopes, and that required good footing. The steers survived to great maturity in spite of everything, and I myself was proud of what we accomplished together.

The day came when, early one Saturday morning, a young man, a neighbour, arrived with a short length of softwood over his shoulder and immediately set to work. He was making a horn-yoke for the steers. Their horns were mature and well shaped. The new yoke would probably stay with them for the rest of their lives. Yokes are unique and fit only one team. The first thing was to judge the length so that the steers could stand close together but free from each other. With skilled craftsmanship he started

cutting and chipping and sanding, stopping frequently to test it on a head. It had to fit perfectly, without pinching or being too loose. Then holes were made for the leather straps and wooden pins to hold them in place. Grooves were cut to hold the irons that fitted the yoke to the vehicle tongue. Finally two upright posts were fitted, around which the further ends of the straps would be wrapped and fastened. Of course there would also be painting and polishing as well as the addition of any brass decorations desired, but by suppertime he relaxed and picked up his tools, his artwork completely finished. And I beamed in approval.

There was one final touch, in a sense the most important of all. The steers had become mature oxen. They had to be shod for summer and winter in order to work. Cogley's blacksmith shop was geared for shoeing horses and oxen. There is quite a difference because horses have a single hoof and steers are double-hoofed. Each ox needs two shoes for each foot. Mr. Cogley sometimes made two identical sets, reminding the teamster that there was a set ready when the team had to be re-shod. Sometimes he made blank shoes of varying sizes in his free time, fitting and sharpening them as he prepared to nail them on. The shop had a special stall where the animal stood in comfort while each leg, one at a time, was bent to kneel so that the shoes could be properly fitted and fastened. Mr. Cogley had some bells for sale, and the grocery store often had a large supply. Each teamster carefully selected two that sounded good to him, and then used a length of light chain, or a decorated and buckled leather strap, to fasten the bell around the ox's neck. The sound of the bells usually identified whose team was coming by.

My young, mature team was not busy enough on our small farm and was eventually traded for an older team. These oxen were a big-boned, completely white team that had worked in the woods yarding logs. They were so beautifully trained that we could harrow a large garden while I stood still, telling them what to do, while they did all the walking. However I admired them, my first love was always the young red twin steers that grew up as I was growing up. We made a great team.

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Bennie

left to right: Ted Windrow, Bennie Bedford, Clarence Bird, Great Village 1924, from Mary Windrow Reeves)

Bennie is a myth, illusion, fantasy, a shadow that lies like a bit of morning fog over Gold River that is clearly seen but a moment later it disappears in the sun and may never have there at all. He was real enough that his grave in the cemetery of Christ Church, New Ross, marks his birth in 1889 and his death in 1954. He really did exist and everybody attests to that fact. If asked to prove it, those who knew him begin painting pictures of the person they see in their minds with fond and pleasant remembrances. Is he really a fact more than a feeling, a man more than a memory?

DeGarthe (1907-1983), one of Nova Scotia's great artists, is famous for his beautiful representations of the day of sail, a Nova Scotia way of life that is gone forever. One of his paintings touches hearts more than any other. It portrays St. Margaret's Bay solidly covered by a bank of silent, still

fog and mist. A sailing ship seems to be emerging from the fog, though the ship is vague and indistinct and may be made of the fog and mist itself. It is so real and so unreal that one must stand in awe and wonder. Bennie was no sailing ship, no artist's creation, but his coming and going, his being here and not being here, were just as ephemeral and genuine as DeGarthe's ship. In telling the story of his life it seems necessary to begin with his death! By 1954 my parents Anson and Glennie were in their early 70's and all nine of their children were grown up and married, except Madelyn, who married in 1960. For all of us and several grandchildren, Bennie had been adopted as a childhood family member, a presence whom we loved. In fact, Bennie belonged to all of New Ross, adopted and accepted as one of us from the time he first appeared.

Bennie first appeared soon after the first Great War ended, possibly in 1920. Somewhere in Canadian immigration records there is a ship's manifest that has a date of arrival, a single line that says BENJAMIN BEDFORD, arriving from London or Liverpool or some other home port. It would be good to have that information but it is not needed. How and when he found his way to New Ross is not known and Anson, my dad, is not here to tell us. Anson, with seven of his nine children already born, was a career saw-miller and might have found Bennie looking for employment. It is unlikely that Bennie found New Ross on his own. In any case, Bennie emerged out of the fog and mist of his past to continue, for more than thirty years, as a shadowy part of the Elliott household and part of a village with a warm place in their hearts for him. For the short while he was in Halifax he had some correspondence with a young daughter back home but that soon ended, leaving her vainly hoping that he would bring her to this new land. He could not fulfill her dream, so he had to let that too fade into the fog of his past. He no longer had a past, only a future, and it would be lived on Nova Scotia soil.

Oscar and Linda, Dad's parents, were married in 1882 and immediately bought their home from the Prat family at The Cross in New Ross. Nine months later Anson and his brother were born, followed in due

course by eleven more children. Basil, the youngest, was the only one born in the twentieth century. As Anson and the other children began to mature Oscar started a small sawmill at the foot of his lot bordering on the Gold River, where Anson got his start in sawmills. When he and Glennie were married in 1905, though they had nothing at all, the couple went to the Annapolis Valley to live, where Robert was born in 1907. Soon after, about 1909, they returned to New Ross. Anson built a home where most of us nine were born and started his own mill across from Lohnes' hotel. Shortly after the Great War ended, Bennie appeared, about the time that Anson went off to set up a mill on the very edge of the salt marshes in Great Village. Bennie was also whisked off to work at the new sawmill. I spent six weeks in the VG hospital with a broken elbow in 1923, and it must have been later that same year that our family moved to the Smith house only a few steps from the new mill. Howard was born in that house in May of 1924. In that same year a photograph of Bennie, Ted Windrow of New Ross, and Clarence Bird, a local man, was taken in Great Village. Soon after, the mill was moved and a much larger one opened in nearby Glenholme. By 1925 we were living near the new mill. Apple barrel stock that was made at these mills was loaded onto scows and shipped to Valley ports such as Port Williams. The ups and downs of sawmills became the ups and downs of Bennie's welfare as well as our own.

During this period Bennie lived in mill camps or stayed in Anson Elliott's home while he worked at the mill and became a part of the family. In the 1930's when the Glenholme operation came to an end, the family, including Bennie, returned to New Ross. They bought the Lohnes hotel, where Glennie maintained a dining room for guests and a long kitchen table for mill hands.

Anson and Glennie's son Lewis was part of the mill business and his wife Ella Mae worked tirelessly at the hotel with Glennie. The few following years were a period when everybody in New Ross was busy and the village was recognized as the centre of a flourishing barrel industry. Elliott children grew up, got married, and with grandchildren made one big family. Bennie

was in the midst of it, a living part of it. He was content with his situation and became a kind of uncle to every youngster.

The Second War was a turning-point for the whole world, including the Elliott family. Robert, Lewis, Chester, Albert and Howard were all in military service, and came home to a different world. In 1940, I put on a different uniform, as I was Ordained into the Sacred Ministry.

Nothing was quite the same ever again. For one thing, the barrel industry came to an abrupt halt, and mills closed down or re-tooled. Electricity came in 1948, roads were paved, and High Schools were built, but families were scattered all over the map and social life took on a new meaning. New Ross slowly settled into a holding pattern, hanging onto as much of its old ways as possible. Everybody got older. Anson retired to take up many different interests and Lewis took over completely. Glennie continued until the approach of her death. The hotel was no longer a place where the whole family lived, but a place where everyone gathered for special occasions.

Bennie was still there, still at home in every house, working at odd jobs and helping wherever he could when he was not working. He was one of us until he died. He was short and slight, moving smoothly and easily. He was always clean and neat no matter what he was wearing. He had a small, clear and distinct voice in speaking, entirely different from the heavy drawling lazy-lips voices of the rest of us. When sitting quietly his eyes might be closed with his face in repose; perhaps thinking of another time or place. If his eyes were open he was taking in everything around him, with a half-smile that came from sheer contentment. Ask anyone what they remember about him and the answer probably is that he played the bones. Every Saturday night in the parish hall, Roy Russell played the fiddle for square dancing, but when Bennie was present he sat beside Roy two or three times in the evening with two carefully selected rib bones held between the fingers of each hand. He would take over the time-beat with skill that often roused a cheer from the dancers.

Lewis's daughter Linda (Linda Voutier nee Elliott), now a retired teacher fondly remembers a doll with curly red hair and freckles that Bennie bought her. The doll never left her sight except for a very few times when she was told to leave it at home. On one occasion she and her family were at her Aunt Jennie's for a visit with Uncle Murray and his wife Aunt Mabel. Their daughter Grace was also at home for a visit from the States with her husband Armand Couture and their two girls. It was the first time that Linda remembers meeting Grace and family. She and Linda Couture, being close in age, were introduced with the idea that they could entertain each other, but the visitor did not have a doll. So it was suggested Linda let the visitor play with Uncle Bennie's doll. It broke her heart, but there was nothing she could do except let her new friend play with the doll. However, Linda made sure the doll went back home with her. In Linda's last memory of the doll, she had no eyes, much thinner hair, and a rather ragged dress, but she was Bennie's gift and Linda kept her long after Bennie died.

And then, as quietly as he had arrived, Bennie slipped away in 1954, and was buried among the families he had gathered around himself decades earlier. It would have been the end of his story, except that fifty years later, in the summer of 2002, the eagle eye of Ron Barkhouse, trained to note unexpected things, spotted a small newspaper ad seeking information on a BENJAMIN BEDFORD. Soon there were letters forth and back, and international phone-calls with family folk on both sides to share information and family details. From this exchange a real Bennie emerges, showing how our Bennie landed in New Ross.

Bennie was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire, England on June 6, 1889, son of James & Naomi (nee Fogg) Bedford. He married Ethel Elizabeth at St. James Church, Chapelthorpe on December 26, 1910. They had three children, Harry, Ada and Doris. Then came the Great War and he enlisted in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and Machine Gun Corps 1914-1920 and served in France where he was also wounded. Somewhere in those military years his wife Ethel began living with another man and had some children, and later she married again, having more children. To what extent

Bennie tried to restore his marriage, to what extent he accepted the situation and bowed gracefully out of the picture, we can only surmise. The end of the marriage and his rejection affected him to the point that his mind closed the book and he never wanted to open it again. He thought of his children and apparently he had some correspondence with his daughter Ada when he arrived in Halifax. For a while she hoped he would bring her to Nova Scotia but that did not happen. Soon everyone in his family closed the book on Bennie, and his grandchildren were kept in the dark about him. Keith, one of Doris' eleven children, took the initiative of advertising, feeling his grandfather deserved better. Grandfather and grandson finally found each other though Bennie was long dead.

Bennie's story is part of the New Ross story. It is also part of my personal story. My lifelong love of square-dancing had its roots in my childhood with the heart-beating sound of Bennie playing the bones in the parish hall.

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Apple Barrels

Whenever I think of the New Ross of my childhood I immediately begin to smell the soft fresh odour of an apple barrel being made, when it is placed over a small wood stove to heat the staves and make them pliable for the cooper's finishing work. There is no way to describe the smell, and I find it difficult to describe the feelings that come over me with that smell, feelings that take me back into the two decades between the two Great Wars. Our village seemed quiet and peaceful though the outside world was turning its unstable peace into a worldwide Depression that led into an even worse war. For a long time, ever since 1816, New Ross had been a tiny world of its own, undisturbed by the outside world, lying "on the southern slope of the EastWest watershed of Nova Scotia" (*History of New Ross*, Caroline Leopold 1966). Its most enduring dealings with the world on either side of that watershed had to do with its apple barrel industry, which dated back to 1863.

A wave of nostalgia still sweeps over me when I visit the Ross Farm Museum and stand watching and smelling the shop where a skilled cooper makes barrels just as they were crafted one hundred and fifty years ago. The museum itself began in 1969, largely the brainchild of local resident and MLA Ron Barkhouse and a few other local folk. The New Ross District Museum Society and the Nova Scotia Museum worked together to develop a Museum of Agriculture.

The first successful European settlement in Canada began in 1605 at Port Royale (now Annapolis Royal) Nova Scotia. European gardening in Canada got its start in that French settlement. During the next hundred and fifty years the Acadians cleared and cultivated the Annapolis Valley from the Habitation on the west to Grand Pre on the east, with several flourishing

communities in-between. They built dikes, turning large expanses of marsh into arable land. Acadians also installed many wooden *aboiteau* to allow water to drain from the dike lands at low tide. The remains of some of these may still be found buried along the muddy banks of rivers and streams in the Annapolis Valley.

When the Acadians arrived in Nova Scotia the primeval forest reached to the water's edge, leaving little opportunity for grasses to grow and thrive. In his wonderful book, *The Old Place,* published in 1997, Dr. Merritt A. Gibson describes how and when many new grasses and plants were introduced and began to spread as land was cleared. He illustrates this information with descriptions of what he found growing on the old place where he grew up. Among many other perennial things that the Acadians planted are apple orchards, which provided fruit for home consumption many years before apples became the primary industry in the Valley. The Planters who began to arrive in 1760 expanded and enhanced fruit-growing and eventually some apples found their way onto sailing ships, probably initially as treats for sailors and gifts for friends in distant ports as far away as England. As simply as that, occasional purchases encouraged the eventual development of a market that soon became an industry.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century Canadians had few skills in marketing, and none at all in packaging and shipping apples. Pioneer consumer goods were simple and basic. Customers bought in bulk, often no more than once or twice a year, storing their supplies in pantries and cellars. These goods usually came in large bags, bundles, and barrels. As a consequence, bags and barrels became second-hand containers for apples in the Annapolis Valley. Of course a growing industry demanded something more uniform and more adequate. Hence its own apple-barrel.

Flour came in light but tight barrels. Fish was pickled and packed in heavy watertight hardwood barrels. Liquid molasses came in massive tight puncheons. The apple-barrel first appeared in 1863 and eventually became a standard three-bushel not-very-tight barrel made entirely of softwood,

with no nails or metal hoops. In the Fall of 1863 Daniel O'Neil of New Ross began making barrels entirely by hand at his home in New Ross. In the following Spring he hauled fifty barrels by wagon and ox-team to the valley some fifty miles distant to be used for the 1864 apple-picking season. In a grand gesture of sheer hazard and intuition, Benjamin Meister, a young man operating a farm at Starr's Point (Town Plot), down the river from Port Williams, had ordered them and paid fifty cents for each barrel.

Slowly the market for apples grew and the demand for barrels increased. Slowly mills began to produce sufficient stock, with new machinery created to produce staves and heads. Slowly new hand coopering tools were devised to replace Daniel O'Neil's simple labourintensive ones. Trucks replaced wagons and teams. Trucks got larger and larger and could carry more and more barrels. About the slowest improvement was in the quality of roads, and top-heavy loads easily toppled over because of a deep hole or sudden crosswind, spilling barrels to roll in all directions.

Sawmills had been common in New Ross ever since the settlers arrived in 1816. For a long time the mills mainly turned logs into lumber, at first with an up-and-down whip saw and later with a large rotary saw. When apple-barrel making came along most lumber mills added new equipment. Barrel-making required a saw to cut logs into the proper lengths. Then there was a barrel-like saw with teeth around one end; a piece of log was placed on a carriage that was pushed into the saw to cut staves with the correct bevel. Nearby there were two jointers who used similar carriages to cut both edges from each stave. Barrel heads required shorter logs; each was sawn into little boards that also had to be edged. Then a worker had to match two or three together to make a square barrel-head. Finally, this square head was fixed upon a round plate that looked like a modern canning machine; as it revolved a double saw cut it neatly into a circular head with a beveled edge that held it firmly in place on a barrel.

In a sense, the six hoops for each barrel were grown rather than milled. Maple or birch saplings 5 ½ or 6 feet long were gathered from

swamps and burnt-over second-growth areas. Each was split into two hoops and kept soaking in water to ensure their pliability at the time of coopering.

Though sawmills of that time may seem complicated they were really quite simple and were often moved from site to site. The machines were grouped at ground level under an open roof, logs were arranged in rows around an open area, and lumber and staves were piled nearby. Piles of sawdust, edgings, and waste wood gradually accumulated. Most mills were powered by steam, requiring a huge boiler and a furnace. Some mills, like the one at the lower end of Lake Lawson, were built over a dammed stream and were powered by a waterwheel. All mills were labour-intensive, requiring several hands.

The mill that my father operated at Glenholme was very large. It included a rotary lumber saw, stave-saw, two jointers, a header machine, a lumber-planer, and a lath machine that cut two at a time. The mill and the cooper shop at the Ross Farm Museum authentically reflect what was going on in New Ross at the height of the apple-barrel industry. Mills outside the area that produced barrel stock shipped it to the cooperages for finishing. Barrels were also made in other communities, but most barrels were made in New Ross. Silas Gates made barrels in Port Williams but many of his coopers were New Ross men. Ships sailing out of Valley ports carried barrels of apples to other parts of the world, mainly to England.

Even though the Great Depression was well on its way by the early 1930's, the Valley kept producing and marketing prime apples. Optimism about the industry expressed itself beautifully in 1933 with the first Apple Blossom Festival. It continues to this day, eighty years later. Moreover, though much arable land has now been lost to sprawling urbanization and other uses, a variety of other tree fruits are produced in the Valley, such as pears, plums, and peaches, as well as some small fruits such as strawberries, raspberries and blueberries. In the early years of the twentyfirst century a fast-developing grape and wine industry is quickly overtaking the traditional apple industry and could surpass it (unless the

smothering urban sprawl is allowed to scuttle everything). The Second War not only brought a quick end to apple shipments, but also a quick end to the manufacture of apple barrels. New local markets were found, and by War's end new ways of packing and shipping were being introduced. Barrels were replaced by less expensive and more efficient one-bushel cartons with inset handgrips and the barrel industry died a natural death.

In a sense the end of this industry also brought an end to the community that New Ross had been. For New Ross, the War brought an end not only to the apple barrel industry but a whole way of life. The family-like village and its pioneer set of values were replaced by a way of life that is open to the whole world of business and industry and new things, a world of speed and travel that leaves little time for quietly enjoying each other. The apple-barrel is now a museum piece, a reminder of days gone by. Change is welcome but it always carries a price tag. In 2016 when New Ross celebrates its bicentennial the village will want to balance its two long lists of pluses and minuses against the hopes and expectations of its original setters of 1816 in order to recover its knowledge of itself as a village, a community, and a family of families.

Note: A file on this topic is in the hands of the New Ross Historical Society, along with an Acadia University study by Rev. Mr. Meister.

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The Local Telephone

The settlers came to a vast wilderness, picked up their land grants, and immediately began to build a home, build a barn for a cow or two and a team of oxen or a horse, and clear some land for a garden. Along with such hard work they also had to cope with two other factors that people are normally quite unaccustomed to, solitude and silence. Solitude was

overcome by making connections to other people with trails, paths, roads and bridges. Isolated families visiting other isolated families soon became neighbours, and solitude began to fade. In silent surroundings every family developed a new appreciation for the sounds of nature, birds singing, brooks babbling over stones, winds breathing through trees, and perhaps a new familiarity with rolling thunder. Those of us used to the noisy global village of today's world cannot begin to imagine what the pervasive silence of a pioneer family must have been like, nor how successfully Alexander Graham Bell's telephone tackled that silence.

By 1875 most of our Nova Scotia pioneer settlements were fairly well established, and it was in that year that the first words were heard over the first telephone, invented by Alexander Graham Bell. Within the next twentyfive years small, local companies were stringing wires up and down roads all over the province, to wire homes together and to overcome silence by making words spoken in any home easily heard in other homes some distance away. What a boon! These wires offered new ways of understanding the meaning of community. Halifax was the largest and most compact urban centre, and the telephone company there presumed to call itself The Nova Scotia Telephone Company. In 1910 it expanded and reconstituted itself as The Maritime Telephone and Telegraph Company (the familiar MT&T).

Soon, it became necessary to have a degree of regularity and uniformity among local companies. In 1913 the Province passed The Rural Telephone Act, regulated by the Nova Scotia Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities. Standards required, for example, that poles had to be good stock, not less than 20 feet long and 6 inches in diameter at the top; they had to be placed a minimum of 4 feet in the ground and spaced not more than 130 feet apart. There were many more details. This Act made it possible to establish telephone companies as properly registered cooperatives, with each subscriber being a member.

Ron Barkhouse, with his extensive knowledge of local affairs, says that the New Ross telephone company started in 1909. The prime mover to establish a subscriber service was Ron's Dad, Alfred Barkhouse, and the company's office and Central switchboard were in Alfred's own place of business. The first employee, secretary and Central-operator, was Annie Meister. (Alfred's association with her eventually blossomed into marriage.) The company at first may not have had a wide territory, but interest was great, enthusiasm widespread, and growth quickly spread in all directions. On its very first line Alfred was No. 1, Frank Boylan was No. 2, and the local doctor, F.C. Lavers, who lived across the river, was No. 3. The manganese mine, beyond the Mill Road, was operating in 1909 and would have welcomed the telephone too. By the time the Province passed its Rural Telephone Act in 1913, the New Ross company had expanded so fast that they did not delay application for formal registration. Its memorandum of association defined its territory, including every place from New Russell to East Dalhousie and from Aaldersville to Seffernville within its bounds. That was a very ambitious undertaking but the company was still growing.

The New Ross Rural Telephone Company Limited kept expanding, but in 1922, the same year in which Alexander Graham Bell died, the Company surrendered itself to MT&T. MT&T brought in an eastern connecting line from Chester Basin and a western one from Springfield. Mrs. Isaac Lantz became the new Central-operator for the New Ross area and the switchboard equipment was moved to her home on the other side of The Flat. After many years she was followed in succession by Mrs. Wilhelmina Seffern, Mrs. Della Turner, and Mrs. Lydia Gates.

When I arrived to live with my grandparents in 1926, the big box phone hung on the wall above the head of the kitchen couch. Most lines were still party lines but they were not heavily loaded. Calling a neighbour whose number was 32 meant signaling with three long and two short rings. If the neighbour was on a different line, the line number had to be rung before the phone number. If a long-distance call was made, it had to go

through Central and that required pressing a button while making one long ring.

From its early days the phone played an important role in family life. It was the first line of approach for reaching the doctor or spreading news of a fire. It brought distant neighbours together, and was highly efficient in spreading local news. In many ways it was a time-saver, and frequently, for the same reason, a life-saver. Only in later generations did it become a chitchat line. Bell's invention made a direct attack upon isolation and silence, the phone-line drawing neighbours into a new kind of community togetherness.

Today, when we see people walk our sidewalks without speaking to others because they are busy speaking into their cell-phones, or when auto drivers have accidents because they are using their cell-phones, we might be excused for longing for good old pre-Bell days when silence and solitude reigned unbroken.

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Knots and Knives

Unless Linc Meister's old log camp in the woods north of New Ross still stands, there is probably nothing whatever to prove that the Boy Scout Movement had a shaky introduction here about 1929, except maybe for my own memory. A start was indeed made, wavering along until I left home in 1934, and I know nothing of its history after that. We joined the movement early, since Robert Baden-Powell's book, *Scouting for Boys*, was published in 1908, only twenty years earlier. Nevertheless, within those twenty years the movement had spread all over the world. Here in Canada a national headquarters and provincial offices had been established. Many communities had thriving groups and New Ross was about to join in. There

was a proper way to organize a local group, a proper way to join, and a proper way to train boys, train leaders, and carry on programs.

The world was opening to me and every other boy in Canada through school, through books of adventure, and through lots of daydreaming and an insatiable imagination. I had to become a scout. I was twelve years old and time was wasting. As a first step I wrote away for all the rules and all the forms that would be required. But the very first step was to have a local organization sponsor us and form a committee that would select leaders to take charge and find a place to meet. And that was just about the *last* step as well, because nobody knew anything about the movement and nobody was ready to assume much responsibility. I thought it through, and in my mind picked a sponsor, named a committee, and found a prospective leader and a headquarters.

Then I went to the rector of Christ Church with my scheme all laid out. He was skeptical, but my strongest argument was that he had three sons of his own who were fast growing into scout age. He also controlled the parish hall, a new building that he had urged the congregation to build. It was not completely finished, but it had a space over the kitchen that we could use. Christ Church became the registered sponsor without committing itself to anything more. A few members of the church became the committee on the assurance that they would have nothing to do because I would do all the paper work. A leader was found, in name only since my own work and enthusiasm was about the only asset in our bank.

We became official on paper. We had a name and a chosen neckerchief colour. A few boys registered, all of whom were still at the tenderfoot level. We were up and running. From the beginning the movement had fixed upon nature, hiking, camping, and all the skills connected with natural survival: life in the woods, knowing the forest and knowing the animals of the wild. All of this was symbolized in the two things every village boy already knew a lot about, ropes and jackknives. I counted that as our greatest asset because we all had good pioneer stuff in us.

Scouting was right up our alley, with nothing new to learn and only old stuff to review.

We learned the Promise and the Laws and became interested in earning some Proficiency Badges. As I recall, it seemed that most of our time was absorbed in learning to tie knots with various sizes of rope. Every homestead had a supply of rope of all sizes and lengths because broken pieces were saved for a multitude of farm needs. We found someone who would teach us how to splice pieces together. In those days there were no synthetic or artificial materials such as nylon and plastics that came along much later.

Every boy owned a jackknife and carried it safely because it was needed often every day. It was used for making wood shavings to start a fire, making wooden whistles from branches of young hardwood saplings, and cutting twine or leather. Even though scouting was only twenty years old it was already possible to get a scout knife - a special one that had two blades, a small screwdriver, a leather punch, a small file, a corkscrew, and a bottle-opener. The scout emblem was stamped on it too. Each of us saved up pennies for a long time in order to be the owner of such a knife and, when we did get one, we carried it proudly displayed on our belt.

Camping was always important in scouting circles and we felt that we should try it. Linc Meister's camp was often vacant and we could walk the few miles to it. There were two buildings, one a stable for his horse team and the other a real live-in camp with four bunks, two up and two down. A built-in table, some bench seats and a good cook-stove made up its furnishings. Among the trees was a spring, and if it were frozen over there would always be lots of snow for water. We were given permission to use the camp and I believe we did so on three or more occasions.

Daily chores and Sunday services reduced camping to nothing more than an over-night experience, usually on Friday. Each boy made his own backpack for three meals and overnight, usually using a heavy blanket with everything else wrapped into it and tied with ropes that became shoulder

straps. There were no dufflebags, no folding cots, no sleeping bags, and no radios, but there was a lot of homemade bread, cookies, a pop bottle full of fresh milk, and something to cook on the stove. We set out immediately after school, and on our way into the woods from the road we set a few rabbit snares, arriving at the camp just as dusk was setting in. We lighted the one oil lamp and checked the lantern that we would use to go to the stable. While I made a fire the others brought in some stove wood for the night. It took some time to open all of our blankets, put the food on the table, and decide who would sleep where. The bunks were hard boards covered with a little straw.

Supper was festive fun with noisy voices, lots of questions and chatter. Eating took a deliberately long time; nobody wanted to think about the silent hours of the coming night. As conversation died down I picked up a pack of cards and invited everyone to a game or two. That occupied quite a bit of time and finally I suggested that we settle down for the night. It took some time to squirm into enough comfort to encourage sleep. With the lamp blown out there was only the tiny reassuring light from the stove. Bit by bit there was only the dark and silence of the woods outside. Any little sound made by the wind or small winter creatures was magnified into scary loudness by the silence. Then sleep came, or a sleepy wakefulness. Once I got up as quietly as possible to add wood to the stove but by the time I settled down again there was a voice from here, another from there; all were awake and wanted to talk.

So we talked about everything and about nothing. I went to the door to look outside. The wind had died down to nothing and the moon was shining in a clear sky overhead, almost like daylight. Daylight? There was no mention of morning but soon everyone was up and dressed to go out. Where to go in the woods at 2:00 am? Go for a hike, check our snares! And we did. But even the rabbits had more sense than to be out running around on a night like this. It was fun anyway. Soon we were back in the camp and back in our bunks for a real sleep, this time right up to a respectable full-morning daylight. Breakfast was full of excited talk and the morning

disappeared in a spirited session of knot-tying and story-telling. At noon all the remaining food quickly disappeared. Wearing our backpacks we tidied up and closed up. On the way out of the woods we stopped and looked back at the camp and fixed what we saw firmly into our minds and memories.

Incidentally, during my first year away from New Ross I belonged to a Rover-Scout group. Throughout my parish life I had opportunity to be a Cub leader, a Scout leader, a group-committee chair, and a scout Chaplain. When I was presented with my 30-year scouting pin I remarked that I had never been a Beaver-Scout because Beavers did not exist in those days. A month or so later, during a Swim-up ceremony, I was called out on the floor and was made an Honorary Beaver! What a wonderful way to close off my scouting career, which had in its beginning in the memorable weekend hike to Linc Meister's log camp. And woe betide me, now zippers and Velcro have even let me forget how to tie some knots!

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Smoke

He limped through the back porch into the kitchen, hesitated for a moment, then tilted his head up and sniffed noisily. He set the two milk buckets on the floor and looked around the kitchen, still sniffing. Without moving he called to the family, "I smell smoke". We rushed around him, feeling the fear in his voice and needing to verify it for ourselves without collapsing into panic. Smoke was alarming; fire was deadly. Grandfather had enough experience with that. He was serious and cautious and he would not lose his calm.

It was not smoke from the kitchen stove. It was not the hard maple wood smoke from the furnace. It certainly was not his tobacco pipe smoke around the kitchen couch. It was different, a bit acrid, a bit menacing, even

threatening. He put the milk buckets aside, and all of us started searching the cellar, the wood-box, a stack of old newspapers, and the sawdust in the woodshed. My grandmother and Aunt Jennie brushed their hands over papered walls of each room checking for hot spots. I climbed an outside ladder to the roof to see if one of the two chimneys had caught fire, burning out a winter's accumulation of creosote from burning green wood. Nothing was discovered anywhere.

Grandfather was not young anymore and he sat most of the time in a rocker in front of the cement fireplace that he had made many years ago. It was not built up from the cellar floor but was firmly fixed onto the heavy floor joists over the cellar. There was no fire burning there today but he sat down in his chair to ponder the situation. He could still smell smoke. In a few moments he called to me to bring the double-bladed axe from the woodshed. He was sure he knew where the smoke was coming from and he went into the parlour, moved some furniture and immediately began chopping out part of one wall in the den, behind the fireplace.

Sure enough, in one spot some plaster lath were black with a tiny red centre from which a thin curl of smoke oozed its way, seeking an outlet somewhere between the walls. Just about ready with any encouragement or more air, it would turn itself into a fire. The danger was averted just in time, and we began to breathe more easily. In due course the mess was also cleared up and the wall patched. That fireplace was never used again. Aunt Jennie got out the large heavy wallpaper sample book to order some new paper but I found a left over roll along with a strip of matching border, and so everything was soon back to normal. We gave thanks that no real fire had come to drive us out, or smother us in the middle of the night.

Why didn't we immediately sound an alarm, or call 911? In those days, there was no fire alarm system in our village, though everybody was always alert to a neighbour's need. 911 service did not exist anywhere at that time. It defies logical explanation, but in a pioneer village there seemed to be a fifth sense, an inner signaling system, that kept neighbours

constantly aware of one-another. It was almost like a mother's instinct that wakens her in the middle of the night even before the baby cries. That awareness was probably part of the realization that people either survive together or they die together. No man is an island, not in a village like ours.

Smoke was an important part of life in our scattered village, with homes situated higgledy-piggledy in all directions, on hills, near streams, beside dark heavy patches of thick softwood or against patches of land cleared for gardens and hay. All of the homes were tied together by little roads like pieces of string that often came to a dead end beside the river or at an outcropping of bare granite cliff. In a sense we could 'see' each other and keep in touch simply by noting chimney smoke rising above hills or trees. Grandfather claimed that he could tell what kind of wood was being burned just by looking at the smoke, but I was never sure about that. Nevertheless, smoking chimneys were not only a sign of life in the village but also a source of life. Smoke was as helpful as a pocket-watch (no one wore wrist watches then).

Smoke was an ancient form of communication. Native people were skilled in sending messages by smoke from hilltop to hilltop, with uncanny speed. To Aunt Jennie it was the *lack* of smoke that sent messages. She knew that Mrs. Lantz, who lived on the other side of the river flat, was ill because there was no smoke from her chimney for the second day in a row. She also firmly declared that old Jim, who lived alone, had died through the night because there was no morning smoke at his bungalow.

On a late summer day a thick black cloud of smoke billowed up over the trees in an otherwise cloudless and windless day. It was up-river to the north and we assumed immediately that it was either Earl Meister's mill or a barn full of new hay somewhere on the Mill Road. Without waiting for some kind of alarm we gathered buckets and made our way there. It was a barn fire, a mow full of new hay that was not quite dry. A spot in the center of the mow had gotten hotter and hotter until the smoldering became a visible flame. By the time we arrived the roof was gone and the hay itself was a big

mound of black smoke and ash. Cattle and machinery, and a pig and some hens had been moved to safety. Fortunately, we were able to help save the barn walls and doors. When the mess was cleared up the farm family knew that lumber and shingles from the mill and offers of help would soon restore the roof. They also had assurances that help would be available if there was a shortage of hay in the coming winter months.

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The Four Seasons

The first concern of a pioneer is how to cope with the changing seasons, to use effectively what each season offers, and to adapt to what each season demands. Sometimes a season seems to be a challenge or problem, yet rewards result from consistent cooperation. Working together, a good life is in the making. Settlers arrived in New Ross on August 7, 1816, though not far away from there, French settlers had been living in the Valley since 1604, and English-speaking settlers had been there since 1760. Life in New Ross, in the hills of the Atlantic Uplands of Nova Scotia, presented some special challenges and a few rewards as well. Grants were laid out on both sides of Gold River, measured from the recently surveyed highway. Somewhere in the process, Peter Aalders, either by his own choice or by some other circumstance, walked six miles further along Indian trails until he found the gentle hollow that eventually became Aaldersville.

A hundred August months passed in the New Ross area while lands were cleared and homes built. It was a scattered, but sheltering neighbourhood of small farms and families that needed each other, but were at the same time staunchly independent and self-sufficient. The village survived as a family of families. In 1916, in the middle of the First World War, New Ross involved every resident in its Centennial celebration. Details of the event were stamped on every resident’s memory, and were beautifully

recorded in a village history compiled by Caroline (Broome) Leopold and published for the 150th birthday on August 7, 1966.

The Ross Farm Museum of Agriculture, the dream child of Ron Barkhouse MLA, and several others, was opened in the summer of 1970. It has kept alive not only pioneer ways of farming, but also the social and personal values that sustained pioneers and still matter most in happy community living. When I step into the Museum farm I step into the village of my childhood, where I was born the year following its Centennial. The sounds and the sights, the tastes and the feelings, are all familiar, and the sense of peace and security, of belonging and being home, rush back over me. If a milk bucket were within reach I would unconsciously pick it up and start towards the barn. For two centuries this little village, off the beaten track, on a side road away from the pulse of national growth and undeterred by international upheavals, has kept its pioneering way of life within the collective memory, now also preserved in its museum of agriculture.

Summer

The noontime sun shimmered on the surface of the lake, all the shades of Nature's green around the lake relaxing their vibrant clarity in the heat. At the crossroads corner the two white churches held the village in their embrace with a quiet peace that smoothed out the coarse edges of daily life. It was August, days were long, gardens mature in confident silence, school doors were locked shut, and everything rested and waited. August was the siesta month of the year.

August was always like that in New Ross. But make no mistake, when a body is at rest its heart grows most in strength, and so it is with a community. Powerful forces are at work under the surface. Dreams build castles in the air, obstacles become opportunities, and worlds are conquered. I lay under the maple tree and dreamed. How were the first settlers dressed? How did they walk so far? What kind of boots were they wearing? I heard Grandmother talking about larrigans, what were they? She showed me, and now, a lifetime later, I pass the information on.

The word itself is now out of use. In my favorite desk dictionary, published in 1929, there is no entry between LARK and LARRKIN where LARRIGAN should appear. But in 1929 I was wearing the last larrigans in New Ross, quite a while after they had gone out of style, supplanted by the more familiar and popular Lumberman's Rubbers. At least I hoped mine were the last, because all the other kids were already wearing lumberman's rubbers and I, embarrassed to be so out of style, wanted them too. Styles in footwear at that time as well as today, like styles in clothes and cars, come and go fast, to be replaced by new styles which have new and classy names, whether they live up to them or not. Being new does not always mean being better, but I wished that my larrigans had gone out with the name itself. Even in 1926, when I was nine years old, I had a little pride about what I had on my feet, especially when kids could see what I was wearing and kept asking: "What are those things?"

When the settlers first arrived here they brought a few things that they could carry, but when those wore out people could not go down to the corner store to replace them. Families made their own things, as many families all over the world had been doing for thousands of years. Pioneers learned many things from the native people, and the natives had some skill and an eye for beauty when it came to their sandals and moccasins. Larrigans must have been among the first efforts of pioneers, made at home out of what was at hand, and made to suit the local need. Something was needed to protect legs as well as feet, something for winter snow, something for work in the woods. A moccasin was only for the foot, a larrigan usually covered the leg as well. Style and decoration were not as important as comfort.

In New Ross nothing much changed during its first hundred years, before the end of the first Great War. Old pioneer ways and values made a good way of life, and people got along with few things. After that war there were some modest changes, yet life remained secure even through the Depression. Some new goods began to appear and demand for some familiar things faded away, including larrigans. However, a few pair of plain larrigans were hanging by their laces on a single hook in my grandmother's

store, a forlorn reminder of the age of homemade quilts and blankets, homeknit woolen socks, and homemade footwear. By then, nobody was buying or wearing larrigans, but the old unwritten rule – throw nothing away – could not be ignored.

At the age of nine, in 1926, I came back to live with my grandparents and in preparation for school got some new clothes, a new haircut, and new, at least to me, footwear. From that day larrigans and I had a brief but exciting encounter. When the only pairs that were left on that hook were sizes much too small for me, I finally got to wear lumberman's rubbers like every other up-to-date boy in school.

My larrigans were boot-size, no leggings, a double set of eyelets allowing them to be laced tightly to the foot over a pair of heavy wool socks. I have to admit that they were extremely comfortable, even though they were nothing more than stitched pieces of plain reddish-brown oiled leather. When I could not explain them to other kids or explain why I had to wear them, the only thing I could do was to explain that they were unique and that I was lucky to be wearing them. They were not only warm and comfortable but I did not get blisters on my heels like the others kids. Besides, I could slide on ice further than they could. Trucks on the school road turned wet muddy places into deep ruts that filled with rain. A frosty night turned each rut into a long narrow bit of smooth ice, and I could slide its length on one foot better than anyone else. And there is nothing better than larrigans for traveling on snowshoes. What I did *not* tell them was that larrigans were also slippery, and they could throw a person into a tailspin or send him flying head over heels without a second's notice. Running where there was a bit of snow or a patch of ice or even some wet grass could end in some unexpected gymnastics.

Privately, at home and away from the kids, I learned to watch for hazards and I found ways of beating them at their own game. In the woods, cutting firewood or setting snares, working in the stable where slippery spots were not always water, carrying two buckets of milk up a little slope to the

kitchen-door, or sliding down haymows, one can learn how to master larrigans. For me as a kid, perhaps the nicest thing about my larrigans was that the leather sole could not last long on my busy feet. Soon there was no new pair for me to wear and I eventually got my lumberman's rubbers, like every other kid. In retrospect, whether they were larrigans or moccasins, whether they were plain or beautifully beaded, especially if one planned to go chasing bears, it was good to remember that they had no *traction* whatever!

One of the worst things about summer days, like the summer of one's life, is that they come to an end. Ever since leaving home in the summer of 1934 for university, I have been nothing more than a frequent visitor. Though circumstances have taken me out of New Ross, they cannot take New Ross out of me.

Autumn

With all their clearing and burning, pioneers were not reckless with natural life. Autumn was a time to collect dividends from earlier investments of dreaming and planning and labour. These dividends were not saved for personal enrichment, but were carefully stored for use in the months ahead as in investment in the future.

October is late in the calendar year when leaves are at the last stage of their seasonal life. It must provide some comfort to our aging population to realize that Nature seems to reserve its greatest beauty for the autumn of life. While we see the widespread devastation inflicted upon our landscape in recent years by clear-cutting, we also notice how quickly nature rushes in to cover the scars with blankets of young green hardwoods that give us autumn colours.

Until the Second World War exposed New Ross to all the bad and good things in world affairs, the village had remained very much like it had been from its beginning. Pioneer life was not easy or comfortable but it was peaceful, and families were free to plan and hope and build more than they

had been able to do in the places they came from. Life was difficult and frugal; every member of the family worked long hours every day in order to sustain what was, at best, a subsistence existence. Cash was scarce and was carefully saved. During the Great Depression between the two Great Wars, New Ross was no worse off than usual, and it survived more successfully than urban areas in Canada. Villagers raised and preserved and made the most of what was needed, using their small cash savings to pay for other necessities from the Simpson's and Eaton's catalogues.

In fall, each family killed a pig and a beef animal, made sausages and puddings, and pickled all that was left. Vegetables were stored in dry bins in the cellar, though some homes also buried turnips below frost depth for Spring use. Tomatoes and apples were carefully watched for use as late as Christmas. Most apples were peeled and quartered and hung on strings in the attic to dry out; onions too were hung in bunches. The cellar had great shelves that contained jars of jams and jellies, and preserves and pickles. Besides putting up barrels of pickled beef and pork, some families may have purchased a half-barrel of sauerkraut and another of salt herring.

Both the pig and beef animals were slaughtered in the barn or house yard and then hung on a structure made of three poles to be dressed and cured. Most farms had a long trough with handles that was filled with boiling water at the time of slaughter. The pig's carcass was lowered from the tripod to be scalded and then scraped clean of all its bristles. On one occasion Grandfather decided to experiment with smoking our own bacon and ham. He selected three long, sturdy poles from the woodpile and erected them something like a tepee near the pile of sawdust. He used some large feedbags to wrap around the top part of the poles, with enough opening for escaping smoke. Thoughtfully, he wetted the bags from time to time so that they would not burn. The bacon and ham were soaked in a light pickle for a short time, and then hung high in the tepee. A hole was made in the ground underneath for a fire made from the saved sawdust.

The principle was good and the smoking was not bad at all, much better than I expected, but it was lot of work. There is much to be said for real smoke, generously applied, in comparison to the anemic bacon and ham available in stores today. The taste of home-smoked meat is one of my fondest memories. It seems that modern technologies should be able to authenticate that old taste much better than they do.

Our yard was also the place where firewood was piled to dry out during the summer and in the autumn. After it was cut into stove lengths, it was carried by endless wheelbarrow loads to be stored in the woodshed.

One of the last autumn chores was to bank sawdust around the house to keep heat in and to make winter more comfortable for the family. Of course by this time all the beautiful leaves had dried out and fallen and children had battled with the wind to collect the leaves to make mulch for their mother's spring flower-garden.

In new beginnings people learned the hard way how to be patient and how to wait for results, not only in planting and harvesting crops but also in other things, so when there was a quick result it seemed like a miracle. For example, every settler grew accustomed to the chronic aches and pains of strenuous physical labour. Anything like instant relief had to be classed among the miraculous. However, such a wonder was not out of reach; it came, due to one sympathetic man.

Dr. Levi Minard had a rural practice in northern Hants County. Day and night his buggy or sleigh bumped over the countryside and he came to know what the residents were suffering. He took immediate action. Back in his dispensary he concocted, developed, and prepared a true balm of Gilead. Beginning in the 1860's, Minard's Liniment was bottled, packaged and marketed in his hometown of Yarmouth. In no time it was known and loved all over Nova Scotia, and very quickly all over Canada.

It was not just liniment, it was Minard's liniment. It was instant doctor, instant relief: just RUB IT IN! Each of the three stores at The Cross

had a small shelf of patent medicines, Minard's liniment among them. No home would be without a bottle when doctors were few and pharmacies rare.

All three stores were extensions of the family home, either because that was an economical use of a building, or more likely because the wife and mother in each could be a storekeeper in her (imaginary) free time, since most grocery business in our village seemed to take place in early evenings. Of course, each store carried more than groceries. Among nails and bolts, shovels and hoes, boxes of candy and bolts of cloth, the small shelf of medicines and home remedies was never without Minard's liniment. Cuts, bruises and sores eventually healed, but pain was something else, especially in leg joints, shoulders, and other places where nature often needed a little extra support to encourage relief. Among many pain-relief remedies and many medical procedures for chronic pain, the "king of pain relief" seems to have carved out an enduring dynasty.

Every autumn chore has something to do with the coming winter. Each chore provides its own degree of satisfaction when it is completed. And that, more than anything else, makes Thanksgiving a true harvest celebration.

Winter

Winter is a season of rest and sleep for plants and for people. In the mystery of that season everything builds up energy and gains strength so that it is ready to burst into new life and growth with the coming of Spring. For pioneers winter meant more than that; everyone was busy getting ready for the busy season ahead. It meant time for repairs and mending, cleaning and sharpening tools, and making replacements for worn-out things. A grindstone was used to sharpen axes and scythes. Scrap metal and lumber that had been carefully saved found good use in the repair or replacement old tools. Farm vehicles and machinery, kept in a large room under a haymow, had to be cleaned, rust removed, parts re-painted, moving parts oiled and wheels heavily greased.

Every family adapted itself to the cold weather as well as possible. Beds were made with flannelette sheets and heavy blankets or quilts, storm windows were plugged with paper to stop drafts, and storm doors were put up. Men and boys wore rough woolen long-johns, wool trousers that laced over the tops of their lumbermen's rubbers, and home-knit wool socks, mittens, and toques. Scarves got in the way for men at work, but were used for dress-up.

I hate the woolen underwear, I'm
mad enough to bawl;
it itches there, it itches there,
The old itch seems to crawl –
And when I start to scratch somewhere, That's
not the place at all!

Winter meant snow and snow meant shoveling. Snow and ice on roads were necessary for sleighs or heavy logging sleds, pulled by oxen or horses, but when banks of snow blocked the road every able-bodied man and boy went out to shovel. When the first municipal plow came into service the driver was asked to lift the blade through New Ross so that two or three inches of snow would remain for logging sleds and teams.

When ice on Lake Lawson was twelve or more inches thick every family that had an icebox started cutting. The blocks, a good size to carry in one's arms, were piled onto double sleds for oxen to haul home. Part of a barn or a woodshed had been prepared with a thick floor of new sawdust. When the ice was stacked all four sides were filled with sawdust and the top was covered. The ice usually kept well in spite of opening the ice house almost daily in hot summer to get a block for the icebox or perhaps to make some ice cream for a family party.

For schoolboys Saturday often meant cutting firewood in the family woodlot. Each boy had his own axe to care for. I also worked one end of a crosscut saw with my grandfather. When we decided exactly where we wanted a tree to fall, a small notch was cut on that side of the tree base.

Then we began sawing towards the notch from the opposite side, and when it was cut through the tree usually fell on the right spot. After felling, we limbed the tree, piled the brush, and rolled the log into a brow until it was hauled home. If building repairs were necessary in the coming summer a few logs were cut and set aside for the sawmill where they would be made into lumber.

There was a large wooded area between The Cross and the school, and I usually set out a few rabbit snares there. I visited them daily on the way to or from school. I could sell rabbits for fifteen cents each or a pair for a quarter. Otherwise, it was just about impossible to beat a spicy rabbit-stew for dinner. It was good business for the local store to buy rabbits from the boys and maybe once a week or so the storekeeper would take a truck-load of frozen rabbits to Halifax for quick sales at a good price.

Winter life was hard for everyone but it also had its good times. Kids could build a snow fort on Linc Meister's field, and play there early evenings until time to study lessons and do home work. A small meadow on the way to school that was flooded by the river every winter was a great place for evening skating, and we burned old car tires for heat and light. A few boys organized hockey games there too, and with the lead of Phil Barkhouse, we actually had an outdoor rink for a few Winters.

Hard things, just like good things, eventually come to an end. The melting ice on the meadow, the appearance of mud holes on the road, and the first robin announced that winter was passing once again.

Old Church registers and dates on local gravestones have tales to tell. It seems that in olden days most people, especially the elderly, tended to run down in late winter because that is when most deaths occurred. In summer and fall people stored up energy from the sun and good vegetables, and they faced the winter in robust health. Through the hard days and weeks of winter they used all their reserve energy. When viruses and other germs blew in with March winds and rains, there was not enough left for

them to fight back. Nevertheless Spring was ahead. From nature we learn that life follows death as much as death follows life.

Spring

The hills are filled with swampy hollows among the rocks. Glorious sounds waft over those swamps each spring as melting ice makes room for evening peepers to begin choral rehearsals. Spring has the same message everywhere, every year. God keeps giving us a new chance to restore and renew ourselves and the world in which we live - and we are terribly slow learners.

On one Spring day every year something like a hurricane blew through the house. The furnace pipe was taken down, the chimney was cleaned, storm windows and doors were put away, banking was removed from outside walls, and windows were washed. Clotheslines and fences held quilts, blankets, sheets and winter underwear. Curtains, socks, mittens, and sweaters were also hung on the lines. Mats and rugs had to be beaten and aired. By nightfall the house was completely dressed for summer, warm or not.

It was my job was to carry tubs and tubs of water for the wash (because there was no electricity until 1948), and to gather the winter garbage and bury it. Then the cellar was cleaned, empty barrels were cleaned, and old vegetables taken to the barn. If enough time was left, cellar walls were whitewashed.

I tapped five maples one Spring. I made my own spiles with triangular teeth from a discarded mowing-machine, and used five empty lard and shortening buckets to collect sap. A warm morning after a frosty night meant that the sap had to be gathered at noon as well as at night.

The oxen were slow but made neat work of plowing and harrowing the house garden, the vegetable garden, and a field for oats. The next few days saw the massive manure pile disappear one load at a time as the gardens

were well fertilized. Then came a second harrowing and making rows for planting. Every home worked according to the weather and by the first week of June everything was ready for nature to do her part. Between planting and first weeding nearly every man in New Ross started making apple barrels in his own little cooperage, rolling each barrel onto the grass to be picked up by truckers.

One year, I was the earliest to arrive at school in bare feet. My trousers were still the bloomer type that buckle above or below the knee. I wanted to be the first to make a wooden whistle from alder or other brushwood. If it was a good one, I might make another from a young maple branch, the best kind, to give to a girl in my class.

Amidst all the changes taking place there were two things that refused to budge: the kitchen clock and grandfather's pocket watch kept ticking stubbornly all summer on standard time, as if daylight-saving time had never existed. He absolutely refused to recognize anything but "God's time". The rest of us in the family had to do a little mental addition every time we looked at the clock in order to get to a meeting, school or church service on time. On the other hand grandfather was forced, by his own watch, to get up each day at 4.00 a.m.!

Spring brings new life, new beginnings, and looking ahead. That is why God put our faces on the front of our heads, instead of on the back or on one side. In 1938, as a young man I spent the summer on the Saskatchewan prairie near the end of the Great Drought, and I was awed and humbled by the resilient hope and optimism of people who kept looking ahead and saying "Maybe next year". The future always grows out of the past and needs to carry some of the past with it into tomorrow. That is why historical societies are so important. In 1933, when the Depression was very bad, those who looked ahead started the Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival, which is still going strong. In 1988 the New Ross Historical Society was begun by people who knew that the future of the community depends upon its historical foundation. For the same reason,

school graduations at the end of the academic year are called Commencement exercises!

This morning is the beginning of a new day, It
is not the ending of yesterday.

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May Day

The first day of May has very little glamour about it any more, though somewhere there may be a display of military might, somewhere a workers' parade, somewhere a solemn memorial occasion. Long ago it was a different story. May Day (May 1) was a festival of spring, a new beginning with lots of singing and dancing and parades, a joyful farewell to winter.

In my childhood, May Day in New Ross was a time for celebration. Before national quick-step marching and long after fairies and woodland sprites sent a young man's fancy to its highest pitch, May Day still had glamour, but none of the more recent glitter. New Ross was still a pioneer settlement in 1927 with oxen, horses and a few very tough automobiles using the dirt roads that connected homes and people rather than separating or dividing them. School was a preparation for life, not a tool for making a living. Most of all, there was peace and quiet, and the sun was shining. It was the calm after the (first) War and just before the worldwide Great Depression.

I was nine, almost ten, years old. Preparations for May Day began early, on the first day I went barefoot. The teacher for the first six grades was a young girl from the South Shore, for whom life was still a mix of fairytale and fact, with young people and the wee-folk who lived under mushrooms dancing around the May-pole. The classroom became a 'kingdom' and the first step was selecting a king and queen. The lot fell on

me and on the golden-haired girl next door who was exactly six days younger than I. I was quite pleased about having a queen-wife; it was something like having a first girlfriend without having to compete with other boys. There was a marriage ceremony – I think it was copied carefully from the Book of Common Prayer, and it sounded very real and authentic. That worried me some, not because I was against the marriage but because I was not prepared for all its responsibilities. Everyone went looking for mayflowers, the trailing arbutus that had recently become Nova Scotia's official flower. The class made two mayflower crowns, one each for the king and queen. I kept mine for years, until it had dried and crumbled to dust.

When May Day came, it was sunny and warm; we danced and sang with fairies around a young maple sapling that was our may-pole. It was a memorable day of real and unreal, people and fairies, mystical and magical, what life is and what we wished it to be. Could not life be more like that? Have we lost our way? Have we lost touch with who we are? Have our children lost their childhood? Among all our great highways today where is the little dirt road back to the magic and beauty where we truly belong?

On moving to Wolfville many years later, at pensionable age, I received a phone-call asking if I were the Russell Elliott of long-ago New Ross. Identification completed, the woman said that her mother had been my teacher in New Ross and she would like to see me. She had come to Grand Pre to teach, had married a local farmer-orchardist, and had raised a large family. What a beautiful visit! I was easily able to confess the longheld secret: the adoration of a nine-year-old boy for his teacher. She understood, and after all the intervening years, I was pleased to find that my adoration had been well directed.

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First Love

The School Road was a narrow and ungravelled link between The Cross and Glengarry. The school was half-way between so that most pupils walked a half mile and more to the seat of their education, a two-classroom building with a woodshed and a double toilet discreetly set against the woodlot that bordered the school clearing. Though the road had a lot of traffic, it was mostly bare feet or the new-fangled lumberman rubbers just beginning to replace larrigans for winter wear. Many interesting things happened along that road from day to day, all the way from breaking glass insulators on telephone poles to one-leg sliding along frozen ruts and, of course, my first love.

She was my age, as I recall. I was twelve years old, and we were in the same grade. To be quite honest, she was really my second love. Three years earlier, when I was in Grades III and IV, this bare-foot beanpole kind of lad had fallen in love with the new lower-room teacher from away. She came from the South Shore, with her warm smile, her sea-breeze cheeks, and wind-swept hair. I expect all the boys loved her. But she went off to the Valley, leaving the local girls with less competition.

One day after school, my other first love started towards The Cross and I caught up with her when she stopped to put her sneakers on her bare feet. I casually held her books while she tied laces and I continued to carry them as we walked along. She had taken her lunch to school today in a brown paper bag, but I usually ran all the way home and back with still a few minutes left before the afternoon bell. We talked a lot as we walked along without saying much, tossed a few stones and jumped some puddles in the road - all good communication but hardly real conversation. Soon we reached the crossroads and stopped. I handed over her books, our fingers briefly touching. Nothing was said as she walked to the left while I stood and watched. When she reached her front door she turned and waved and disappeared behind the door. I walked along to Aunt Jennie’s store and to my grandfather’s house where I was living.

For the next five years it was pretty much like that. Until our schooling ended, our casual arm's-length relationship flourished and faltered but never entirely faded. In our first spring season of such togetherness, on the way to school one morning I cut a fresh new alder branch with my jackknife (every country boy needed a knife) and made a whistle. It sounded good so I gave it to her, token of a quiet understanding. We studied together, paired off for school games, eventually going to square-dancing in the parish hall sometimes and walking home afterwards. In a casual way we talked about future studies and works and ambitions but nothing very personal, with no plans to visit or write letters. Others may have thought we were destined to marry but we were never really for or against the idea. It remained a first love. When we reached age 17, I went off to University of Kings College and she went to Normal School. There was nothing that could be called a separation, only a door that was never quite closed, never quite open. We had nothing to regret, and yet lots that each of us would cherish in the years ahead. Some thirty years later the young child of a family in my pastoral care died in a car accident, and it came as a surprise to find that the child belonged to the second grade school class that she was teaching. We met to care for the hurting family and the grieving class, conferring as we had many years before. Our fingers touched again, in contented approval and agreement, and it ended as gently as before, each going our own way, not asking or offering anything.

It is not necessary, perhaps not even advisable, that a first love should lead to marriage. A young couple need not try to make it so. Puberty is a thunderous and life-shaking sexual experience, as terrifying as it is glorifying, but when a relationship is only sexual it lacks grace. Marriage and home and family are much more than that. When sex is a bonding of two into one that holds a marriage and home together it becomes a glorious celebration of oneness as well as a nourishing and renewing of life together. Yet every first love contributes more than we can measure towards an eventual marriage.

My first love was a gentle togetherness that needed no bonds and created no bonds. It did introduce and nurture graces that coloured and strengthened my preparation for marriage.

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My Last Sunday School Teacher

The older we get the more we like to look back and recall the people and events that significantly shaped and coloured our lives, helping to make us what we have become. My last Sunday School teacher was one of those people, particularly because he was Captain A. M. Ross, the last Ross to live at Rose Bank, The Ross Farm. It was the year of my Confirmation, before going on to assist the rector as a Server and eventually going on to seminary at the University of King's College. The whole world was being dragged deeply into the Great Depression that ended in a second world war. My Sunday School teacher was a gentle, aging man who was now serving our Lord, just as he had already served his country by training some local militia and taking them overseas in the first Great War.

By the 1930's New Ross was well into its second century though its life-style and sense of community were the same as they had been from pioneer days. The Church was always the centre of life for everyone; attendance at services was in family groups seated in family pews. Sunday School was an extra enhancement to Sunday service, but not a substitute for attending service. Christ Church Sunday School took place only in summer months when there was no need for heat in the building. Each class assembled in its own pew. Because it was a sacred place there was no frivolity or games or noise. Pupils, like their parents, came into church clean, wearing their best clothes. They walked from home, some a mile and more over dusty and muddy roads, while I lived just across the road. Some children walked all the way from home in bare feet, then sat on the monument in the centre of the crossroads to put on stockings and shoes before going into church. At the close of services they took their shoes and

socks off at the monument and walked all the way back home in bare feet again.

Anglicans had little need for extra class lessons; we had the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer had a catechism that we memorized and a Church calendar by which we followed our Lord's earthly life and ministry from Advent to Trinity. From Trinity back to Advent we learned the Christian way of life. We also memorized the list of books in the Bible, all thirty-nine and twenty-seven of them, a total of sixty-six.

Captain Ross was elderly, younger than my grandfather but in the same generation. Like my grandfather, he was also the grandson of an original settler. The Captain and his sister Lizzie (Elizabeth) lived in Rose Bank cottage as the last of the Ross family, since neither had married.

My aunt knew everybody and everything about everybody, and allowed her mind to build stories around local people. These stories, often shared by everyone in the village, were much more interesting than real facts and became the substance of continuing local gossip. One example of this revolved around the Captain as an eligible but somewhat reluctant bachelor. The village had him in love with a woman who lived east of the lake, and everyone waited every Spring to hear that he had popped the question, while she waited year after year as he continued to delay. In time age got in the way, but still the village waited with great expectation. It is probable that they were both totally unaware of the village's hopes and expectations. Finally, about the time that I entered college, the village was stunned when the woman married a man from away, and all their expectations were dashed. I imagine that people expected the Captain to fade away and die of a broken heart, but it did not happen quite that way, and they had to revise their story. The Captain died a bachelor.

Realizing that the years were slipping by and there was no one to keep the farm going, the Captain and his sister started making plans. They had a sister who had married C. Dewitt White, a young priest who was the rector of Christ Church in 1894. They invited one of her family to come and live

with them and eventually inherit the farm. Thus Mark White, a young man some years older than I, came to live with his aunt and uncle. Eventually Mark married Nina (Keddy) and they carried on the farm as the old folk died. In 1963 Mark died suddenly, leaving Nina and her young family with the responsibility of Rose Bank. By 1969, she had successfully negotiated the conversion of Rose Bank farm into the Ross Farm Museum of Agriculture.

I must admit that I cannot remember a single thing Captain Ross tried to teach me. Yet this is a lesson for every Sunday School teacher: my memory of lessons may be scant but I remember my last Sunday School teacher and his deeply Christian character, which left me with a profound example that I have never forgotten. He was a gentle man. He was a man of principle. He was a man of God. May he rest in peace. *Requiescat in pace.*

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Forgotten Sounds and…..

The Halifax Explosion of 1917, when I was less than six months old, was rated the world's greatest man-made blast to that date. There have been several greater ones since then. Ours is a noisy world and a noisy generation, from dynamite blasts to gas explosions, from arsenal destruction to atomic bombs, and from underground mine accidents to outer space blast-offs. Though we become accustomed to noise we unconsciously long for some peace and quiet. The world used to be quiet, so quiet that our ears were tuned to the tiniest sounds and how to interpret them. Native Americans could put their ear to the ground and distinguish where a sound came from, what animals were approaching, and how far away they were.

The first European settlers had to learn the difference between the swish of a fast arrow and the swish of a cow's tail, or a dog barking at an intruder and one that is cornered by a skunk. They quickly came to know that both the slow silence of the day and the soft calm of the night are filled with sounds that are full of music and messages. Their ears became responsive to the variety of languages that filled the seemingly quiet air.

In unfathomable ways, scattered homesteads became schools of anthropology and practical maternity hospitals as they experienced the mystery of life. Who in today's world has ever heard the soft pecking inside an egg announcing that a chick is ready to tackle the outside world, or the gentle cracking of eggs under a setting hen? Who has heard the low plaintive mooing of a heifer in her first heat? Who has watched a cow drop her calf on the warm sod of a pasture, nudging the neatly folded package of life into a ball of hide standing on four long spindly legs, all the while licking

the calf through its first bath? And yet we think that we know everything about birth and parenting!

We talk a lot today about our environment and about how important it is, while we continue to alienate ourselves from it. My childhood village taught me sounds that every child should learn. In the morning I woke to crows discussing stable grain, or sometimes a lone crow in a tree carrying on a long-distance conversation with another on the next farm. Before school I saw a beaver sitting, studying where to dam the brook and what trees to use first. Over noon hour an oversize bumblebee worked among the short weeds and grass, in danger of, and a danger to, bare feet rushing home for lunch. On the way to school a mother partridge with three little chicks scurried across the dirt road to greater shelter and safety. Along that road in winter there may have been a lone owl sitting on a fence-post, looking at nothing at all but seeing everything, like a lone Scots piper on a hill. On an early Spring evening the music of the peepers came up from the swamp, tree frogs rehearsing for tomorrow's recital. As evening closed in, a mother robin was late returning to her nest with food; soon the sleepy tweeting of fledglings could be heard as they happily ate the worms and bugs she brought before they dozed off to sleep.

When the church bell began to toll in the middle of the week everybody stopped, waited, listened, and began to count. It was the quick way of communication in the village. If someone had died, the age was tolled and people immediately knew who it was. Before dark a neighbour would appear at the door to do evening barn chores, boys appeared to squeeze a playmate's hand and to carry in firewood for him. Girls also appeared carrying plates of food to meet the family's needs for the next few days. Words are difficult to come by on such occasions, but deeds speak more loudly than words. If it was the death of the head of the family, neighbours also organized to finish the man's haying, gardening, or cutting of firewood.

Villagers knew that some sounds are too deep and profound to be heard by the ear; they can only be heard by the heart. Moreover, the greatest words can never even be spoken by the voice. As Psalm 19 puts it, one day tells another, one night certifies another, and though there is neither speech nor language, their sound goes out to all lands and their words to the ends of the world. On such occasions it was a gentle touch that spoke volumes and felt good forever.

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.....and Forgotten Smells

It is well known that we get acquainted with our world by means of our five senses, sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. There is no agreement on which one of these we would rather lose if we had to surrender one, but loss of sight or sound is common as we begin to age. Nature, however, gives us a wonderful gift *that is infinitely greater than a physician's prescription* when we lose sight or hearing. It is the gift of memory. In the social sophistication of my urbanized life in recent years, I have moved away from some smells that once beautified my childhood years. Now I can enjoy them only in my memory, and I frequently indulge in memory trips.

Pioneers, following ancient practice, used candles and oil lamps for light. In my childhood we used candles and lamps that burned kerosene, a new kind of oil distilled from bituminous material in a process invented in the mid-1800s by Abraham Gesner, a Nova Scotian from the Annapolis Valley. Until 1948 when electricity first came to New Ross, kerosene lamps were used in homes and churches, and kerosene lanterns were used outdoors or in barns. A lighted lamp in a window guided many a person home many a dark night.

I was employed as church sexton when still a young teenager, and one of my responsibilities was lighting the candles used in services. I also cleaned lampshades, trimmed wicks, and filled twenty or more lamps needed for evening services. Kerosene lamps with mantles instead of wicks offered a tremendous improvement in lighting that made reading a much greater pleasure. The light was much better, but the mantles were fragile and the

lamps needed gentle handling. In any case, kerosene lamps had a unique smell that stuck to fingers.

Before they had resident medical doctors, pioneer settlements depended primarily upon family remedies and cures that were passed down from ancient times. The settlers also learned much from native people about the curative value of certain wild berries and tree leaves and barks. Even when there was a local doctor the general store usually kept a small shelf of patent medicines. The value of such medicines was sometimes measured by the strength of their smell. Antiseptics as germ killers topped the list, with penetrating rub-in ointments a close second. A bottle of creolin in the stable and a bottle of Minard's liniment in the kitchen were about as basic as doors or windows. Both had a very strong odour and both did their duty admirably.

An elderly wood-worker in New Ross had a shop that was full of magic for a child. It was also full of shavings and fine wood dust, and the smell was as heavenly as Santa's workshop. The friendly old man talked and worked without let-up, though he always seemed to be whistling some tuneless music as well. All the while magic items went up on shelves as shavings piled deeper and deeper around his feet.

From the wood-worker's doorway I could see Cogley's blacksmith shop and a team of oxen standing patiently waiting while shoes were shaped for them. It is difficult to describe the smell of a blacksmith shop, a mixture of several smells. Each one was unpleasant, but all together the smell was good. In the centre of his open fire-pit a thin coal flame was being fanned from underneath by hand-pumped air. That flame turned a black bar of iron or a steel rod into white-hot metal that the blacksmith artistically pounded into an ox-shoe that fitted properly after it was dipped into cooling water. That too was a bit of magic. It may not be desired in a home or a hall, but smells from old leather, animal hides, and old pieces of iron blended with coal smoke in the blacksmith shop made a unique, strong, and memorable, smell that was honest and good.

Nor does my memory fail me when it comes to apple barrel making. Men set up shop at their homes, squeezing the essential equipment into a little shed beside their house or barn. The smell was unique and pleasant, a warm feeling that could be breathed deeply in. Freshly sawn stave wood still a bit green, heated over a barrel stove, wooden heads, and hoops of split saplings were worked into a three-bushel barrel that was all wood, with no nails or other fastenings. The finished product was rolled out onto the grass to wait for use. When I stand beside the small cooperage at the Ross Farm Museum, seventy-five years melt away. I close my eyes and drink in the smell and wish my clothes would absorb some to take home with me.

Cooking the same foods or once more doing the same old things brings the taste and smell of childhood happenings back to life. Yet, somehow, it is not quite the same taste or smell; it is not quite what we remember, but a little different from what we enjoyed and became part of our being. Perhaps that is because today our world and our style of living are not what they used to be.

There is something special, something deep within us, that our soul is trying to recover. It may be a remembered moment that blends a bit of growing-up days: a bit of our own bare feet and mother's apron, a bit of village playmates and the sounds of excited young voices, together with the smell of fresh-baked bread and the taste of lemonade! But that something special is not only about pioneer days, or lost childhood, or old New Ross. It is part of humanity's cry for Eden, a Christian glimpse into the Kingdom of God, Paradise Lost finding Paradise Regained. It breathes the atmosphere of love, security, peace, and comfort. Thank God that our childhood stays with us, producing all the roots from which our later years grow, roots that keep breaking through the surface of our life. Forgetfulness is unstable, often brushed aside by flashes of memory, like looking at old snapshots. Some people in today's urbanized society may never know the wonder and worth of growing up in a village, particularly a village that retains its own pioneer roots.