

# Heritage Notes

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## *Special VE Day 1995 Edition*

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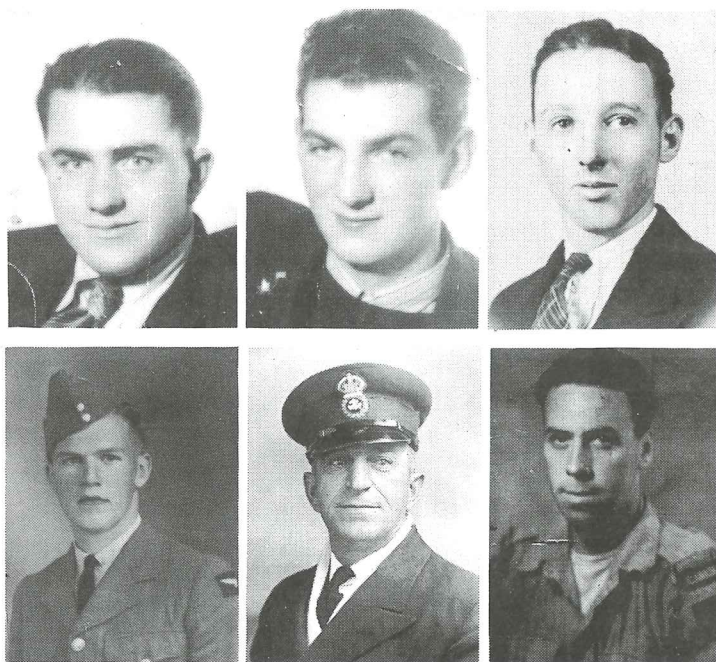
### 1939 & 1940

To the Louisbourg of 1939 the looming war declared by Great Britain and France on Germany on September 3rd was a minor affair that hardly rippled the even tenor of everyday life.

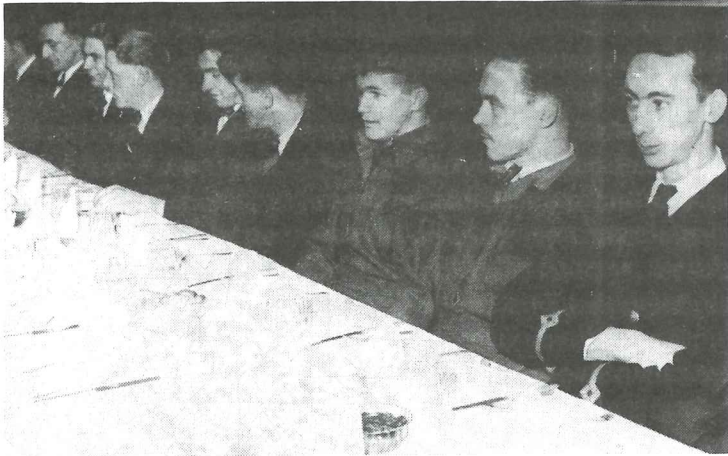
The previous February, Mayor Melvin S. Huntington arranged with Malcolm Patterson to introduce a bill in the Legislature establishing the boundaries of the town.<sup>1</sup> The opening of the new Post Office on February 14 and the Customs Office in the same building on February 23 were signs of progress.<sup>2</sup> Swordfishing went on in the summer and the fleet was welcomed as usual. On September 1, Huntington noted in his diary, "Germany invaded Poland today and the war that has been threatened for many months has begun." Up to then, nothing in the way of world news was considered worthwhile mentioning in his diary.

On September 3rd, Huntington and D.M. Johnston, then Chief of Police, attended a meeting in Sydney with other Cape Breton municipal leaders, "to organize the towns, City of Sydney, and rural communities in Cape Breton County, in preparation for possible air raids by enemy planes..." Dr. H. J. Townsend of Louisbourg was appointed chairman for Louisbourg to deal with the Mayor to organize an "Air Raid Precaution Committee" in the town.<sup>3</sup> The first "blackout" was on September 7. On September 10, Canada declared war.

By September 14, an ARP Committee was organized, with Dr. Townsend as chairman, George Lewis, secretary, R.A. Peters, Fire Chief, D.M. Johnston, Chief of Police, Councillor Guy B. Hiltz and Mayor Huntington. For the duration of the war, this committee met faithfully to supervise the "blackouts" ordered from time to time by County officials.



Men from Louisbourg killed during the war included. Top l-r: John A. MacIntyre, William Bagnell, Patrick MacMullin. Bottom l-r: Ronald Cann, Daniel Townsend, Robert Thomas. ( photos - Mrs. Mary Dominey, Mrs. Sadie Mrazek, Mr. Garfield Cann, Mr. Daniel Townsend, Mr. Dan Joe Thomas )



Dinner for returning veterans by the Town of Louisbourg after WWII. L-R: Carl Levy, Everett Bussey, Lawrence Cann, Bud Bagnell, Emmy Townsend, Kippy Shaw, Austin MacLeod, Jimmy Kehoe. ( photo - Jean Kyte )

On September 27 Mayor Huntington wrote Lt. Col. Dobbie, Fortress Commander, Sydney, respecting the defenceless condition of the port of Louisbourg in the event of enemy attack. He suggested that some action be taken to protect the shipping piers of British Empire Steel and Coal Corp., and the port in general. The letter was politely acknowledged from Halifax noting that "... it is impossible adequately to guard all desirable points. Therefore, our forces are concentrated in those places which are considered vital to Canada." However, copy of the letter was sent to Ottawa.

The major topic of interest in the town was the question of a new lighting system. The Red Cross was organized October 2.

In April 1940 a meeting was called to consider the town's participation in the nation-wide YMCA War Service Fund appeal. The meeting was so poorly attended that the group decided to seek the assistance of the Women's Institute Branch and a week later the WINS agreed to help with the fund raising. On June 10, Huntington noted that Canada declared war on Italy.

On August 5, about 500 swordfish were landed and on August 17, the Mayor bought a revolver as instructed by Town Council, that had decided to arm the town's policeman.

On August 19, National Registration of all persons 16 years of age or older, took place in Louisbourg as well as Canada. Six hundred and seventeen people registered in Louisbourg.

The N.S. Power Commission started putting up power lines. On October 19, there were twelve Lunenburg sailing vessels in port, and they sailed the next day.

On December 10, a town-wide Greek War Relief collection was authorized. The sum of \$162.00 was raised from a town still in depression times.

The number of vessels entering port either for bunkering or coal cargoes began to increase, and the town became more familiar with the flags of their countries - Finland, Greece, Latvia, Iceland, Panama, Poland, Yugoslavia and Norway. Norwegian ships were a familiar sight over the years in the port, with George Lewis the Norwegian Consul (since March 25, 1921).

### 1941

By 1941, particularly in the spring and fall, life in the town became more lively. The S.S. EMPIRE RAZORBILL came in January 9 with damage to her hull caused by a German submarine which had opened fire on her somewhere in the Atlantic. She had been calling at the town for many years, being in the coal trade. Bad weather brought in three naval ships, one a tug, for shelter. One young man from town, Johnson Siteman, R.C.N., died January 19.

In February, a War Savings Campaign was planned. Louisbourg consistently achieved its quota of Victory Bond sales and in 1942 raised \$110,600 or, 235% of its quota.

The N.S. Power Commission began work on a new lighting system in March. By June Germany and Russia were at war.

On July 14 a meeting of the Community Club was held to arrange for comforts for H.M.C.S. LOUISBURG.

On July 22, the first swordfish of the season was landed and bought by Lewis and Co. The next day an advance party for Michael Lerner, international sportsman who pioneered the capture of swordfish by rod and reel, arrived. Lerner himself arrived the next day to begin his fourth trip to the town. During the next two weeks he landed seven swordfish, and donated the proceeds to the Queen's Canadian Fund war relief and the Community Club for the comforts for H.M.C.S. LOUISBURG.

Mrs. Marion Hassler, also a rod and reel enthusiast, arrived in August and made a number of landings. She sponsored a town dance in the Masonic Hall, which was appreciated by the townspeople, as was a showing by Mr. Lerner of a movie taken by his professional photographer of an informal concert by young people of the town.

#### Notice

Citizens, Town of Louisbourg and District;

In common with other towns in the County of Cape Breton, the Town of Louisbourg and surrounding District, will stage a "Blackout" test at 9.15 o'clock to-night.

The signal, consisting of a number of short blasts, will be given by the power house whistle, when citizens are requested to extinguish all lights in their homes and places of business, or to screen their windows so that lights are invisible from the outside.

The "Blackout" will last for about five minutes, and be followed by two long blasts of the whistle, announcing that the test is over, when all lamps may be re-lighted.

Your co-operation is requested.

Air Raid Precaution Committee.

Louisbourg, N.S.

September 7, 1939.

Notice of the first "Blackout" test in Louisbourg.  
( William O'Shea )

Meanwhile, fishermen landed 350 swordfish up to the end of August.

The war was being brought home slowly

to the town. The major industrial company in Louisbourg was the L.H. Cann marine repair shop on Commercial St. On July 26, 1941 there were three damaged ships in the harbour - the British ship BIAFRA had collided with another ship in her convoy, the Norwegian S.S. FIDELIO had rammed Big Lorraine Head (she was later sunk in convoy) and S.S. IOCOMA had lost her rudder and grounded near Port Nova. The pier underwent repairs for three months in the summer and fall.

The Navy League of Canada Branch was organized October 16 and work started on the Hut on November 3.

The impact of war hit in the winter of 1941. On September 30 a Latvian Ship, S.S. EVEROJA, straggled into port with a jagged hole in her bow where she had been rammed by another ship in her convoy. The ship repair plants in Sydney were working full time, so the ship was sent to the L.H. Cann repair plant at Louisbourg. Later in 1941 the harbour began to fill with the convoy ships from many lands.

On November 19, a detachment of the Veterans Guard of Canada (the Home Guard) was organized with twelve men, most of whom were World War I veterans: Cpl. William MacKinnon, John Pope, Wilfred Troke, Malcolm MacLeod, D.J. MacIntyre, J.R. Defriese, Michael Murrant, Alex MacDonald, Charles Dickson, Dan Smith, Arthur Gaudet and James Pope. Their headquarters was the I.O.G.T. Hall, now the Louisbourg Library.

On December 8, the town was hard hit with the news of death in England in an accident, of 21 year old Ronald M. Cann, R.C.A.F., son of Mr. and Mrs. L.H. Cann.

On December 23, 1941 the corvette "LOUISBURG" (Flower Class) paid a courtesy visit to the town and the crew was given a tour of the Fortress site, a dance and a lunch, and presented with an address and a picture of the surf at Louisbourg. There was a sense of loss and personal sadness when she was sunk in the Mediterranean in February of 1943.



**Louisbourg Canadiens - all of whom joined the Services. Front: Murray Fleet (Navy). Centre l-r: Charlie Shaw (Merchant Navy), Bobby Thomas (Army), Jimmy John A. MacDonald (Navy), Arthur Covey (Army). Back l-r: Donald Phalen (Army), Ronald Cann (R.C.A.F.), Danny Townsend (Army), Billy Bagnell (Merchant Navy). Absent when photo was taken. Frank Murphy (Army), Roy Parsons (Army) Malcolm MacIntyre (Merchant Navy), Vernon MacIntyre (Navy). ( photo - Mrs. Anny Covey and S&L Railway Historical Society )**

## 1942

By 1942 the population had grown to 1,008. The Navy League Hut opened in January. Ships making a regular run to Louisbourg for coal or landing iron ore for the steel plant at Sydney were now being escorted by naval vessels, and were having guns mounted as a defence against submarines. In February churches and public buildings were closed due to a diphtheria epidemic. The ban was lifted February 12. On February 17 a War Salvage Committee was organized, and on February 21 seven planes in formation flew over the town en route to some unknown destination.

L.H. Cann's ship repairing plant was busy refitting all Dominion Coal Company Ships in 1941-1942.<sup>4</sup>

Rationing of some foods was taken in stride as it was ordered by the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. On June 20, sugar was rationed (half a pound per week per person, replacing the voluntary rationing of three-quarters of a pound in effect since January). Sugar rationing continued to November 27, 1947. Tea and Coffee were rationed in August (one ounce of tea and four ounces of coffee per week, but not both), and butter was added to the list in December (one-half a pound per week). Meat rationing came along later. Gasoline was also rationed.

The ration book had coupons which had to be taken out by the seller of the provisions. Members of the Red Cross collected meat coupons and turned them in to the Board "thereby making more meat available for overseas."<sup>5</sup> Meat coupons had "change" tokens - small blue disks with a hole in the centre. Inevitably some cheating took place, but most people took the restrictions stoically, feeling their sacrifices were helping the war effort.

There was mail censorship (Louisbourg was an East Coast Port) and envelopes were duly stamped. Victory Bond campaigns were enthusiastically supported and school prizes were often a number of \$0.25 "war savings stamps" which, when a booklet of \$4.00 was completed, could be turned in for a War Savings Certificate.

In September a platoon of the Cape Breton Highlanders Reserve Battalion held its first drill. The drill instructor was Cpl. MacKenzie, assisted by Corporal William MacKinnon of Louisbourg (supervisor of the Museum at the National Historic Site in West Louisbourg) a member of the Louisbourg Detachment of the Veterans Guard of Canada. The platoon members were: Howard MacQueen, Trueman Hunt, Archie MacVicar, Walter Jewell, Jr., Edward MacVicar, John MacDonald, William Stewart, Alex Hunt, George

MacGillivray, Howard Magee, James Burke, James Harte, Ernest Matheson, Albert Bate, Carl Levy, James MacKay, George MacKay, William Hilchie, William MacGillivray, John MacKinnon, Wilfred Covey, Charles Crooks and Gordon Troke.

A First Aid Squad with a Nurses Unit was organized with lectures by Dr. Moe Ulberg. Under Oscar Harris and Ed Levy, the two squads were composed of: Oscar Harris - Frank Stacey, Walter Jewell, A. Covey, James Harte, Joe Burke, Enoch Cann and Harold Cross, and under Ed Levy - Charles Bagnell, Sr., Charles Bagnell, Jr., Ervin Levy, Wilson Levy, Murray Fleet, William Burke and Ralph Townsend. The Nurses' unit had Miss H.R. MacDonald (the Public Health Nurse for the town), Mrs. Ruby Stewart, Mrs. Winnie Kyte, and Mrs. M. Ulberg.<sup>6</sup>

The Battle of the Atlantic intensified in 1942. Many young men joined the Merchant Navy. In May, the MONT LOUIS was lost in the Caribbean, with William Bagnell, Jr. and John A. MacIntyre among the casualties. On September 5 the LORD STRATHCONA was torpedoed in Wabana Harbour, Nfld. She had been a regular caller to Louisbourg for years. Louisbourg was the winter port for the North Sydney-Port-aux-Basques passenger ships. The town came to look on the visits of the CARIBOU and KYLE as part of their own winter activities. On October 15 the CARIBOU was sunk on her trip to Newfoundland with the loss of 137 of the 235 aboard. The town heard the news in disbelief. It just didn't seem possible that a ship so familiar and so much a part of the winter routine could be a victim of war. Worse was yet to come.

On November 2nd., the S.S. ROSE CASTLE, a coal carrier with crew from the area, was torpedoed in Wabana Harbour as well. Pat MacMullin, whose family lived in town, was among those killed.

In December, the military negotiated the site of the military camp on Kennelly's Point, and construction started December 13.

## 1943

In January, Minesweeper J256 showed up with gear for anti-submarine nets and a gate. On January 21, the U.S. subchaser SC-709 went aground on a bar west of Battery Island and in a dramatic rescue the crew was saved by Louisbourg fisherman and crewmembers of the barquentine ANGELUS and given first aid in the Navy League Hut by local registered nurses and a group of women from town. The ANGELUS was later torpedoed in the South Atlantic, with only two survivors.

A collection of \$404.50 was made for the Canadian Aid to Russia Fund. U.S. Coast Guard vessels began to visit on their route to Newfoundland. Louisbourg was District No. 6 and ration book distribution for the town was carried out as well as to Gabarus, Main-a-Dieu, Catalone and Bateston. The steam barge BD3 (Boom Defence 3) was on duty during the winter.

In May, "sugar for canning" ration coupons became available, 10 to 13 lbs. per person, to enable women to take advantage of home made jams, jellies, pickles and other preserved food, to alleviate the monotony of the daily diet.



Veterans Guard of Canada. All but two were WWI veterans. Front l-r: Bill MacKinnon, Jim Pope, John MacIntyre, Alex MacDonald, Mike Murrant, Malcolm MacLeod. Back l-r: Arthur Gaudet, Dan Smith, John Pope, Charles Dickson, Sr; John Roddie Defriese. Absent Wilfred Troke. ( photo - Mrs. Mary Pope )

The Boy Scouts were reorganized in St. Bartholomew's Church, Town Council "adopted" the newly-launched H.M.C.S. LOUISBURG, named to replace the town's namesake sunk the previous February in the Mediterranean. In June, a CWAC platoon was welcomed to town and gave a precision drill and later a concert. The anti-submarine net was replaced in July.

In October, Louisbourg was the first community in the county to "go over the top" with Victory Bond sales of \$117,600 against a quota of \$85,000. The male members of the Navy League tendered a dinner of appreciation to the ladies who continued to supply sandwiches and sweets each night at the Navy League Hut to members of the Armed Forces and the Merchant Marine.



Volunteers at the Blood Donor Clinic held in the Navy League Hut. The Louisbourg Red Cross was formed in October 1939. ( photo - Jean Kyte )

## 1944

On February 3, 1944 the S.S. FORT TOWNSEND collided with one of her convoy escort, H.M.C.S. MAHONE, in a dense fog off Louisbourg. She was given emergency help and sent to Halifax for further repairs. Causing more immediate excitement was the explosion from spontaneous combustion of the PHILIP T. DODGE in harbour at about 1.45 a.m. on March 14. Bemused citizens were shaken from their beds believing that a bombing raid was in progress, or that a ship in harbour was being torpedoed. Debris from the ship rained on roofs and little fires burned all over the ice of the harbour.<sup>7</sup> No one was hurt but the ship was badly damaged. It was repaired in Louisbourg. On March 22 the WATUKA was torpedoed off Halifax, but all hands, including local men Capt. Ben Pope, Raymond Martell, Charles Martell, Willard Troke, Gordon Troke, Philip Tutty and James Kennedy were saved.<sup>8</sup>

The Battle of the Atlantic abated, and the invasion of Europe occasioned some optimism for the future. In April, Mayor Huntington, George Lewis of Lewis & Co, Ed Levy, and Eric Lewis met in Halifax with government officials and management of General Sea Foods Ltd. to discuss the establishment of a modern fish plant in Louisbourg. They continued to meet in Halifax and in Louisbourg over the years following and plan for the plant, which was finally opened in 1952.

Ninety swordfish were landed in July. In September a public meeting was held to discuss post-war problems, and in October another meeting was held to arrange a civic reception to welcome men and women who would be returning from the Armed Forces. A banquet was held in the Navy League Hut on December 28. A Civilian Rehabilitation Committee was organized, but it was not particularly successful, although it met periodically for the next couple of years.

## 1945

The Council considered a memorial suitable for veterans of both wars. In March, two Spanish trawlers arrived. The Spanish sailors scoured the shops in town buying soap and, for a few days after they left, townspeople had to wait until local merchants could restock their shelves.<sup>9</sup> The Spanish ships had made the town their base in 1944 and continued to call. At the same time, ships were sailing under armed escort and armed trawlers and minesweepers patrolled the coast.

Emerson Grant arrived home from overseas in February 1945 and in March the anti-submarine net was taken up because of drift ice. The Eighth Victory Loan campaign launched April 23 was successfully completed by May 1, a week before May 8, V-E Day.

V-E Day was celebrated with general rejoicing, followed by an abrupt slow down of activity both socially and commercially.

In July a naval tug left for North Sydney with three anti-submarine gate pontoons. This was the last except for the one anchored off the head of government wharf being used as a moving buoy for the stern of the Canadian frigate, ORKNEY, which was undergoing repairs and refitting.

On July 23 the first swordfish were landed. August 14 was V-J Day. On September 2 the R.C.A.F. station officially closed, on October 11 the Senior Naval Office closed, and on October 23 the ORKNEY sailed. On November 19 Mayor Huntington attended a 9th Victory Loan Campaign dinner - in Sydney.

## ARMED FORCES IN LOUISBOURG

About the middle of January 1943 a naval office was opened in the building that originally housed the office of A.A. Martell, M.L.A., then the Post Office until 1939, and more recently, the Credit Union.<sup>10</sup> The naval barracks was the former Dundonald Inn. Commander George A. Burton,

R.C.N.R. was in charge. He died in 1944.

By early 1943 convoys were commonplace to Louisbourg. Sydney was designated an SC (slow convoy) assembly point,<sup>11</sup> and ships collected in Louisbourg Harbour to load cargo and bunker (take on coal as fuel for the ship itself) while preparing to join the convoys.

The office closed October 11, 1945.

## ARMY

By January 1943 Wolfe Battery was established at Kennelly's ( Russell Pt.). It was officially called "Fort Wolfe."

Fort Wolfe consisted of two 18-pounder field guns, and two sixty-inch concentrated beam searchlights "disguised as fishing shacks on the shore line." About fifty men from the Sydney Harbour and Canso Defences formed the winter detachments at Louisbourg although one year a unit from Quebec manned the battery. A submarine would have to come through the Channel at the mouth of the harbour on the surface because of the shallow depth of the water and the guns thus commanded the channel.<sup>12</sup>

The camp was located on both sides of the road where the old Kennelly house once stood. On the east side of the road were eight round topped corrugated huts and on the west side, four or five similar ones. Huts were about 25 feet long and ten feet wide. On the west side two or three wood and tar-papered shacks were placed. Near the shore, there were two wooden buildings housing searchlights. The engines for generating the power were in a small wooden building at the edge of the trees east of the searchlight building. The guns were positioned on two concrete gun emplacements and one was mounted on a rubber wheeled carriage.

The army detachment, except for a small guard, usually decamped during summer.