



Heritage Notes

No. 2

July 1991

The Town of Louisbourg in 1901

William A. O'Shea

In 1901 the mood in the newly-incorporated Town of Louisbourg was optimistic. The population stood at 1046. Six years earlier, in 1895, the Dominion Coal Company opened the Sydney and Louisbourg Railway line. In the town the Company constructed the S&L station, the coal pier and, a few years later, a freight pier. Louisbourg became a major transshipment port for coal, during the winter, and a year round fueling depot for steamships. There was a small but healthy fishery and some people were promoting tourism related to the historic ruins in the Old Town. Modern Louisbourg was a town of wood shingled houses and businesses, railroad tracks and coal dust, dominated by the coal pier and the steamers waiting to load. Here is a glimpse of Louisbourg in 1901 as reflected in the *Sydney Daily Record* and the *Sydney Daily Post*.

Louisbourg is Incorporated

On January 8, 1901 the ratepayers of Louisbourg voted 111 to 57 in favour of incorporation. The move for incorporation was led by Captain William W. Lewis, a merchant and relative newcomer to Louisbourg. He was supported by H.C.V. Levatte, born in Main à Dieu, but living in Louisbourg for a number of years. Levatte was the Warden of Cape Breton County and the main source of Liberal political power in the area. The motive behind incorporating was to put Louisbourg in a position where tax incentives and free land could be promised to industries wishing to locate here.

The *Daily Record* had anticipated a closer vote. It was rumoured that many of those who had been in favour of incorporation had changed their minds. The anti-incorporation lobby felt that by waiting until 1902 Louisbourg would have obtained certain "concessions" from the Provincial and County governments.

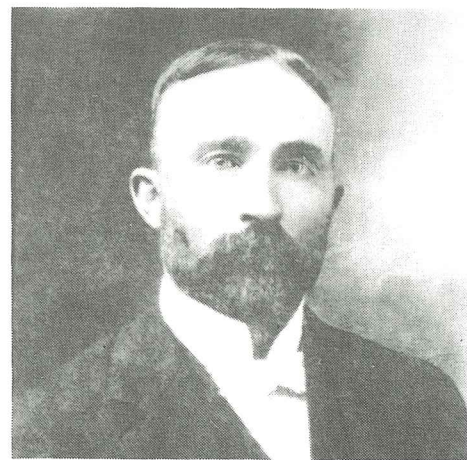
But the generally favourable support for the move in 1901 is reflected in the *Daily Record* for January 11 which states that, "It is certainly a somewhat small community to have its own chief magistrate and other administrative machinery, and will probably in point of population be the smallest incorporated town in the province. In point of importance

however it will not be the least. Not population, altogether but the enterprise and public spiritedness of its citizens determines the standing of a town or any community. That the people of Louisbourg are not lacking in these qualities is evident enough. Their determination to take up the burden of a separate and independent civic life shows this. It is also shown recently in their laying of a complete system of water works, a public utility to which many large towns throughout the county have not yet attained. Apart from this however Louisbourg has her prospects. She has the prospect of becoming one of the chief winter ports of Canada."

The municipal boundaries restricted the new Town to the north-east section of Louisbourg Harbour and did not include either the Old Town or West Louisbourg.

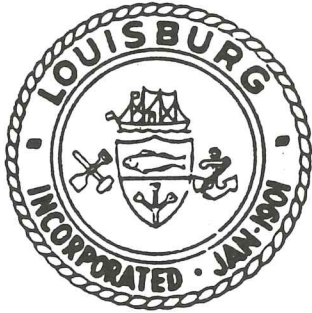
Notices were posted for election of a mayor and six councillors with nominations open until the 25th of ~~February~~ ^{Jan}. On that day William W. Lewis, the only nominee for mayor, was declared the winner. Election for councillors took place on February 1. The results of this first civic election were Neil Townsend 138, Joseph O'Toole 114, John E. Tutty 111, Fletcher Townsend 110, Dan J. McInnis 108, W. P. Cann 94, Duncan Lamont 85 and Edward S. McAlpine 48. The first six were declared elected. The only change to the slate until the next annual election resulted from the resignation of O'Toole and his replacement by James MacPhee in July 1901.

The political mix of the new council, according to the *Daily Record* for February 6, included a Liberal mayor, 3 Liberal councillors and 3 Conservative councillors.



Captain William W. Lewis the first mayor of Louisbourg

The first meeting of the Council took place on Friday, February 8 according to the *Daily Record* for February 11. The Town Hall fire of 1982 destroyed the Council Minute Book, but a record of the first meeting survives in the Women's Institute, *History of Modern Louisbourg*, printed in 1958. At that meeting B. W. Townsend was elected clerk, Wesley Townsend policeman pro-tem and a committee was struck to draft bylaws.



The first seal containing symbols of the industry of the Town as directed by the 1901 Bylaws.

For many years the Council met in the County building which also served as a lockup. This building was located on the south side of Main Street at Aberdeen. In 1901 there was no Aberdeen Street, though as early as January, the Coal Company was offering to open a new street in this location to connect Main Street with Commercial Street. By doing so the Company hoped to close off Commercial Street under the coal pier and increase the size of the coal pocket. There would be a major clash between the ratepayers and Council in 1902 over the politics behind the establishment of Aberdeen.

Streets were an important first consideration for the new council and the Town Superintendent, Robert Ranson, was hard at work improving them. The correspondent for the *Daily Record* felt, on June 18, that such work was, "*befitting a town of such importance as Louisbourg promises to be in the near future.*" M. G. Hennigar, an engineer from Sydney, was also in town during the summer establishing street alignments. Because a number of buildings fronting the Main street would have been moved back by Hennigar's recommendation for a 66 foot wide right of way, the Council met in July to reduce the width to 60 feet.

The water system was also another consideration for the new Town and the privately-owned Louisbourg Electric, Water and Power Company met to discuss extending the line to new streets. The company's Directors were L. McLean, W. W. Lewis, Dr. F. O'Neil, J. E. Burchell and M. G. Henniger.

One of the early conflicts between the council and ratepayers concerned the impounding of sheep and cattle. According to the Bylaws, "*Horses, cattle, sheep, swine, goats or geese shall not be allowed to go at large on the streets of the Town after the hour of six o'clock in the evening or before seven o'clock in the morning.*" The policeman was to enforce this strange curfew and impound animals. By June there had been a large number of cattle and sheep impounded and ratepayers were complaining. At one point 22 sheep were sold for \$8.00. According to the *Daily Record* for August 16

it seemed that there was to be legal action taken against the Town, the poundkeeper and the person who had turned in the wandering animals. The bylaw was tightened up in 1902. Ducks were added to the prohibited list and animals were restricted at all hours on the streets between the Railway Station and Jerret's Brook.

Death and Disease

In January, Queen Victoria died after a reign of 63 years. Flags were flown at half mast from stores and public buildings in the town and from ships in the harbour. The bell in the tower of St. Bartholomew's church tolled when news of her death reached the town; and a special service was held on February 2 at 9:00 AM, the same hour that services were held for the deceased queen in England. The *Daily Record* for January 24 commented that, "*...the citizens of Louisbourg in common with all British subjects wish to show their esteem and respect to the memory of one of the greatest sovereigns who ever sat on the English throne.*"

Tragedy struck the town, in February, when pilots George Dixon, Daniel Townsend and Philip Townsend drowned. Their boat was swamped, during a storm, on Nag's Rock Shoal as they tried to return from the station on Battery Island. All three men were married and left widows and children. Diver Defriese searched for the bodies but they were never found. Not since the Dorcas disaster of 1893 had the community been so brutally touched by the power of the sea. In May, Captain William Kennedy of little Lorraine was suffocated by a fall of coal while working in the Coal Pocket at the pier. He too left a widow and young family. The investigation into his death recommended having experienced foremen on hand when men were working in the Pocket.

In addition to accidents, disease produced tragedy and concern. Two children died from measles and one from diphtheria. In April the diphtheria epidemic resulted in three houses being quarantined. Even the Council was effected and could not hold its meeting at the first of May because the town clerk was restricted to his quarantined house. Z. W. Townsend was charged with entering a quarantined house and there were unproved accusations, at meeting of the Board of Health, that the doctor was suppressing information about the extent of the epidemic. The doctors in Louisbourg were Barnaby, Morrison and O'Neil.

William McKinley, President of the United States, was assassinated in September and the *Daily Record* for the 17th notes that flags in town were at half mast. These buildings included the Royal Bank, for upstairs were the offices of H.C.V. Levatte who was the U.S. Consul in Louisbourg.

The South African War continued but without the detailed attention of earlier years. The war ended in 1902 and is remembered in Louisbourg by Strathcona Street.

Holidays, Special Events and Elections

The first *Daily Record* article of the year, on January 8, mentions that, "*a number of young people have taken advantage of the good skating. Every night crowds repair to Little Lake to indulge in healthy and enjoyable pastimes.*"

On the 24th of May there was a field day at the Louisbourg A.A. Grounds, probably located at Slattery's Head on the west side of town. The *Sydney Daily Post* covered the event and noted that E. A. Richardson, who was the Royal Bank Manager in Louisbourg, was in fine form, winning all the events. These included the 14 pound shot put, high jump, vaulting, standing broad jump, hop step & leap, 100 yard dash, 22 yard dash and the bicycle race.

On July 1, Dominion Day, all the businesses closed, there were flags flying from stores and vessels in port and many buildings were decorated with bunting. The *Daily Record* on July 2 reflected that, "it is good to see that a true national spirit is prevailing the hearts of our people today than heretofore in the celebration of today as a national holiday. Five years ago in Louisbourg you would not see a solitary flag flying." There was a baseball game between the Victorias and the Crescents with the Crescents winning 27 to 21. This enthusiasm for the game in Louisbourg resulted in a baseball club being formed in August. The Dominion Day events continued with a bicycle parade and ended with a costume ball in the Sons of Temperance rooms at Mitchell's Hall.

On July 12, the Orange Lodge in Catalone joined the Louisbourg lodge for a church service in Calvin Presbyterian church and a picnic at Slattery's Head. Evidence of the practical ecumenical spirit of the times was the 1905 agreement between the Orange Lodge and the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association to share the cost of erection of booths and other facilities at the Slattery grounds.

Governor General Minto visited Louisbourg and toured the ruins of the Old Town at the end of July. This visit caused a sensation in the local media. The citizens and their newly elected council were enthusiastically awaiting the first official visit to the town by the Governor General. The town was decorated and Mayor Lewis had a speech written and submitted for review. But the mayor was informed that the Governor General wished to visit the ruins informally and had asked Reverend T. F. Draper to accompany him. Lewis withdrew the official welcome and was accused of snubbing Minto at the wharf when the Governor General returned from Old Town. No permanent damage seems to have been done, however, and it is likely that Minto Street was named in 1902 in an effort to demonstrate that the Town Fathers had recovered from their disappointment.

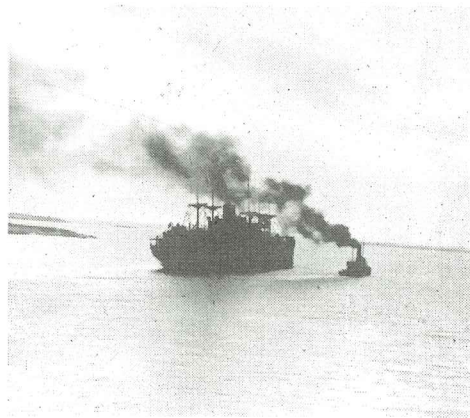
The Canadian Pressmen visited Louisbourg on their tour of Cape Breton in August. They were impressed by the Sydney and Louisbourg Railway line and facilities. They travelled to view the ruins of the Fortress on board the tug, E. M. Cates, and were lectured on the sieges by Patrick Kennedy after which they took part in the "usual scurry for relics" before departing for Sydney. The ongoing interest in relics from the 18th-century fortress town resulted in at least 20 guns having been raised from the harbour two summers earlier by a Captain Brown of Montreal, according to a *Daily Post* article of June 2. Two guns had been purchased by the University of Toronto Engineering Society and the Arts Class of 1901 and donated to the university. Another was acquired by Dalhousie University in Halifax. Still on the topic of the Fortress, Senator Pascal Poirrier visited Louisbourg in December on behalf of the Royal Society of Canada. He noted that the presence of the ruins and the proposed railway from Canso to Louisbourg along the south shore from St. Peters would attract thousands of visitors.

In the fall of 1901 there was a provincial election. The Murray government ticket was represented by McKenzie and Gillis while the Conservatives were represented by Mullins and McKinnon. The polling station for the Town was advertised as at or near the lockup. For those residing outside the town boundaries the polling station was at or near the S&L station. The *Daily Record* noted on October 4, that the election day was quite and the town vote not as large as might be expected since, "several liberals who were either so sure of victory or not interested enough in the election did not poll their votes". That fall there was also a county election and Louisbourg citizen and long-time Warden H.C.V. Levatte was returned.

On October 10 there was a disastrous fire in Sydney which destroyed over 78 buildings in the centre of the town. But there is no record of any concern in Louisbourg for its own fire safety. Beginning early in the next year, however, there were a series of mysterious fires which would lead to the development of a Coal Company fire brigade and enthusiastic, but unsuccessful attempts to organize a town brigade.

Business and Buildings

The harbour was filled regularly with steamers and schooners. On February 21, the *Record* correspondent mentions the Strathavon, Turret Bell, Bonavista, Coban, Cacouna, Cape Breton, Norge and the Aberdeen were in port awaiting cargoes. Other steamers in Louisbourg in 1901 included the Mira, Alf, Britannic, Crewe, Alladin and Ceylon. During the winter and fall these vessels shipped coal from Louisbourg to Boston, Halifax, St. John's, Placentia, Quebec and Montreal. In the summer the steamers would continue to come into port for refuelling.



A Steamer leaving Louisbourg Harbour

The steamer Ceylon arrived from Philadelphia in January, on its second visit, with a load of brick for the Steel Company in Sydney. The Symra arrived from Boston with a cargo of wheat bound for Sicily. She had delivered a load of sugar from Havana to Boston. The winter before she was chartered to carry coal from Sydney to Montreal. Schooners

delivered cargoes of lumber and food then left with coal for ports in Nova Scotia, PEI and New Brunswick.

The *Daily Record* for November 14 reported that the fishing season was nearly over and had been fairly good. The fall mackerel season was a failure but the spring catch was successful. Lobsters were below average but the catch of cod was above. The price for cod, lobster and herring was good but not so for mackerel. One feature of the summer had been the arrival of Captain Sol Jacobs from Gloucester, Mass., with his schooner the Helen Gould. The *Record* for May 30 noted that she was, "equipped with a gasoline engine and so can be independent of sails."

Economic development was actively sought. The railway line up the coast from St. Peters seemed assured. In the *Record* for June 25 it was reported that the line would be extended to St. Peters by the end of the year and then on to Louisbourg. The likelihood of a railway terminus led H.C.V. Levatte to dust of a 25 year old report by a parliamentary committee looking into the shortest mail route between England and North America. Louisbourg's location placed it at a distinct advantage. It was reported in July that capitalists planned to open iron ore works at Lorraine and a smelter would be located at Louisbourg. The ratepayers met in August and voted tax exemption and free land to any company wishing to construct steel hulled ships in the town.

The economic health of Louisbourg was reflected in building construction. The *Record*, for July 3, reported that there were 30 buildings in the course of erection. This was merely the middle of a building boom the like of which has not been repeated in Louisbourg.

Lewis & Company was enlarging its store on the waterfront and O'Toole and Company, an old and established business, was enlarging its wharf premises. J. Ballah had set up shop in Mitchell's Hall and James McLean opened a law office there. A. Hooper from Forchu was building a store, Z. W. Townsend had opened a new store, while John Berry from PEI and William Yetman from Halifax opened barbershops making three or four in the town. Paul Bates set up a tailor shop in his brother's store and the Louisburg Hotel was remodelled, adding a bathroom and hot and cold water. Joseph Laybolt was building a store on the south side of the harbour, the first of its kind in that area of town.

Z.W. Townsend had also build a double tenement. Other houses or stores were constructed by C. S. Keefe, Arthur O'Toole, C. S. McAlpine, Stephen Murphy, Eldridge Dickson, Joseph O'Toole, Mrs. McCormack, Thomas Wilcox, Archie McNish, Ben Heckman, Angus Beaton, Patrick Burke, Thomas Bagnell, Mrs. Ferguson, Joseph Troke, Mrs. Charles Martell of Main à Dieu, Enos Mann, Alexander and Paul Bates, and Mrs. David Gibbs. Edward S. McAlpine sold his house on the corner of Warren and Main to Dr. O'Neil and was planning to build a new one for himself and three others for rent.

Even the churches reflected the excitement of a growing town. The Methodists constructed a parsonage and were talking of enlarging their church. The Presbyterians constructed a manse and the Roman Catholics a glebe house. Stella Marris, until then a mission of Main à Dieu, became a parish and Fr. William Kiely, the priest in Main à Dieu, became the first parish priest of Louisbourg. The Salvation Army had come to town and was holding meetings in

Mitchell's Hall. The Baptists were considering the construction of a church.

The year rang out with Christmas displays in the stores along the main street. The *Daily Record* on December 24 noted that good sleighing had an "enlivening" effect on business in town. Peters' Bros. was doing a "rushing Christmas trade" and R. McDonald and A.L. Bates were credited with an elegant display of toys and varieties. The year 1901 was good in Louisbourg.

Louisbourg at 90 Years

The Town of Louisbourg is 90 years old. Approximately 1400 people live within its boundaries. It's an election year. Because of the reconstructed 18th-century Fortress we are one of the best known towns in North America. Tourism is an important, growing industry. The Sydney & Louisburg Railway Museum, for example, registers about 20,000 of the 130,000 visitors to the Fortress. A challenge for the Town is to attract and hold more of that market. The fishery, the backbone of the local economy, is experiencing a period of uncertainty. The Town's largest employer, National Sea Products, has begun a seasonal shutdown for the second year running. Still, two smaller plants, Chelsea and Hopkins carry on. The lobster fishery is an important local employer. But the time is ripe for new initiatives.

The Town of Louisbourg Council in July 1991 includes: George Wheeliker, Mayor; Victor Hanham, Councillor and Deputy-Mayor; Councillors Gerry Gartland, Bill Bussey, William Tutty, Jim Steylen, Stewart Whynott. The Town Clerk is Elaine MacPherson and Barbie Graham the Deputy Clerk. John George MacKeigan is the Town Superintendent with a crew consisting of Donnie MacKeigan and Robert Ranson. There are 3 policemen: Chief Wayne Pitcher and constables Reg MacEachern and David Csernyik. Cindy Trimm is Recreation Director. The Louisbourg District Planning Commission employs Rick McCready as Executive Director and Marie Lovett is Secretary/Bookkeeper.

Louisbourg and Louisburg

In 1901 the Town was incorporated as the *Town of Louisburg*. The Post Office converted to the present Louisbourg spelling on May 2, 1951. The Council took a similar step that same year, though the loss of the Council Minutes in the fire of 1982 means that the specific date for the decision is lost. Still, the spelling was not officially changed until E. A. Manson, M.L.A. for Cape Breton West, introduced a Bill in the House of Assembly in the mid-60's. On April 6, 1966, "An Act to Change the Name of the Town of Louisburg" changed the spelling to Louisbourg.

Supported by Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation, by a donation from Sanjiv Maindiratta, Louisbourg Pharmacy, in memory of Mrs. Eva Lewis 1894 - 1991 and by the Town of Louisbourg.

© July 1, 1991, Louisbourg Heritage Society
P.O. Box 396, Louisbourg, Nova Scotia, B0A 1M0
ISSN 1183 - 5834, ISBN 0-9694720-5-6
Reprint July 20, 1991 by the Town of Louisbourg