

# Heritage Notes

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## *Special VE Day 1995 Edition*

Jean Kyte

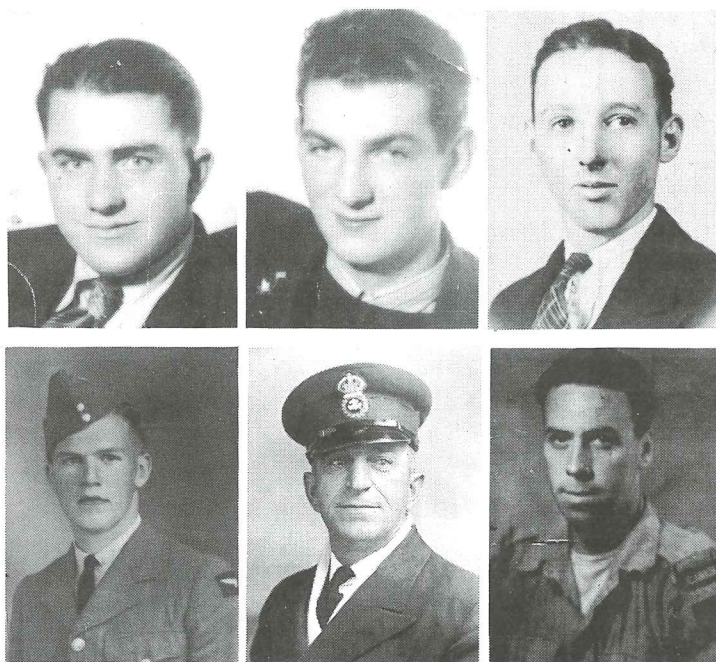
### 1939 & 1940

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.

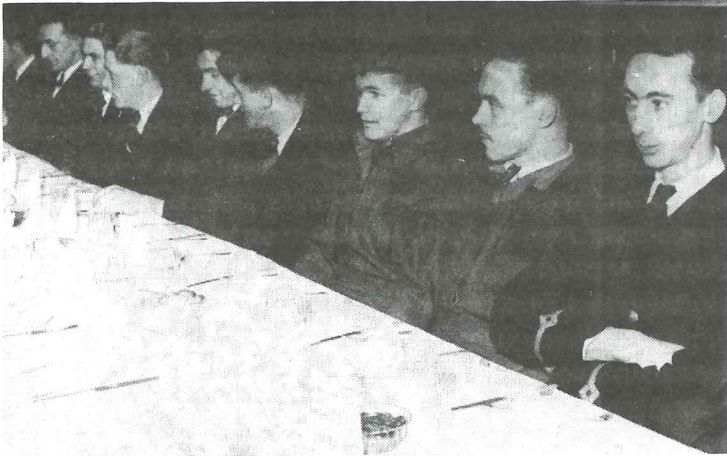
On September 3rd, Huntington and D.M. Johnston, then Chief of Police, attended a meeting in Sydney with other Cape Breton municipal leaders, "to organize the towns, City of Sydney, and rural communities in Cape Breton County, in preparation for possible air raids by enemy planes..." Dr. H. J. Townsend 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.



## THE R.C.A.F.

The R.C.A.F. station was located on the old Louisbourg Road (Terra Nova Road) on property owned by the late John MacMillan and was established in 1942.

It was called No. 6 Radar Station and was attached to the R.C.A.F. station in Sydney, Nova Scotia. A ration run to Sydney was made each week for supplies. About 80 to 100 men were stationed there. [The Radar units extended from Iceland to the United States East Coast.]

The station tracked planes over the Atlantic and at one time received a commendation for tracking one plane for 18 hours. The equipment was manned twenty-four hours a day, with four shifts of four to six men. They also tracked ships.

The station comprised an administration building, housing the Orderly Room, a cook house and dining room, a guard house, H barracks with men sleeping on one side and a hospital and games room on the other side. The officers slept in one end of the Administration Building.

In the early days, as the heating equipment was not completed, men were moved to the Dundonald Inn and to private homes in town. Some of the married men brought their families to live with local families. A number of local women married R.C.A.F. men and moved away after the war.

Commanding officers of the RCAF were, F/O B.F. Deshaw, P/O V. J. Hawkeswood, P/O W. H. Noble, F/O S. R. Talbot, F/L J. M. G. Dorais and F/O W. J. McLaughlin.

The base closed on September 2, 1945.<sup>13</sup>

### L.H. CANN'S SHIP REPAIR PLANT

Louisbourg Motor and Machine Works Limited was incorporated in 1920 with three partners, one of whom was L.H. Cann. In 1924 Cann bought out his partners and carried on business under his own name.



**L. H. Cann's marine repair shop workers consistently supported the Victory Loan drives. In 1944, R.C.A.F. Officer James Lovelace presented them with a flag. L.H. Cann, holding the edge of the flag is standing to the left of Lovelace. ( photo - James Lovelace )**

The company did general machine shop, motor repair and small marine repair work until 1941-42 when a complete refit was carried out on all Dominion Coal Ships.

On September 30, 1941 a Latvian ship, S.S. EVEROJA, was sent to Louisbourg for repairs to a hole in her bow. Up to this time, the small marine repair shop was mostly used for fixing loose hinges on deck doors, installing light bulbs on ships and general machine work. To handle the welding of a whole new steel plate to the side of a ship, the plant underwent an abrupt adjustment in equipment, personnel and importance. Cann, the plant owner, issued a call for workers. A stenographer, the first trained one in town, was employed.

During the Battle of the Atlantic, all available facilities were engaged in repair work and Cann's was given a contract by the Department of Munitions and Supply to refit Naval vessels. The plant was enlarged,



men from all over Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland as well as other parts of Canada were engaged and new machinery bought. During the war, fourteen naval ships - H.M.C.S. VEGREVILLE, GRAND MERE, COWICHAN, MULGRAVE, UNGAVA, DRUMMONDVILLE, AGASSIZ, LA MALBAIE, CHAMBLY and RIMOUSKI, and H.M.S. AYRSHIRE, BAFFIN, ANTICOSTI, and CALLIFF - were refitted, and repairs and refits made to many merchant ships, naval crafts, scows, derricks and fishing boats. The H.M.C.S MAHONE was towed in for temporary repairs to get her to Halifax, and the PHILIP T. DODGE was repaired after an explosion.

The plant eventually had a work force of 250, handling the machine shop, boiler shop, electrical shop, carpenter shop, fitter shop, welder house and compressor room. No time was ever lost due to strikes or labour difficulties.<sup>14</sup>

The employees supported the sale of approximately \$100,000 worth of Victory Bonds.<sup>15</sup>

### THEY ALSO SERVED ....

The Dominion Coal Company with the Sydney and Louisburg Railway provided vital support in the shipment to Britain of coal, steel, fuel, food, munitions and civilian supplies. Work went on twenty-four hours a day, with three eight-hour shifts. The S & L Station was managed by A. Tilley, who also handled the Canadian Pacific Telegraph business. Until his death in 1942, D. J. McInnis was superintendent of the coal pier, being succeeded by Arthur Hallett.

Lewis & Co., founded in 1896, was the principal merchandiser in town, as ships' chandler, fish buyer, shipping agent, general store, fuel oil supplier and office for various agencies and services. Gordon P. Stevens, founded in 1914, was the second largest general store. Other businesses in town included Beavers Transfer, A. D. Cann, fish; Crowdis Hotel; Lloyd Harris, confectionery and groceries; B.W.Heckman,

confectionery and groceries; Herbert Hopkins, fish; M.S.Huntington, newspapers and confectionery; D.M.Johnston, funeral director; Allister MacDonald, Rexall Drug Store, which also had a small lending library; Louisburg Co-op Society, groceries; Mrs. Belle MacMillan, groceries and household goods; Harold MacQueen, groceries, confectionery, stoves and furniture; The Royal Bank; Sullivan Bus Service; Wilfred Tutty, billiards, pool and snooker; Fred Burke, barber shop; Abe Cameron, bus and taxi service; Hugh Lynk, insurance. The restaurants in town were managed by Tom Wong (the Grubstake Restaurant building), by Cecil Stevens (on the site of the Royal Bank) and William Thomas who managed the Green Lantern Restaurant.

### WHAT IT WAS LIKE IN TOWN

The citizens came face to face with war with the arrival for repairs of the Latvian ship EVEROJA, on September 30 1941.

The ship's crew, Latvians, Englishmen, Welsh and Scandinavians, provided the town with a constant source of gossip. The first week of the ship's arrival, the town people reacted with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion. Young girls who normally thought nothing of walking home alone at night were no longer permitted out unattended. Suspicion was increased when some of the crew became drunk and engaged in brawls on the main street.

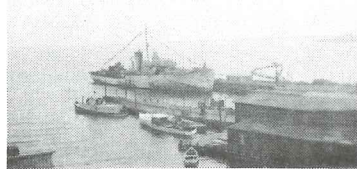
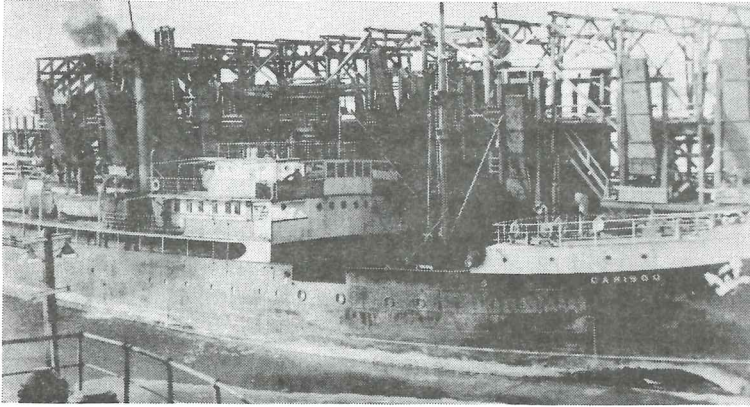
However, the suspicion was alleviated after the crew members attended several social evenings held in the Anglican Parish Hall. They displayed good manners (bowing from the waist when asking permission to dance, and quickly removing one of their own men who had become drunk.) Their behaviour overcame the initial antipathy and many townspeople accepted them socially, inviting them to their homes for dinner and to spend the evenings.

The ship remained over a month, and the crew of about thirty became friendly



with the townspeople and particularly with the men who repaired the ship. They had an orchestra of five aboard which played for a number of dances and one of the crew was a professional fakir, billed as Rolando, who performed such deeds as sticking a knife through his tongue and driving needles through his breast muscles. He treated the citizens to a free performance in a local hall from which several women and one man were carried unconscious.

This first exposure to wartime conditions which proved pleasant socially and financially for the town was probably largely responsible for the friendly attitude with which the people greeted the numerous servicemen, both Canadian and foreign, who were stationed at Louisbourg during the war.



**Photographs of Louisbourg during the War.**  
Clockwise from Top: passenger ship S.S. Caribou sunk in 1944, H.M.C.S. Chambly on VE Day, Rolando in 1941, Navy League Hut, L.H. Cann's marine repair shop. ( photos - Jean Kyte, Cecelia LeDrew, Jean Bagnell, Alex Johnston )

Between 1942 and 1944 the marine repair plant increased its staff to 225 employees. Canadian, British and American naval vessels tied up at the wharves along with merchant ships. By this time thirty-six men from town had enlisted, leaving only the older married men for work. Since they were mostly jack-of-all-trades, skilled workers had to be imported - electric welders, tinsmiths, machinists, pipe-fitters. Of the 225 men employed at the plant in 1944, 115 were "outsiders", of whom 18 had brought their families to town.

Along with the increase in population through the war industry, there was also a rise in population due to the building of an airforce camp outside the town, an army base at the Lighthouse, and a naval station in town. At times it was estimated that the "from away" population exceeded the native population.

This invasion of new families, servicemen and industry created a distinct break in the economy of the town and in its social life. For the natives who worked at the plant, it meant the first steady employment most of them had ever had in town. The security of a steady weekly pay envelope resulted in a rise in the standard of living which was quite apparent in 1944. The criteria for this rise included enlargement of the large general store and increase in staff; increase in trucking operations between Sydney and Louisbourg to cope with the greatly increased demand for provisions; expansion of the ship chandlery company which provisioned ships; increase in number of scheduled bus trips between Sydney and Louisbourg; higher status gained by several families which had suffered from chronic poverty - the higher status resulting from the fact that the fathers obtained regular work at the plant; and increase in staff at the local bank and Post Office.

A total of sixteen houses were built during the war. Of these, twelve were built by Louisbourg natives who subsequently occupied them.



Since most of the town houses were large, the housing shortage was solved by householders renting parts of houses, and taking in boarders. With practically all Louisbourg citizens employed it meant the old standbys of fishing and coal trimming were largely ignored. Fishing boats and lobster crates were left high and dry on the beaches during the summer although absenteeism at the plant became more prevalent during June and July when call of the sea proved too strong for some fisherman. The small tourist business faded completely as government restrictions on gasoline and travel became more severe.

With the men working at the plant or on the pier, and young sons in the services or at sea, the mothers had to adjust to the tempo of wartime Louisbourg. Symbolic of the increased tempo of life was the punctual whistle of the plant which blew every eight hours, announcing a change of shift. The added burden of boarders which almost every wife bore meant people coming and going at all hours. This new responsibility for the housewife gave her a rise in status in the household since she felt she was an important cog in the machinery of the war effort and also in respect to making it possible to increase the family income.

The new positions opened in the Navy League, Red Cross Society, War Savings Campaigns, blackout committees and Home Front organizations, offered fresh opportunities for women to contribute to the war effort. The local branch of the Women's Institute of Nova Scotia had been organized in 1936, the Red Cross in October 1939.

The Women's Institute helped raise money for a Canada-wide fund for an ambulance for overseas, directed the voluntary registration of women in town, filled "ditty-bags" for the Navy League, bought cigarettes for local servicemen overseas, made clothing for civilian relief and comforts for the Women's Auxiliary Service in Great Britain. It also sponsored six blood donor clinics in co-operation with the Red Cross, sent money for milk for Britain, bought Victory Bonds and organized a local share of the national clothing drive.

Red Cross members contributed hand-knitted and sewed comforts for the armed services and for clothing campaigns and the "Blankets for Britain" campaign in 1941. They also held fund-raising campaigns and supported local causes, such as the town tennis club, the Navy League, the Salvation Army and families suffering natural disasters, as well as sponsoring various nursing courses, and the shipment of food or clothing to two families in Britain.

With respect to recreational life, Louisbourg citizens no longer maintained the previous ritual of the Saturday night show and the intermittent church meetings. The knowledge that there might be something doing up town often prompted them to stroll up town after supper. This gradually led to frequenting the Navy League Hut and the restaurants and the Strathcona skating rink until finally the curiosity developed into a demand. Women who thought their dancing days were over found themselves eagerly sought as dancing partners. At first there was criticism of married women who attended dances and social affairs without their husbands, but their new roles were construed as 'chaperons' for the younger people. This phase of activity was rationalized under the heading of 'war effort' since women claimed they were doing their 'small bit' to make things more pleasant for the servicemen. The presence of these older women at the social functions was also justified on the grounds that the age level of the girls attending the affairs was far below



VE Day in Louisbourg with the Girl Guides as part of the parade. ( photo LHS )



norm. Although the dances were attended by girls as young as 13 or 14 years, there were sufficient informal restraints ensuring community surveillance over them, as they associated with men far older than themselves.

In the case of the younger girls, their mothers were usually present and accompanied them home after the dance. The girls themselves, particularly the high school group, which constituted the most active group in the social affairs, had decided it was more interesting to go stag to the dances because they could meet numerous men instead of dancing all evening with one boy or one another. Unless a girl was considered 'serious' with a boy, she was criticized by the other girls if she attended the dance escorted. So it became the custom for all the girls to go in groups to the social affairs, and invariably afterwards the groups walked home together, accompanied by some of the servicemen. Since no restaurants remained open after midnight, parents knew what time to expect their children home, so few lingered along the way.

The influence of these informal restraints was obvious - there was no tension around as in many other port towns by the fear that there would be an onslaught of rape accompanying the influx of servicemen. The smallness of the town, and the ease with which the servicemen were able to become acquainted, and the natural inclination of Louisbourg citizens to be friendly, led generally to understanding and respect between the servicemen, outside workers and townspeople.

### END NOTES

The Huntington Diaries, kept by the late M.S. Huntington, former mayor, are an invaluable source of information in the town and are the source of much of the material in this note.

1. M.S. Huntington, Diary, February 21, 1939.
2. Ibid., February 14 and 23, 1939.
3. Ibid., September 3, 1939.
4. Post-Record, Sydney, N.S., article "Louisburg Has Record of Fine Achievement in Repairs to Ships," by Laurie Kyte, undated, 1945.
5. Louisbourg Branch, Women's Institute of Nova Scotia. History of Modern Louisburg 17-58-1958. 1958. Louisbourg District Planning & Development Commission. 1988., p.50

6. THE SCOOP, a privately printed news sheet, Louisbourg, May 18, 1942.

7. Reminiscences of Mrs. Cecelia (Shaw) LeDrew, who lived on Commercial St., Louisbourg, during the war.

8. Clipping, undated (most likely from Sydney Post, Sydney N.S.)

9. Mrs. Cecelia (Shaw) LeDrew.

10. Now, apartments owned by Brian Harpell.

11. Joseph Schull, The Far Distant Ships, published by Authority of the Minister of National Defence, Ottawa, 1950, p. 72.

12. Peter Moogk., "From Fortress Louisbourg to Fortress Sydney," in K. Donovan, ed., Cape Breton at 200 (Historical Essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial., 1785-1985) University College of Cape Breton Press, Sydney, Nova Scotia. p. 157., Also, Huntington Diary, January 10, 1943.

13. Letters to author from Steve Burrell and Bob Parr, (1991). They served at the base during the war. Huntington Diary, September 2, 1945 and Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa.

14. Post Record, Sydney, N.S. Laurie Kyte op cit.

15. Laurie Kyte., op cit.

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