

Spring 2017



GAZETTE

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The Unpleasant Expedition: My Grandfather’s Titanic Connection

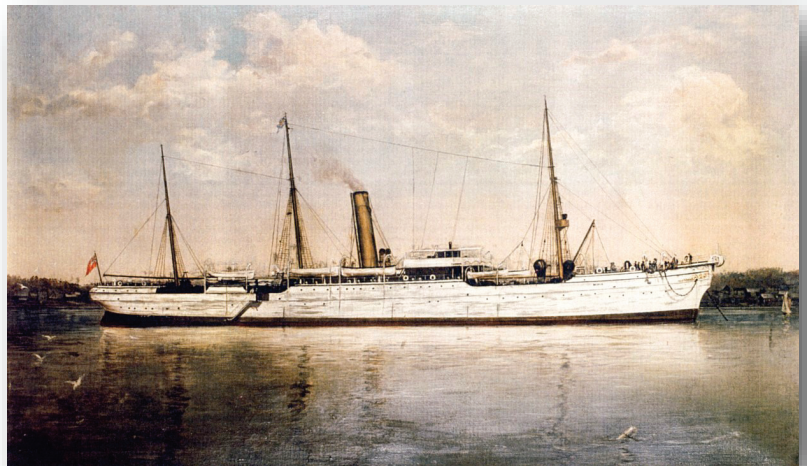
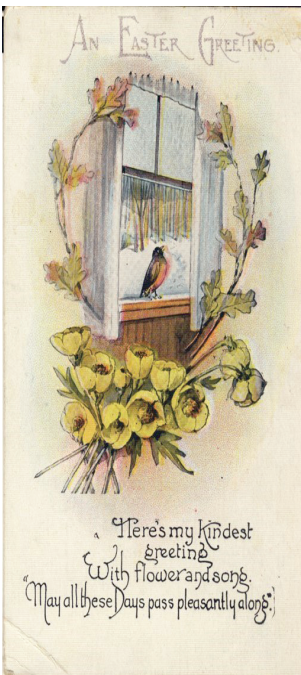
Patricia Teasdale

The stories surrounding the building of *Titanic* and its tragic sinking in the North Atlantic have always fascinated me. I am also thrilled to have learned that my grandfather, Francis Rickards Dyke, had a direct connection to the recovery of bodies from *Titanic* in the aftermath of the sinking.

My grandfather was born on January 5, 1892 in Farringdon, Berkshire, England. He was raised in a wealthy English family, and received his education from a private family tutor and through attendance at a private boarding school.

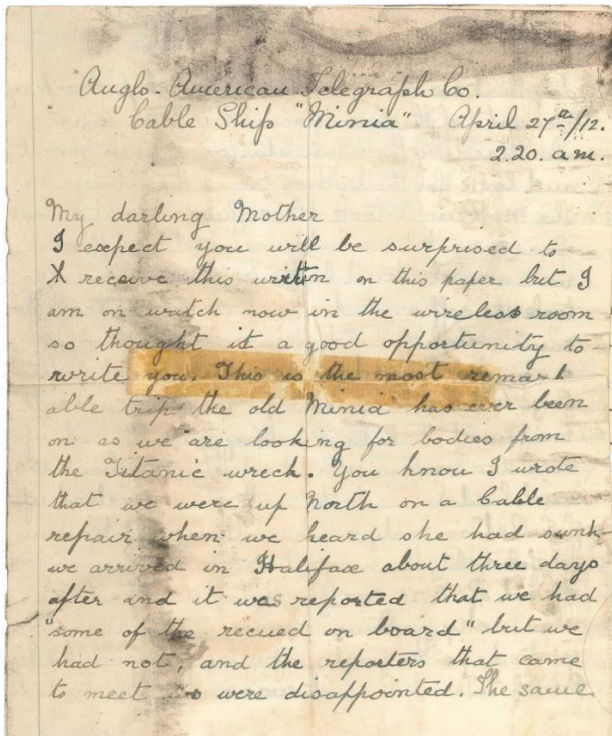
Around the age of 18, he studied the new technology of wireless communication. On January 1, 1912, at the age of almost 20, he signed on to the cable ship *Minia*, out of Halifax, as Second Electrician. This voyage would forever connect him with the *Titanic* story

The *Minia* was the second cable ship, after the *Mackay Bennett*, hired by the White Star Line, to recover bodies from the *Titanic*. From this voyage, there exists an amazing letter, written by my grandfather to his mother in England! The letter is written over several days between April 27, 1912 and May 6, 1912, and it gives details of his daily experience, as the crew of the *Minia* were recovering bodies from the *Titanic* site. Fortunately, the letter is owned and safely preserved by the Dartmouth Heritage Museum! It was recently displayed at Evergreen, in April 2012, on the



Photograph of painting of the SS *Minia*. Dartmouth Heritage Museum. 2007.040

(Continued from page 1)



Page 1 of Francis Rickards Dyke's letter.
Dartmouth Heritage Museum. 2005.014

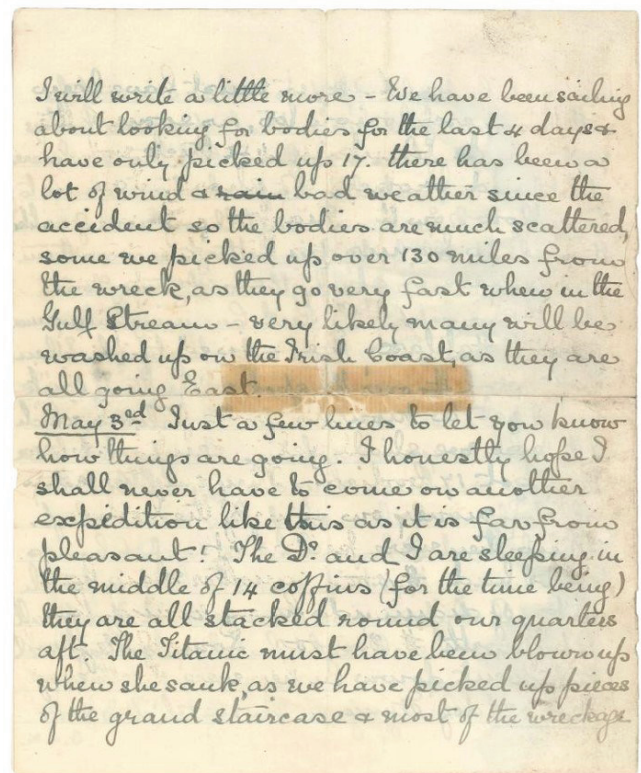
occasion of the 100th commemoration of the sinking of
Titanic.

This is the most insightful letter I have ever
read and it moves me to tears whenever I read it. I
continue to get more meaning from it with each
reading. Granddad begins by telling his mother that,
"This is the most remarkable trip the old *Minia* has ever
been on as we are looking for bodies from the *Titanic*
wreck."

Because the *Minia* was chartered after the
Mackay Bennett, fewer bodies were recovered – 17 to be
exact. By this time, most of the bodies had drifted from
the site of the sinking and were moving very fast in the
Gulf Stream. Granddad states that the first body they
picked up was that of "C. M. Hayes, President of the
Grand Trunk Railway. It was no trouble identifying him
as he had a lot of papers on him (and) a watch with his
name on it."

I think of him at that age of 20 years old and I
cannot imagine his thoughts. How must he have felt?

How was he able to put feelings aside and carry on with
his duty? He puts a human touch on this gruesome task,
in several ways in his letter. He relates that Reverend
Henry Ward Cunningham of St. George's Church, had
come on the voyage to bury the dead at sea, if needed.
Granddad writes, "When we passed over the spot where
the *Titanic* sank he held a short service in the saloon
which I thought was very nice of him. I expected to see
the poor creatures very disfigured but they all looked
calm as if they were asleep." The lines that deeply touch
me are, "I honestly hope I shall never have to come on



Page 4 of Francis Rickards Dyke's letter.
Dartmouth Heritage Museum. 2007.040

another expedition like this as it is far from pleasant.
The Dr. and I are sleeping in the middle of 14 coffins
(for the time being) they are all stacked around our
quarters aft." These two lines appear as a quote in the
Titanic Exhibit at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic
in Halifax.

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My grandfather's connection with Dartmouth began when he met a Dartmouth girl, Jessie Higgins Austen. They fell in love and were married in Christ Church, Dartmouth, on April 23, 1915. He was Chief Electrician on the *Minia* at this time. He lived the rest of his life in Dartmouth, raising a family of three daughters and seven grandchildren, of whom I am the second oldest. He continued to work for Western Union, serving as an officer on the cable ships, the *Lord Kelvin* and the *Cyrus Field*, and later as a Cable Inspector. He contributed to the community in many ways, the highlight of which was serving as the founding Chairman of the Board of the Public Library of Dartmouth, working tirelessly toward the establishment of the Dartmouth Library. When the Dartmouth Regional Library was finally established in March 1963, Granddad served as the first Chairman of the Board. He was also a devout Anglican, serving in the capacity of Warden of Christ Church and Superintendent of the Sunday School. One can see the early qualities of the man he would become, in the writing of his *Titanic* letter.



Photo of Francis Rickards Dyke in frame made from *Titanic* wood. Teasdale Family.

Our family treasures Grandad's *Titanic* letter. We knew him our whole lives, as our loving grandfather, but we did not know about the letter until after his death. My mother, Doris Evelyne (Dyke) Teasdale, was the first to discover its existence in 1992, when she observed that quote I mentioned earlier from his letter, in the *Titanic* exhibit at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic!

Our family owns a small picture frame, carved from *Titanic* wreck wood by the ship's carpenter, William Parker, and given to my grandfather. We have placed a photograph of Grandad in this frame. It is a photo of him sitting at a wireless set and we believe it is from the time when he was 18, studying wireless in England.

I was privileged in April 2012, to be invited to participate in the filming of an episode of *History Detectives*. The film crew from Lion TV came from New York to Halifax to investigate the origin of a wreck wood picture frame, that was owned by another family and this led them to my grandfather's letter and our picture frame. I was thrilled to be interviewed and to read excerpts from Grandad's letter on April 27, 2012 – one hundred years to the day when he wrote it! (*History Detectives*, Season 10, Episode 5 on PBS).

Thank you to the Dartmouth Heritage Museum for preserving an important Dartmouth *Titanic* story.



The Director's Desk

Bonnie Elliott

As we head for St. Patrick's Day this week, I am thankful that the winter wasn't as bad as it has been in other years. Like most people I am gratefully anticipating signs of spring like seeing packages of seed at my local hardware store. At the museum we have been busier than ever lining up events and exhibits and being busy working on the collection and answering research requests. This year the museum can look forward to a number of milestones and we have tidbits of good news to share.

The first bit of news is that the museum signed a new management agreement with Halifax. This has released an additional \$50,000 to our yearly revenue and allowed us to hire Julia Clarke on an interim basis as our new Visitor Services Officer. She along with

our valuable front desk volunteers, will be the welcome faces to greet you as you enter the museum.

This year the museum is celebrating its 50th Anniversary and what a better way to celebrate this milestone than with a strawberry tea in July and a tall ships viewing party at the end of July. (Details to be disclosed in our next issue.) This year we will also be commemorating the Harbour Explosion of 1917 with an exhibition in the upstairs exhibit room set to open on July 14th. 1867 marks the year when Evergreen was built and also the 150th Anniversary of Confederation for which Joseph Howe, frequent visitor of Evergreen was a Father of Confederation.

The proceeds for the Celtic Tales story teller event (sold out as of March 7th) will go towards a new exhibit for the Helen Creighton room. We are working towards a new plan for the tea room to offer weekly afternoon teas in the green parlour and sunroom this summer. The other bit of good news is that once again we are producing an historic calendar for 2018. It will be on the theme of Dartmouth Sports and recreation and if all goes well we should have them to purchase in July.

The AGM is scheduled for Wednesday, May 24th at 7 pm at Christ Church. Once again Board member David Jones, will give a scintillating talk on Dartmouth history.

The month of March marks the end of winter and beginning of spring. It can be both windy and stormy as well as having warm sunny days. In this image from the March issue of The Woman's Magazine 1920, the wind is creating havoc on this elegant woman's walk. As she tries to steady herself against the force of a gale, her scarf is carried upwards and her coat is blown open to reveal a blue lining with a sun burst pattern indicating warm and sunny days ahead.

DHM 1996.010.049



Staff News

Collection Assistant Intern

Shannon Baxter



Shannon Baxter in the Green Parlour

As I continue my work on the museum’s ice skates collection, I have often been amused by the various names of styles of skates. The Starr Manufacturing Company was rather creative with the



Mabel Davidson

names they associated with their skates: Acme Club, Dreadnought, Bulldog, Beaver, and Demon, to name a few. As I worked through the cataloguing, it was very rare to see a name associated with these skates. The only exception I had seen was for the Acme Club skate, often referred to as “Forbes’ Patent’

skate. That is however until I stumbled across a single pair of skates, produced by Starr, with the name ‘Mabel



Starr Manufacturing Co.’s Mabel Davidson skates. DHM 1970.087.008

Davidson?. This naturally sparked a single question: Who was she?

After a little digging, this is what I have been able to discover: Mabel Davidson came from a family of figure skaters and entertainers. They originally hailed



Close up of Starr’s Mabel Davidson skates. Dartmouth Heritage Museum. 1970.087.008 .

from Minnesota, but had moved up to Ontario in the 1880s. By 1890, Mabel Davidson had been recorded as performing in skate exhibitions in both Ontario and the Maritimes. It is possible she may have visited Dartmouth, and that is why Starr Manufacturing Co decided to name one of their skates after her. It is also possible that Starr was responding to the interests of their overseas clients in England where Mabel Davidson was extremely popular.

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Figure skating was a novel practice in the early nineteenth century. Talented figure skaters would leave spectators awed by their fluid movements on the ice. Mabel Davidson was one of the earlier stars of this art, and toured to England between 1897 performing at the National Skating Palace in London between 1896 and 1897. *The Sketch* described her as “A perfect mistress of ice, takes every possible and impossible liberty with it, and the poor ice can't ever manage to retaliate...She held the spectators spellbound while she treated the ice to such a series of gymnastics as is seldom or never seen...She is one of the best.”

Unfortunately, Mabel Davidson's time on the ice would not last for long. A mere year later after these

words of praise, in 1898 Mabel Davidson had died. The papers described her death as being caused by “consumption, resulting from a heavy cold contracted while on a professional tour in England.” It is a cruel irony that it was her passion that ended up being the cause of her untimely end. At the very least, the Dartmouth Heritage Museum has a piece of that brief but brilliant history in their collection. As I draw close to completing my project with the Ice Skate collection, I am still delighted with every new discovery I find!

If you have any additional information about Mabel Davidson, please contact Shannon at (902) 464-2300 or intern@dartmouthmuseum.ca.

The Sleeping Pier

Frank C. Leaman

The remains of it are still there. If you stand in the parking lot of Alderney Landing and look toward the Angus. L. Macdonald Bridge, you will see it. A long finger shaped pier of earth and rocks. This, plus fill and boulders, was the original of what was once known at the Dartmouth pier. Since I was a boy, I was fascinated with the marine traffic that tied up to that pier.

Eventually, I was seconded to be wharfinger or record keeper for the pier. I was asked to send to the Harbour's Board records of what ships, barges, and other marine traffic tied up to the pier and how long they stayed. This way the wharfage could be charged etc. We had a lot of traffic in those days. There were freighters from Europe and everywhere that came to pick up wooden pit props or small logs used in mining. There were freighters who came to pick up or deliver bulk cargo. These usually were with us, as they had to wait for berths in Halifax. We had many ships from the sealing fleet. Some might remember sealing ships like

the North Star, Arctic Prowler and Olaf Neilson. Several times huge ocean going tugs would come as they waited for their tows to be prepared. I well remember one huge tug from Poland that came to tow our surplus naval frigates (ships) to La Spezia in Italy. We also had a large following of Dartmouth folk who loved to visit the pier to swim, fish and paint. Many local people also kept small fishing craft and recreational boats there and enjoyed the harbour. I often wonder now how we ever lost this great source of activity.

At the head of the pier, on the shore, stood our lumber company and woodworking mill. This was the opportune place to keep watch on the pier. This manufacturing and lumber business was called Dartmouth Woodworkers. Many older Dartmouth residents can recall how we supplied windows, doors,

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etc., for their houses. This plant was once known as The Chebucto Milling Company. It was owned by one of Dartmouth's famous mayors, Mayor [Frederick] Scarfe. Mayor Scarfe is known as the builder of the large mansion on Crichton Avenue known as "Edgemere". Now a seniors' residence. When my father bought the mill, there was lots of manufacturing equipment there mostly to do with the woodworking. The water lot our mill was on was called a pre-confederation water lot and you could build up to 300 feet in the Harbour for wharves etc. We built a cribwork for more room and I well remember going with my father on a rowboat to pick up logs and timbers along the shore to use in our construction. Many are still there. It was a different time then. For instance, our large lumber planter put out copious amounts of shavings. We sold some to farmers for animal bedding and the large chicken farms in Cole Harbour. The shavings still piled up so some wit said, "let the shavings go on the outgoing tide". We foolishly agreed! Soon after we had an irate member of the Dartmouth Ferry Commission who informed us one of the ferryboats had sucked in some of our shavings and caused a problem. Sufficiently chastised, we did not do that again.

Getting back to the pier, in that period it was very busy. The railroad had tracks on the pier and they could shunt boxcars etc., on the pier as well. The water and railway commerce of the city was ever present in the area. Sometimes if you were interested, the local dealers in the automobiles would bring in new cars. There would be usually one boxcar with maybe three new cars on wood staging inside the boxcar. You could watch this puzzle being disassembled and wonder who could afford a new car. Today when I look at the auto port and see thousands of cars in shipment, I think of what used to be.

I remember in that period, Canada had a national shipping line. Many men from Halifax and all over worked on these ships. They mostly had names

that started with Canada. Like Canadian Conqueror, Canadian Trader, etc. These men (mostly) asked for an increase and better working conditions, which brought



Aerial view of Downtown Dartmouth. The Angus L. Macdonald Bridge can be seen at the top. The Dartmouth pier is to the right.

Dartmouth Heritage Museum.

on a strike. They were called communists and other names and it was very bitter. These ships started to fill the anchorages in Halifax Harbour, Bedford Basin and the Dartmouth pier. The tensions got so high the government brought in strike breakers led by an American thug called Hal Braks. He arrived driving a white Cadillac convertible! Things got nasty after that.

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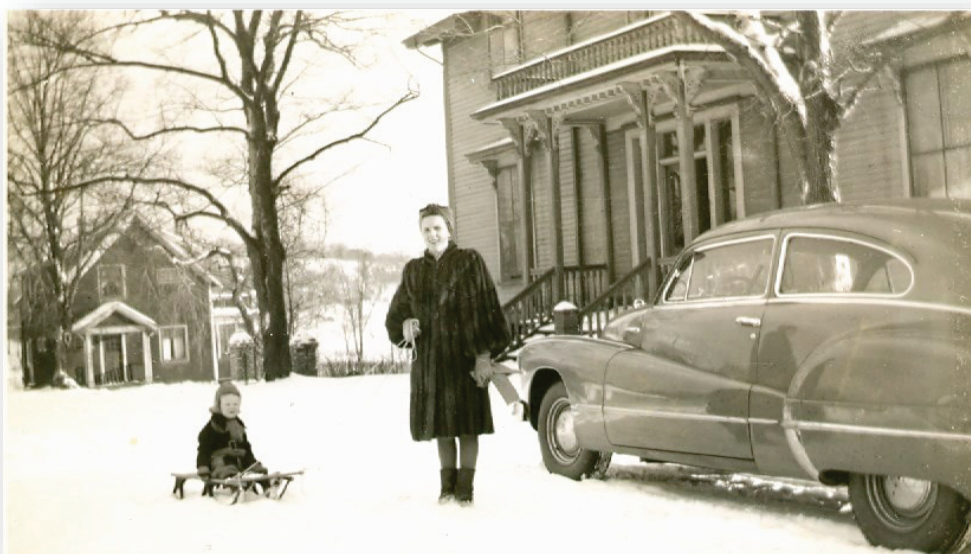
The sailors would not leave some ships and the company would not let them be supplied. In some cases, their wives smuggled food to them with rope slings. Tensions erupted and men were beaten up and in some cases shot! In the end, the ships were sold to Fidel Castro and others. The two small liners that many local people might remember as the Lady Boats ended their days in the Middle East.

History changed again when cargo containers came in. This trade moved to special container terminals and “our” pier became a holding area. One of

the famous tenants I had was the Arctic [USRC] Bear or “Bear”. She was a highly decorated ship for her famous exploits. She had been to the Antarctic with Admiral Byrd and to the Arctic, along with her special adventures in Alaska. Her captain, Mike “Roaring” Healy was the only black captain in the American Coast Guard of the time! His exploits are famous for taming Alaska and at one time, the Bear’s wardroom was the courtroom of Alaska and its final say. “Roaring” Mike hated the bootleggers who abused the native population. “Bear” was also a movie star when she played the part of “The Ghost” in Jack London’s Sea Wolf when made into a movie.

Memories from the Past

One of the many wonderful things about working at the Dartmouth Heritage Museum is hearing the personal stories and connections people have to our sites. An email we recently received from Wendy and Doug Taylor in British Columbia shared one such story. Wendy’s parents, Jay and Ola Milne, and her sister, Barbara lived in an upstairs apartment at Evergreen House from 1944 to 1946. Wendy writes, “My parents were good friends with Mrs. Creighton. There was a story that she even accompanied them on a trip to Ottawa in the “Green Hornet”, as their car was affectionately called.”



Barbara and Ola Milne in front of Evergreen House. Wendy Taylor

DHM Society Donors:

Each year Society Members give over and above the membership fees to help us run our programs at the Museum.

Hats off to their ongoing generosity!

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Like most not-for-profit organizations, the Dartmouth Heritage Museum Society is largely dependent on the generosity and support of the community. To help reach our goals we are working on a new fundraising package to involve individuals and organizations. Current opportunities include sponsors for new exhibits as well as advertising spaces in our 2018 Dartmouth Heritage Museum calendar. If you are interested in pledging your immediate support or in being notified when the package is available, please contact our Executive Director Bonnie Elliott at 902-464-2916 or director@dartmouthmuseum.ca.

EVENTS & EXHIBITS

Mark your calendars! The **AGM** is scheduled for **Wednesday, May 24th at 7 pm** at **Christ Church**. Once again Board member David Jones, will give a talk on Dartmouth history.

Upper Level — Opening March 31st – **W.R. Symons, Watercolourist**

W.R. Symons lived his whole life in Dartmouth and left behind a wonderful legacy to the DHM in the form of watercolour paintings. This exhibit will explore the life of this local artist who produced a wonderful record in painting of the lakes and streets of Dartmouth and the wider environment.

Main Level — Opening April 15th – **Rare Dartmouth Maps**

A look at the art of the cartographer from 1755 through ‘til the 1960’s through examples from our permanent collection.

Lower Level – **The Carriage Room Photography Studio**

Come and visit our recreation of a 19th century Photographic Studio to learn how the art of photography has developed through the years. Peer into the past through the lenses of select antique cameras, and witness the process of creating wet-plate photographs.

Evergreen House

26 Newcastle Street, Dartmouth

Phone 902-464-2300

www.dartmouthheritagemuseum.ns.ca

\$5.00 Admission. Members and children under 12 are free.

Tuesday - Friday 10am – 5pm & Saturday – 10am -1pm & 2pm – 5pm

Evergreen Writers’ Group

We welcome newcomers to our meetings at Evergreen House, 26 Newcastle Street in Dartmouth. We get together the first Wednesday of each month for discussion, encouragement, providing feedback to each other on works in progress, guest speakers and workshops. For more information, call 463-5612 or email evergreen_writers@yahoo.ca



Dartmouth Heritage Museum

protecting, preserving, and promoting our heritage

26 Newcastle Street
Dartmouth, NS B2Y 3M5

Phone: (902) 464-2300
Fax: (902) - 464-8210
E-mail: info@dartmouthmuseum.ca

<http://www.dartmouthheritagemuseum.ns.ca/>

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An **exhibit** on the **Harbour Explosion of 1917** is being planned for next year. If you have stories, artifacts, archival material or photographs you wish to loan, please email elliottb@bellaliant.com

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A \$10 tax receipt will be issued, you will receive our newsletter by mail, and membership will entitle you to free admission to museums (Evergreen and Quaker House) upon presentation of your card.

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Name: _____ Date: _____

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Dartmouth Heritage Museum Society, 26 Newcastle Street, Dartmouth N.S., B2Y 3M5

Check the box if you would you like to receive the E-bulletin by email?