Dear friends,

I first came to Sackville in September 1969 from the gently rolling hills of northwestern New Brunswick (Edmundston) to the flat marshlands of Sackville with its striking (it certainly was to me!) collection of numerous (at that time) and distinctive grey covered bridges and marsh barns. Up to this very day I knew very little about them – until now! Prepare yourselves to read the most interesting stories and documentation about the Tantramar’s covered bridges researched and written by Donna Sullivan. You will not only learn about where and when they were built (and sometimes moved!) but who built them as well! It’s a “must read” for anyone who has known and lived within sight of the Tantramar marshes for any length of time.

Then, dear friends, there are all those folks who volunteer their time and effort to make the Tantramar Heritage Trust a reality, especially after 20 very successful and productive years! Read Al Smith’s summary of those who have made it possible for us to write to you about the Tantramar, its people and history. And as all of us will happily declare, it has not only been interesting, but also a lot of fun! Thank you for supporting us for the last 20 years!

Peter Hicklin
Tantramar’s Covered Bridges

By Donna Sullivan

New Brunswick is renowned for its iconic covered bridges and our Tantramar region once had seven of them. Only the Wheaton Covered Bridge on the High Marsh Road remains and reached its 100th year in 2016. It is not the oldest or longest in a province noted for its number of covered bridges. Unique to the Wheaton Bridge is its location, an entrance to the Tantramar Marshes with a view that has captivated the minds and hearts of many poets, photographers and artists. New Brunswick’s many rivers, abundance of wood and skilled men contributed to its numerous covered bridges of which only 60 remain.

It was in June 1916 when Contractor W. R. Fawcett of York Co., New Brunswick, and a large crew of men started work on two bridges spanning the Tantramar River, one on the High Marsh Road, the other on the marsh road to Midgic, now called the Goose Lake Road. The covered span over the bridge on the High Marsh Road was lifted off and moved up river about a mile to be installed at what was formerly called Anderson Bridge, later Goose Lake Road covered bridge. New substructures for both bridges were built and a new span was then built on the High Marsh Road using the Howe Truss design, ensuring sturdy walls against the strong marsh winds. The new bridge was named Wheaton Bridge #2 for Thomas Wheaton who lived in the last house on the left approaching the bridge from Church Street. Thomas probably owned the land that the two bridges were built on and would be seen driving his cattle up the road and through the bridge to pasture on the other side.

No records have been found to determine when the first covered bridge over the Tantramar River at the High Marsh Road was built. The earliest bridges were logs supported by beams thrown across the river. There is no record of a bridge during the Acadian period but a 1791 map does identify “Great Bridge” at that location. At that time the roads were in terrible condition and not fit for wheeled traffic. There was no shortcut across the marsh for people living in the lower Sackville area. A person wishing to go to Amherst had to travel around by Middle Sackville across the marsh to Point de Bute and then on by way of Mt. Whatley. It was a good half-day journey. It is possible that the span removed from the High Marsh Road to the Goose Lake Road in 1916 was the first covered bridge on the High Marsh Road and would have been a substantial bridge to accommodate the stagecoaches that ran through it.

The High Marsh Road was a part of the Westmorland Great Road developed shortly after 1816 to carry mail by stagecoach passing through Sackville from Saint John to Halifax. The route was shortened by five miles in 1840 when Bridge Street was established and a covered bridge was erected over the Tantramar River a little to the east of the present railway bridge. It was the first of three
covered bridges to span the river at that location. Built by Timothy Gallagher, it lasted only 16 years when it fell into the river in the middle of the night without a trace the next morning. It was replaced by a bridge erected by Timothy’s brother Hugh Gallagher which burned in

1901. The third covered bridge, built by Whitman Brewer 1902-03, using the Howe Truss design, was torn down in the fall of 1940 to make room for a new 2-lane highway bridge. For a period of time Sackville Parish had seven covered bridges standing, five of which spanned the Tantramar River. A panoramic view of five bridges could be seen from the Forks Road. Familiar to the people of Sackville is the 51 meters (165 ft.) Wheaton High Marsh Road covered bridge. Some will possibly remember the slightly shorter Goose Lake Road covered bridge but not many remember the other smaller covered bridges. The one that crossed the Tolar Canal on the Cole’s Island Road was called the Cross Dyke Bridge. The road was used not only by farmers who owned marshland in the area but was also the road by which the people of Cole’s Island could travel to Middle and Upper Sackville. When the bridge over the Tantramar River at Bridge Street was down, the families of Cole’s Island had an alternate route to get supplies, do business and attend church. The Forks Road covered bridge gave the farmers and cattle access to the marshland across the Tantramar River. The covered bridge on Route 940, the road to Midgic just east of the White Birch Road, was also over the main channel of the Tantramar River. There was also a covered bridge over Allen’s Creek in Wood Point.

A wooden bridge left uncovered would last about ten years while a covered wooden bridge could be expected to last 80 years or more.
They were usually built with pine or spruce plank, occasionally fir and or oak was used. The lumber would be well seasoned and reasonably free of knots. The contractor would hire a team of local men to work on the bridge, starting with felling the trees and framing the lumber. The obvious reason for covered bridges was to protect the wooden substructure from the elements and the peaked roof would easily shed the snow lessening the weight on the bridge deck. Also, some horses refused to cross an open bridge when they saw the water. But with a covered bridge blocking the view of the water and daylight at the end of the bridge, there was no hesitation.

Maintenance of the bridges is presently the responsibility of the New Brunswick Department of Transportation. In the past, bridge caretakers were hired to keep the bridge clean of debris, especially hay and straw that could easily start a fire. During the winter months they shoveled snow onto the floor of the bridge so the sleds wouldn’t wear the floorboards. They also reported to the District Highway Engineer when the bridge needed repairs. Periodically the covered bridges would need a new roof and/or sideboards and abutments would have to be reinforced or replaced.

By the 1950s, the covered bridges of the Tantramar region were showing their age. Sideboards and shingles were missing and erosion, taking place around the abutments, was weakening the structures. Damage from road graders and snowplows was also evident. Skilled men and available lumber were not as plentiful as they had been when these bridges were built. Steel that could not be obtained during the war was now available.

Steel culverts became the solution. By the late 1960s all but the Wheaton and Goose Lake Road covered bridges had been replaced with steel culverts. The bridge on Route 940 was temporarily replaced with a flat-top bridge to one side while repairs were made to the road and the new culvert installed.

At Wood Point, the covered bridge over Allen’s Creek had been replaced by the mid-1960s. Those living beyond Allen’s Creek remember the detour through Dorchester to
Sackville while the steel pipe, encased in concrete to withstand the force of the Fundy Tides, was installed and the road rebuilt. The demise of the Goose Lake Road covered bridge began in the winter of 1976 when a grader, possibly with an attached snowplow, went into the side of the deteriorating bridge doing considerable damage. By the following year it was also replaced with a steel culvert. Still standing strong and very much in use today is the Wheaton Covered Bridge. The last major work on the bridge was in the early 1990s when it received new roofing and sideboards and two steel under-supports. Also, an arch indicating the maximum load height was placed at the western entrance. The form of traffic has changed over the years from horse-drawn stage coaches and horse-drawn carts stacked high with loose hay to closed-in heated tractors and rubber-tired hay wagons piled high with rolls of baled hay. Improvements have been made to the High Marsh Road over the years and although the barns are slowly disappearing, it is still uplifting in all seasons to take a leisurely drive through the Wheaton Covered Bridge and enjoy the magnificent view.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this account, especially John & Judy Carlisle for introducing me to the Tolar Canal and bridge locations and for providing many other details.

NOTES
1. Sackville Post, June 13, 1916
2. Survey map of 1791 with updates to 1808, Mount Allison Archives 7933/6/4
4. For more on these bridges go to “Bridge Out” by Donna Beal (Sullivan). The White Fence, Issue #38, Feb. 2008
5. http://archives.gnb.ca/Exhibits/CoveredBridges/?culture=en-CA
Volunteers

The Heart and Soul of the Trust

By Al Smith

Entering its 21st year the Board of the Tantramar Heritage Trust can indeed be proud of the organization’s many accomplishments.

The Trust has:

• grown its membership to be one of the largest community organizations in the Town of Sackville.
• acquired six highly significant historical buildings.
• restored, retrofitted and now operates two Museums (both opened in the first 10 years).
• established a Tantramar History and Genealogy Research Centre.
• published 30 books on local historical topics and publishes a regular, member driven, Newsletter filled with historical articles – 74 issues to date.
• maintained a comprehensive website filled with extensive historical materials on the Tantramar Region.
• acquired thousands of artifacts now organized into interpretative exhibits at the two Museums.
• accumulated a capital asset value in our buildings, artifacts and equipment of $1.17 million.
• organized and sponsored historical gatherings, plays, lectures, themed dinners, heritage day events and a wide range of programming for children.
• organized and hosted a major gathering (Yorkshire 2000) of descendents of settlers from the Yorkshire Immigration to Chignecto and which attracted 3000 attendees.

How was all this possible in just 20 years? Along with our very generous donors it was the contributions of dozens of volunteers contributing thousands of volunteer hours. Back in 1995/96 it was a small group of volunteers who had the vision and energy to create the organization and draft the required documents to establish a non-profit charitable Trust. Acquiring the old Campbell Carriage Factory buildings and artifacts in February 1998 a group of dedicated volunteers undertook the massive task of recording, sorting, mapping and storing the over 6000 artifacts prior to a major restoration.

To give some idea of the extent of volunteer participation I will single out a single project – the Boultenhouse property that the Trust purchased in July 2001. During a single fiscal year (1 April 05 to 31 March 06) on that project close to 50 volunteers logged some 2014 hours of volunteer time. During that year volunteers did everything from planning, creating exhibits, fund-raising, property maintenance and major retrofitting. On retrofitting the building to become a museum a group of 14 volunteers contributed 819 hours of work.

Looking at our annual programming, in addition to the volunteer Board of Directors, the Trust has numerous volunteers contributing. Events like our annual Heritage Day breakfast (25+ volunteers), Taste of History Fund-raising Dinner (7-10), annual clean-up days spring and fall (6-8), capital campaigns (10-20 volunteers),
then there is the Trust’s many programming committees, etc. Simply stated, the Trust is our volunteers as their collective vision and energy over the past 20+ years brings us to where we are today. To all of our exceptional volunteers, a very sincere thanks.

To recognize the exceptional contributions of volunteers to the Trust the Board initiated a Volunteer of the Year award in 2011. To date eleven of our outstanding volunteers have been recognized:

2011 – Leslie Van Patter
2012 – Joanne and Gene Goodrich
2103 – Charlie Scobie
2014 – Ray Dixon
2015 – Nick Rodger
  Emma Kean-Sanchez
2016 – Margaret Fancy
  Donna Sullivan
  Vanessa Bass
  Mike Bass
  (see photo)

We all look forward to the next twenty years!

Want to Help?
Areas Where Volunteers Are Needed

- event planning
- publicity: writing articles on the Trust’s activities, future plans or on our significant artifacts (i.e. articles for newspapers and for social media)
- photography: creating photo essays to be used in our interpretive programming and on our website.
- property maintenance: landscaping and lawn care
- data entry in both Collections and the Research Centre
- transcribing and scanning archival documents to make them accessible to the public
- committee participation: join a committee: Events, Research Centre, Discovery, Exhibits, Publications, Fund-Raising, Building maintenance
- assist with sales control and inventory for our Publications and Gift Shop items
- become trained as a volunteer guide at one or both of our museums
- create items for our gift shops

If you are interested in assisting in any of the above please contact the Trust Office at 536-2541 or email tantramarheritage@gmail.com.
Heritage Day – Saturday, February 18

Theme: Canada 150

MORNING
Tantramar Regional High School
7:30-10:30 am

21st Annual Heritage Breakfast
The day will begin with our popular Heritage Breakfast at the TRHS Cafeteria featuring eggs, bacon, sausage, beans, toast, juice, tea and coffee. Tickets are $7 for adults and $4 for children to age 10 and can be purchased in advance from Trust board members, at the office at the Boultenhouse Heritage Centre, or at the door that morning.

Heritage Displays and Demonstrations
Visit us in the foyer for membership renewals, publications sales and more, presented by the Trust with other Heritage organizations from Amherst to Dorchester.

AFTERNOON
Sackville Town Hall
31 Main Street, Sackville, NB

2 pm
Book Launch:
“Surrounded by Smart Women” by Larry Black
The Trust will launch its 31st publication, Surrounded by Smart Women, by Larry Black. This 168-page book chronicles the lives of two Maritime women, Statira McDonald and her daughter Gwendolyn McDonald Black. The author presents the very compelling story of these women who dealt with adversity while maintaining families and displaying extremely high standards as professionals. These two women were well ahead of the later feminism movements. Gwen Black (1911-2005) was well known in Sackville having mostly lived in the Town since arriving at Mount Allison University in the fall of 1928. The author details many interesting historical facts of life in the Town and linkages with Mount Allison University.

Dramatic Readings of a new play “Our Four Fathers of Confederation” by playwright Walter Jones.
This play gives a Maritime perspective on the Confederation process through the experiences of the four local Fathers of Confederation (Charles Tupper, Jonathan McCully, Edward Chandler and Robert Dickey) during that especially significant period of time in Canada. A lively and interactive dramatic presentation featuring Clare Christie, Dale Fawthrop, Dick Beswick, Walter Jones and Rod Ogden.

Light refreshments will be served.