

PICTOU COUNTY ROOTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

October 2026 Volume I Issue VIII

UPCOMING DATES

PCRS Monthly Meeting –

October 14th 2:00pm at New Glasgow Library

Obituary Writing

Workshop – Oct 14th 6pm at New Glasgow Library

Talk on Dark/Cemetery

Tourism with Susan Parker
Oct 15th 6pm New Glasgow Library

Monthly Meeting – Wed.

Nov 4th, guest speaker Bruce MacDonald 2pm

Book Launch! Sat. Nov 7th

Judge Clyde MacDonald, Still More Tragedies & Triumphs

See our website for more dates!



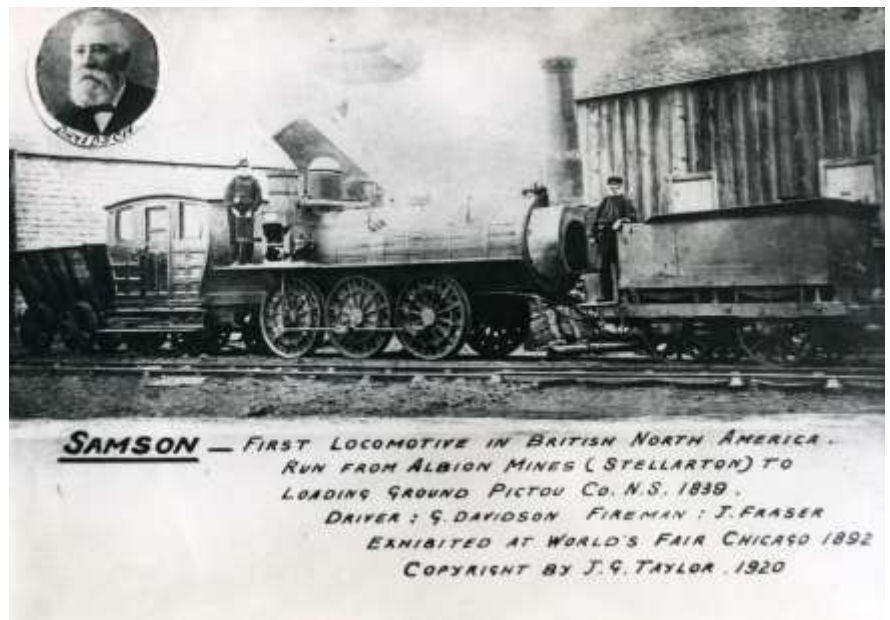
PICTOU COUNTY ROOTS UPDATE

We would like to hear from you 😊

Submit your questions, interesting finds, photos or stories to be included in future editions. Submissions can include brief write-ups of trips to genealogical places of interest!

Q. Send your questions or submissions to eacoadyDNA@yahoo.com or roots@parl.ns.ca

*There is a fine line between a packrat
and a serious family historian.*



Samson Train. MacCulloch House H.A.G.G.I.S. database. Pictou, NS.
<https://haggis.mccullochcentre.ca/documents/206> [Accessed Oct 2, 2026]

Witchcraft Once Blamed For Sinking Of Ship Favorite In Pictou Harbour

By ROLAND H. SHERWOOD

PICTOU HARBOUR has been the scene of unusual events and circumstances: the long years since the town was founded, some of them events in history, such as the arrival of the Hector in 1773, and the brig Betsy (Hope) six years earlier.

It was the meeting place for native Micmacs who came to witness the fire-balls that were seen in the fall of the year. From this harbor sailed the Royal William to make history as the first ship to cross the Atlantic using steam the whole way. And on the broad bosom of the harbor, in the days of wind ships, the vessels from ports around the world lay at anchor. And this harbor saw the American – Round – the – World fliers as they set their planes down on its placid waters.

These are the events that made history, and there was no mystery.

But the Pictou Harbor was to know mysterious happenings that to this day have had no explanation. On ships anchored in Pictou Harbor, in the long days, a substance fell from the sky a mysterious substance that resembled bread, but wasn't bread, and that's one of the unusual happenings that has had no explanation.

Mysterious Sinking

The other was the mysterious sinking of a vessel in the harbor, without apparent reason, but was attributed to witchcraft by those who came from Scotland on the vessel. The year was

1803, and in all of Pictou County there were only 5,000 people, but each year thereafter immigrants came in to settle the virgin country at the rate of 1,000 per year.

Of all of the vessels that came into the harbor, one vessel alone came with immigrants and the curse of the Scottish witch. That vessel was the "Favorite" out of Kircaldy, under command of Captain Ballentyne.

She had sailed from Ullapool without clearance and arrived in Pictou Harbor on the third day of August in 1803, after having made the Atlantic crossing in five weeks and three days, a voyage considered to be record for ship speed at that time, and one that was to stand for many years to come.

The 'Favorite' was a good ship and a staunch ship, yet when all 500 passengers had landed safely, and the vessel lightened by the removal of cargo, she immediately sank in the harbor. There seemed no apparent cause for the unusual accident, and it excited considerable speculation among the citizens of Pictou.

Those who learned the story of one passenger on the vessel, shook their heads and declared that the vessel had arrived in the nick of time, for in the minds of those early citizens there was no doubt what had caused the sinking. The vessel had been sunk by witchcraft.

Mysterious Animal

And this is the story. Shortly before the 'Favorite' sailed from Scotland, one man who was to be a passenger, discovered a small rabbit-like animal going from cow to cow taking the milk. The man tried to shoot the creature but his bullets had no effect. Knowing then that a witch was at work, he put a silver sixpence in his gun and fired. This time the creature limped away, leaving traces of blood behind. The next day the man made inquiries. Had anyone in the parish been injured?

It was found that an old lady, suspected of being a witch, was confined to bed by some unexplained injury. When this old lady discovered that this man was to be a passenger on the 'Favorite' she openly declared that with him on the vessel would never reach its destination. The other passengers, fearing her powers of witchcraft, applied to the authorities to have her confined until the vessel had reached Pictou. This was done.

When the "Favorite" was off the Newfoundland Banks, she spoke to another vessel which was homeward bound. When this vessel reached Scotland the captain told the authorities they

might release the old lady, as the "Favorite" would be safe in Pictou Harbor.

The old lady was released, and when the "Favorite" sank in Pictou Harbor without any apparent reason, those who knew of the old lady and her threat, felt that she had sent her powers across the wide ocean, taking her revenge by sinking the vessel at her mooring.

The "Favorite" was supposed to be in good condition, and she must have been a large vessel to carry 500 passengers, and why she went down in Pictou Harbor was never explained.

Today, investigation would most certainly reveal the cause of the sinking of any vessel, but in those days, 159 years ago, when superstition was part of the lives of the people, the belief in witchcraft was very real indeed. The people knew of the story of the old lady, said to be a witch. They knew of her threat, and they believed she had worked her black magic when the vessel sank in a sheltered harbor. What need to question further? The evidence was plain. Sunk by witchcraft.

There matter rested and the mystery remains to this day.

Article found in: The Evening News, February 8, 1962, Page 12. via Newspapers.com

*<https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-evening-news-witchcraft-blamed-for-s/207158342/>
[Accessed October 2, 2026]*

Contact Us:

Pictou County Roots Society

In the New Glasgow Branch of the Pictou – Antigonish Regional Library

Website: <https://www.pictoucountyroots.ca/>

Email: roots@parl.ns.ca

Genealogy & Library

Heritage Room Updates

Heritage Room:

The display for October is on the Foreign Protestants with key books to help trace the families that came in the 1750s, including many familiar names in the River John/Tatamgouche areas.

A copy of the *East European Genealogist* was added to the genealogical reference section. The issue focuses on research help for tracing Catholic Germans.

Library Events:

An **obituary writing workshop** will be held on October 14th at 6pm, with Kate Phillips-MacDonald, an apprentice at the Arimathea Funeral Co-op. Learn how to get started, what to write, and more.

A talk will given by Susan on dark/cemetery tourism the following day, October 15th, at 6:00pm. Hear about the lure of cemeteries and tragedies in tourism along with some interesting cemeteries and tombs from around the world.



Genealogy Updates:

We had a new request for information on the Stevenson family from Pictou/Lyons Brook area, along with requests for information on the Dorrington/Smithers/Gero families of New Glasgow, and the family of Gordon Kerr and Flora Hill.