

## HISTORICAL SKETCH OF BRIDGETOWN

Written by John Irvin, Esq., K.C., and Read Before the Nova Scotia Historical Society.

The collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, just issued, contain a historical sketch of the town of Bridgetown, Annapolis Co., illustrating the changes which have taken place in the names, customs and habits of the rural population of Nova Scotia during the last century. The sketch—which is an extremely interesting one—was read before the Historical Society by John Irvin, K. C., on the 2nd of January, 1914. Mr. Irvin says:

"The genesis of the town of Bridgetown, in Annapolis County, must be placed somewhere between the years 1800 and 1815. At the first date there were just seven houses within the area embraced by the site of the present town, now (1915) containing over 150 substantial dwellings, public buildings and stores, and a population of 1600 souls.

"From information gleaned from very old people some twenty odd years ago, the winters in the early years of the century were very severe. The snow came in November and continued till the last of March, so that our dwellers in the Valley, who went to sleep a century ago would experience a different climate on waking up at the present time, when we hardly have any snow till after Christmas, and your noble harbor has long been freed from its icy fetters.

"Some few remaining houses built in the early days of the century, tell us the sort of shelter which our forefathers had. Most of the houses were of one story, and low ceilinged, with very small windows. They had mostly high, pitched roofs, giving an attic room, in which were stored the large spinning wheel and weaving loom. Some were long, rambling structures, and appeared to have been added to from time to time, as the family increased in size.

"But whatever the size of the dwellings, there was one feature which characterized them all. The kitchen was generally the largest and most important room in the house. Its floor was kept as white as sand and soap, with constant scrubbing, could make it so, and on the floor would be laid platted mats, not hooked as now. They were circular in shape and displayed the good housewife's skill as one of the articles of domestic manufacture. In one corner stood the small spinning wheel for winter spinning. Among the few articles of tinware, then in general use, was the candle-mould, for making tallow candles, the only light then known in the country districts, except a lamp made of brass or other metal, containing seal oil, which was used only on rare occasions. Near the fire place was a small closet, high up out of the smaller children's reach, in which was kept a miscellaneous collection of dried herbs and other simples, in case of sickness, a bottle of Opodidock for aches and pains, some senna leaves and Epsom salts, with perhaps a package of sulphur, to be used in the Spring, with molasses, for cleansing the blood. On a shelf, over the huge fire place would be a pair or two of metal candle-sticks, with a tray and snuffers to match. The very well-to-do people had brass candlesticks of various patterns, which were kept brightly burnished by constant polishing.

"A clock was rarely to be seen; a few families had eight-day ones, which were heir-looms in the family and stood as an ornament in the hall or otherwise in the best room. Sundials were used by some, and there are a few yet preserved as relics by descendants of some of the old families. Watches were not so common as now; few except the head of the family possessed one, and it was probably handed down from father to son, usually where there was no clock in the house, the watch hung on a nail over the kitchen fire place. From thence on Sunday, it would be transferred to the pocket of the satin vest of the owner and piously carried to church.

"The kitchen fire place remains to be described. Modern people can have no idea of this huge cavern for the consumption of wood. Three or four ordinary persons might comfortably seat themselves in some of them and yet not be crowded. In some of the very old houses scattered here and there through the country they have been bricked up or removed to make way for modern requirements. At one side of the fireplace was attached an iron bar called a 'crane,' which swung in and out of the fire place. It had iron hooks attached to it upon which were suspended from pots for cooking purposes. Meats, game and poultry were not baked as at present, but roasted before the fire. The

piece or round of beef, goose or turkey would be suspended on an iron spit made to revolve slowly before the fire. Back of the roast was placed a large tin shield, concave to the fire, its polished surface reflecting the heat; while underneath was placed a large pan to catch the fast dripping gravy, from which the cook, from time to time, would baste the roast.

"In winter, just before dark, the kitchen fire would be made up to last the next twenty-four hours. First a large hardwood log from three to four feet in length and about two feet thick would be rolled in, and placed comfortably at the back of the fire-place. This was called the back log. On top of this, and resting against the back of the fireplace, was laid an ordinary size cordwood stick. In front and at some little distance from the back log, supported on andirons, was placed another ordinary sized cordwood stick. Under this would be raked the hot embers; a few dry chips thrown on them, and soon it would burn briskly, and the immense back log, catching fire, would blaze away merrily, sending forth both light and heat throughout the apartment, and from thence through the house.

"In winter the evening meal was partaken of quite early, usually at about five o'clock, a long evening being desired. A favorite dish at this meal was composed of Indian cornmeal, boiled with milk, which was called 'saupon.' Its excellence consisted not so much in its ingredients as in the manner of its preparation, which began immediately after dinner. A godly sized pot was nearly filled with sweet milk, into this was stirred meal made from home-grown corn sufficient to make a stiff batter, seasoned with salt. The pot was then hung on the crane over the fire, and allowed slowly to boil and bubble all the afternoon till tea time. It was then served with sugar and cream or milk. This with bread, made from wheat grown on the farm, carryway-seed biscuit, freshly baked, and home-made cheese, with milk as a drink for the younger members of the family, and a great dish of tea for the seniors, comprised the evening meal.

"After tea on very cold or stormy nights all the family gathered in the kitchen, the cheerful glow from the fire place furnishing light enough for the different occupations to which the evening hours were devoted. The boys did little or nothing except to dry and grease their coarse heavy boots in preparation for the next day's work in the woods, getting out timber and firewood. It was at this period that the districts of Granville and Clarence began to be cleared of the mighty trees, the beeches, the birches and the rock maples, giving place later on to cultivated fields and miles and miles of orchard which now cover the slopes of the North Mountain range. But the boys were full of the lure of the wild and the incidents of the day in the snow-laden forests, and upon these their converse would run. One had discovered the lair of a fox and was going to set a trap the next day; another had seen the track of a raccoon or he had observed a wild cat spring upon a luckless rabbit, he had not his gun with him or he would have had such a fine skin. Another, with a sly look at sister Susan, busy at her spinning wheel, would tell how Jim Bolzer, a neighbor's son, had met him on the way home with the last load of wood, and he said he intended being at the singing class next night, while Susan pretended not to hear the mention of her sweetheart's name as the blush on neck and cheek rivalled the red gold of her locks. Ah, happy Susan, pleasant be your dreams when you fall asleep thinking of the next singing class.

"But knitting was the chief occupation of the female portion of the family. They knit the most beautiful socks and stockings, mitts and gloves and underwear, of the softest yarn, spun from the wool of the flock on the farm. All the girls were taught to knit and took pride in it, an accomplishment which today has almost ceased to exist."

"There was very little reading matter in the majority of the houses, and but few books beyond the family Bible, the Book of Common Prayer in some instances, or Wesley's hymns and sermons, and maybe a copy of the Pilgrim's Progress. In later years came Belcher's Farmer's Almanac, and in many houses some carefully preserved copies of Agricola's letters. Among the generality of the people, very little was known of the outside world, or even of our own province, for that matter. Letter writing was very little practiced—postage was very expensive and was regulated by the distance. The postage on a letter from Annapolis to Halifax cost six pence;

from Halifax to Quebec, 1s. 6d.; to Montreal, 2s. 1d., and to Toronto, 2s. 9d.

"Singing classes, as they were called, were a great source of amusement and recreation for the young people. Hence nearly all could read music, and there was no difficulty in congregational singing. The class would meet weekly at the different houses in the settlement and practice singing by notation. Generally in each settlement there would be some one advanced enough in music to be able to teach singing, and classes would be formed every winter for practice, sacred music being principally used. There were no organs, so the tuning fork set the pitch of the tunes.

"Besides the singing classes there were other gatherings of the people for the amusement and pleasure of both youth and age, but their character differed according as the company viewed the question of dancing. Among the staid and sober-minded friends, the strict Baptists and Methodists, the afternoon tea was the fashion for middle-aged and elderly people. The function was very unlike the afternoon teas of modern society. Very early in the afternoon, near three o'clock, the matrons would meet at the house to which they were invited, knitting or other light work in hand, bedecked in white lace caps

and best gowns, the gown being made of silk, cobour cloth or alpaca, according to the opulence of the wearer. The afternoon would be spent in pleasant gossip until tea was served at the usual family tea hour, at which time the matrons would be joined by their husbands, and all would partake of the repast. After tea the men would quietly withdraw to the kitchen, when pipes and tobacco would be produced, and amid a halo of tobacco smoke, conversation became general. It would simply be local affairs and agricultural matters that would be discussed. Of the great world outside, little would be heard.

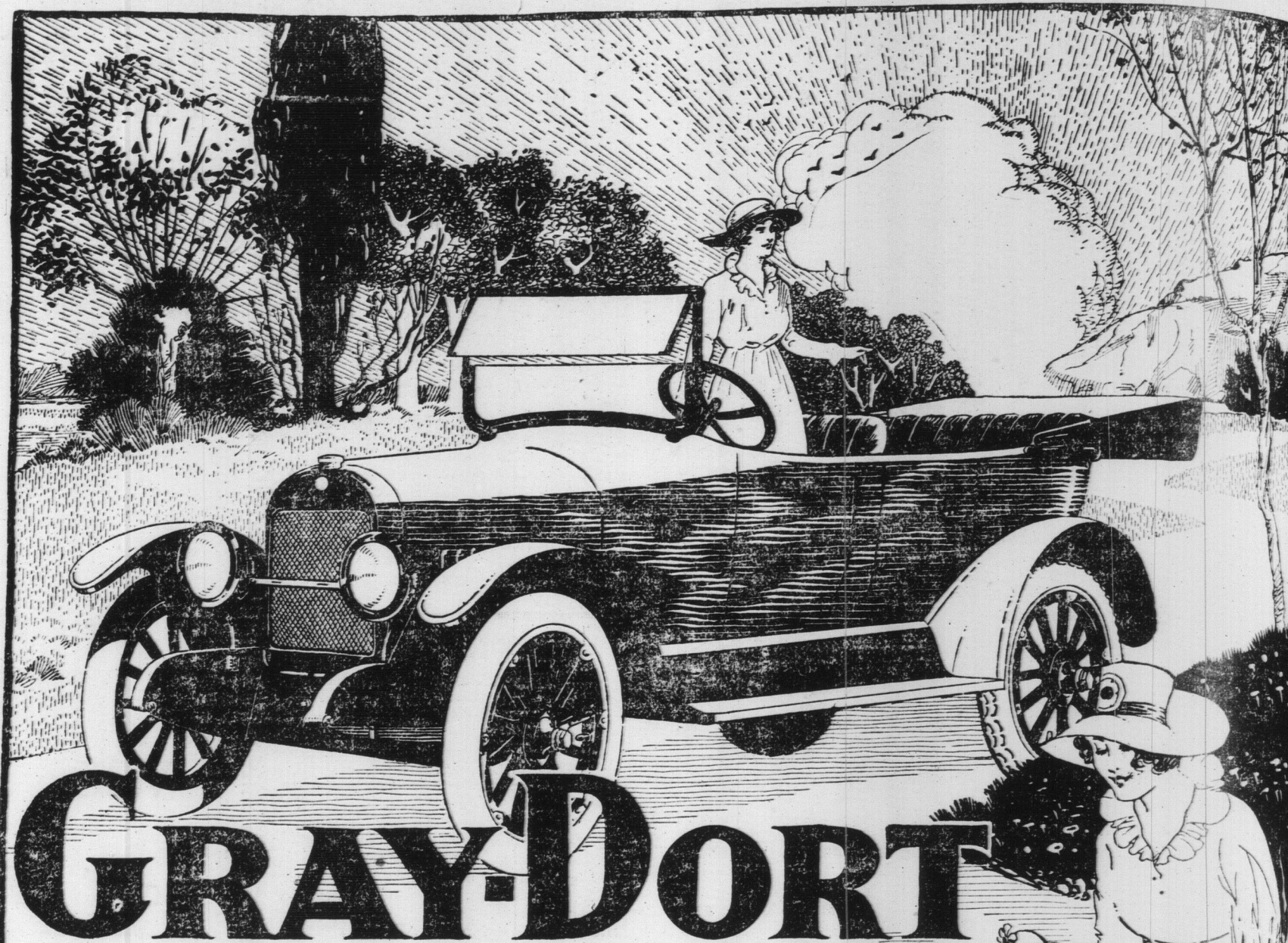
"Evening parties for the young were held after tea, at which games and forfeits were the dissipation indulged in. But among that class of people, who did not regard dancing as wicked, 'frolics,' as they were called, were frequently held, at which dancing was the chief, if not the only past time. Round dances were unknown, but indulged in with a zest that nothing seemed to tire. The 'frolic' began early and was kept up till a late hour. There was generally in the neighborhood some one who could play the violin, and whose stock of tunes consisted of 'The Flowers of Edinboro,' the 'Soldier's Joy,' 'Old Dan Tucker,' and 'Catch the Squirrel.' At midnight there would be a halt in the dancing, and supper would be par-

taken of, and oh! such a supper—the biggest turkey, the fattest goose, with roast chickens and a round of beef, flanked on each side with huge piles of mashed potatoes and gravy, followed by delicious mince and apple pies, displaying the culinary perfection of the rural hostess. And such appetites, such fun and jollity, such joking and rare country wit, followed by explosions of hearty laughter as would make the rafters in the kitchen ring again! Such ogling on the part of the country swains, such flirting on the part of the rural belles! Oh dear, I wonder if our modern balls and dances can show the like as compared with the old time frolic?

"After supper, for a half hour or so, would come the opportunity of the old folk to show their accomplishment in dancing, while the younger people looked on. The oldest of the guests would take their place on the floor in eights and fours. Matrons of three-score-and-ten would vis-a-vis with young men of twenty, and to them would seem the days of youth would seem to come back as three-score-and-ten courtesied with old time grace to octogenarian bows. And how the youths and maidens would laugh and clap their hands as the old folk, galvanized by the excitement and pleasure of the moment, would show the young folk how much better and prettier the dances were stepped

in their day than in their modern day. "But there were other sections of a different character. Death, to visit the neighborhood, and settle old farm house would be filled with self-invited guests. It was then considered a sacred duty to attend the funeral of a neighbor. There were no flowers used to relieve the gloom of the occasion, but no deeper sympathy could be shown. Nor was any regular undertaker in those days. The local carpenter would make the coffin, generally of pine wood, stained with black. Nor were there stately hearsees with swan plumes such as you find in the country today; but kind neighbors would remain on a simple hand-carried little grave yard on the farm, many old farms in the country can be seen those little cemeteries where sleep the dust of generations of pioneers. This old custom of burial on the farm has been given up and public cemeteries are now used."

"This article was written in 1915, but since that time knitting has been revived by the ladies, who are putting socks for the soldiers at the front."



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## TRAVELLERS' GUIDE

DOMINION  
ATLANTIC  
RAILWAY

TIME TABLE REVISED TO MONDAY  
JULY 1st, 1918.

	GOING WEST	
	Express Daily	Mixed Daily
Middleton	11.37 a.m.	6.00 p.m.
Lawrencetown	11.51	6.25
Paradise	11.58	6.40
Bridgetown	12.00	7.00
Tupperville	12.20	7.35
Roundhill	12.29	7.45
Annapolis Royal	12.42	8.30
Upper Clements	12.53	8.45
Clementsport	12.59	8.55
Deep Brook	1.05	9.10
Seaview	1.15	9.25
Bear River	1.18	9.35
Imbertville	1.22	9.35
Smith's Cove	1.27	9.55
Digby	1.37	9.55

	GOING EAST	
	Express Daily	Mixed Daily
Digby	12.30 p.m.	4.20 p.m.
Smith's Cove	12.45	4.40
Imbertville	12.49	4.40
Bear River	12.53	4.55
Seaview	1.05	5.10
Deep Brook	1.14	5.25
Clementsport	1.21	5.35
Upper Clements	1.33	5.50
Annapolis Royal	1.47	6.29
Roundhill	1.57	6.44
Tupperville	2.08	7.05
Bridgetown	2.19	7.40
Paradise	2.26	8.00
Lawrencetown	2.42	8.30
Middleton	2.42	8.30

R. U. PARKER,  
General Passenger Agent.  
GEO. E. GRAHAM,  
General Manager.

## H. &amp; S. W. RAILWAY

Accom.	TIME TABLE	Accom.
Wednes- days only	IN EFFECT March 10, 1918	Wednes- days only
Read down	STATIONS	Read up
11.10 a.m.	Lv. Middleton	Ar. 5.00 p.m.
11.41 a.m.	*Clarence	4.28 p.m.
12.00 p.m.	Bridgetown	4.10 p.m.
12.32 p.m.	Granville Centre	3.45 p.m.
12.49 p.m.	Granville Ferry	3.25 p.m.
13.12 p.m.	*Karsdale	3.05 p.m.
13.30 p.m.	Ar. Port Wade	Lv. 2.45 p.m.

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