

[Page 25 - Robt. Elmsley's "Early History of Baddeck"](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 42](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1986/6/1

Robt. Elmsley's "Early History of Baddeck" / / Robert Elmsley kept a diary. It is mostly short, valuable, day-to-day jottings. But he also wrote a brief narrative of the early days of Baddeck, covering a period from 1839 to about 1860. In 1937 Alex D. MacLean published Elmsley's history in the Victoria-Inverness Bulletin, along with a few paragraphs of his own adding to Elmsley's information or telling of the present state of certain landmarks. In 1985 we took Elmsley's and MacLean's works to Dr. C. L. Bethune, who offered some additional information. From a letter we received from Willard Lyman Elmsley: "I am a son of Herbert Clarke Elmsley and Pearl (Bentley) Elmsley. My father's father (my grandfather) was Robert Elmsley, who was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1823. Robert emigrated to Sydney in 1839, and to the Baddeck area in 1840. In 1856 he married Mary A. Plant of North Sydney. My grandfather was for many years a merchant in Baddeck and was the first postmaster in the newly erected Post Office, this building now being used as a library. Robert Elmsley's appointment as a Postmaster was .May 10th, 1858." We offer here the Elmsley history, followed by Alex D. MacLean's commentary, with Dr. Bethune's additional remarks inserted in both texts. Numbers in the margins correspond to numbers on the map on page 28. Robert Elmsley: (1) (2) (3) (4) In September 1839, Mr. James Anderson of Sydney, merchant, felt a desire to procure some birch timber for the Scotch market, and having a small shallop idle, he loaded her with goods, and sent her to Baddeck. No place on the mainland was cleared or available, Mr. Kidston then residing on Mutton Island (so named on the map), rented one-half of his dwelling, and a store was fitted up and opened in a few days. There being thick woods on the mainland from Grave Yard Point to Hector MacLean's log cabin east of Knox Church, and only a cow path to Big Baddeck from Mr. Hart's wharf past the site of the Chapel, it was imperative to transact all business by water with boats and canoes, and such came from all quarters, including that from Big Baddeck, till roads were opened--Whycocomagh, Grand Narrows, and Shenacadie coming also, including Boularderie. The cow path customers waved a napkin opposite the store and a wooden canoe would ferry them to and fro gratis. (Dr. Bethune, do you know about how Kidston came here? "Duffus and his wife lived on the island; they had a store there. And he went to Halifax for medical treatment and died there. The executor of his estate sent a man named Kidston down to settle the estate. And the way he settled it was to marry the widow, who was 20 years his senior. And the Duffuses had a son, and of course he died at a very early age--and there was yak-yak that they had done away with him. ("The Kidstons had a daughter. Belle. I suppose her name was Isabelle. And the old woman--Mrs. Duffus and then she was Mrs. Kidston • invited my grandmother down for supper. And she went down. And Belle was quite the lady. After they had supper. Belle said to her mother to take Mrs. Jones into the parlour and she'd look after the dishes. So this happened. But they didn't hear any dishes being washed or anything, so Mrs. Kidston and my grandmother went out. Dishes were still on the table. Went in the kitchen, there was no Belle there. Went upstairs, and a



ladder--she had eloped with a fellow by the name of Irish, William Irish. And he wasn't considered good enough for Belle. But the old girl had hysterics, and started, 'I might have known something was going to happen--Belle washed her stockings today.' So when we were kids, any? thing special, we'd always say, well, 'Belle had better wash her stockings 1''") There were many Indians, and they were industrious. They camped on Grave Yard Point, on point of Mut? ton Island, and at head of Steamboat Wharf, just where Mother Gaelic's house stands now--it was a fine sheltered spot--trees all round with lots of rabbits, partridges, foxes, squirrels, crows, and birds, besides lots of eels and fish. Their camp? ing ground was a perfect beehive--they caught and (5) (25)