

Ninety Years of Change – Irene Cooke

By Linda Harrington
Irene Cooke turned 90 on July 22nd. A celebration was held in her honor July 18 at the Bass River Community Hall.

Irene spent most of her life in Bass River and she has many fond memories of these years.

The daughter of Arnie and Verna Rutherford, Irene was born on Edgewood Road in Bass River. She took her schooling in Bass River through grade 12. "I was an unhealthy teen and it took me four years to get from grade 10 to 12," she says, "but I made it and then it was off to Normal College in Truro, where I took my training to be a teacher."

Irene taught locally in Halfway River, Cumberland County, Portapique and Montrose. She loved teaching and has especially fond memories of three years she spent in Halifax at the School for the Deaf where she says her students had such a "love for life". "The deaf were not well understood at that time and we were made to teach them verbally, without the use of sign language. It was a lot of work, making up my own teaching aids such as flash cards, but it was great to see what you had accomplished each year," says Irene.

Irene was married to Lloyd Cooke and moved back to Bass River in 1950. She taught in Montrose, in a one room school, covering whatever grades were needed by students from grades 1 through 8.

She took some years off from teaching full time to raise her three children Helen (Lowe), Merna (Fisher) and Donald. She worked as a substitute teacher but did not enjoy that as much as teaching her own class.

Irene spent the years after teaching looking after her husband who was disabled for nine years and then her father who needed full time care. It was after all these years of caring for her family's needs that Irene says she finally "retired" to her apartment in Bass River.

"I was free to do as I wanted and I loved to take bus trips," she says. "One I especially enjoyed was a thirty day trip across Canada in 1989".

Irene says that she has seen a lot of changes in her ninety years. "It was a different way of



Irene Cooke looks over some of the cards she received in the days leading up to her 90th Birthday on July 22nd. (Harrington Photo)

life before there were many cars and we drove horse and buggy or walked places. There was never a time when you didn't know every single person in the village."

Irene feels that there was a lot more participation from those that lived in the community. "Getting to Truro was a big deal, so we had to do more locally."

She remembers most people had big families to help with the work and they were all busy growing their own gardens, raising hens for eggs, cattle for meat and milk and growing crops in the fields.

"Families all went to church, not just the mother, and kids all went to Sunday School...because they had to," she says. "It has become more difficult for families to all go to Church on Sunday when things like sports are taking the children away for games on Sunday mornings."

Irene feels it is sad to not see children out to Sunday School any more but she says there are not as many children in the communities either. "I remember that within a mile and quarter at Edgewood Road there were 40 some children around the age of myself and my brother. People are having smaller families now," she says.

Irene remembers that at the school in Little Bass River there were 53 children in one room with one teacher. In 1932, a room was added to the Bass River School and this allowed grades 10, 11 and 12 from outlying schools to go there.

The smaller schools offered up to grade 11 but there may not have been any students in the higher grades, as many dropped out to go to work.

Irene remembers when paving of the road in Bass River took place in 1935 and 36. She says it was prepared one year and then paved the next. Up until then it had been mud roads and the new pavement made a big difference in travelling.

"The money to build the roads was paid by the government to an overseer and he then hired local teams to do the work until the money ran out. I remember the man asking for teams from Edgewood to show up to help out. So many teams showed up that he ran out of money by 10AM. The men decided that since they had all their teams there to work they would keep on working the rest of the day for free."

This was the kind of hard work everyone was used to, says Irene. People grew their own food in gardens but then it also had to be bottled, dried, or salted. It could not simply be frozen as it is today.

She often saw her father would work until 5 at the Dominion Chair, then walk home, eat supper and then had off to the barn where she would hear him singing as he did his chores for the night.

"But there was no working on Sunday. That was the day you were free to entertain yourself," says Irene.

Money was tight but Irene says that you always found a way. She would pick marsh greens to earn a dollar and then find six other girls to share a cabin at Birch Hill Beach. They could camp for the week for only a dollar each and food from their home pantries.

"I don't think we worried about things as much as the young people do today," she says. "They seem to have more worries about getting along with each other and having fancy hair and clothes. We always had enough clothes and no one had any better."

Irene is very pleased with how she sees the elderly being cared for these days. She feels we are very lucky to have access to

Canada Pension and Old Age Security, even though some people feel it is not enough. "It was unbelievably sad to see people who had to go to what they called poor farms. These people who had no families to help them out or perhaps they didn't want to impose on their younger families. It was sad to see these people have to leave the communities they grew up in, just because they had no money."

Irene gives a chuckle when she thinks about what her family would do for entertainment. "We went picking dulse or checking the fish weirs," she says. "Dad probably enjoyed it the most and he always told the story about how one time everyone else came back by car but he brought the horse and wagon all the way from Lower Economy. It poured rain all the way home and he got soaking wet."

Irene says it is not hardship, if you don't look at it as hardship. Everyone was in the same boat. "Poor was not something we knew about."

She recalls the people of Cape Breton having an especially difficult year and the people of Bass River packing up vegetables, mittens and other supplies to send to them. "There was no feeling of being poor, so we weren't poor."

These days Irene says she is happy to have her health. She had a second knee replacement in December and has no intention of slowing down.

RCMP Veterans assist Hospice



Gary Bishop and Charles Parlee of the RCMP Veterans Association presents Cathrine Yuill, Executive Director of the Hospice Society with a cheque for \$4340.00 (Submitted Photo).

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life threatening illness. Support encompasses the whole family and continues on grief support after the death of their loved one. The support from the RCMP Veteran's Association will give

a major boost to programs including Food From the Heart, a program that provides Sobeys' grocery vouchers to individuals who are terminally ill and experiencing financial difficulties.

For information, contact: Cathrine Yuill, 893-3265.

She enjoys helping out at the Bass River Heritage Museum whenever they need her and laughs as she calls herself "just another one of the antiques".

Irene appreciates the support of her family and feels very fortunate to be able to do whatever

she enjoys.

She shares the secret, her father once told her, about how he lived to be 92. "Just by the grace of God," he said.

Irene agrees with this reasoning, "There is no other reason than just my own good luck!"

MacCaull Villa Notes

By Hazel Hill

Audrey Rector, who has been visiting her daughter, Colleen Rector, Dartmouth has returned home. Allen Roulston is a patient in Colchester Regional Hospital.

Visitors with Shirley Ryan this month were her sister-in-law, Naomi Ellis for Florida and Etta Williams from Windsor, NS. Martha Hill, Winnipeg, is spending her vacation with me and other family members.

Several from here enjoyed the delicious salmon & strawberry shortcake from St James United Church on July 8th.

In reporting birthdays for July, sorry, I forgot Phyllis Rushton. So happy belated birthday, Phyllis.

Bud & Linda visited Bernice and took her out to supper at the Double C Restaurant.

Sea-Mail Answer Received

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then by rail and taxi to Joy's home. "So although it was not the sea that brought your bottle, it has travelled a very long way to a different country," says Bill.

Mr. Batt's letter is very informative and Michaela's mother Gena says that when the family started reading the note they were all very touched. "We were sad to learn that he had recently lost

his wife and how much he misses her," says Gena.

Bill Batt asks Michaela to show the letter to her parents and/or her teacher. She was very excited to be able to share the note with her classmates.

Michaela plans on looking up Sunderland on Google-earth and then sending him back a note, in which she will include a copy of The Shoreline Journal containing this story.



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