

# Camp Debert: The Impact of Building a Base

By Stacey Culgin

The opening of an Exhibit at the Colchester Historeum on October 22, 2016 at the Colchester Historeum depicts the impact of building the Army base on the village of Debert. This small quite farming community was transformed into a modern military training center beginning in 1939.

Residents later spoke of the changes they endured: 5000 soldiers arriving during one night; the constant noise of airplane's on training missions over the mountain and out over the Bay of Fundy; soldiers marching through the village, across the mountain, out to Masstown, Belmont, etc at all hours of the day and night, so many it

proved difficult to cross the road at times; there was constant gun fire and army vehicles on the move.

A number of longtime residents were forced to sacrifice their home, lands and farms to make way for the building of the airport and base. Will Chisolm lost his farm; as did George Wood, Ed Rector, Luther Jonah and the widow McDorman, to name just a few.

I spoke with Ross Slack, his parents lost their home and small farm once located along the Plains Road, near the railway tracks...I asked Mr. Slack "What was the general feeling among the villagers who were having their lands expropriated?"

He replied, "although we

were all sad to be losing our old homes we were also excited about all the commotion in the area, all the traffic and all the changes happening around us. We were paid a fair sum for the farm and remember, it was the end of the dirty thirties and neither my father, nor many others, had ever seen that kind of money before. It was enough for them to build a brand new home down further in the village. They also felt they were doing it for the war effort and it was their duty to do so. Some felt they were not justly paid but father didn't feel that way."

The building of the base had a huge impact on the local economy. Prior to the war Debert had a population of around 500 supported mostly by mixed farming and lumbering. During the 1930's it had a post office, a railway station, two churches, a two room school house, a Gospel hall, a barber shop, a community hall, the former Fulmore Hotel, McCulloch's Brothers Lumber mill, a blacksmith shop and three stores - Davidson's, Barnhill's and Perley Reid's.

By the early 1940's the

railway station was expanded 4-5 times its original size to accommodate the incoming troops, military vehicles and supplies. Astute businessmen descended on the village from all over the Maritimes. They built tea rooms, ten restaurants' (lunch counters); the Colchester Inn; meat markets; grocery stores; a bank; telegraph and telephone offices; barber shops, a tattoo parlor, pool halls and tailor shops to cater to the soldiers, the workers and their families.

Many villagers opened up their homes and took in boarders. They transformed chicken coops, fox houses, old sheds, built small cottages...anything they could rent out to the newly arrived civilian and military personal and make a few dollars for themselves.

It is hard now to imagine that the finished military base could accommodate up to 20,000 personal and had a 700 bed brand new hospital.

The exhibit at the Historium showcases old photos of this hectic and prosperous time for the Village of Debert. It will be open until the Spring of 2017...come and have a look!

The majority of the information used in this exhibit has been loaned from the Debert Military Museum. If you are interested in the history of Camp Debert you must visit this wonderful museum in Debert; closed for the winter but will reopen in May of next spring. Special thanks to Irene Gratto for all her help with this exhibit.



In the foreground is the DND hospital which was located where Ritchie Bros is now located.



Soldier's Marching.

## Masstown Community News

By Christine Urquhart

Merry Christmas to you and your family! I realize that some folks are afraid to say "Merry Christmas" these days because they might offend unbelievers. Personally, I would not be offended by being wished "Happy Hanukah" or "Merry Solstice Day" or whatever. Therefore, I wish each and every one of you a Very Merry Christmas and a New Year full of blessings!

As our old year comes to a close, let us remember all the wonderful things that happened in 2016 and be glad. Even if we must remember sadness, let us be glad that we can feel sad. Even if we must remember sorrow, let us be glad that we know the difference between sorrow and happiness. Let us always try to have an attitude of gratitude!

Breakfast With Santa, which was held on Saturday November 26th, was very successful! Thanks to "Santa" Harry Bentham, to Joy Reid for taking all the photos with Santa, those hard working cooks in the kitchen - Rhona Gomez-Murray, Paula Digout and Bev Covey; to those ladies who served the breakfast, those who looked after the tables and each of you who came out so early to enjoy this fun event!

Speaking of fun events, we had a great turn out for our Christmas Tree Lighting at the Masstown Community Park! We had a great bon fire, lots of hot chocolate, marshmallows to roast and our voices were raised in singing a bunch of Christmas carols! Thanks to the MacDonald's for their power to keep the tree lit and to Diane Robinson and Folly Mountain Trees & Wreaths for the tree. It will remain lit for a few hours each evening until after Christmas.

Masstown UCW will meet on Thursday January 8th, 7pm, at the home of Gail Hines. All ladies of our community wel-

come! At this meeting we will be setting up our social committees and our new executive and planning future events. Lunch to follow the meeting!

The "Get Ready For Christmas" Basket, which was actually a large tote, was won by Charlene Downs of Bedford. Charlene was very excited when she got the call to tell her she had won and rather than have one of the Masstown Community Association members bring the basket to her she drove up on Sunday and picked it up herself. I want to thank each and every one who bought tickets on this basket; the funds raised will go towards paying for the insur-

ance on our Masstown Community Park, paying for the mowing and some other projects which are in the works!

Travelling this month were Darrell and Margaret Currie who spent an enjoyable time in Cuba.

Condolences go out this month to: Susan Russell and her family on the death of her mother, Ruth Hanham; Heather Milligan and family on the death of her aunt, Ethel Gertrude Steeves; and Bernie Totten and family on the death of his wife, Judy Totten.

May you have a blessed Christmas with many warm memories made which you will take with you into the New Year. Merry Christmas and a Very Happy New Year from Ron and myself!

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### Maximum of \$75,000 per Internet Project

Government is providing funding for small-scale projects that will bring better high-speed Internet service to more rural areas of Nova Scotia. Municipalities and community groups in all areas of the province are now able to apply for funding to support plans that will improve Internet service over the coming months.

A total of up to \$500,000 is available, with a maximum contribution of \$75,000 per project. Applications will be accepted until Dec. 31, and proposals will be reviewed as they are received.

Government continues to review 11 service-provider proposals that would provide additional immediate improvements to Internet service.

These efforts will be coordinated and aligned with the work of the recently announced Internet strategy team. By spring 2017, they will develop a long-term strategy that will deliver the maximum benefit for Nova Scotians.

To apply, please go to <http://novascotia.ca/business/internet/>

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## Happy Holidays and all the best in 2017!

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