

250 years in Chester Basin

The Chester Basin 250th Anniversary Society invites you to take part in the grand opening of their summer exhibits.

The event takes place June 30 from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Fellowship Hall, Aeon Baptist Church in Chester Basin.

The grand opening will be accompanied by local musicians, local dignitaries, partnered organizations and the Chester Basin 250th Anniversary Society.

All summer long the society will be exhibiting extensive historical materials and displays at the hall.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, in 1760, Chester Basin, in what is now Lunenburg County, began as a settlement with the arrival of New Englanders (1760-1783), and grew with the arrival of disbanded British soldiers (1804-1816), and later (1820s-1860s), families from the foreign Protestants group who initially came to Lunenburg in 1753.

Prior to its settlement,

groups of Mi'kmaq, a tribe of the Wabenaki confederacy living mainly along the mid-eastern coast of the Atlantic Ocean, used the area as a summer fishing location.

The basin became an important centre for shipbuilding and the transporting of goods and as a fishing port. Later, gold mining, barrel making and the growing and exporting of Christmas trees joined the important industries within Chester Basin.

Chester Basin also served as a connecting point to places along the coast and to the hinterland of the province, especially the settlements of New Ross (initially Sherbrooke), Dalhousie and Wellington.

The following selected historical pieces are a condensed history of some of the key industries in Chester Basin since its inception. For more in-depth information about them, visit the summer exhibits at the fellowship hall, Aeon Baptist Church.

The Lacey Gold Mine

Industry in Nova Scotia began here

It may not be common knowledge anymore, it may be just a memory, but Nova Scotia is widely considered to be the birthplace of gold mining in Canada.

And the former Lacey mine is part of a rich tradition of mining that once saw this province as the leading producer of the precious metal.

The discovery of gold was an accident of sorts.

Daniel Dimock stumbled upon the resource while salmon fishing the aptly named Gold River in 1861.

The news that gold had been found spread quickly and soon prospectors from all across North America flocked to the region in hopes of finding their fortune.

With the gold rush came government regulation and growth. Roads were built along the river, mining machinery became a fixture and the village flourished.

For many years after prospecting remained the prevalent way of searching for gold.

The Lacey mine was first staked by a local man, Irving Croft, under the management of John Lacey of Hebb's Cross. The owner was Chester Basin's R.C. Stewart, who built a crushing mine that went into production in the early 1900s.

It was around this time that several mills were built across the province, with the Lacey mine being the biggest operation.

Around 1905 the price of gold dropped so low it was difficult for mine owners to make a living. Mine was gradually shut down and most miners were laid off. Some went to Ontario while others went to New Ross to work in the new manganese mine there.

Prior to this 3,000 tons of crushed ore from the mine produced 3,000 ounces of gold.

The Lacey mine wouldn't reopen until following the First World War.

It wasn't until the late 1920s when mining was again a viable local option, this time, thanks to Newton Meyer from Quebec.

Mr. Meyer investigated the possibility of reopening some of the mine in the region. The Lacey mine was judged to be the best option.

A building was constructed and Lockland Croft was hired as operation manager. The Gold River Gold Mining Syndicate was born. The second incarnation of the mine included the Lacey shaft, a 105-foot-deep shaft with a 30-foot southward tunnel at the bottom.

The "Swamp Angel Fissure," as it came to be known, was deemed a valuable ore body. But, it was never developed.

After four years, thanks in part to the Great Depression, the mine was shut down again.

This effectively was the end of the Lacey mine as a gold mine and a commercial enterprise. The mine was eventually taken over by the provincial government in 1936-37.

Following the takeover the Mine Apprentice Project of Chester Basin was born. The project was reopened as a training facility as there was a nation-



The Lacey Gold Mine circa 1936.

wide shortage of competent miners.

The project was received with open arms by the community. More than 400 men were brought to the village from all over the province to train.

During this time the mine was, in effect, a working gold mine. More than 1,200 ounces of gold were produced from 16,700 tonnes of ore.

War once again took its toll on the Lacey mine, effectively closing it for good in September of 1939.



The Lacey Gold Mine, shown here in an undated photo, was at one time arguably the most lucrative such mine in the province.

The various times the mine was active provided an economic boom to the community, without doubt.

But, it also created a social boom of sorts. The life-style of the community became more open. Seasonal and annual activities such as dances, softball, boxing and hockey games became the norm. An annual field day was held.

The presence of the mine continued to linger for some years afterward, as some of the men married local women and become part of the community.

Today the mine, grown over by nature, exists only in stories, photos and memories.

Contributing sources: "225 years in Chester Basin," "Chester Basin Memories."

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From shipbuilding to barrel making

Although not as well-known as some of its neighbours, Chester Basin was once home to a proud shipbuilding industry.

The first documented shipyard operating in the basin was around 1819 on the land of David Crandall. Mr. Crandall was granted water rights and land around this time and historical maps indicate the existence of a shipyard.

Often, land was officially granted years after requested, so it is conceivable shipyards were in operation even before that time.

Eventually, the property once operated by Mr. Crandall landed in the hands of Chester Basin's most recognizable shipbuilders and traders, the Hennigars and the Oxners.

By 1864 the property became known as Anderson and (Hiram) Hennigar's. Seven years later, in 1871, Levi Oxner took over the property.

Under whatever name, the shipyards were a strong part of the business community for more than 100 years. Over the years hundreds of men were employed in one fashion or another to build the wooden vessels.

Many three- and four-masted ships, including the Arthur H. Zwicker, were built and launched in Chester Basin over the years.

But, it wasn't meant to last.

Because shipbuilding went into decline

from 1902 to 1914, the Oxner shipyard was forced to close. However, following the outbreak of the First World War, the demand for wooden ships of all kinds soon heavily outweighed supply.

With the help of several Lunenburg businessmen the shipyard reopened, this time as Chester Basin Shipbuilders Ltd., owned and operated by Howard Oxner (son of Levi) and Robin Hennigar (son of Hiram).

The new company went into the production of fishing schooners and trading vessels.

Although, it wasn't meant to be.

Just three years later, in 1917, the fishing schooner W.C. Kennedy was the last commercial fishing boat launched from Chester Basin, thus ending more than 100 years of tradition.

The decline of wooden shipbuilding can directly be linked to the innovation of steel in shipbuilding.

The death of one tradition, however, led to the birth of another.

Barrels.

They were an integral part of daily life and many families initially produced their own barrels. Gradually, the barrel-making business became more consolidated, especially when wooden shipbuilding declined.

One company in Chester Basin converted its shipbuilding industry to barrel making and a second barrel plant was

set up.

The latter, the Moyle I. Oxner Barrel Manufacturers, still has its original barrel-making equipment and can and does produce barrels today.

In the five years between 1974 and 1978, almost 87,000 full-size barrels were produced at this "factory," as well as 1,000 half barrels, 1,065 clam barrels and 33 ornamental barrels. The growing popularity and production of plastic barrels in the later 1970s brought an end to the major production of water-tight wooden barrels.

At one point, Chester Basin was widely recognized as the barrel capital of Canada. Today, there is a new and growing market for wooden barrels, especially for the storage of and the transporting of products such as wine, rum and coffee.

There is also a growing market for decorative and utilitarian barrels for garden purposes, display use, furniture and the like. Both types of barrels, the decorative and utilitarian, are produced in Chester Basin.

Barrels are also produced at Ross Farm



The four-master vessel Arthur H. Zwicker is under construction in this 1918 photo. The boat was captained by Walter Creaser.

in New Ross and can be purchased at the Peddler's Shop.

The image of the barrel has since become a trademark of Chester Basin.

Iron barrel shapes are found on the lampposts and are used for hanging flowers (in summer) and wreaths (in winter). The Basin Gardeners have incorporated the barrel in their logo; a special song has been written about the barrel factory and the making of barrels.

A wagonload of barrels with ox team and teamster was also used on Chester Basin's postal cancellation stamp to help celebrate Chester Basin's 250th anniversary.

Contributing sources: "225 years in Chester Basin," "History of Chester Basin."

The New Ross Freighters

Recreating the community's link to the world

Today, the trip from Chester Basin to New Ross is complete in just a matter of minutes.

With modern methods of transportation you can travel the world in mere hours.

But not so long ago, even the shortest of trips took days to complete.

A round trip from Chester Basin to New Ross, perhaps the most important land link for both communities, took an average of three days.

The trips were made by the locally renowned New Ross Freighters, also known as the Teamsters.

Chester Basin was a key entry point from the sea inland to New Ross and to other points along the way.

Using teams of oxen, the New Ross Freighters travelled regularly between the two communities (a 25 kilometre, 15-mile one-way trip) transporting barrels, lumber, ships' timbers, cordwood, farm products (butter, eggs, vegetables, apples), knitted items (socks and mittens) and the like to Chester Basin.

These items were either used locally or were shipped out on the many coasters (small sailing vessels which travelled to ports along the coast). In return, the New Ross Freighters transported goods inland, such as furniture, stoves, books, farming tools and many other items.

Without the New Ross Freighters, both New Ross and Chester Basin, not to mention other Nova Scotia communities, would have had to do without a lot of the things we take for granted today.

As mentioned before, a round trip took about three days, with overnight stops at one of the four way stations (as the inns were known) along the route.

One of those stations, in Chester Grant, now known as Morrison House, was used as a way station in the 1880s.

The charge for a room and breakfast, which included housing the animals (usually oxen, but sometimes horses) was 10 cents per night.

In an effort to make the trip easier, the route was divided into sections. Those sections were named. They were given such labels as Russell's Burnt Land, Watering Brook Hill at Water Lake, Oak Hill Lily Pond and Hand Wash Brook, Cross, Pratts or Mill Hill, Elliot's Flat and Johnson's Cut.

As part of Chester Basin's 250th celebrations, the New Ross District Museum Society and the Chester Basin 250th An-

niversary Society are planning a re-enactment of the New Ross Freighters.

Today's road between Chester Basin and New Ross is part of a major transportation link between the South Shore, western Nova Scotia, the Annapolis Valley and the Bay of Fundy.

The re-enactment will be a two-day journey from August 14 to 15 and will involve six to eight teams of oxen. "Teamsters" have been working with their oxen to prepare them for the walk along the now-paved route.

Because times have changed, the oxen will be fitted with special shoes for the trip.

The teams will start together, one behind the other, with two of the teams

pulling wagons of produce. After some distance, a relay process will be used to give the two teams pulling a break and to allow the others to take their place.

This process will continue until the freighters reach Chester Basin and will include an overnight rest.

The teams will travel along Highway

12 to Cornhill and proceed down to Highway 3, past the Ultramar station and into Oxner's Field behind the station.

There will be a number of photo stops along the way, giving spectators an opportunity to experience, at least in part, a method of travelling and transporting goods long extinct.

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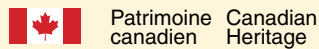
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Chester Basin 250th Anniversary Society

www.chesterbasin250.ca

Check website for updates

Exhibits/Displays/Special Events

June 30 – 2-4:30pm – Official opening of exhibits/displays. Snapshots of history and heritage of Chester Basin and area that people will see and be a part of when they visit the hall over the summer months.

Public Hours: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, 10am-4:30pm; Friday, 10am-8pm; Sunday, 2-4:30pm (closed to public on Monday and Tuesday)

“Permanent” Group

The exhibits/displays have been organized mainly according to themes. Some of these will be available all summer, either in whole or in part. This permanent group includes: People and Industry, World Events and Recreation.

“Changing” Groups

Every two weeks, exhibits/displays, arranged according to themes, will change. Occasionally there will be exhibits outside of the themes.

Group A – July 7-11; July 14-18

Themes: See “Permanent” Group; Other: Community Histories

Group B – July 21-25; July 28-August 1

Themes: Social, Arts, Environmental, parts of People and Industry

* Special event: July 24, 10am-4pm – Rug and Quilt Display in the church

Group C – August 4-8

Theme: part of Industry

August 9-13 – Vacation Bible School – closed to public, except for:

* Special event: 2 pm, August 9 – Talk by Robert MacNeil in the church; refreshments afterward in the hall

August 14-15: Continuation of earlier displays

* Two-day re-enactment of New Ross Freighters – New Ross to Chester Basin

Group D - August 18-22; August 25-29

Themes: part of People and World Events, Government, Transportation

Closing: August 31, 2-4:30pm

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

JUNE

- * Every Friday 5:30-7pm – TGIF Supper, Chester Basin Legion
- 19thBreakfast, Western Shore Fire Dept.
- 23rd11am-4pm – Genealogy Day, Fellowship Hall, Aenon Baptist Church
- 26th7:30-10:30am – Newfie Breakfast, Chester Basin Legion
- 30th2-4:30pm – Official opening of Summer Exhibits, Fellowship Hall

JULY

- * 250th Anniversary Summer exhibits/displays will be open to the public, beginning July 7th: 10am-4:30pm Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday; 10am-8pm Friday; 2-4:30pm Sunday
- * 11am-2 pm, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, the Circle Pond Farm, a working heritage farm of mostly poultry, will be open for tours. Check our website or at the Fellowship Hall, Aenon Baptist Church, for appointment and directions
- * Every Friday 5:30-7pm - TGIF Supper, Chester Basin Legion
- 1st.....Canada Day: Chester Basin Legion - 11am Flag Raising; Garden Party; BBQ
- 1st.....Chicken BBQ, Western Shore & Area Improvement Association
- 3rd 7:30-10:30am – Country Breakfast, Chester Basin Fire Hall
- 11th..... 11am-3pm – Strawberry Tea, [Basin Gardeners] Check website and posters for details
- 24th 7:30-10:30am – Newfie Breakfast, Chester Basin Legion
- 24th 10am-4pm – Rug & Quilt Display, Aenon Baptist Church

AUGUST

- * 250th Anniversary Summer exhibits/displays will be open to the public: 10am-4:30pm Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday; 10am-8pm Friday; 2-4:30pm Sunday
- * From 11am-2pm, on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, the Circle Pond Farm, a working heritage farm of mostly poultry, will be open for tours. Check our website or at the Fellowship Hall, Aenon Baptist Church, for appointment and directions
- * Three family reunions will be held. These are private
- * Every Friday 5:30-7pm - TGIF Supper, Chester Basin Legion
- 7th7:30-10:30am – Country Breakfast, Chester Basin Fire Hall
- 7thStorytelling by Sheree Fitch. St. John’s Anglican Church
Herring Chokers Supper, St John’s Anglican Church
- 8thHeritage Sunday, Aenon Baptist Church
- 9th2pm – Talk by Robert MacNeil, Aenon Baptist Church
- 14-15th...Re-enactment of the New Ross Freighters. Teams of oxen traveling from New Ross to Chester Basin over two days. Check the website, posters, newspapers for details.
- 28th7:30-10:30am – Newfie Breakfast, Chester Basin Legion
- 31st.....2-4:30pm – Official closing of 250th Anniversary Summer exhibits/displays at the Fellowship Hall, Aenon Baptist Church

SEPTEMBER

- * Every Friday 5:30-7pm – TGIF Supper, Chester Basin Legion
- 4th7:30-10:30am – Country Breakfast, Chester Basin Fire Hall
- 11-12th...Floral Arts Autumn Anniversary, Fellowship Hall, Aenon Baptist Church
- 18thBreakfast, Western Shore Fire Dept.
- 18thChowder Supper, Chester Basin Legion
- 25th7:30-10:30am – Newfie Breakfast, Chester Basin Legion

OCTOBER

- 2nd.....7:30-10:30am – Country Breakfast, Chester Basin Fire Hall
- 16th7pm – Lunenburg County Fiddlers, Chester Basin Legion
- 20th2-4pm – “Tea & Tales - 6”, Chester Basin Legion
- 23rd7:30-10:30am – Newfie Breakfast, Chester Basin Legion
Kohl Canon Supper, St. John’s Anglican Church

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

- * Every Friday 5:30-7pm – TGIF Supper, Chester Basin Legion
- 6th7:30-10:30am – Country Breakfast, Chester Basin Fire Hall
- 7th10am – Gold Mines Tour (alternate date 14th)
- 11th.....10:45am – Gathering at cenotaph for service, Chester Basin Legion
Lunch following service
Musical entertainment
Military display
- 20th7:30-10:30am – Newfie Breakfast, Chester Basin Legion
- 20thBreakfast, Western Shore
- Last week – Holiday Trees. See website and posters for details

DECEMBER

- 3-5thNew Ross District Christmas Festival. Check brochures, Ross Farm Museum, newspapers for details
- 4th7:30-10:30am – Country Breakfast, Chester Basin Fire Hall
- 18th7:30-10:30am – Newfie Breakfast, Chester Basin Legion
- 31st.....Closing event for the 250th Anniversary Year, originally scheduled for New Year’s Eve, will now take place New Year’s Day at the Levee

JANUARY 2011

- 1st.....1pm (start) – New Year’s Levee - Chester Basin Legion. Closing of Chester Basin’s 250th Anniversary Year. Check website, posters, newspapers for details.

