



Port Hastings Station

The original inhabitants in the Strait of Canso were the Mi'kmaq Indians. Arriving from the Isle of Jersey in 1788, Captain Philip Balhache and his wife Douce were granted 200 acres of land in Plaister Cove (renamed Port Hastings in 1869).

Douce Elizabeth Balhache died July 23, 1795, age 6 years 7 months.



Douce Ballache's only child died at the age of six in 1785 and her husband died soon after in 1801. She became the first woman entrepreneur of Cape Breton Island – a trader in cattle and sheep, a landlord, and a developer of a gypsum quarry and a weaving business. She died in 1843 and is assumed buried beside her daughter in the tiny graveyard alongside the replica of the lighthouse at the Canso Canal.

After the American Revolution, a few Loyalist families who had settled in Guysborough County in 1784, relocated in 1793 on lots along the Cape Breton shoreline. The largest number of settlers to this part of Cape Breton came directly from Scotland, especially after 1802. Some established businesses in Port Hastings village and others settled on land along and to the rear of the Strait of Canso and St. George's Bay. Descendants of these two groups still reside here.



Hugh & Mary MacMillan, circa 1900

As early as 1819, Hugh MacMillan operated a ferry service between Auld's Cove and Plaister Cove (became Port Hastings in 1869). Later Henry A. Archibald's Stage Coach Company needed over 100 horses to carry passengers and her Majesty's mail to all parts of Cape Breton Island

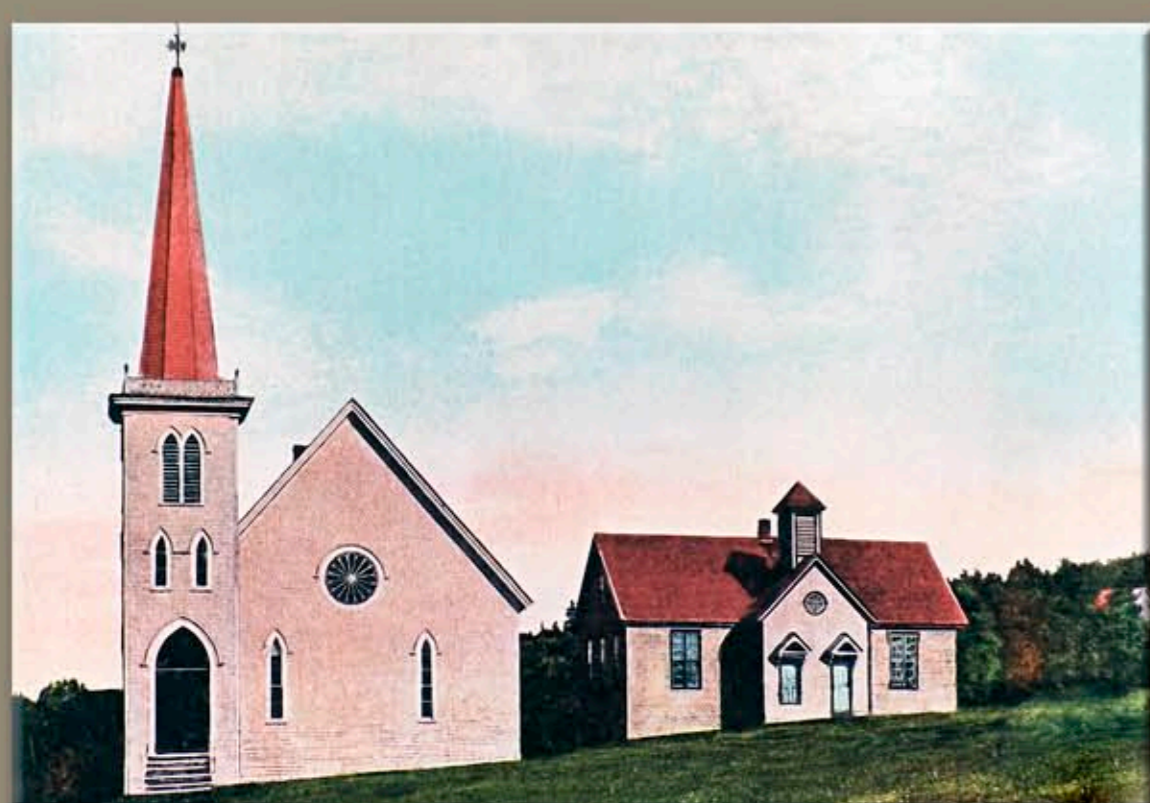
News of the world arrived via the first telegraph cable which came across from the mainland side of the Strait by 1864 into Hugh MacMillan's house.



Telegraph Cable Repair Crew circa 1910

Port Hastings village was the business centre for the electoral district which had a population of 2,213 people in 1871. Because of its excellent location, many fishing vessels made it a port of call to purchase supplies and obtain water and men on their way to the fishing banks.

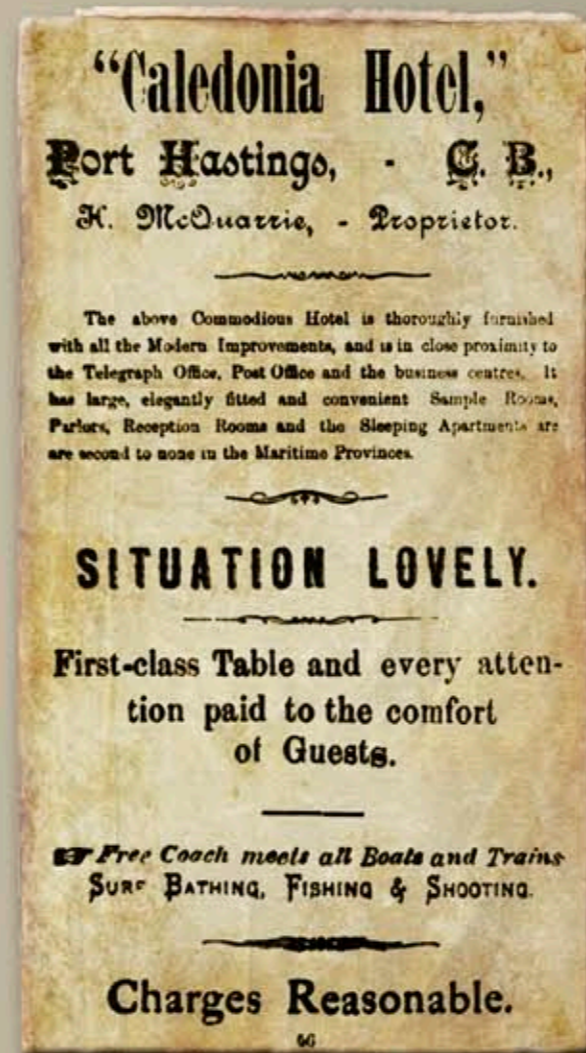
There were eventually three telegraph offices in the community as well as the American Consular and Custom offices, a post office, wharves, many general stores, barber, tailor and shoe repair shops, hotels and a blacksmith. The first Presbyterian Church was built in 1829. Present day St. David's United Church was the fourth building which was officially opened in 1885.



St. David's Presbyterian Church & School, circa 1900



George Craig Laurence Residence & Business built circa 1874, torn down circa 1922. There was a general store on the north end, the middle door led to the customs office and at one time, the American Consular office. The third floor was a large hall that seated 200 people and had a stage. It was used as a Temperance meeting place. The right end of the building gave entry to the Laurence's residence.



Caledonia Hotel Advertisement, circa 1894



Port Hastings looking south by Angus Walker, circa 1950



Port Hastings from Coal Pier, circa 1910



H. McLennan's Store, circa 1895



George MacLean's Store, circa 1902

Wharves and the Pier allowed many ships to dock at Port Hastings, circa 1905



Hector MacKinnon was a blacksmith on Main Street, circa 1903

Main Street, Port Hastings, circa 1905

Local men worked to build railway, circa 1901



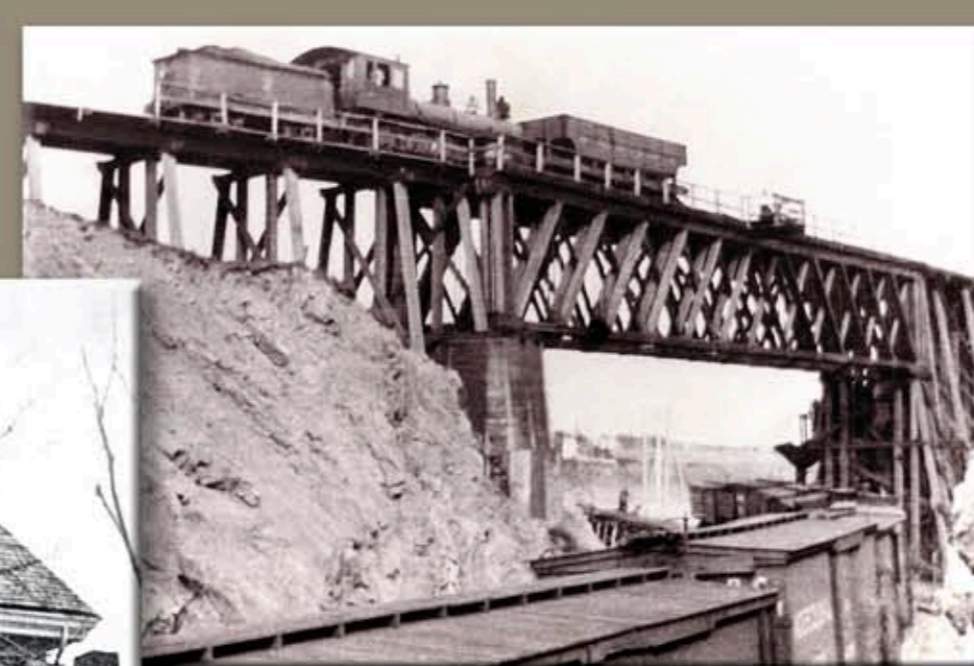
The Inverness and Richmond Railway constructed between Port Hastings and Broad Cove opened in June 1901. It was extended to Point Tupper by December of that year. At the same time, many men began work on the construction of the 182.9 meter long by 19.5 meter high (600 foot long by 64 foot high) Inverness Railway and Coal Co. Shipping Pier along the deep waters of the Strait of Canso at Port Hastings.

The base was constructed of rock gathered along the shore by local men. The frame of the large Pier was built of hard pine imported from the Southern United States. There were 20 chutes on the large Pier which up to 60 men at one time loaded 9-10.9 tonne (10-12 thousand tons) of coal per day onto ships. The big Pier stopped operations in 1927 for economic reasons and was torn down.

The Howe Truss was built to withstand the weight of trains going over it to the pier. The approach for coal laden trains was a trestle on high ground to the north of the Pier, where the present day Tourist Bureau is located. Train cars would ride on top of the Pier and empty their loads into the angled storage unit.

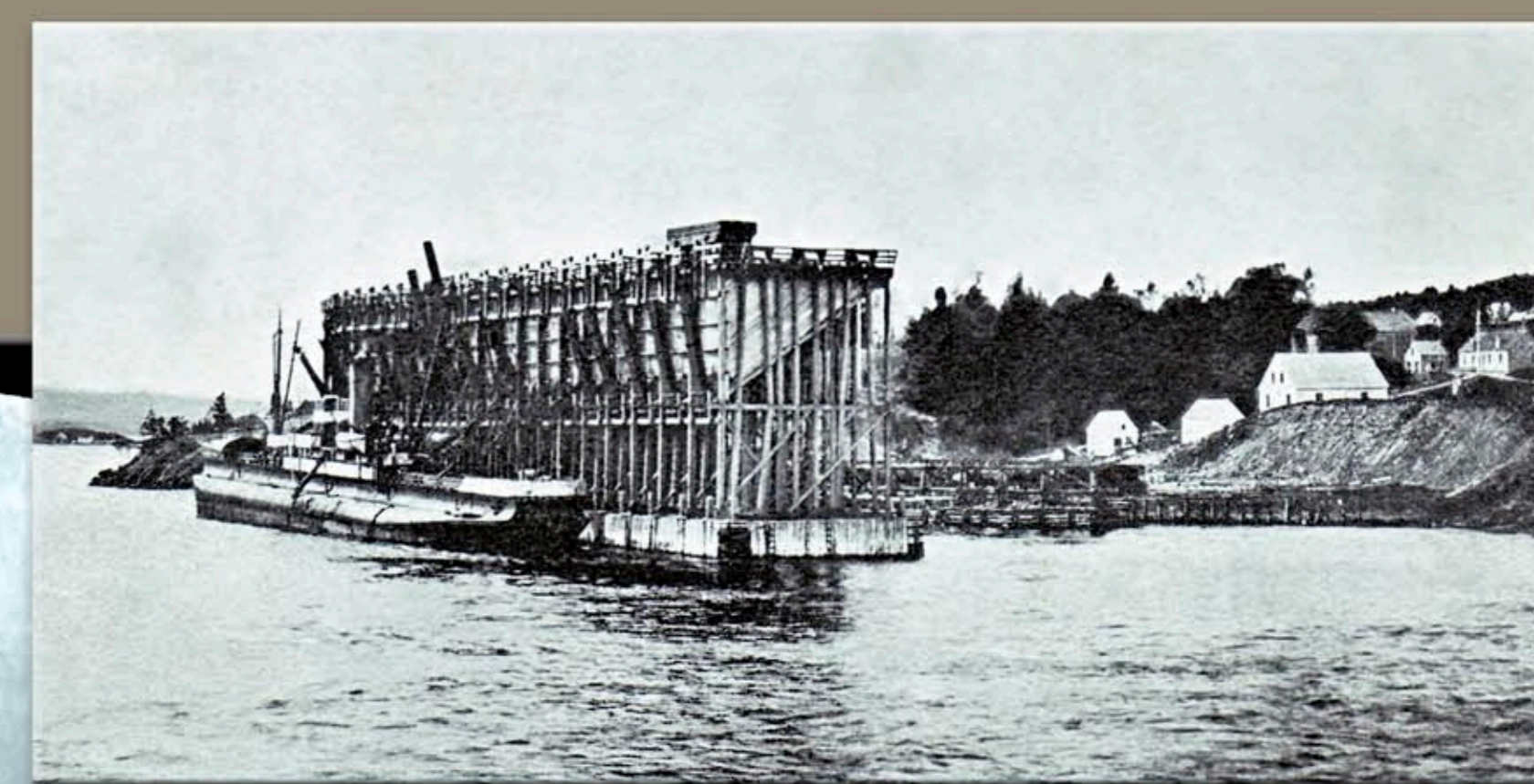


Building the Inverness Railway Coal Shipping Pier, circa 1901



The Howe Truss, circa 1902

Railway and Coal Pier workers, circa 1910



Coal being loaded on ship at the Pier, circa 1904



The completion of the Canso Causeway and Canal in 1955 blocked in winter the huge ice to the north and the resulting very deep, ice free waterway on the south side attracted several industries to the Strait area starting in 1959. Hundreds and hundreds of new jobs were created along the shores of the Strait of Canso.

After all these years, the waters of the Strait of Canso continue to impact on the lives of the residents of the Greater Strait area communities.



Text: Yvonne Fox
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Property of Inverness County TransCanada Trail Project.