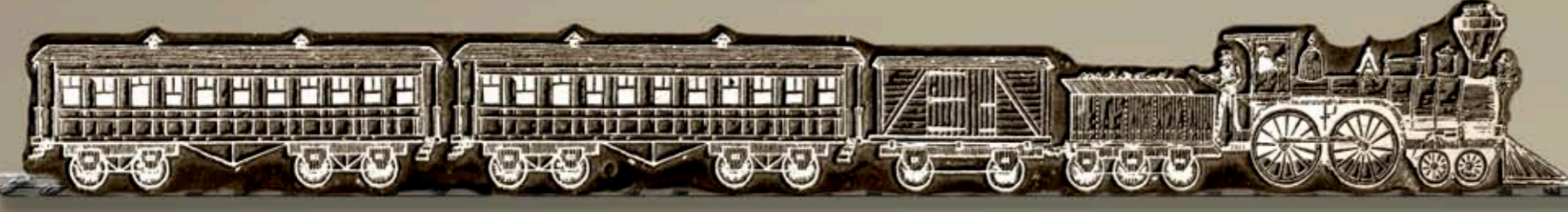


Port Hood Station



Welcome to Port Hood

The Mi'kmaq call this area Ke'kwiamkek (Geg wee ahm geg), meaning the 'great sandbar' which once linked the mainland to Port Hood Island. After 1500, Basque, Portuguese, French and English whalers, sealers & fishermen regularly visited our coast, on a seasonal basis, to harvest the sea. France established a settlement here circa 1720 to quarry stone for the construction of Fortress Louisbourg, and to build boats. They named it Juste Au Corps.

The British used the name Barrington Peninsula or Port Barrington until renaming our community Port Hood in honour of Viscount Samuel Hood, commander in chief of the navy of North America (1767-1770). United Empire Loyalists began arriving here in 1786 from the newly independent United States of America and have left a strong imprint. Settlers from the Highlands of Scotland began to show up in large numbers after 1790 and called the place Seastago. The 1818 census reveals a sizeable number of Irish tradespeople and merchants.

The completion of the railway from Port Hawkesbury to Inverness in 1901 and the development of the coal mines saw a marked population increase in the community of Port Hood. It was officially chartered a town in 1903. An impressive built heritage was constructed and the performing arts were encouraged.

Port Hood prospered as a well-established mining town from 1903 - 1946. By the 1940s the town was in decline following an earlier flooding of the mines and a major fire in July, 1942, which destroyed the main business section. People have been mainly employed throughout the past two centuries in the four primary industries of fishing, farming, lumbering and mining.

Port Hood, circa 1905



Court House - Nomination Day 1933



St. Peter's Glebe House & Convent



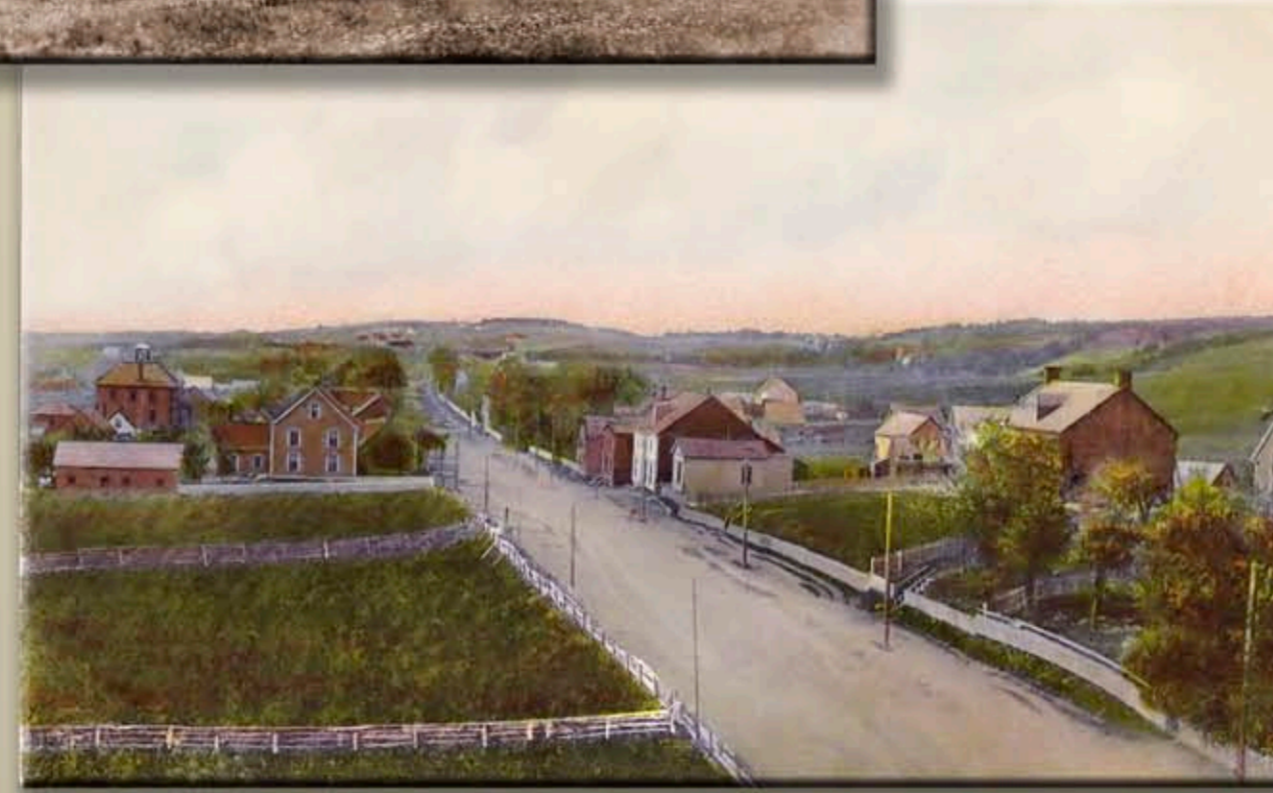
E.O. Leadbetter House (now Hillcrest Hall), circa 1912



Port Hood Academy & Free Union Church, circa 1912



Low Road from McKinley's Hotel



Main Street, view North from Convent, circa 1898



Bank Head Colliery, circa 1911

Mining

The Port Hood Coal Company Ltd. had developed the coal mining industry in Port Hood in the first years of the twentieth century. Port Hood became a town and a development plan was laid out for future expansion. More than forty single-dwelling company houses were built and rented out to miners. By 1906 when the Port Hood and Richmond Railway Coal Company bought out the mining interest, coal was king and the town was prospering. Many new homes and stores were erected, and new families moved to the area. Business people, lawyers, doctors and other professionals set up offices and a general prosperity took place throughout the district. A pier was built to ship coal to Atlantic and central Canadian markets.

The early mining boom soon met a serious setback. The miners worked with naked lights and loose powder as an explosive. On February 7, 1908, an explosion took place in the mine and some ten miners lost their lives, six of them residents of the area and four Bulgarian immigrants. It took the community some time to recover from this, but soon further development was carried on. Then on June 22, 1911, a mine on a main coal seam, producing 86,847 tons in 1910, was flooded from the sea. This disaster caused many miners and their families to leave this place and seek work elsewhere.

Other companies continued to develop the vast coal seams in this area over the succeeding decades. Most notable were the Malcolm Beaton Coal Mine in the 1920 era, and the Henderson Mine, operating with Montreal financing, which employed 125 men in 1937. Keeping the sea out, labour problems and costly production, all conspired against coal mining in Port Hood and in January of 1967, the Sheriff of Inverness County seized all the equipment and closed down the last mine completely.

Source: "The Inverness And Richmond Railway", (MacBean, A.W.D.) and "The Smiths of Cape Breton" (Smith)



Miners, circa 1935



1942 Fire at Post Office Corner



Port Hood Band at Old Smith Hotel, circa 1909

Port Hood Royals, circa 1910



Post Office Corner

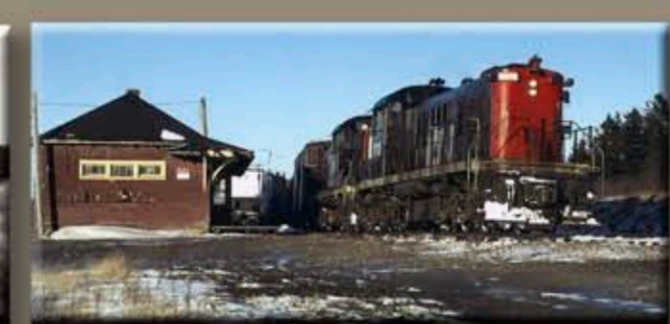


Miner's Houses, circa 1910

Coal Miners, circa 1937



Train Station, 1920



Train station

*Train Station 1970-74



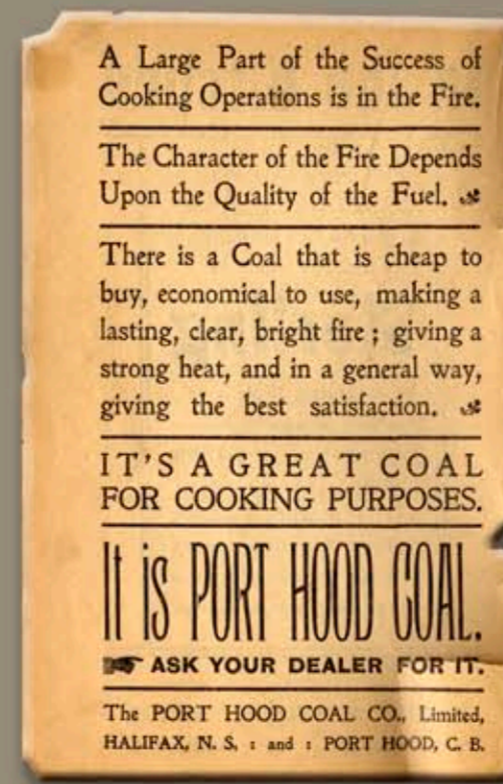
Les Tobey, Mail Carrier

On this site were located two separate train stations. The first one served from 1901 to 1922(ca) when it was destroyed by fire. The second officially opened in September, 1928, and today (2008) it serves as the Port Hood Community Funeral Home. A passenger coach car was used as the station in the interim period. The Port Hood station was large, with two waiting rooms, an agent's office and a freight and baggage room. It was the first on the line to have both a furnace and electric lights. In addition there was a freight storage shed.

The station was both a busy building and area. Passengers travelled to and from here regularly between 1901 and 1959. Commercial agents came and went with samples and wares. Bags of mail arrived on a daily basis. The local bank's money supply was sent here first from head office prior to going to the branch.

Timber, pulpwood, coal, livestock, fish, milk and cream were shipped from here. The station telegraph office was a key communication link. Trains carrying passengers, mail and freight passed through here twice daily. When the coal mines were operating they would have their own rail sidings, and sometimes extra freight trains would run. The Christmas season was the busiest of times with parcel and person traffic noticeably increasing.

Leslie Tobey was the Port Hood Island mail carrier from 1950 until 1970. He was also a full time fisherman, fishing in the morning and finishing in time to collect and deliver the mail in mid-afternoon. The mail was delivered to Port Hood by train. Les could see one of the train signals on the mainland from his house on the Island. When it would change from red to green, he knew that the train carrying the mail would soon be arriving in town. If he left immediately, he could cross the channel in his boat, pick up his car on the mainland and drive to the Post Office to arrive just in time to collect the newly sorted mail for his rural route on the Island.



Advertisement from "The Art of Cooking Made Easy".



Text: John Gillies
Photos Chestico Museum collection, Port Hood, NS
* Additional Photos 1970-74 Gut of Canso Museum, Port Hastings, NS & Orangedale Railway Museum, NS
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