

Hammonds Plains Historical Society

www.hammondsplainshistoricalsociety.ca

Our Barrel Making Heritage:

While Barrel Making and Cooper Shops are now long gone from Hammonds Plains, the industry, for over one hundred years, was the driving force behind being a prosperous independent village. Hammonds Plains was known as one of the main barrel producing communities in Nova Scotia during the later 19th and early 20th centuries. The following feature traces the history of the special relationship between the barrel and our community.

Wood products first became a community export soon after mills became popping up in the area during the early 1800's. At first, the mills only created lumber and shipped it directly to local markets in the Halifax area, via local waterways. However, it wasn't too long before wooden by-products started to be developed, including barrels.

The early settlers of Hammonds Plains and Upper Hammonds Plains brought with them the skills of a cooper, and it was only natural for cooper shops to spring up in a community rich of timber and saw mills. The cooper trade primarily developed from the expertise of two groups of residents – the Chesapeake Blacks and the European descendants, especially those transplanted from the Lunenburg/Chester area.



Hammonds Plains Coopers Harry Romans and Blake Thomas applying their trades in 1958



General Meetings for 2014-15:

We are looking at a variety of topics for presentations next year. Come and learn about our past, including a detailed look at the former hub of the community – the Forrester Community Hall.

Our next meeting is **September 26th**. Look for more details in the fall

Becoming a HPHS Member:

You can become a member of the Hammonds Plains Historical Society by filling out a registration form and e-mailing it to Dave Haverstock (haverstockdave@gmail.com) or mailing to 1541 Hammonds Plains Road, Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotia B4B 1P6. **Annual fee is \$10.**

Registration forms are available during one of our general meetings or by copying from our web site.

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Some of the Chesapeake Blacks had learned the art of barrel making on Colonial farms and saw the opportunity to introduce the industry to their new settlement. It is believed that Allison's & Whiley's Cooperage built in 1825 was the first one in the Hammond's Plains area. At this cooperage, fir and spruce were hauled to the mill by oxen to be crafted into barrels, with the hoops being made from maple and alder.

As the lumber mills in the area multiplied during the 1800's, cooper shops became popping up within the area. Most of the shops were built along the Hammonds Plains Road going from Lower Hammonds Plains to Kemptown, but there were a few located in the Yankeetown area. During the 1800's, barrels were produced with wooded hoops and used for a variety of purposes, such as apples, potatoes, and fish. Both wet (for holding products that needed water) and dry (for holding dry products) barrels were produced. The barrels were hauled to different locations in the region, so it was common to see a wagon load of barrels on the way to market travelling the Hammonds Plains Road during the later 1800's. A number of young folks who were skilled as Coopers were enticed to move to the United States for financial gain to apply their trade there during the late 1800's. Minneapolis seemed to be where several of the Hammonds Plains Coopers moved to.

The 20th century saw the golden age of the barrel making industry in Nova Scotia. There was a high demand for fish barrels as the salt fish industry became a booming industry in the province. For much of the first half of the 20th century approximately 30 cooper shops were operating in the Hammonds Plains area. The 1911 census, actually listed 107 residents of the immediate area, identifying themselves as a cooper. Coopers were able to produce 30-50 barrels per day, depending on their skill level and whether the supplies were available. The art of barrel making was usually passed down from generation to generation, so the shops for the most part were a family runned business operated by the same family for generations. As such, family names such as Smith, Thomson, Thomas, Haverstock, Allison, Whiley, David, Marsman, Jones, Romans, Pace, Wright and Frizzel became synonymous with the barrel making trade in the community.

As the 20th century progressed, a number of factors saw the barrel industry slowly start to decline. A decreasing demand for barrels resulted from a change to packing fish using boxes instead of barrels, the move to iron hoops improving the longevity of barrels, the increasingly use of plastic products instead of wood, the drying up of foreign markets due to WW2, and gradual decline in the number of fish plants throughout Nova Scotia. This led to a steady closing of the community family cooper shops. By the late 1940's, there were only approximately 20 Cooper Shops left in the community, although in 1944 the Halifax Herald noted that 80 Thousand Barrels were created in Hammonds Plains. By 1960, there were only several shops remaining and the last cooper shop (W. G. Haverstock) closed it's doors in the late 1970's.

The sound of banging rivel holes in the barrel hoops and the smell of the blue smoke coming from the stove heater no longer exists in the community, as the last barrel was made over 35 years ago. However, the role of the barrel in the heritage of the Hammonds Plains area will always live on and be a significant part of our past.



Cooper Elias Rafuse hammering a hoop at the W. G. Haverstock Cooper Shop in 1967

St. James Catholic Mission Church



The Roman Catholic faith has had roots in Hammonds Plains from the very beginning. We know that some of the very earliest families living in the community in the early 1800's were of the Catholic faith. By the 1830's, there were a number of Hammonds Plains families that were regularly meeting to practice the RC traditions. It is believed these early settlers met at the home of Henry McEnnary. The census of 1827 lists 15 Roman Catholics living in the community.

During the 1830's there began discussion of building a Roman Catholic chapel in the community. In the early 1840's this became a reality as Henry McEnnary donated a lot of land for a chapel and cemetery (at the present day entrance to Uplands Park). It is thought that the chapel was completed in 1844. By 1845, arrangements had been made for a priest to deliver a service in Hammonds Plains once a month. Father Power was the first known priest.

The Chapel was finally blessed in July 1852, with the Archbishop of Nova Scotia attending. The Church was dedicated under the name of **St. James the Apostle Church**. Dorothy Bezanson Evans in her book 'Hammonds Plains – The First 100 Years' describes the event, "... it was fine day, and the new Kearney Lake Road had recently been built and so a large concourse (congregation) from the city and vicinity, numbering between one and two thousand persons, taking advantage of the fine weather and the new road, assembled at an early hour at the church. Naturally, only a handful of this large gathering was able to get inside the chapel at one time".

The St. James Chapel remained the focus of the Catholic congregation in the community during the second half of the 19th century, with upgrades to its interior throughout this time. Seating capacity was for approximately 60 people. The Chapel was originally served by priests from St. Mary Basilica, but in the later 1800's it became a mission of the new parish in Enfield. This met that the priest who was assigned to the church, had his primary assignment in Enfield.

The 20th Century brought forth new changes and opportunities. Electric power was introduced during the 1930's and upgrades to heating and lighting were made during the first part of the 20th century, as well. A ladies guild was formed and became very instrumental in raising funds and providing an organizational forum for church functions. In 1919, St. James became a mission of the new St. Ignatius parish in Bedford. The congregation remained stable in terms of numbers throughout the first half of the 20th century, evident by the 60 seat pews which had graced the building since its original days. The Annual Report of 1929 notes there were 14 practicing Catholics in the church. Throughout this time, mass was still held on a monthly basis. In 1954, the mission was reassigned to be with the Our Lady of Perpetual Church in Rockingham.

With new subdivisions being introduced to the community in the 1960's and many Catholics moving to the area, St. James began a major transformation during this time. The congregation found itself in a dilemma to not only support the suddenly increasing membership of the church, but also to deal with an aging and crowded building. The first move was a decision by the Bishop to have weekly masses at St. James in 1962 and to reattach the church once again to St. Ignatius in 1963. In 1968, renovations were done to the old church, although the building remained the same size **(picture found on previous page is a picture of the old church from the late 1970's)**.

The steadily growing membership of the 1970's were very determined to preserve the sense of a Catholic community in Hammonds Plains and it spurred its members to overcome obstacles and dedicate long hours in planning, presentations, research and re-thinking. The result was the building of a brand new multipurpose church on the land adjacent to the original church. While the building was designed by architects and the main frame was constructed by a construction company, the parishioners did much of the finishing touches including, painting, floor coverings, cupboards and landscaping **(See picture at bottom of page for design of new building)**.

The new building was finished in 1982 with a seating capacity of 237, and was blessed by Archbishop James Hayes on Dec. 14th, 1982.

The membership of the new St. James Church grew at a staggering rate during the 1980's & 1990's, with multi services having to be held each weekend to allow its members to attend the Sunday Mass. Sunday School (Catechism) had to be moved to Hammonds Plains Consolidated School to house the large numbers of children, that had become part of the congregation due to all the new young families calling St. James their home church. By 2001, some 780 families and 2730 members of the congregation were being served by St. James.

In 2002, the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth, established a committee to study parish life in its Catholic community. From this committee, a recommendation was made to amalgamate several parishes in the western zone of Halifax, including St. James into a new parish called St. Marquerite Bourgeois Parish. In 2007, the new parish was created with plans to create a new place of worship. At the present time, St. James still operates as a place of worship, but plans are in place to sell off the building and property once the new church is built, although the cemetery will remain for the foreseeable future.



New St. James Church in the early 2000's