

Recalling Our Cooper Legacy

Echoes From the Past – Essay # 2

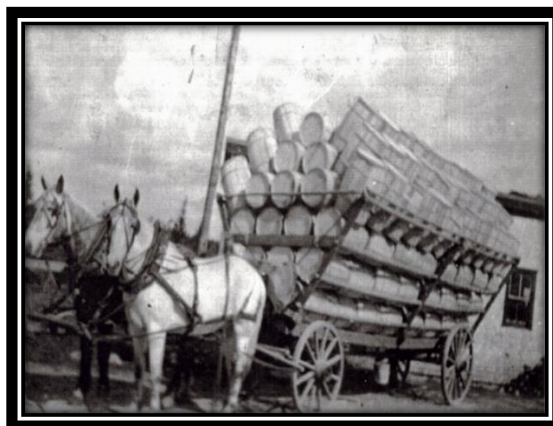


One might wonder after reading the above title that maybe Hammonds Plains once had a special connection to the Mini Cooper, but it didn't. Instead we are going to talk about wooden barrels, not types of cars. It may surprise some of you that the Hammonds Plains area was once a Nova Scotian leader in producing barrels for the provincial fishing, agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

'Cooper' is the name given to someone who makes barrels and the place that they made the barrels was known as a 'cooperage shop'. In the Hammonds Plains area, there were once tens of such shops (as many as 25 operating shops in the early 1900's). Hammonds Plains was also once known as having some of the most skilled coopers in the province, with the best making between 30-50 barrels per day. In fact, on the 1911 Census, coopers were the most common occupation among the residents of Hammonds Plains. Through the years, Hammonds Plains coopers learned their trade via the apprenticeship system; learning from previous generations.

Some of the early residents of both Upper and Lower Hammonds Plains brought with them coopering skills from their native lands and with the wonderful forest resources nearby, the area was ripe for the making of barrels. The Allison & Whiley Cooperage was believed to be the first cooper shop in the area, beginning in 1825. Before the age of vehicles, a common sight on the Hammonds Plains Road were the horse drawn barrel wagons heading towards the Halifax markets or train station in Bedford. Imagine your reaction if you saw such a sight today!

The last day to day cooper shop (W. G. Haverstock Cooper Shop) closed its doors in the late 1970's, ending the auspicious era of the Hammonds Plains Cooper.



Hammonds Plains Barrels leaving the Cooper Shop – Early 1900's



Well known Hammonds Plains Cooper Bub Rafuse applying his trade - 1967