

# PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY AT ORWELL CORNER

## PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

The Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat of Prince Edward Island held its first Orwell Public Archaeology program in 2012. Public archaeology offers visitors of all ages the opportunity to uncover the past while working alongside professional archaeologists. Our objective is to increase public awareness of archaeology and local history while promoting Island tourism. Visitors and volunteers will learn firsthand about how archaeologists excavate and record sites, archaeological features, and artifacts.



## THE MACPHERSON HOUSE

Excavations at this site, which we call the “MacPherson House”, provide us with a special glimpse into rural life in Prince Edward Island during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Archaeological evidence from the house shows that the floorboards eventually gave way, causing the contents of the house to slide into the cellar where they were found by archaeologists. In addition to the identification of period artifacts, this evidence tells us that the house had been left to collapse by the early 1930s, leaving thousands of artifacts inside.

The property was used by individuals of remarkably diverse occupations including a teacher, a painter, a cook, a cabinet-maker and a master mariner.



## TO THE ARCHIVES!

Historical documentation such as that which can be found at local archives has provided us with the names of people who owned and inhabited the property, as well as many of their occupations.

This site is named after the MacPherson family who lived here between 1877 and 1886. Christina and Malcolm MacPherson were originally from Scotland, settling on Prince Edward Island's Murray Harbour Road in 1829 where they raised eleven children. Upon the loss of her husband, Christina and her youngest son Alexander moved to this two-storied, six-roomed house from their home on Murray Harbour Road (an approximately ten-kilometer trip). Alexander was about twenty years old when they arrived and ran a cabinet-making business here in Orwell with Charles MacGregor Jenkins.

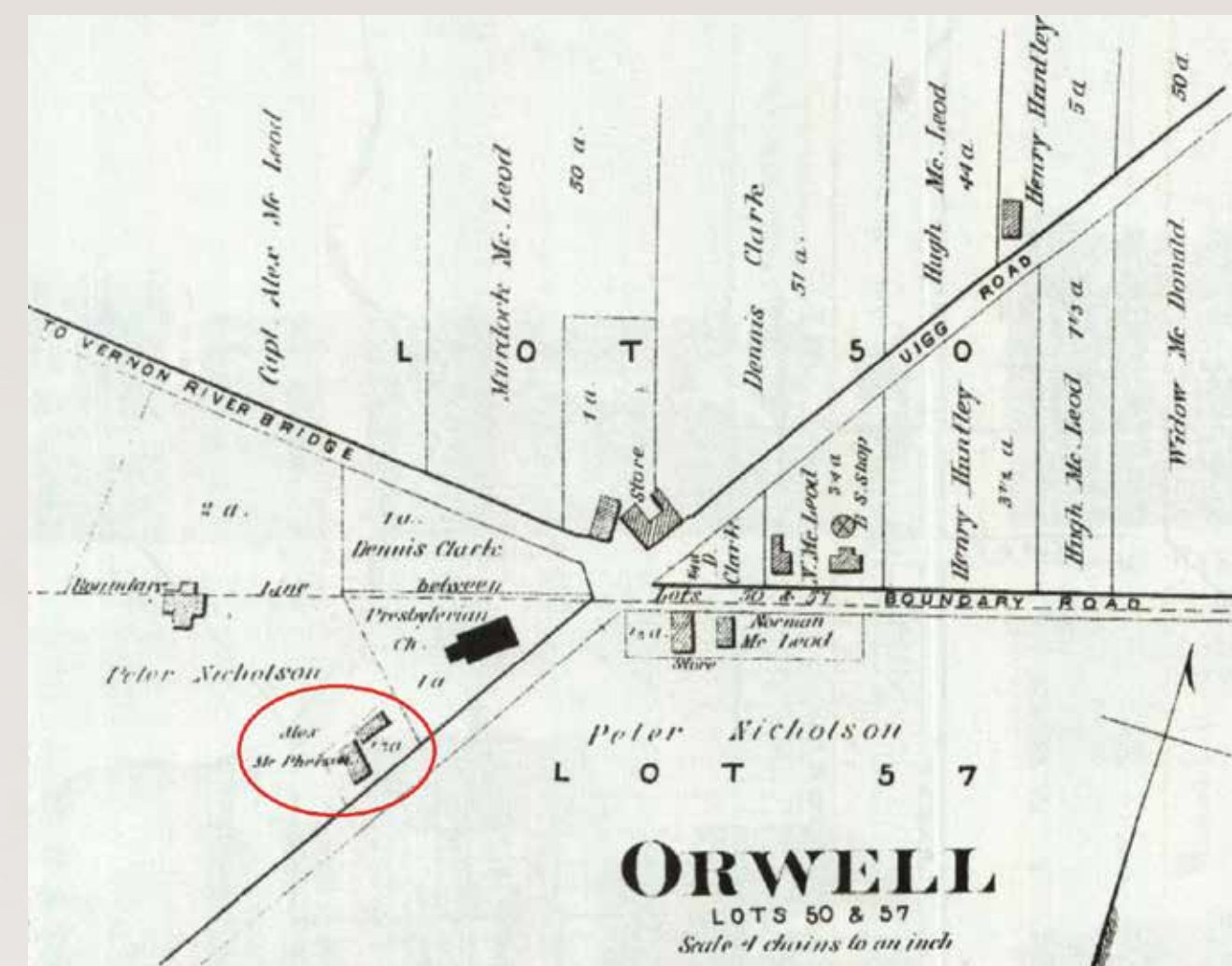
Christina and Alexander shared their new home with James McPherson, a relative a few years younger than Alexander, a carriage-maker named James Smith, a young painter named Alex Smith and Catherine McPhee, a clerk.

The MacPhersons sold the property to Captain Alexander McLeod Sr. in 1886. By 1891 Alexander had moved away and Christina was living in Valleyfield with her widowed eldest daughter, Flora.

The MacPhersons were neither the first nor the last to own this property, however. Its proprietors have been identified from circa 1803 to the 1930s:

### TIMELINE

- c. 1803** John Nicholson owned but did not inhabit the land.
- c. 1870** Peter Nicholson, grandson of John Nicholson, owned but did not inhabit the property.
- unknown date** Captain Alexander McLeod Sr., a master mariner, likely built the house on this property.
- 1877** Christina MacPherson bought and moved into the house with her son Alexander.
- 1886** Captain Alexander McLeod Sr. purchased the land back from the MacPhersons.
- 1890** Bella Ross, her sister and widowed mother moved into the house. Bella was employed as a cook and her sister, Katie, as a teacher. Bella's literacy allowed her to conduct the property purchase although she was only 16 years old at the time.
- c. 1913 -1923** Charles Dougald MacDonald, his wife Mary and their children moved into the homestead.
- c. 1930** Andrew MacPhail bought the property but did not live on it. You can learn more about him as you explore Orwell Corner Historic Village.
- 1970s** Orwell Corner was recognized by the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation as an historic site.



### MEACHAM'S ATLAS

Meacham's Atlas, published in 1880, provides maps of each of Prince Edward Island's lots. This detail shows the MacPherson property as it was situated in Orwell.

## TO THE TRENCHES!

Based on archaeological investigations, the stone foundation supporting this house's wooden frame measured approximately 36 by 21 feet and was equipped with a cellar. There is no evidence that the house was burned down; all evidence suggests that the building was abandoned to collapse over time.

Artifacts recovered from the site such as ceramic vessels, smoking pipes, buttons and jewelry provide us with information about the day-to-day lives of the house's occupants.

### DR. PIERCE'S GOLDEN MEDICAL DISCOVERY!



Bottles containing pharmaceuticals such as *Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery* were uncovered here.

This concoction, imported from Buffalo New York, was an alleged cure-all capable of treating malnutrition, blemishes, digestive issues, weakness, sore throats, liver ailments and more, and could be purchased in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries for \$1.35.



### HAT PIN ORNAMENT

This ornament was worn on the end of a hat-pin. Hat-pins were common accessories in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, becoming less common in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ARTIFICIAL TOOTH

This artificial tooth, made of a material called *ivorine* – a type of plastic developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – is equipped with tiny metal nails for installation as a dental replacement.



## You Can Help!

Tell us your story. If you find an artifact anywhere in PEI, contact Dr. Helen Kristmanson, Director of Aboriginal Affairs and Archaeology, at [hekristmanson@gov.pe.ca](mailto:hekristmanson@gov.pe.ca) or (902) 368-5378. Artifacts provide valuable information about PEI's past and our provincial archaeology team can make sure that this information is recorded and shared and that the artifacts are kept safe for future generations to study and appreciate.

