**Interview with Robert Messenger**

July 11, 2010

Interview by Adele Wick

Bob is a retired school teacher starting his 38th year as a fireman. The Junior Fire Fighters start young – as young as 14. All are volunteers.

Bob came here at 26. His uncle, manager of a bank, worked for Cyrus Eaton; Bob visited him as a child.

Herewith, two stories:

1. Several years ago, some young people broke in here and took the silver tea service. RCNP investigaged and found it in a culvert at the dump. They probably hid it because they drank out of the cups.
2. Bob met CSE in Halifax just once. He was a very old man at that time at the Governor’s Tea Party. They shook hands and that was that.

The Fire:

It began on/in an interior wall and was electrical in nature. Bob talked to two firemen with good memories. There are three stories, of which his is the third.

1. A nail driven into the wall shorted a couple of wires.
2. The short occurred in the electrical box in the basement.
3. The short started in electrical box in the kitchen.

[AW and RM look in the kitchen, where a wooden square is nailed into the wall where RM remembers the box; a smaller square is in the bedroom closet, we think on the other side of the same space.]

Bottom Line: Arson was definitely not involved.

Word spreads quickly. Indeed, they had trouble fighting the fire because there were so many people in the way. “Don’t use water until you see yellow” is one of Bob’s principles, but there was so much smoke – and then water, that they decided it was best to get the stuff out. Firefighters got it out, and then people grabbed it and moved it to the dining hall. The place was full – and it was pretty large.

The fact that the people of Pugwash were denied access to the Thinkers’ Lodge in the main didn’t matter during this emergency. “The people in Nova Scotia would risk their lives to save their worst enemy.”

Another Story [RM is a very careful man. Before the interview, he asked about its purpose and what would be done with it. He relaxed only with time. He used the word “story” to bring home the point that accuracy is beyond our reach.]

The astronaut brought a gift – a chariot, three horses and drivers (may not even be true). Cyrus was here and had an appreciation of animals. The demonstration occurred right outside the lodge; the chariot was upset, and one horse was put down – by the chariot driver. [AW notes: CSE did receive a troika, complete with 3 stallions and a trainer…]

Birth Place

Jerry Jameson will have a lot of information – if anyone, he can take us to the site – roughly across the river from father’s house. Used to take an iron bridge across the driver. [AW: marvelous imagery here – iron bridge to cross, Iron Curtain as barrier finally torn down…]

RM again notes that he has been talking about what he’s heard and not what he knows.

CSE was disillusioned with Pugwash, in particular because of what happened to the sea wall and Margaret King School, both of which he built. In the case of the former, the concrete started to wash away. The crew from New Glascow had done a poor job. In the case of the latter, schools were consolidated, and Pugwash lacked the funds to maintain the school.

The question remains: Why did CSE live in Deep Cove, not Pugwash?

Back to Fires:

Technological changes have been great. RM “babysits” fires. He waits for total silence. Wait, stop, listen – put ear to wall. If you hear faint slips, the fire’s still alive. RM stayed outside the lodge, orchestrating the rescue. He left late, probably after lining up another babysitter.

As a teacher -- of industrial art, he got official permission – in writing – to leave class for fires. The principal – or vice-principal – would take over until the secretary found a replacement. People in the salt mine are in the same position today.

Some 50% of Pugwash has burned down. The wooden-shingle roofs contributed to the spread. RM’s son was a volunteer youth until he went away to university. His wife was a nurse for years and years. So they were really involved in the community.

The new school has a Rotblat Hall.

People in the area are scared to death of change. Here’s “us” and they’re “them”. RM probably should be one of “them”, but he’s been here so long, and he and his wife are so connected, so they’re “us”. A friend, after three generations, is still “them”. It’s all relative. At the present time, there’s talk of Pugwash Peace Exchange and wanting a new building, and a certain segment is afraid it would change the nature of the village.

The town of Oxford, with its foreign plant and its blueberries, is dying. But Pugwash continues to grow – some of its people work in the Oxford factory. The fishing and pewter businesses are basically gone though. The pewter factor still sits there – bought, he thinks, by China, with the owner(s) pretending it manufactures while, in reality, it’s just a warehouse. The guy who lost it set up a smaller pewter plant; at one point he’d had over 200 people working for him. The salt mine employs many. Pugwash may also lose its commission and autonomy. Residents who pay taxes by don’t get services (no town septic or water) are understandably disgruntled.

Bob believes the proper approach is to fix what’s wrong, not to destroy it.

(Why not 1) allow the disgruntled to be eliminated from village rather than(2) push to have county takeover? Pugwash may be the only incorporated village in the province.

Note: on this side, one can buy a alot for $10,000; on the Gulf Shore, a lot costs $100,000.

In the winter, he still knows everyone; in the summer, not so.

In other involvements with the Pugwash Conferences and property, Bob talked Mrs. Eaton into giving the town the park so that funding would be available to shore up the shore. He also cracked lobsters at the Lobster House for church dinners.

[AW notes: Mr. Messanger has a very pleasant face. He walks slowly and awkwardly, with a limp from an accident on the job. He’s very careful – started by asking how the interviews would be used; often said – when I praised him – “Part of the job…”; also emphasized the “story” aspects of the facts and the varying perspectives.

Other Firemen involved in Fire:

Robert Charter 243-2322 (death in family, so didn’t come)

John Murray

Ron Betts, Jr. -2076

Ashley Stevens -2296]

Andy Yaro

[Once again, spelling at best phonetic]