

# Historic homes may hold keys to unlock the past

BY FRED LAWRENCE

*The Hants Journal*

Last summer, researchers from the Mount Allison Dendrochronology lab (MAD LAB) joined a CBC camera crew and host of *Decouverte* Radio Canada, Jacques Giguere, along with local historian Richard Armstrong on an investigation into pre-expulsion Acadian dwellings and stone basements in Falmouth.

The first of the three local homes was the Harry Armstrong barn, believed to have been constructed by Acadians prior to the deportation in 1755. The barn is a masterpiece timber frame, constructed with hand-hewn beams, mortise and tenon joinery and hand-made wooden pegs.

The second property is a home owned by Art McLachlan in Mount Denson. The house and property have been traced back to 1774 and may well be Acadian in ori-

gin. Early land descriptions indicate a number of Acadian dwellings existed along the Avon River in Mount Denson that were not burned when the English laid claim to the area.

The third property investigated was the former Robert (Bob) Brown house on Town Road, Falmouth. There is speculation the house may be torn down; but this information has not yet been confirmed. The Brown house is believed to be one of the oldest in the area and could prove to date pre-1755. In the book, 'Falmouth - A New England Township' by John Duncanson, the author mentions the house was used for public meetings before 1800.

Dr. Andre Robichaud, a postdoctoral geographer at Mount Allison University led the project chronicling Acadian dwellings throughout the Atlantic Provinces. Dr. Robichaud said the majority of Acadian houses and cellars

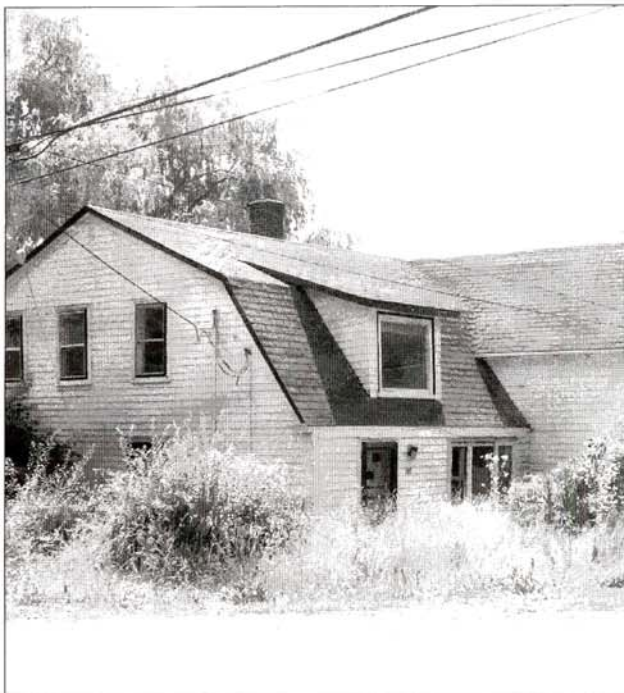
are found in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick where the French sought refuge from the English during the expulsion years.

Part of the process to identify whether a house is Acadian in origin involves taking wood samples from structural timbers. Core samples are examined at the lab. Dr. Robichaud explains, "We then sand it, measure the rings and compare them to a master chronology baseline to date the year." Usually within a week of testing the results are concluded and then a report is completed on the site.

One of the increasing problems Dr. Robichaud noted was the lack of old growth, or 'Acadian', forests left for comparative analysis. "The main purpose of this work is to date the structure back as far as possible, but also we want to retrieve information on past climates and how the ecology of an area has changed over time - there is a fountain of information found in the wood samples we take."

Dr. Robichaud said, "I'm surprised at the seeming lack of interest in this area of the heritage, particularly the history of the French settlers. Falmouth is one of very few areas where old buildings and basements are still standing; but not a lot of work has been done on any of this." Regarding help from the provincial and federal governments Dr. Robichaud added, "The governments don't seem too interested in preserving historical sites - particularly French sites." If the Brown house is demolished Dr. Robichaud will not be too surprised. "Many places that were very old have been torn down but we have to face the fact that you can't keep everything. It is how the people in the community will react that will be important, and if they have an interest in history."

A home in Upper Fal-



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## FALMOUTH'S OLDEST HOUSE?

The Bob Brown House, located on the Town Road, was one of five homes in Falmouth investigated by CBC Radio to determine any potential Acadian provenance.



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## REVIEWING OLD MAP

Falmouth historian Richard Armstrong (right) peruses an old map of the Falmouth area with Dr. Andre Robichaud at the former Clarence Patterson house in Falmouth. Dendrochronology students were working on a CBC documentary on Acadian houses and this one was investigated to date the structure.

mouth known as the Clarence Patterson house was the last to be examined by the team, which included two research students, Richard Armstrong, Dr. Robichaud and the CBC crew. The Patterson house was once owned by Charles Ingliss, grandnephew of Bishop Charles Ingliss, around the turn of the 19th century and is a marvel of architecture located in a picturesque setting with rolling farmland, the Avon River and some remaining original Acadian dykes in the background. This house has an amazing stone basement complete with a huge stone and timber chimney base

that once serviced four fireplaces and shared the large sloped chimney.

"If these properties turn out to be pre-deportation Acadian dwellings, people should know," Dr. Robichaud said. "Good lessons can be learned from the past and the construction styles reveal a lot about the changing times - especially because so many old houses have been renovated a lot over the past centuries."

Radio Canada host Jacques Giguere, said reconstruction and renovation over the years can make the dating process more difficult. "The problem is that changes happened every 50 years or

so, and our job was to find what was there from the starting point and eliminate newer additions so we could properly date the original structure. The history of the town and community can be found in the changes over the years; you can go through the whole history of the area by the different construction techniques," Giguere said.

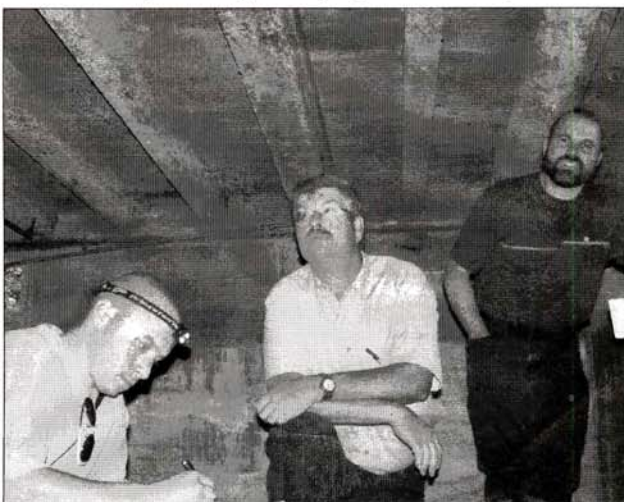
Acadian or not, the work done by the team will provide significant insight into the history of this area and possibly encourage various levels of government to start preserving historic properties for future generations before they are lost forever.



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## UNIQUE HOME

This dwelling was known as the Clarence Patterson House, named after the last family to live there. The house was investigated for any possible Acadian connection recently by members of Mount Allison University and Dr. Andre Robichaud of the University of Montreal. Current owner, Elizabeth Curry, has restored the old home to its original condition.



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## ORIGINAL TIMBERFRAME

The basement of the Bob Brown house was of particular interest to investigators Ben Phillips (left), local historian Richard Armstrong and Dr. Andrew Robichaud.