

Archibald and Mary Brannen

Archibald Brannen (1777-1827)

The Brannens of Cape Island can be traced to Archibald who came to Barrington Township in 1792. This according to notes prepared by Professor Arnold Doane. (1) Professor Doane's research was described by Dr Edwin Crowell's preface to his book *A History of Barrington Township* published in 1923, as "... employed his vacations in ferreting out the life-stories and relationships of the early settlers of Barrington." (2) Professor Doane's work likely took place between 1890 and 1911. His notes unfortunately do not indicate their date nor the people he interviewed. It is clear that Professor Doane was capturing raw oral history. In Archibald's case he was dealing with a man who had been dead about 75 years. These notes can be found at the Cape Sable Historical Society in Barrington.

The Brannen history begins in 1792 with Archibald Brannen. We know nothing of Archibald's life prior to that date. He arrived in Barrington as a fifteen-year-old in the company of Jacob Glance according to Professor Doane's notes.

Although we know nothing about Arch's previous life, we do know that Glance was relocating from Shelburne to Barrington after being burned out of his home in Roseway (Shelburne) in 1792. He came to Barrington and went to work at John Sargent's mill and settled his family on River Road. Glance had been a soldier for hire, employed by the British in North Carolina during the War of Independence and had escaped to Shelburne in 1783 after the war. This has led some people to jump to the conclusion that Arch and Glance were connected from North Carolina. There is nothing at all to confirm this. Arch would only have been six years old when Glance was escaping from North Carolina after the defeat of the British.

So, after 225 years and a through search, my conclusion is that our history begins when Arch came to Barrington in 1792.

Both Doane and later Edwin Crowell in his book *History of Barrington Township* used fifteen as his age of arrival. Crowell in his book on page 441 concludes "*ARCHIBALD BRANNEN came to Barrington when about 15 years of age with Glance a loyalist soldier.*"

It is likely Arch came to Barrington by way of Shelburne but there are no records of his presence in Shelburne. Considering Glance's state of affairs, it is likely he would have walked, about a full day's hike if there was an overland marked trail.

Professor Duane notes say of Archibald *"he went fishing with the Hopkinses."* *"A.B. was a great fisherman"*. (1) In Archibald's 1815 deed he is described as a fisherman. In this probate records several of his larger debts appear to be with area fish dealers. This suggests that he was a fisherman but if he was a great fisherman, he was perhaps a poor businessman. With regard to his fishing career it has not been determined if he was an independent inshore fisherman with his own boat or if he was employed as a crewman on one of the Barrington fishing schooners.

Doane notes that, *"Archibald Hopkins was named after him."*(1) Archibald Hopkins was born in 1795 to Samuel Hopkins Jr and his wife Rebecca. (3) This date would seem consistent with Archibald, *"fishing with the Hopkinses"* sometime after 1792.

Archibald first appears in the records of the township when he witnessed the signature of Samuel Hopkins in a Sale Agreement dated March 14th, 1798, and swore an oath to this before Justice of the Peace John Sargent November 1798. He would have had to have been at least age 21.

He registered his stock marks with the Township on March 24, 1801. This would have permitted him to pasture livestock on undivided lands. His mark was *"A halfpenny under the left & a halfpenny top right ear"*. This indicates that at age 24 he was beginning to establish himself in the community. Professor Doane sums this up by saying *"The dates will indicate at what time the newcomers became really domesticated..."*(1)

The next public record of him was of his marriage to Mary Atkinson (1788-??), October 14 1802, by Rev. Samuel Osborne Doane in Barrington (3). He appears to have been about 25 and Mary 16 years old. Their first son Archibald Jr. was born soon after the marriage, December 9th of that year. Mary was the oldest daughter of Robert Atkinson and Hannah Nickerson. Their marriage was recorded in both Reverend Samuel Doane's record of marriages and the Barrington Township Records. (3) Her father Robert Atkinson was a deserter from the Royal Navy who came to Barrington after leaving his ship and swimming ashore at Shelburne. He settled on Cape Island what is now Stoney Island where Mary grew up.

There is no record of where Arch and Mary spent the first years of their marriage. There is no record of where he resided in the township prior 1815 but on September 23 of 1815 he purchased 1.5 shares of land in Class # 11 in the second division of land on Cape Sable Island. This property was purchased from Ebenezer Crowell for 10 pounds and included access to marsh and meadow. The area was unsettled and they were likely the first settlers in that area of the island, now known as Clam Point. He would have had to clear land and build a house as well as create a garden in the inhospitable soil of eastern Cape Sable Island. Because of the significant

period between establishing a household and his purchase, it is possible that they occupied the land and established their home there prior to the land purchase. The only indication of where the land was located comes again from Professor Doane's notes "*A.B. lived on the first good available house spot to the South Eastward of James McCoy.*" (1) As land parcels were described in terms of metes and bounds. In this system the boundaries are marked by rocks, trees shorelines etc. I have not been able to pinpoint the location of the property

At the time of his land purchase on Cape Sable Island there were seven living children ranging in age from a new baby to oldest son Archibald Jr. almost 13 years old. In total they had 12 children, eleven of which appear to have survived adulthood. Of the eleven that survived nine remained in the area and established families on Cape Island, Woods Harbour, and Baccaro. Two sons Archibald Jr., the oldest, and Jeremiah, according to oral family history moved away were not heard from again.

March 22, 1821, he appears with Mary as charter members of Reverend Asa McGray's new Church of Christ. (5) At that time, his family had grown to nine living children ranging in age from one year to 18. Reverend McGray held his services in his home in Centreville near what is now the intersection of the main highway, Stoney Island Road and South Side Road. The house was across the road from the current Brannen-McGray House. This would have been a significant trek on foot across the island using an unstructured "sled road" that passed through the forest and around the swamps from their home in Clam Point. Based on the 1870's map published by A.F.Church the road/path would appear to have been an extension of what is now known as Clam Point Road and crossed the Island and coming out in Centreville about 200 feet south of the McGray's wharf road. This would have been a walking distance of more than three and a half miles which would take at least two hours each way was over that terrain. Ownership of a beast of burden and wagon would have been an unlikely extravagance for a fisherman with no other land travel needs. Shopping, fish sales and medical treatment would have taken him to Barrington about than two miles by sail across the passage to the main land or Sherose Island where two of his major creditors, Obediah Wilson and John Sargent operated their fish store businesses.

June 22 of 1827 Archibald passed away. The Book of Records for his church in 1827 states "*June 22 Departed this life Archibald Brannen one of this church*"(5) He appears to have been around 50 when he died. He may have died of a lingering illness. This is derived from the fact that two of his creditors were doctors who attended him including his "last illness". Their claim was for £6.6.4 which seems to be a sizable sum considering his land purchase of £10 pounds. (4) At the time of his death there were six children under age 14.

His estate and the length of time to finalize probate was certainly notable by the aggressiveness of some of his creditors. He died without a will and with significant debts. He owed £127.8.7 1/2 to eleven creditors. The estate was insolvent, which should have been evident at a very early stage. Two of his creditors were doctors, one, John Fox, was owed £5 for medical services. In mid-1729, two years after Archibald's death, the doctor had James Fox petition Probate Court to become the Administrator of the estate. After his appointment, an inventory of his real and personal belongings was ordered. There was no separate mention of boat ownership in the list of assets, however the sale of personal property raised a little over 9 pounds which may have included a boat.

In April 1831 Mary petitioned the Probate Court for an allowance of some sort. In her petition, she stated her personal and removable property had been seized and sold without reservation of a bed or any other article. It was illegal to seize personal property without leaving the necessities of life.

When the estate was finally settled in 1833 after 6 years, the personal property of the Brannen's had been taken and sold for £9.19.10, and the real estate sold to son Reuben for £23.7.6. subject to his mother's dower. The house was nearly derelict. Estate expenses were £34.0.3. There was nothing left for the creditors and certainly nothing for Mary after expenses were paid.

There is no explanation for why the process was so protracted and so bitter that they stripped the house of all personal belongings. The debt to Dr. Fox was a mere £5 and clearly unrecoverable.

There is no record of where Archibald and Mary are buried however, he was both a charter and current a member of the Centreville church at the time of his death which would make the Centreville Cemetery the most likely burial site. There is no marker for many of the graves in the older part of the cemetery and no cemetery records from that era.

Mary Atkinson (1786-??)

Archibald married Mary Atkinson, the oldest daughter of Robert Atkinson and Hannah Nickerson about October 14th, 1802. Their marriage was recorded in both Reverend Samuel Doane's record of marriages and the Barrington Township Records. (3) Her date of birth was recorded in the Barrington Township records as March 30, 1786. Her father Robert Atkinson was a deserter from the Royal Navy who came to Barrington after leaving his ship and swimming ashore at Shelburne. He settled on Cape Island what is now Stoney Island where Mary grew up.

The following sketch is taken from Crowell's History of Barrington Township:

Robert Atkinson of Dorchester, Eng, was captain of the main top and ship's carpenter in a man-of-war which came to Shelburne. There he deserted, swimming ashore with a kit on a moonlit night and kept hiding until the ship left. He came through the woods to Barrington and went fishing with Richard Pinkham at the Town. About 1785 he married Hannah d. Gideon Nickerson and settled at the East End of Cape Island. (2)

Church records for the Centreville church show her as being a charter member of the church. She was baptized March 20, 1837, by Rev Asa McGray. (5)

She was widowed when she was about age 41 with seven children at home. Archibald was both insolvent and intestate when he died. It took six years to settle the estate during that time her personal and household possessions were sold at auction, which appeared to be against the law. She did remain on the property during that period. In a petition to the Probate Court April 1831, she wrote:

"That personal and moveable property hath been sold without the reservation of a bed or any other article whatever for your petitioner...."(4)

There does not appear to be any mention of her in the Centreville Church records after March 20, 1847 however the records are far from complete or exhaustive. (5)

Where she spent her final years, when and where she died and was buried have not been determined. The usual practice was for the widow to live with one of her children, or in some cases spending time with various children. Census records of her era did not identify household members by name.

Archibald and Mary produced twelve children. Their names and dates of birth are recorded in the Barrington Township Records 1994 transcription page 72. Their second born Atkinson died young in 1813, this also recorded in the Township Records. (3) Archibald Jr. and Jeremiah moved away from the Island and "were never heard from again". Their son Joseph was drowned when he was 25. Joseph's only child Salome was raised by another son Robert.

The surviving children of Archibald and Mary all settled in Barrington Township. Reuben was a fisherman and moved to Woods Harbour around 1845 some of his descendants still live on his original land there. William settled in South Side. He was a carpenter. Robert was a fisherman and settled at Stoney Island. Henry was the youngest son, he became a fisherman and settled in Baccaro sometime before 1861.

The daughters of Archibald and Mary married local men and established families on the Island. Susanna married Moses Ross of Stoney Island. Abigail married Smith Swim of Swim's Point. Sophia married Eleazar Penney and likely lived at Lower Clark's Harbour.

Rebekah married twice, first to Samuel Penney and had 8 children, she then married her sister's widower Smith Swim and lived at Swim's Point.

To-day Archibald and Mary's descendants make up a significant proportion of the population of Barrington Municipality. The children of Archibald and Mary produced about 69 children that lived to maturity, 43 of those continued the Brannen name.

Footnotes

(1) Arnold Doane was born 20 August 1833 in Barrington, Nova Scotia. In June 1852 Arnold, with his brothers, Seth, Joseph and Arthur, purchased the brigantine Sevim built by Arnold's brother Captain Warren Doane at his shipyard in Barrington. They sailed to Australia where Arnold worked for several years in the goldfield at Ballarat. With the proceeds, Arnold attended the Royal Academy of Music in London, England. He then became a professor of music in Barrington and in Halifax. Doane spent years collecting data for a history of Barrington. Doane died in Barrington on 14 January 1911

(2) A History of Barrington Township and Vicinity - Shelburne County, Nova Scotia 1607-1870 was originally published by Edwin Crowell in 1923. Dr. Edwin Crowell 1853-1926 was born in Barrington Township. He had a busy life and a succession of achievements. He began as a crewman on his father's schooners out of Barrington. He received a BA and later an MA from Dalhousie University. Between terms he taught school in and the worked as a bookkeeper before studying for the ministry and obtaining a degree of Bachelor of Divinity. Later Acadia University conferred a degree of Doctor of Divinity for his work with Free Baptist Conference and his editorship of the Free Baptist Banner. Along with his other accomplishments he was hired to make an index of Hansard for the House of Commons in Ottawa. After the death of Professor Doane in 1911 he acquired his memoranda and put them together with many changes and extensive additions. He spent about 12 years travelling interviewing and collecting additional items before writing his book which was published in 1923.

(3) Barrington Township Records: Early Records of marriages, Births and Deaths in Barrington , Nova Scotia from the year 1761. Transcribed by Patricia A. Terry A publication of the Shelburne County Genealogical Society, Storycroft Publishing, 1994

(4) Archibald Brannen's probate file

(5) Church of Christ, Cape Sable Island Book of Records 1821-1866 transcribed by Rev Hazen C. Parent