

The Crammond Islands Elopement

The story of Angus Ross' (1823-1906) marriage to Mary Smith (c1826-1887) is one of the most intriguing romances of St George's Channel. There are various versions of the story but all of them contain the same essential elements. Mary Smith was a very pretty girl, chubby with blond hair, a combination considered extremely attractive in those days. Angus Ross lived at the Marshes¹, West Bay, a couple of miles by water from the Smith home on the Crammond Islands in the Bras d'Or lakes. There had been good ice on the lake in 1843 and at all the skating parties Angus and Mary were constantly in each other's company. Everyone considered Mary Angus' girl and assumed they would soon marry but Mary was only seventeen and Angus twenty-one. There seemed to be lots of time for the young couple before taking the final step.

In 1844 Angus purchased the MacLeod farm at St George's Channel. It appears that the farm had been abandoned for some time and considerable work was required to bring it back into shape. This kept Angus very busy and since about five miles of water separated them it seemed to Mary's parents that the romance had dulled because Angus had neglected to keep in contact as he worked to create a comfortable home for Mary.

By 1846 Mary's father, Donald Smith (1801-1878), had become convinced that Angus Ross had lost interest in his daughter. Living on a island as they did, the potential for Mary acquiring a new love interest was not good. Mary's mother, Ann MacDonald (1810-1844), had died in 1844 and Donald remarried the following year. There may have been some antipathy between step-mother and daughter, we do not know, but what we do know was that Donald was anxious to find a husband for Mary. Some have suggested that he was concerned that Mary was getting too old and he feared that she might become an "old maid." That seems unlikely as by 1846 Mary was only 20 years old, not particularly old for a single woman at the time. Most women married between the ages of 20 and 25.

Donald began to make inquiries to find out whether there were any acceptable men looking for an attractive wife. A local clergyman took on Donald's search for him and found a man who fit Donald's criterion. This man was a teacher by the name of John Johnston who lived at East Lake Ainslie. Arrangements for a marriage were made and the date was set to bring everyone together for the wedding preliminaries

¹ The locale referred to as the 'Marshes' is at the head of Ross Pond.

with the wedding to take place the following day. Johnston was smitten when he saw Mary. Everything seemed to be going as planned but no one seemed to have consulted Mary.

As the festivities of the betrothal party were taking place someone inquired about the bride. It soon became evident that she was missing. Everyone began to search for her but she was not to be found. Then someone recalled that one of the guests had been Angus Ross. But where was his horse? It was gone. It was not long before the assembly had figured out what had happened. Angus and Mary had eloped.

John Johnston was totally humiliated. This was a terrible state of affairs for him. The assembled company had to do something for him but what? One of the gentlemen, a Mr MacKenzie (believed to be John MacKenzie), stood up and said that he had a marriageable daughter that was unattached and that would make him a good wife. Now parents were not usually cold and callous as they set out to find husbands for their daughters. In general, women were expected to find a suitable husband without their parents' intervention. In this case, Miss MacKenzie's father had also done just that. Unknown to her father Miss MacKenzie did have a gentleman friend and her intended immediately protested that Mr Johnston could not have his girl.

Poor Mr Johnston had again been rejected. As everyone sat around bewildered as what to do a dark, slender girl came forward and volunteered to become Mr Johnston's wife. The volunteer was Hannah MacKenzie (c1826-1899), believed to be the younger sister of the first Miss MacKenzie. Her proposal was accepted and the couple set off for Arichat where they could be married upon the purchase of a license. It is said that the two couples passed on the ice on the Bras d'Or lakes: the Rosses, already man and wife, as they were just returning from Arichat where they had married, and the engaged couple on their way to their nuptials. As they passed they briefly greeted each other and moved on.

In the St John's Anglican Church records, Arichat, the two marriages are recorded side by side: Angus Ross and Mary Smith on March 3 and John Johnston and Hannah MacKenzie on March 4.

Excerpted from "A Living Community - A History of St George's Channel"
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