

Charles Summer 25 #10: Seeing People, Places and Plays

Warning: This is a meandering blog ... which also describes our travels. So, I apologize in advance if it's hard to follow!



One of the fun things about travelling is you get to catch up with people you haven't seen in a while.

Because we were in the Annapolis Valley, we had to stop in Berwick and call in on my old friend Pam Lutz who I met at Ryerson over 50 years ago! We had a lovely lunch together and Pam was, as always, full of stories, both about our days back in Toronto and the colourful life she has back in her hometown. (This was well before the wildfires which were not far from Berwick.)



And it wouldn't be a proper visit to Nova Scotia without stopping in to see Katrina Walsh. She and I became friends nearly 20 years ago when we worked together on one of my favourite TV show experiences, *The Mighty Jungle*. Always great to see her and her wonderful and talented husband Jerry. As a bonus we got to meet Katrina's sister Esabelle, who kindly took this photo.



Next stop, Dartmouth, where we connected with Jennifer VanderBurgh, who Jim has known since she was born (and before!). We had a nice lunch with Jen and her partner Andrew, and then had a very quick visit with Jen's son Pip.





But we aren't the only ones travelling in Nova Scotia. Our friends Dorcas Beaton and Mike Holm were also there. Dorcas has a cabin there (which is a whole other story!). Mike is from Nova Scotia and has family there. So, we stopped at their place, where Jim had the opportunity to test out their hanging chair. (It passed.)



And then we met up with Mike's sister Heather for dinner at a very busy restaurant, in a lovely setting.



Also visiting Nova Scotia was Jim's daughter Courtenay, who shares a cottage near Pictou with her mother and uncle. So, of course, we had to go there for some father-daughter time.

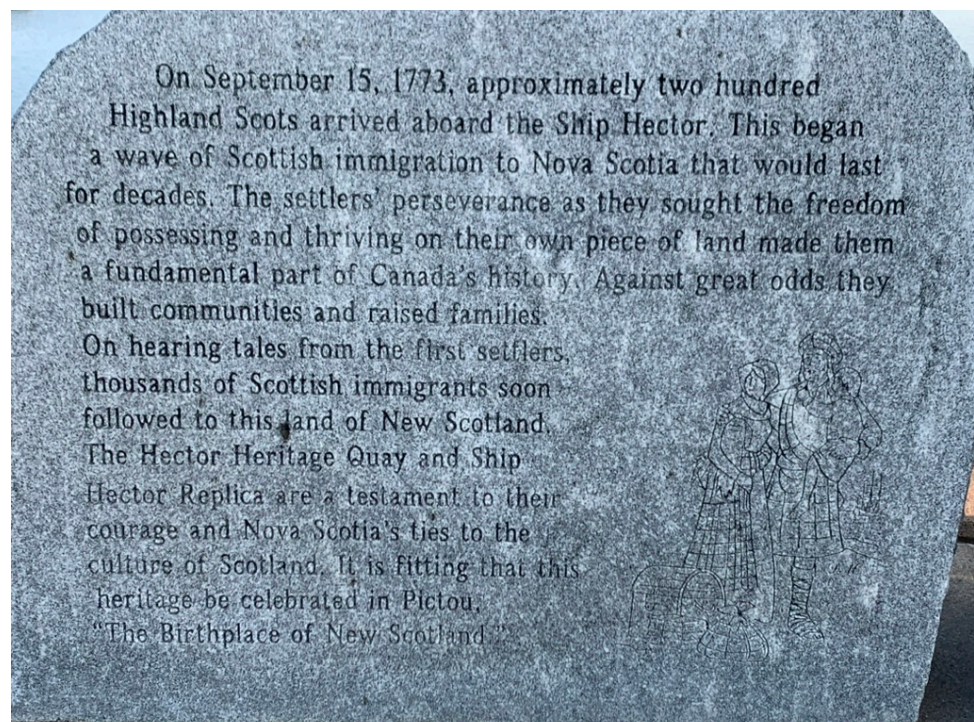


While there, we hit a few sights. We went to the Pictou Lodge, which was spectacular, and is making its way back after being hit by Hurricane Fiona a couple of years ago. We were happy to provide support by having a pre-dinner drink there.



Then we headed to downtown Pictou for a little history lesson.

I had never heard of the Hector, but it's known as Canada's Mayflower, having brought the first 200 settlers from Scotland in 1773, and landing in what became Pictou, New Scotland. The restoration of the ship had been going on for many years, and the official launch just happened earlier this summer.





Apparently, Pictou brings out the kid in a lot of people.

From the time we started planning this trip (and I use the term “planning” loosely), Jim said he wanted to see a show at Two Planks and a Passion Theatre. So, we made sure to include it in our meanderings around the province.

Set in the countryside outside Canning, this theatre company, founded and still run by Ken Schwartz and Chris O’Neill, has been for creating theatrical productions for 34 years!



This year, they had two productions, *Quixote* and *The Haunting of Sleepy Hollow*.



We arrived on a beautiful warm afternoon, and we wandered the grounds a bit before making our way to the outdoor stage.



What followed was a delightfully original production of the Don Quixote story, presented in a Commedia dell'Arte style, with the imaginative use of puppetry. The sequence where the "very dangerous lion" was released from its cage and took the opportunity to lift his leg and relieve himself was a highlight.



Having thoroughly enjoyed the production, we made our way back to Charles for dinner, although we could have partaken in the box dinner they offer.



Then, just before 9:00, we walked back to the play area, which now had a small stage for musicians and seating surrounding a roaring bonfire. (This was before the fire ban, and apparently when that occurred, the bonfire was replaced by a fake fire, which I gather was still effective. However, we were glad we saw the original version.)



The *Haunting of Sleepy Hollow* was a musical retelling of the story about the townspeople and their new schoolteacher, Ichabod Crane. The bonfire was the only source of light, and throughout the play, different members of the cast would add another log or two, as part of the action. All the music was acoustic, we could hear everything, and the overall effect was terrific.

After the show, everyone was invited to gather 'round the bonfire and roast marshmallows with the cast. It was a thoroughly unique and enjoyable experience.



During our travels in the Annapolis valley, we drove through Wolfville. We only stopped briefly so I could take some pictures of the Wolfville sign.



While there, I discovered this striking statue of Thomas Vernon Smith, who was responsible for the building of the Windsor and Annapolis Railway Valley in 1866.



We didn't have time to explore more of the town, but I continued snapping photos as we drove through.

Some weeks later when I was scanning through my photos, I saw something I hadn't noticed before:



The Alex Colville Wolfville Gallery?? And we didn't stop to go inside?? How unCanadian! So, we decided to return to Wolfville to give Alex Colville the attention he deserved.

We found a very nice Harvest Host (a vineyard / winery that allows RVers to stay overnight for free).

Lightfoot & Wolfville had a beautiful property overlooking the Minas Basin, with an impressive and busy outdoor restaurant.





So, we repaid them
for generously
letting us park
overnight, by
ordering a couple
of their delicious
woodfired pizzas...



... And of course,
flights of their
wines.



All of which were quite tasty. We spent the night in Charles, parked beside the peaceful vineyards.



The next day, we drove into Wolfville, and parked Charles near the Wolfville Gallery, eager to appreciate Colville's brilliance.

But when we went to the front of the building, instead of a gallery, we found...



We asked the men who were doing work on the exterior of the building where the entrance to the gallery was.

They had no idea.

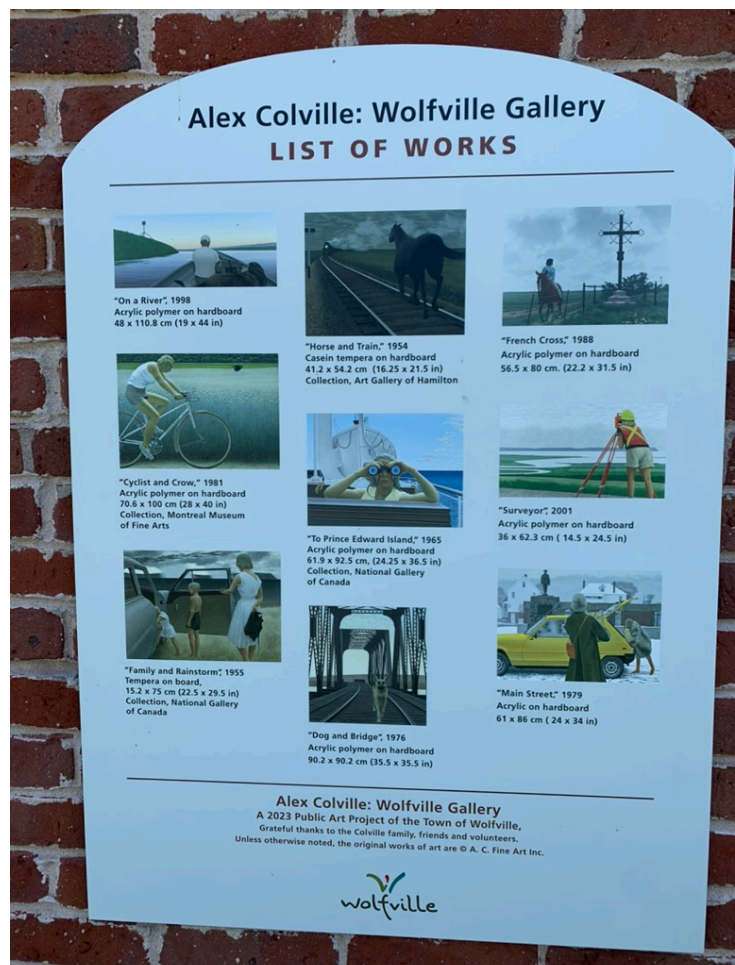
So, we went into the dentist's office to ask if it was somewhere in the building, and we were informed that the photos on the outside wall *were* the Alex Colville Gallery.



So, the wall that we had driven by weeks earlier was all there was to see.

Boy did we feel stupid.

But at least we got a chance to take a closer look and be reminded of Colville's great works.



Wolfville wasn't the only place we made a return visit to.

In past trips we had enjoyed Sunset Watch, a great campground near Tatamagouche. So we decided to go back there for a few days. And we were glad we did. Perched as we were, right on the edge of the Northumberland Strait, we had wonderful views.



Sometimes the tide was out.



And sometimes it was in.



Sometimes we could see – and hear – the seals resting on the sandbars when the tide was out. (They were too far away for my camera to capture clearly.)



And sometimes there were views that just made us smile.



But there's a reason it's called Sunset Watch. And unlike the Colville Gallery, it didn't disappoint.





But it was time to move on. There was a play and person we wanted to see.

Our friend, Martha Irving, was in a play in Antigonish, so we included that in our travel plans.

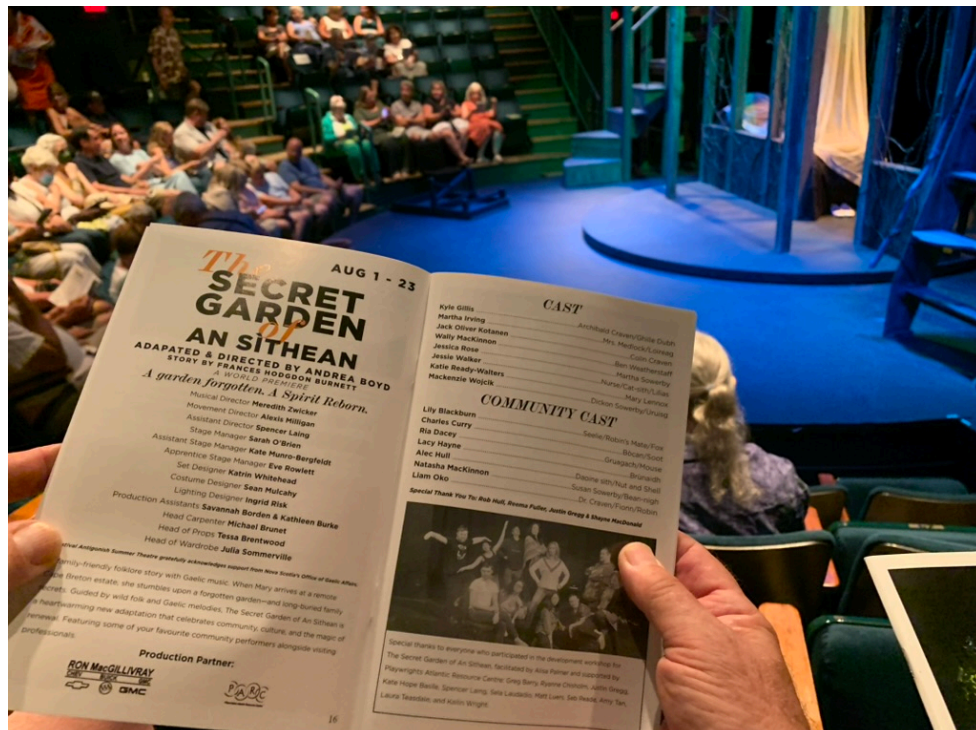


We had a delicious dinner at a restaurant called Gabrielle's.





And then we saw a new version of *The Secret Garden*, with traditional Gaelic songs, performed by a combination of professionals and community actors. It was fun to see this distinctive take on the story and to catch up with Martha afterward.



After that, we zigged and zagged around, finding interesting sights ... and signs.



Until we found the sign we were looking for.



Because that led us to the person we were looking for...



Back at the cottage near Pictou, Emily was taking a break, so we spent an evening catching up with her. And of course there were good hugs.



You can't go to Nova Scotia without going to Cape Breton, so that was definitely on our route.



We found a colourful boondocking spot not too far past the bridge.



And the next day we went to Baddeck, partly to see the town and partly to see a play.



The town is vibrant and full of colour, and it sits on the beautiful Bras d'Or Lake.

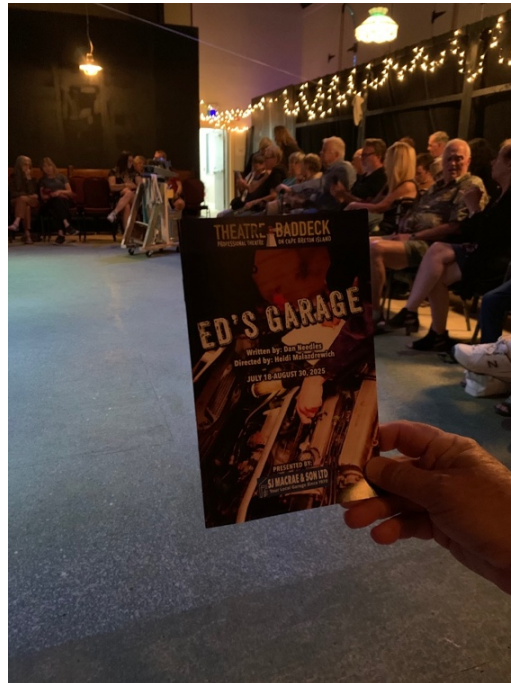




But you do have to be
on the lookout for
pirates.



The play, *Ed's Garage* had all the humour and familiar markings of a Dan Needles play, and offered up some nice performances.



Next, we went to Sydney, where our friend Wesley Colford has been producing shows at the Highland Arts Theatre (HAT) since he founded the company 11 years ago.

This summer, they produced *Hairspray*, which was just as exuberant as it needs to be.

And we got to see our friend Chris Tsujiuchi play the classic role of Tracy's mother, Edna Turnblad, which was even more fun.





Wesley is a very busy guy.

Just a few days after *Hairspray* closed, his company presented *Back to Broadway*, in a former church, now an elegant venue.

With a talented cast of about a dozen, it was a very glitzy show with two acts of nonstop singing and dancing. And Wesley didn't just produce it, he also performed in it!



A day later, we sat in on a dress rehearsal of the Kat Sandler comedy *Punch Up*, which Wesley and two other actors were presenting in Chester starting the next day!

After keeping up with Wesley and his shows, WE were exhausted!

So, we relaxed for a few days at the very peaceful Mira River Provincial Park.



Then we went back to Sydney, because we had some other travellers to meet up with.



Our designated meeting place was “The Big Fiddle” which is the world’s largest fiddle and commemorates the music of the Celtic community in Cape Breton.

At 60 feet high, it greets people who visit Sydney, by land or by sea.

It’s the landing spot for all the cruise ships that come through.

And that’s exactly why we were there.



Two of the 3500 passengers on this gigantic ship had made the trip to Sydney specifically to meet up with us! (Note how tiny the “big” fiddle looks next to the ship.)



My cousin Diane and her husband Jerry, who live in Florida, decided that the only way they were likely to see us in the next while was if they came to us!

So, they took a cruise from Boston that stopped in a few Canadian ports, ending with Sydney. So, we planned to meet and spend a day together!

Fortunately, they love cruising.

But still, that's dedication!



Jim and I had never been to Louisbourg before, and Diane and Jerry, who are former travel agents, love to see historic places. So, we drove about half an hour south of Sydney to check it out.

The French spent 25 years building the fortress as protection against British attacks, and completed it in 1745. Of course, the main reason it was important to both was its proximity to the gigantic cod fisheries. By 1758, the British won it back. And then they destroyed it. So, the entire site of today's Louisbourg is a reconstruction. (As one of the "inhabitants" pointed out, the restoration, which is about a tenth of the original site, took about the same number of years to build.)

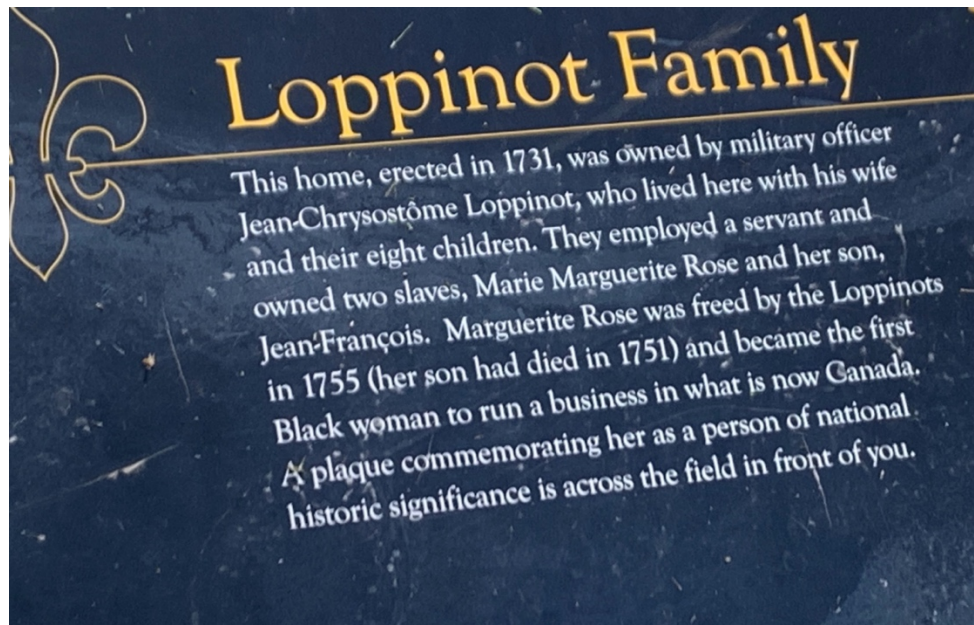


Even though it's just a tiny portion of the original fortress, it still covers a huge area.



It was a perfect day and we were able to explore some of the grounds and speak to a few of the costumed guides about life in the 18th century. But I have to say I was disappointed in the amount of engagement and guidance they offered.





Unfortunately, Jerry wasn't feeling great, and the enormity of the place made it a challenge to fully appreciate it.

So, we decided to leave and to do what we do best:

We found a place to eat!

We'd heard about North Star, owned by (the apparently famous) Colin & Justin, so we decided to enjoy a nice lunch.



Then we returned Diane & Jerry to their ship, by way of the Merchant Mariners Memorial, which acknowledges the role played by the Merchant Marines during World War II.

We were sorry to see them go after such a short visit.

They definitely get the prize for travelling the farthest just to see us!



There was one more family we needed to see while in the Maritimes. We had a couple of days before they arrived, so we decided to return to one of our favourite campgrounds, The Ovens. We got there right around the time Hurricane Erin was blowing by, and the waves were amazing!





We left The Ovens and headed to a place with the unlikely name of Lake Mushamush to see some family members. They don't live there. In fact, they live about an hour from us, in Uxbridge. But when my niece Whitney said they were going to be at a cottage in Nova Scotia in late August, we couldn't resist finding them to spend a day together.

It was a great cottage, the lake, despite its name, was beautiful and it was fun to see the kids enjoying it.



We adults enjoyed it too.



From all reports, the rest of their stay in Nova Scotia was great, and they even checked out a couple of our favourite places – Lunenburg and The Ovens. So, there's a good chance we'll be bumping into them again next time we spend the summer in the Maritimes.