



# EXTRA! EXTRA!



—ELEVATION—

*John A. Munroe, Arch<sup>t</sup>.  
65, Prince St. St. J.*

PANB H6-



## What's in a Drawing?

*Architect John A. Munroe designed this extension to Saint John's Lunatic Asylum in July 1869. A few months later, he was on trial for murder.*

## the Black River Road murder

It is an architect's drawing of a functional building—the Saint John institution commonly known as the Lunatic Asylum. But behind its simple lines lies a melodrama worthy of a Victorian novelist, or perhaps a 21st Century filmmaker.

This drawing and a few others in the collections of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick are the only surviving examples of the draftsmanship of John A. Munroe. At the time they were made—for an extension to the asylum in 1869—he was emerging as one of Saint John's leading architects and most promising young men. His commissions already included the Germain Street Baptist Church, the Carleton Masonic Hall, and "Jewett's

Castle," the splendid private residence of American lumberman E.D. Jewett. Still only in his thirties and married with two children, Munroe had a gentle manner and quiet competence that appeared to guarantee a comfortable future.

And then he met a woman. And that meeting led to murder. And the murder led to the most heart-wrenching and sensational courtroom trial Saint John and New Brunswick had ever seen. Not only did it transfix the thousands of people who followed it in court and in the newspapers at the time, it also provides, 135 years later, poignant insights into the practices and attitudes prevailing in that distant age in the old province.

There are numerous places where we might begin the story of the undoing of John Munroe. But let us arbitrarily choose the day in September, 1869, when a group of blueberry pickers on the Black River Road, outside Saint John, made a terrible discovery. On a patch of ground just off the road, they stumbled across a scattering of human remains and bits of clothing. These would later be determined to be those of a woman and a small child. For the moment, however, the people making this horrifying find, who all happened to be Blacks, decided it would be best if they kept quiet about it, a decision that surely spoke volumes about their tenuous position in the hierarchical society of the day.



Ron Keith



*Recognizing the frenzied public interest in the case, a Saint John photographer produced souvenir cards, including one bearing this re-enactment of blueberry pickers discovering human remains at the murder scene on the Black River Road.*

But something like this couldn't remain a secret for long. Soon the authorities were on the scene, a coroner's inquest was convened, and shortly the police, with a rumour-driven inexorability, found their way to John Munroe and arrested him. He had, after all, been seen in the company of a young woman who was not his wife. He contended she was a "Mrs. Clark," a widow with a babe in arms whom he was merely trying to help. But presently it developed that she was really Sarah Margaret Vail, the youngest of six sisters in a family of 10 siblings from nearby Carleton, and that the child was his.

Munroe had apparently met Sarah at a picnic grounds in Carleton. In her early twenties, she was hardly his intellectual equal—she could neither read nor write—but she was very attractive, with her plump figure, fine teeth, and beautiful "waterfall" of darkening brown hair. And soon she was also pregnant.


After the child was born, Munroe made a few trifling gestures of support, while Sarah, for reasons that never became clear, turned over to him \$500 she had gained from selling her deceased parents' house. By now, she had become estranged from her closest sisters, who disapproved of her involvement with a married man.

Growing desperate in October, 1868, she followed Munroe to Boston on the same boat he had taken with friends; his paramour was becoming not just a nuisance but a palpable threat to his standing and career.

Back in Saint John, poor Sarah shuffled from one hotel to another, an unwed mother with a baby and a few meagre possessions packed in two modest trunks. Munroe went to Fredericton on a riverboat, and it was during this trip that he finally figured out how to get rid of her. It was not a clever plan, filled as it was with elements that even the dimmest constable could uncover, but he had become desperate, too. So he bought a Smith and Wesson six-shooter and then made arrangements for an excursion with Sarah and the baby to the Black River Road.

They actually went twice, by public carriage, no less, ostensibly so that Sarah could visit friends at a place called Collins' at Loch Lomond. On the second trip, as he had on the first, Munroe asked the coachman to let them out a short distance from their destination so that they might walk the rest of the way. It was a Saturday, the last day of October, Hallowe'en, and the weather was crisp, the dirt road partly frozen. About an hour later, Munroe was back at a nearby

roadhouse, where the driver was waiting. He said the woman had decided to stay with her friends until Monday, when she would return to the city in time to catch the Boston boat. He arranged for the coachman to deliver her trunks, which were still at a hotel in the city, to the docks where Munroe would see that they were put aboard.



**The Sad Tale of Maggie Vail**

Come all you fellow citizens  
With pity lend an ear  
To the sad and mournful story  
You are about to hear.

Concerning a young damsel  
In Carleton town did dwell  
She was handsome young and innocent  
The truth to you I'll tell.

The first place that I saw Miss Vail  
Was on a picnic day  
We were introduced and pleasantly  
We passed the time away.

Not knowing I was married  
And trusting me also  
'Tis little did the poor thing think  
I'd prove her overthrow.

Likewise five hundred dollars  
She trusted to my care  
And said there was none other  
With me she could compare.  
.....

RS1

*These verses are from a ballad written at the time of Munroe's trial and sung throughout the province, including in lumbercamps.*

Testifying later, the coachman remembered that Munroe had appeared flushed and agitated when he returned to the roadhouse. Indeed, he'd been so anxious to leave that he insisted the driver forego his dinner. It was no wonder. In the intervening hour, Munroe had led the woman and child into some spongy ground off the road, then strangled the baby and fired a bullet into Sarah's skull. Afterward, he'd covered the bodies with moss and brush.


At the trial, which began in early December, 1869, Attorney-General A. P. Wetmore meticulously built his case on forensic and physical evidence. The coroner was able to determine that the remains belonged to a woman and a child, even though the site had been badly disturbed by wild animals who'd apparently carted off many of the bones. Other witnesses identified the trunks, which had gone unclaimed in Boston, and the clothing found inside. Particularly damaging were the testimonies of the coachman and one of Sarah's sisters who remembered, among other things, an occasion when she'd heard Munroe, perhaps jokingly, perhaps not, ask Sarah whether, if he obtained some poison, she would administer it to his wife.

Against long odds, Munroe's lawyer, S.R. Thomson, mounted a defence that consisted mainly of a parade of witnesses who had known the prisoner in one capacity or another. All referred to his sterling character and their own utter disbelief that he could have committed such a crime. The lawyer even produced a couple of chaps who claimed to

have seen Sarah at the dock on the Monday after Hallowe'en; their wavering testimony was not convincing.

Thomson's best moment came in his closing argument, which was as remarkable as it was eloquent. He attacked the zeal with which the attorney-general had prosecuted the case, lectured the jury on the improbability of the circumstantial evidence, and excoriated Saint John's chief of police, a friend of Munroe's since childhood who "in the guise of a serpent" had gained the accused's confidence, then betrayed him. Nor did Thomson let the jurors go gently into their deliberations. Addressing the matter of capital punishment more than a century before it was formally abolished in Canada, he told them: "If you, gentlemen, find a verdict of 'guilty' in this case, not one of you can escape the responsibility of so taking the life of a human being, and when the scaffold is erected, and the bell is tolling, and the rope is placed on the neck of the victim, in that dread hour not one of you can escape responsibility for what is done."

*We are grateful to  
Ron Keith for the  
loan of  
illustrations for  
this article. With  
his agreement  
they were copied  
for the holdings of  
Provincial  
Archives of New  
Brunswick.*

The case went to the jurors at two o'clock on the afternoon of December 17. Barely an hour later, they were back with their verdict: "Guilty, with a strong recommendation for mercy." Munroe, whose calm appearance earlier in the trial had given way to a pale, haggard look, appeared momentarily stunned. Then he slumped in his seat, buried his face in his hands, and shook uncontrollably, until a constable gently led him away. Four days later, as a crowd of 1500 jammed the courthouse and environs, the judge sentenced Munroe to hang on February 15. The day before he died, he signed a confession. "I cannot say that money was not one of the motives for the act committed," he said. "It was the money, my anger with her at the time, and my bad thoughts on and after the trip to Fredericton, working together, caused me to do the bad act." 



## NEW PRODUCTS AVAILABLE FROM ARCHIVES' ASSOCIATES


The Associates' fund-raising for a reader-printer-scanner has been successfully completed and the equipment is installed and operating at the Archives. The Associates are considering a number of projects to support programmes of the Provincial Archives in addition to the on-going sales of publications. A commitment was made to enlarge the line of products offered for sale and to market these on the Archives web site.

The campaign to raise funds for the acquisition of the Beutel editorial cartoons is continuing. Other activities include: an application to the

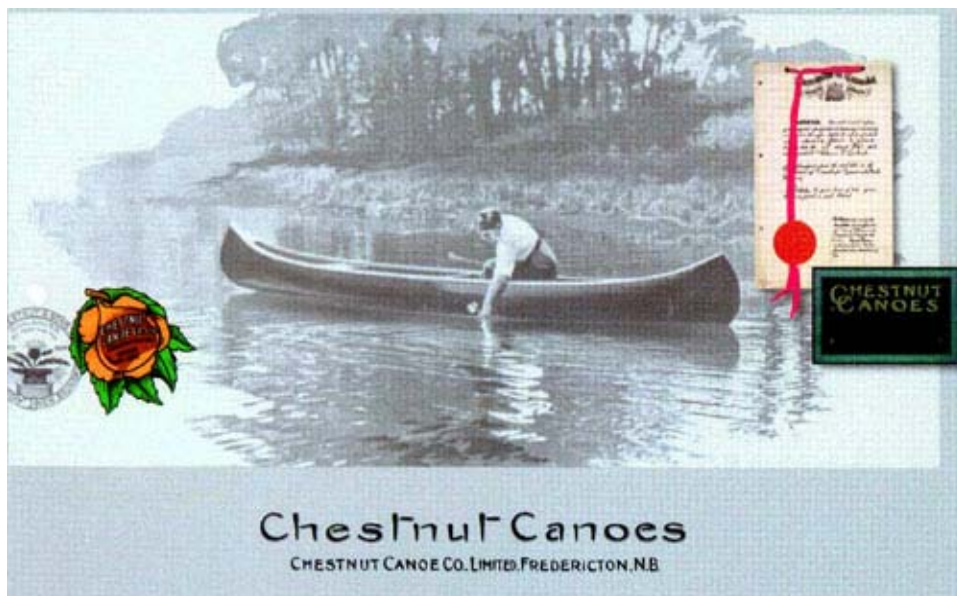
Environmental Trust Fund for funding to prepare finding aids for a number of unprocessed collections in the holdings of PANB that relate to aspects of the environment such as meteorological logs, nuclear reactor records, tidal power, and natural resources; and an application to the NB 2004 Initiative to fund production and touring of virtual and actual exhibits on the St. John River, its naming by Champlain, and the development of communities along it.

The Associates approved contributions to the Provincial Archives to assist in the construction of a case to display

sales items, for the cost share portion required for a student funded by the Young Canada Works in Heritage Programme of the federal government, and toward the purchase of software for a non linear audio editing system.

The Associates are also involved individually in a number of archives and heritage related activities and projects including historical research, arrangement of archival collections, negotiations for acquisitions, and additions to the cemeteries database on the Archives web site. 

**The Associates are pleased to announce that they are now carrying Chestnut Canoe clothing, decals, and other memorabilia in their sales kiosk. Also available is the definitive company history *When the Chestnut Was in Flower* by Roger MacGregor**

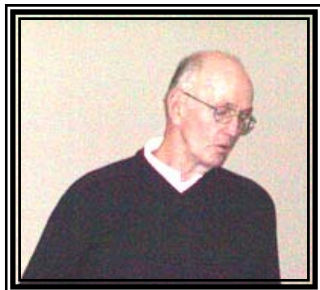




## PROFILE OF A BOARD MEMBER

### 50-YEAR QUEST FOR QUILTS

**John** Corey of Buttemut Ridge,  
Havelock, Kings County, New

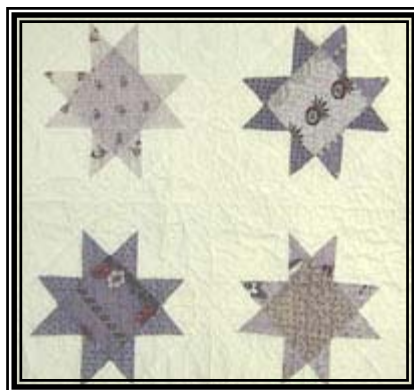


Brunswick, has had a lifelong passion for his province's history. This interest has made him a fountain of knowledge and a resource person par excellence. John has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Associates of the Provincial Archives since 1994. He has assisted with many of the Associates public programmes and he has been instrumental in many significant records being preserved at the Provincial Archives. Research, appraisal, and detective skills are just some of the tools he brings to bear on questions the archives presents to him. Along with all this knowledge, another of John's great attributes is his network of contacts throughout New Brunswick and beyond. If he can't solve the question posed to him, someone he knows will be able to help out.

He has been associated with the refurbishment of a number of heritage buildings in New Brunswick and this has given him a keen interest in conveying accuracy of detail to ensure authenticity. Through observation, experience and careful study, he has developed connoisseurship in a number of decorative art subjects. One aspect of daily life that fascinates him is domestic

textiles, most especially the quilts, coverlets and blankets that were produced to provide both warmth and decoration in New Brunswick. His collecting began at a local country auction in 1950 where effects of the Venning family were being sold. There he purchased the sturdy and finely quilted, Eight-Pointed Star-pattern, pieced quilt that was probably made by Adelia Annie Gosline [Gosselin] Venning (1850-1948) about 1880.

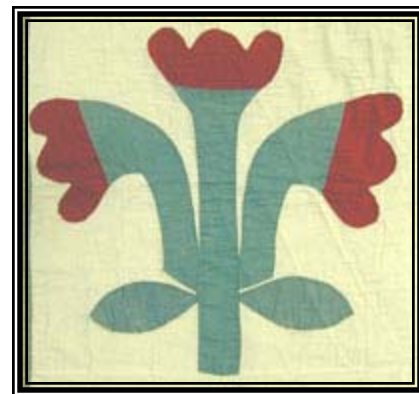
Initially the impetus for his acquiring was practical use but as



*Eight-pointed Star pattern pieced quilt*

the collection began to grow so did his appreciation for the diversity of pattern, technique and craftsmanship. As he attended more auctions and frequented the shops of antique dealers, knowledge of his interest became more widespread and eventually individuals would contact him privately to sell, and sometimes give, examples to him. The collection became an invaluable resource for talks, lectures and exhibitions for groups interested in history and especially traditional quilting and it has also provided modern quilt makers in southern New Brunswick with the information needed to understand,

develop and evaluate their work. Some items have garnered interest from outside the region as well and one item, a folk art Tulip-pattern appliqué quilt by Theadocia (Tressie) Keith Thorne (1858-1942) made about 1925, was circulated by *Canadian Living* magazine as a Women's Institute shared pattern.



*Tulip pattern appliqué quilt*

The collection dating between approximately 1780 and 1940 and totalling over 300 individual items has been offered to the New Brunswick Museum. In combination with the more than 150 pieces already housed in the Museum, this grouping of artifacts will ensure that the Museum is one of the centres of study for domestic textiles in Canada. The New Brunswick Museum is currently fundraising for the acquisition of this important collection.



# NEW ACQUISITIONS

MC80 **Base Gagetown 50th Anniversary Reunion Project** – Local histories:

- MC80/2771 **Greenfield Settlement** by Vaughn Ashburne
- MC80/2772 **The People of Shirley Settlement** by Donald Lindsay
- MC80/2773 **Summer Hill, Dunn's Corner, Gone but Not Forgotten** Editor: Richard Corbett
- MC80/2774 **Place of Our Hearts: Memories of the Base Gagetown Communities to 1953** (June, 2003)
- MC80/2775 **New Jerusalem: We Remember** by Verna Mott
- MC80/2776 **Tweedsmuir**
- MC80/2777 **Reflections of Petersville New Brunswick, 1819-1956** by Evelyn Garland
- MC80/2778 **Olinville** by Lourie Raymond
- MC80/2779 **Along Hibernia Roads: Faded Memories**
- MC80/2780 **Enniskillen: Golden Memories** by Suzanne McCann
- MC80/2781 **Remembering Coote Hill** by Frank Queen
- MC80/2782 **Clones, United Church and School—Days Remembered**
- MC80/2783 **Armstrongs Corner**

MC223 DS-16G2 **“Handmaiden of the Church: the Church of England Women of the Diocese of Fredericton, 1880-1904”** (35 p. 2001) by Gillian Liebenberg

## NEW FINDING AIDS

### GOVERNMENT RECORDS

RS141 / B7 **Indexes to Provincial Returns of Marriages, 1944-1945** (update to our existing database).

RS141 / C4 **Indexes to Provincial Returns of Death, 1894-1900** (update to our existing database).

RS330 **Records of Thomas Carleton, Lieutenant Governor, 1784-1803.** *1 m.* Revised finding aid includes a précis of the documents.

RS336 **Records of George Stracy Smyth, Colonial Administrator and Lieutenant Governor, 1812-1823** *20 cm.* Revised finding aid includes a précis of the documents.

RS538 **Provincial Secretary: Warrants, Appointments, and Commissions, 1784-1965** *2.4 m* An updated finding aid.

RS649 **Records of the Court of Piracy and Crimes Committed on the High Seas, 1929-1865** *6 cm.* An updated finding aid.

## PRIVATE RECORDS

MC68 **McFarlane Wagon Company fonds** (2 *cms.* 1915-1926) Nashwaaksis company. Estimates of cost of parts and labour, include detailed designs for wagons and wagon parts and sometimes the name of the customer who ordered the wagon.

MC197 **Meductic Women's Institute fonds** (17 *cms.* 1948-1989) Minutes, Financial Records, Incorporation Certificate etc.

MC396 **Hugh B. Hay fonds** (27 *cms.* 1914-1941) Chipman area doctor. Appointment diaries, 1914, 1931-1941.

MC492 **Home Committee of the New Brunswick Women's Institute Home, Woodstock fonds**, (Microfilm F22998, F22999 1952-2000) Minutes.

MC623 **Moncton Railway Company Collection** (20 *cms.* 1836-1974) Collection of press clippings, photocopies, notes and printed ephemera pertaining to the railways in New Brunswick including the Intercolonial Railway, the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian National Railway and various branch lines. Information about the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, 1898-1929, is included, as is material about the Moncton street railway which ran the street cars. There is also a section on Mr. H. A. Whitney, superintendent of the European and North American Railway, and a few railway publications.

MC905 **John C. Allen fonds** (13 *cms.* 1820-1899) Lawyer, editor, Supreme Court reporter, Clerk of Executive Council, Solicitor-General, M.L.A., Speaker of House of Assembly, Attorney-General, Chief Justice. Correspondence, notes, legal documents, personal financial records and register of civil cases.

MC906 **T. Carleton Allen fonds** (14 *cms.* 1866-1929) Son of John C. Allen (MC905) Lawyer, Clerk of the Pleas and Clerk in Equity, Registrar of Supreme Court, Deputy Attorney-General and first Chancellor of Anglican Diocese of Fredericton. Personal and professional records.

MC1734 **Dalhousie News** (Microfilm F23039, F23057, F23059, F23060 1951-1970, 1971-1975, 1984).

MC2121 **Pointe de Bute Women's Institute fonds** (Microfilm F22984, F22987-F22989 1939-2000) Minutes supplemented by Branch of Honour Scrapbooks. (re-microfilmed with additional records transferred by Mount Allison University Archives).

MC2179 **Fonds de l'Institute feminin de Clair** (1977-1979) Minutes.

MC2973 **Weldon U. Pickle fonds** (20 *cms.* 1925-1950) Correspondence and notes of Pickle, native of Hillsdale, Kings County, who spent most of his adult life in Alberta and Saskatchewan as a teacher, preacher and realtor -- but who retained a lifelong passion for Kings County history and genealogy.

MC3003 **Bruce F. Hay fonds** (3 *cms.* 1936-1949) Magistrate and notary public in Chipman. Records of several court cases and membership dues notification etc. for Corinthian Lodge No.13 of which he was a member. Son of Hugh B. Hay (MC396).

MC3094 **Maple Leaf (Gagetown) Women's Institute fonds**: (Microfilm F23055, F23056 1939-2000) Minute Books.

MC3095 **Lakeside Women's Institute fonds**: (Microfilm F22986 1949-2000) Minutes.

MC3101 **Queens County Prohibitionary Alliance fonds** (.5*cms.* 1883-1886) Temperance organization with the aims of distributing temperance literature, introducing a temperance text book to schools in the county, and the strict enforcement of the Scott Act and other legislation to prohibit sale and import of beverage alcohol. Minute Book includes constitution and the rules of the organization.

MC3155 **Britton Mining Company of New Brunswick fonds** (.5 *cms.* 1890-1894) Company formed for the purpose of mining gold and silver in Lower Wakefield, Carleton County. Organizational and legal records of this Company.

## ADDITIONS TO ARCHIVES WEBSITE

**Death Certificates** 1952-1953. These indexes include the name of the deceased, the date of death, the county where the death occurred, the registration number of the certificate, and the microfilm F-number where on the certificate may be viewed.

**Marriages** added. This index includes marriages from 1882-1951. The index was compiled from the records of Vital Statistics in RS141 located at PANB.

**Provincial Returns of Deaths** updated: 1894-1902

**Historical images of New Brunswick** updated. Currently 2,273 images are available.

**Cemeteries** uploaded;

Johnville Old Section, Carleton  
New Catholic, Charlotte  
Wheaton Settlement Baptist, Westmorland  
First Community 1784-1876, Charlotte  
Lone Pine, Westmorland

**View Provincial Archives of New Brunswick's On-line Exhibits;**

New Brunswick at War  
Women at Work  
Royal Visits to New Brunswick  
Canoeing on the River



**<http://archives.gnb.ca>**



## HAVE VITAL PERSONAL RECORDS REPAIRED

There is hope for precious documents suffering the ravages of time, mishandling, or poor storage. The Conservation Coop is a programme administered by the Associates of the Provincial Archives to assist in the preservation of New Brunswick's documentary heritage. Its services are available to archives, museums and historical societies and to individuals and corporations.

Work performed includes conservation treatments on paper based documents, maps, bound volumes, photographs, and art on paper. Treatments include cleaning, mending, bookbinding, matting, and construction of custom enclosures.

The standard on which conservation practices and decisions are based reflects the *Code of Ethics and Guidance for Practice of the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property*, and of the *Canadian Association of Professional Conservators*.

Estimates of the time required for a service or treatment are provided to clients. Charges are \$40.00 an hour to cover labour and material costs. For information contact; Leslie McDougall (506)453-2637

## Join the Associates of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick

As an Associate

- you will help staff and volunteers further the mandate of the Archives by enhancing programs for schools and services to the public and by supporting the acquisition of archival treasures for preservation,
- you will receive a newsletter twice a year giving information on new accessions and new finding aids to collections,
- you will be informed about the programs and coming events at the Archives, in Fredericton and around the Province,
- you will be invited to exhibits and special functions as a guest of honour.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!

is published twice yearly. Inquiries about the newsletter should be addressed to Paula Glendenning, c/o Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5H1 or e-mail to [provincial.archives@gnb.ca](mailto:provincial.archives@gnb.ca)

**THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS of The Associates of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick** are members of the public who have volunteered to facilitate the activities of the Provincial Archives. They come from many walks of life and have diverse cultural interests. In some way all had some connection with the Archives before this appointment. All have experience using the documentary holdings of the Archives. The Associates for 2003/2004 are: President, Gwen Davies, Alfred Chiasson, John Corey, Joseph Day, Cyril Donahue, Joe Knockwood, Jocelyne LeBel, Edward Leger, Frank Morehouse, Mark Pedersen, Elizabeth Sewell, and Bill Spray, Vice-President.

**ARCHIVE WEBSITE** <http://archives.gnb.ca> provides general information on the Archives, its holdings, hours of operation and its programs as well as information on the Associates of the Archives. Also available are some general guides to holdings and genealogical guides for each county. Additional information continues to be added and existing information is updated to reflect changes in publications dealing with records management and electronic records, information on exhibits and finding aids, and growing databases.

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**THE SUMMER PAST PHOTOS**  
Reproductions of these and other images can be purchased at Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.  
Contact: provin-

