

# Only in *Pubnico*

Pubnico, NS, may be smaller than a city-state but it's still a community unto itself, with its eclectic characters and quirky traditions

by Sandra Phinney  
photography: Kate Barden and Bruce Cramer

Calvin d'Entremont (father, municipal councillor, lobster fisherman) kisses his uncommon blue lobster. He has permission from Fisheries and Oceans Canada to keep it in a cage tied at a wharf during the summer, when he also wears another hat: tour guide. The blue lobster is a big attraction; visitors love hearing his stories about the fishery and Acadian lifestyle.





## For the 30th time

Laurent d'Entremont is anticipating the annual meeting of the Bologna Club. Sometime between Christmas and New Year's—the only time the club meets—a band of friends head to the woods in Pubnico; they make a fire and brew black tea in a big tin can, then they toast bread, fry bologna and swap stories. “There is always a small bottle of black ‘vitalizer’ to add a bit of good cheer,” says Laurent, “taken in moderation of course.” For a couple of hours they'll reminisce and argue about the coastal fishing village of their youth.

The Bologna Club has no dues, minutes or bylaws, but there is one rule: membership is limited to 12 people. “Two prominent community leaders wanted to join but were turned down,” says Laurent. “They may forgive us someday—if they live long enough.”

Only in Pubnico.

Pubnico is a region in Southwest Nova Scotia made up of East Pubnico and West Pubnico, with Pubnico Harbour in the middle. The east side has a population of approximately 540, and is made up of East Pubnico, Middle East Pubnico and Lower East Pubnico. The west side has a population of 2,450

and is composed of Pubnico, Pubnico Head, West Pubnico, Middle West Pubnico and Lower West Pubnico. The people in this story live on the west side, referred to simply as Pubnico.

Founded in 1653 by Sieur Philippe Mius d'Entremont, Pubnico is said to be the oldest Acadian community still inhabited by descendants of its founding families. “Pubnico” is derived from a Mi'kmaq word of various spellings and meanings—the most widely accepted being “Pobomcoup,” meaning a place where holes are made in the ice for fishing. Although the Acadians were exiled from here during the 1756 and 1758 Deportations, they returned 11 years later—and stayed.

Laurent is one of these descendants. The eldest of 14 siblings, he has worked in a service station, gone lobster fishing, been a carpenter and managed the local Credit Union. For the past few years he's focused on writing, volunteering and recently, helping to care for his mother, until she passed away last spring. Outside Pubnico, Laurent is best known as CBC Radio's community correspondent, or party-liner, for *Information Morning*, recognizable by his jokes and his Acadian accent.

Aside from writing three volumes called *Stories to Remember*, and tinkering with his 1931 Model A Ford station wagon, Laurent loves to talk and walk. Most days, at 6 am he drives to the Dennis Point Café, sips green tea and parlays with his cronies. By 6:30, he's off to the Pubnico Point Wind Farm for a stroll.

The wind farm started over a beer, when Brad d'Entremont



visited Joerg Losse at his home in Lake George, 40 miles away. The discussion turned to how popular wind farms were in Germany. “Someday it's going to happen in Nova Scotia,” Brad said, “and I know the perfect site!” He was thinking of Pubnico, where wind is more common than clouds.

In 2000, Brad, Joerg and two others formed Atlantic Wind Power Corporation; three years later, they won a bid to build a 30.6-megawatt wind farm. Now there are 17 windmills capable of supplying enough energy for 12,000 homes. Each windmill is named after a person associated with the project, or related to the original owners.

Laurent isn't the only one who walks here. Mothers often show up with baby carriages; teachers go after school to unwind, and it's a popular place for birders.

Deanna d'Entremont is a regular. She likes to accompany Charlie and Ansell, or Arielle and Lexie—alpacas raised on the farm owned by her and her husband. At sunup or sundown it's not uncommon to see the young ones pranking (hopping) across the fields. “They prunk on four legs at the same time and can cross the pasture in three to four bounces,” Deanna says.

While managing the alpaca herd (the animals are bred for



Stories and whittled shavings abound at the Liars Club. Opposite page: Laurent d'Entremont takes a break in his workshop that has two radios, making it easy to switch between French and English stations. Left: Deanna d'Entremont and her alpacas love to walk the windmill roads.

their fleece) is mainly Deanna's domain, her husband, Roger, manages Le Village historique acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse. A testimony to the Acadian spirit, le Village was created in part by the community banding together. Many donated artifacts, materials, time and money. Buildings were relocated and restored. Local fundraising events were held, including a pie sale 11 years ago where 1,000 apple pies were made from 2,000 pounds of Cortland apples.

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Laurent d'Entremont is part of the pie making crew every year—and four years ago, he donated a 1915 Model T Ford to Le Village. It's in great shape, thanks to the care that Olen d'Entremont gives the prized jalopy.

Olen's a lobster fisherman from November to the end of May. Like many fishermen Olen juggles more than one job, taking on the role of interpreter at Le Village. The crowfoot wrinkles surrounding his eyes turn upwards in a smile—perhaps characteristic of a people who have suffered but have not soured. Growing up, his grandmother used to say, “There goes Olen again, *la bouche y bouille!*” (His mouth's boiling over!) This is the perfect job for Owen—he gets to talk to his heart's content; visitors love his stories, especially about lobster fishing.

The name of Olen's boat is *Total Chaos*. He bought it second-hand and, being a superstitious kind of guy, didn't change the name. Whittling aboard his boat, saying the word “pig” or leaving a hatch upside down are all taboo. He also created his own good luck charm. “I go fishing to make money. So I'll bring maybe 35 cents for good luck. If I have a good day, I'll go back the next day with the same amount. If my luck runs out I might try 40 cents. If I get too greedy, I might have to go back to the basics and try 25 cents.

“My wife thinks I'm crazy.”

Three years ago, a farmer from Vermont gave Olen a JFK 50-cent coin. “This will make your life easier,” he said. That fall, on the first day of lobster fishing, Olen used it. The size of his catch was astounding, and every day thereafter the coin was



Clayton Hopkins hams it up with his son Ryan in front of Acadian Fish Processors Ltd. Left: Brian MacIntosh. In peak season the fishery keeps six fish plants humming, sustaining 300 jobs.

in his pocket. "People wondered what I was using for bait," he says.

On one trip, Olen's luck crashed. "Bad bait," he thought. When he went home, his wife said, "Did you lose this? I found it on the sofa."

It wasn't long before the fisherman nailed the coin to the beam of his boat. "Don't get me wrong. If I lose my coin I'm not going to sell my boat," he says, adding rather quickly as if to convince himself, "this is just a fun thing."

In his spare time, Olen plays the guitar and mandolin. Banjos, accordions, ukuleles and guitars are as common as coffee in most Pubnico homes. Kitchen parties are popular. They used to take place at Musée des Acadiens des Pubnicos but got so crowded they needed more space, so le Musée now hosts them at the fire hall. But there's always something going on at le Musée. A small homestead from the 1800s, it's a hub of activity celebrating everything from book launches to quilting bees and cultural exhibits. As well, many Acadian descendants come here to find their roots.

Bernice d'Entremont is the museum's co-ordinator. Laurent says she should be given a medal—and a raise—for her work. She oozes passion for keeping the Acadian stories alive.

One of the fascinating things about Pubnico is the number of people with the same surname. Out of 1,074 listings in the telephone directory, 358 are d'Entremonts and 143 are d'Eons, for example. Trying to identify who's who with the same surname can be tricky. In Bernice d'Entremont's case, her maiden name was d'Eon. After her marriage to Réal d'Entremont, she was identified as "Bernice-à-Réal." Their daughter, Nicoline, was referred to as Nicoline-à-Bernice-à-Réal, until she met Justin Armstrong; now she's identified as Nicoline-à-Justin.

Equally fascinating is the fact that Pubnico never sleeps. Dennis Point Wharf is one of the busiest fishing ports in Canada. State-of-the-art boats ply the waters in search of herring, lobster, tuna, swordfish, marine plants and groundfish (haddock, cod, halibut, flounder, red fish, monkfish, hake and pollock). The wharf is home to more than 100 vessels, ranging from 25 to more than 100 feet in length. The fleet employs



Bernice d'Entremont, above far left, and friends at le Musée, where quilting is all about fun (and fundraising). Right: Ted D'Eon scouts the skies in preparation for take off.

approximately 350 fishers who generate more than \$40 million a year. In peak seasons this fishery keeps six fish plants humming, and sustains 300 jobs.

Boats come and go at all hours; people are poised on the wharves ready to do anything from shovelling fish out of a hold to weighing fish and moving giant tubs on forklifts. As fish plop onto conveyor belts inside the plants, a crew churns out ice (one plant makes 80 tons a day), while others sharpen their knives in anticipation of fish rolling down the assembly line. Workers fillet, weigh and package thousands of pounds, depending on the catch.

Occasionally, a whiff of discontent surfaces. In the late 80s, when the fishery was in jeopardy, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans established Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs). There were too many boats and not enough groundfish so the ITQs created a mechanism to transfer "quota"—the quantity of fish that someone could harvest—to licenses.

As others did elsewhere, a handful of fishermen from Pubnico started buying up ITQs to keep themselves and their families employed, and have been referred to as "fish lords." It's a love-hate relationship. The fish lords have lots of money and power—and they take huge risks. Begrudgingly, they are respected for creating jobs and saving the fishery.

Pubnico without the fishery would be like many rural communities, having a smattering of homes, a post office, school (if you're lucky), church, garage and corner store. But Pubnico is not a typical village: the lucrative fishing industry has spawned economic spin-offs—welding shops and businesses selling marine supplies, for example. Two boat building companies have buyers all over the world. There are two post offices, a Royal Bank, Credit Union, a food co-op and pharmacy, a senior citizens' home, hardware store, two restaurants and a motel.



Photographers, artists, hairdressers, a chartered accountant and tour guide—to name just a few—straddle both sides of the road from one end of Pubnico to the other.

A popular business for both locals and visitors is d'Eon's Rappie Pie. Brothers Clayton and Johnny d'Eon produce thousands of rappie pies a year. They look like a blob of thick, gray glue (see "Right Some Good," page 39); the appeal is in the flavour and tradition. They are a staple for homecomings, weddings, wakes, Christmas and New Year's—or any time the mood strikes. And the dish seems to be exclusive to the Acadian communities of Southwest Nova Scotia.

Like many in the village, Ted d'Eon is a rappie pie fan. A retired pharmacist, he's frequently seen playing his guitar at kitchen parties, or viewed from a distance, 500 feet up in the air, cruising in his powered paraglider.

"I dreamt of flying for years," Ted says. "Then I saw a group of people paragliding when my wife and I were in the Alps in 2002; I told her I was going to do that." Typical of how resourceful and tenacious people in Pubnico can be, Ted found an instructor in Quebec within a year, signed up for a course and bought his own machine. To date, he's made 134 flights. In spite of a few motor failures and getting his foot caught in the propeller, he's still flying.

Ted is also a keen bird watcher. He's organized the Pubnico Christmas Bird Count for the Audubon Society for 25 years, and has spent years trying to save the threatened endangered roseate tern on the Brothers—two nearby islands. In the late 80s

he helped form the Roseate Tern Recovery Team. Ted's made hundreds of nesting boxes and, with the help of son Nigel and some friends, they monitor the terns' progress, conduct nest counts, repair the boxes and assist the Canadian Wildlife Service banding the chicks.

As a result of these efforts, the roseate tern population has increased from 20 nesting pairs in 1991 to a maximum of 90 nesting pairs in 2002, and the Brothers was designated an Important Bird Area.

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For the past six years, le Musée has hosted an annual Tern Festival late in June, with slides, lectures, bird walks around le Village and the windmills and a boat tour to watch the terns feed their chicks. But bad luck lurks and some years predators like mink or owls have wreaked havoc on the islands. Two summers ago the colony was hit by a Great Horned Owl, many adult terns were killed and chick productivity was reduced to almost zero. In 2009 and 2010, nest numbers continued to decline as several terns chicks mysteriously died of starvation. Yet Ted never gives up, although he likely wings a prayer or two for their survival.

Folks in Pubnico are still religious, even if attendance at church is not what it used to be. It's not uncommon for residents to light candles or invoke saints for aid and assistance.

Lots of prayers were likely offered 31 years ago when an English family moved into the community. When the parents objected to Home & School meetings being held in French, Pubnico became fractured. Concerned that the Acadian language was in jeopardy, one group formed le Réveil de Pombcoup, which was literally a call to the Acadians to wake-up. In the long haul, this organization had a role to play in acquiring French school boards for the region and preserving Acadian culture and language.

In spite of personality clashes and some fiery feuds, when there's a crisis such as an accident, cancer diagnosis or house fire, the community leaps into action. Penny parades, dances and bake sales appear like quicksilver. Thousands of dollars have been raised in support of those in need—roots run deep.

Meanwhile, three doors down from St. Peter's Church is a white, one-room structure. On the outside of the building a sign reads "Liars Club." It's been open every night of the year for about 30 years. Anyone can drop in, although women don't cross the threshold. The main purpose of the club (besides trading tales and righting the world) is to whittle. Sunday nights tend to get crowded, and the pile of whittled shavings rises like the tides.

Currently, the most serious issue facing the Liars Club is that they've run out of blocks of soft cedar to whittle. For the longest time they were able to acquire old cedar posts that the power company replaced. Now they have to resort to whittling pine; it's just not the same.

Although Laurent d'Entremont has yet to write about the Liars Club, perhaps Vol. IV of *Stories to Remember* will include it—and how in 1997 Ted d'Eon and Réal-à-Bernice discovered

## Right some good: rappie pie

Rappie pie is made with finely grated potatoes. The liquid is extracted, and replaced with chicken broth. Onions, seasonings and cooked chicken are added. Then it's baked.

The d'Eons' company also sells packs of raw potato pulp so people can make rappie pie at home. They use three tons of potatoes and 800 pounds of chicken a week—double that amount at Christmas and New Year's.

"Taking out the potato eyes takes forever," says Clayton.

When the World Acadian Congress took place in 2009, there was a rush order from a customer in Neguac, NB, for 200 packages of potato pulp to make poutine râpée, a form of potato dumpling with meat in the middle. The d'Eon brothers went into overdrive to produce the order, then Clayton drove seven hours to deliver it.



Brothers Johnny and Clayton d'Eon removing the eyes from potatoes before they are grated to make the pulp for rappie pie. Johnny takes a break to eat some cooked rappie pie before tackling another bucket.

a 17th century millstone in East Pubnico, likely from an early d'Entremont settlement. After an arduous process of moving the millstone and taking it to le Musée on the west side, Réal received a letter from a government official telling him not to touch it, citing heritage laws, and how they would have to apply for a permit to move it.

The millstone is still ensconced at le Musée.

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