

The Ties that Bind
The O'Hara and DeMone Families

By Norma Cooke

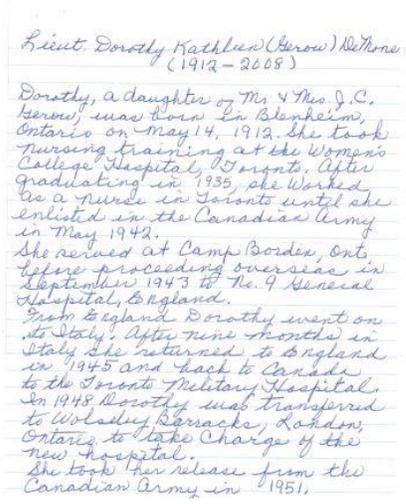
Transcribed by Gerry Madigan

22 September 2018

Introduction by Gerry Madigan

This is a story fresh off my recent foray in the Journal "They that go down to the sea in ships". Once more we touch upon the life of Capt Morris O'Hara.

The bulk of the story comes from beautifully handwritten notes sent to me by Norma Cooke of Isaac's Harbour.



Lieut. Dorothy Kathleen (Berow) McTone
(1912-2008)

Dorothy, a daughter of Mrs. & Mrs. J.C. Berow, was born in Brampton, Ontario on May 14, 1912. She took nursing training at the Women's College Hospital, Toronto. After graduating in 1935, she worked as a nurse in Toronto until she enlisted in the Canadian Army in May 1942.

She served at Camp Borden, Ont. before proceeding overseas in September 1943 to No. 9 General Hospital, England.

From England Dorothy went on to Italy. After nine months in Italy she returned to England in 1945 and back to Canada to the Toronto Military Hospital in 1948. Dorothy was transferred to Wolady Barracks, London, Ontario to take charge of the new hospital.

She took her release from the Canadian Army in 1951.

Norma is a historian in her own right, who has greatly assisted me and many others, in bringing to life the history of Guysborough County through the years. It is a deep, rich, and interesting history that is easily lost if we don't stop and take the time to record it.

This article was largely taken from Norma's written notes and news clippings that she and her late husband Findlay amassed over the years. My role here was merely to add some joiners to make the story flow between the sections.

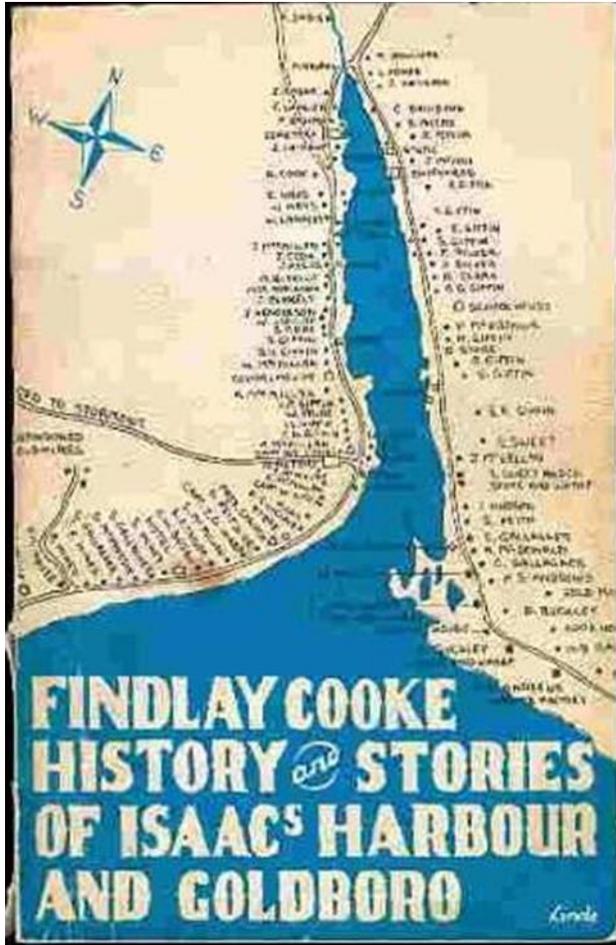
My wife Melodie and I recently spent some time with Norma at her home in Isaac's Harbour to flesh out this story a little further.

Norma came by her love for local history quite honestly. Her interest began with her husband Findlay. Both became avid collectors of memorabilia and artifacts over the years. But it wasn't the collecting that was important, Findlay's interest lay in the history behind the items. That is what intrigued Findlay most of all.



Norma Cooke and Gerry Madigan editing story 18 October 2018

Findlay wrote a book, now out of print but still much in demand, titled "History and Stories of Isaac's Harbour and Goldboro" published by FORMAC of Antigonish, NS 1 January 1976. Sadly, Findlay passed 26 September 1981, but he left Guysborough County this great legacy.



Amazon website copy of Findlay Cooke's Book Cover Jacket

Norma shared Findlay's love of local history. That love was encouraged by chance because of a second career upon their return to Isaacs Harbour in 1970. It happened shortly after they retired there from Dartmouth. The local post master died that left a vacancy at the post office to be filled. The position was put up for competition. Norma was asked amongst a number if she would consider applying.

Three people from the community in total applied. They all had to go to the Sherbrooke Post Office for an oral interview. There were two board members, one being the Area Manager, Mr. Parker from Sydney and the other Frank Jordan, Postmaster at Sherbrooke. All were interviewed individually and a selection amongst the three candidates was made. Norma was offered the job, which she accepted, and worked as Postmaster at Isaac's Harbour as a second career for 27 and a half years.

It was a fortunate circumstance for it was here that her interest in history truly piqued. Norma met a lot of "real nice people" in this job from as far as Texas, New York State to Oregon and beyond. All had an interest or had some connection to the Isaac's Harbour and surrounding areas.

People often stopped at the post office as a first point of contact to obtain local knowledge and for clues to finding their ancestors and family origins.

These inquiries nurtured her interest in local genealogy. It soon became the chase for the history behind the personal connections, which truly peaked Norma's interest to researching and preserving Guysborough's local history that continues to this day.

I asked Norma what her plans are for the future. She cheerfully replied with a chuckle and modestly said "I'll probably continue with it as long as I am able. Every year it's getting a little bit harder, but I just enjoy doing it!"

Norma is a unique person and treasure. I hope you enjoy Norma's rendition of your local history as much as I and "The Ties That Bind".

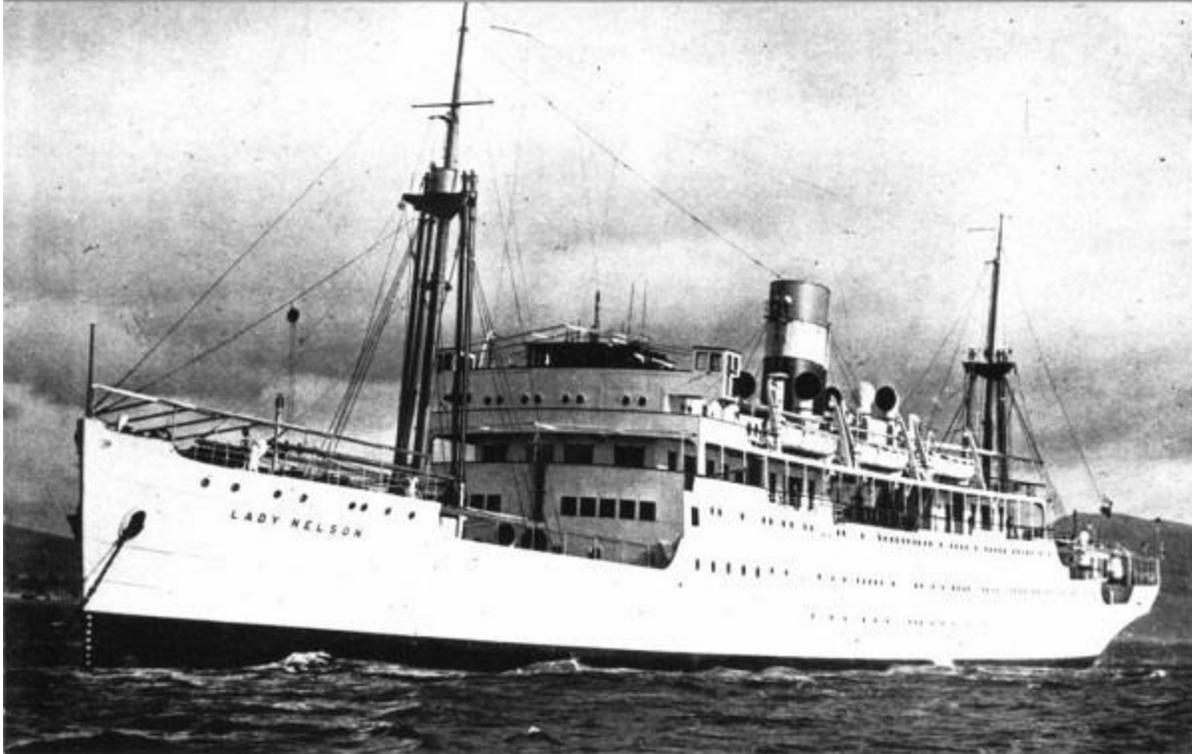
“The Ties That Bind”

Life is a tremendous journey along whose many paths we will come across people, places, and things. It will all produce memories. Some will be memorable, others less so, and perhaps wished to be best forgotten. And so, it was for Capt Morris O’Hara of Isaac’s Harbour, NS. Morris was a man bred for the sea. He was the son of a sea captain. His three brothers were sea captains and their grandfathers and great grandfathers, also sea captains.

Morris O’Hara’s life and seafaring career were documented in a recent article in the Guysborough Journal titled **“They that go down to the sea in ships”**. Captain O’Hara ultimately followed the path of his father’s footsteps, a man at sea, having a very distinguished career, while serving more than 33 years notably, 26 of which were spent with the Canadian National Steamship Line (CNS). Captain O’Hara was very modest concerning his accomplishments in the news accounts of his deeds.¹

Morris O’Hara was indeed a very modest and humble man. One brave intrepid newsman attempted to interview him in 1947 on his life and accomplishments. He wrote “Questions about his life brought only growls of disapproval from his ample frame but the twinkle in his eye belied his gruffness.” In Wartime he was master of the hospital ship Lady Nelson, but he scoffed at the idea he might make an interesting story.

¹ Gerry Madigan, **“They that go down to the sea in ships” - *The Life and Times of Captain Morris O’Hara (Isaacs Harbour, NS), Master of Lady Nelson during the Second World War***, Guysborough Journal, submitted 22 July 2018



U-boat Net – Lady Nelson Photograph courtesy of Tim Webb

Capt. O'Hara went to sea in the days of sailing ships. He was first officer of the Lady Nelson in March, in 1941 when she was torpedoed in the Harbour of St Lucia with the loss of 16 lives. After she was repaired he was made master and sailed her some 199,357 sea miles bringing 21,099 wounded Canadians home from overseas battlefields.

Despite all this, however, Capt. O'Hara barked "Nothing to tell" when asked about his life at sea."² But there is indeed much to tell. *Air Vice Marshall G.O. Johnson, C.B., M.C., Air Officer Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Command, put it all in perspective when he personally expressed the thanks of the RCAF to Capt Morris O'Hara for his outstanding service as captain of the Hospital Ship "Lady Nelson".*

After the war years Morris was Master of the Canadian National Steamship (CNS) Liner "Canadian Cruiser". After serving 26 years with CNS he retired in 1955. It was at this time where his life had a number of paths cross.

In the spring of 1956 Morris was "shanghaied" when the Captain of a Greek freighter suffered a heart attack minutes before the ship he was on was due to leave Halifax Harbour. Port Officials asked Capt O'Hara to take command of the vessel. It was a freighter that was bound for Cyprus with 10,000 tons of grain.

² Unattributed news account, Canadian Press, **M.N. "Also Silent"**, MONTREAL, 26 Nov 1947

It proved to be an interesting voyage for Morris. First and novel to him, was that for the first time at sea he was forced to sleep in a bed instead of a bunk. Rough weather on the voyage threw him out of the bed, and he spent most of the 14 day journey in a chair on the bridge.

Morris's troubles were not over. He was almost arrested in Gibraltar for failing to have a passport. He was very fortunate to have a small Spanish boy who was able to speak English explain to the Spanish police that Morris was not a fugitive from justice but the Captain of the ship in Port.³

"It isn't easy"

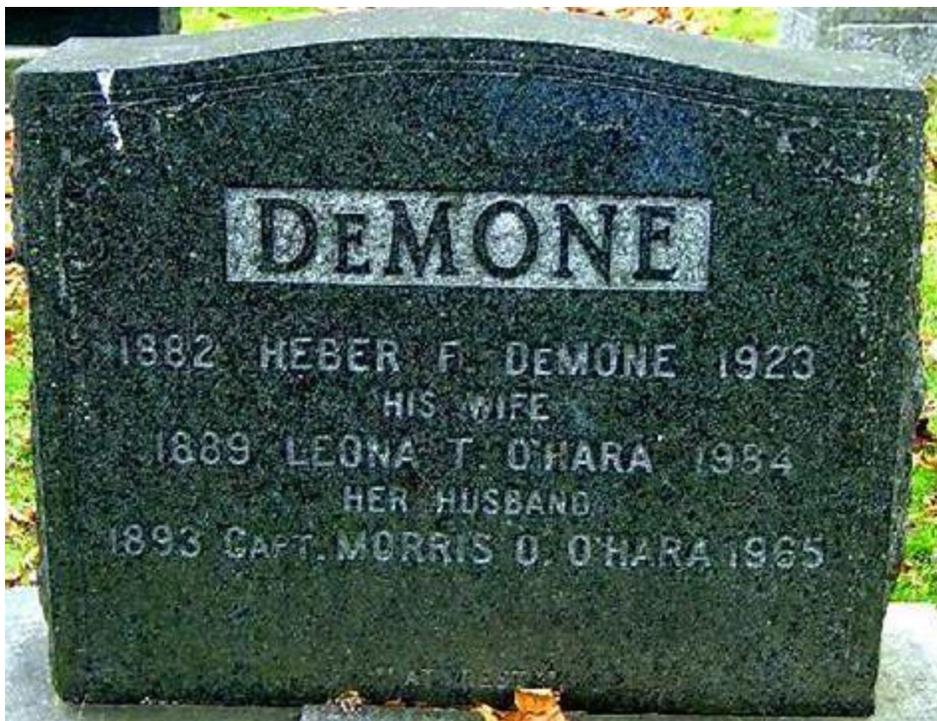
The threads of our being are weaved into a pattern shaped by the experience and memories of our lives. In reflection they paint a picture of who we were, what we touched, and who we loved. It was no different for Morris. He would have likely been a life long bachelor had he not met and married Leona DeMone.

Leona was born in Isaac's Harbour, daughter of Capt Ira & Abbie (Pride) Giffin in 1889. She too had the sea cast in her veins.

During the Second World War she served with the Red Cross Service, like many other Canadians, taking a job in the assistance of her country.

Leona was previously married to Heber F DeMone. She bore him a son, Frank. Sadly, Heber died in 1923 leaving Leona a single mother to raise their son, Frank Lewis. Lew was born in Halifax on April 22, 1918. His father, Heber, died when Frank was very young, just five years old. Morris was the only father Frank knew growing up.

³ Norma Cooke, **Notes on the Life of Capt Morris O'Hara**, based on an account given to her by a cousin of Morris a number of years ago. 12 Sep 2018 (account a direct transcription from Norma's notes)



Source: CanadaGenWeb's Cemetery Project; [Camp Hill Cemetery](#) (Section: KA, Row 3), Halifax County, NS, photo 1973398

Morris married Leona 10 Apr 1929 in Halifax NS. He was 36 years old, Leona 40, joined together in marriage in a Baptist ceremony performed by Rev F.R. Daleman. Morris was a Master Mariner at the time; Leona a Householder residing in Dartmouth, and he in Halifax.⁴

The year 1929 proved to be a change of fortune for both. They married yes, but Morris was eventually to become first officer aboard the Canadian National Steamship Lady Nelson. Morris's future and job were secure as a Master mariner. 1929 would prove a change of fortune for the country. It was to be the start of the Great Depression that fall. But Morris and his new family were lucky in one respect. Their future was secure. Morris had a good job.⁵

But it was the coming war that further entwined the family. Morris would command a Hospital Ship and sail the seas. Lew would join the army and fight through Europe. And Leona would also do her part with the Red Cross. It was the ship and the sea that would be the common tie in their work and surprisingly, their future as a family in some respect. The ships brought them to and from the war. They also brought the eventual ties that bind, which eventually brought all back to Isaac's Harbour.

⁴ Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Marriage Records Morris O'Hara and Leon Thursa DeMone, 10 Apr 1929, Source: : <https://www.novascotiagenealogy.com/ItemView.aspx?ImageFile=55-370&Event=marriage&ID=185526> Accessed: 22 Sep 2018

⁵ Ibid Madigan, 2018, pg. 11

“A new day a new chapter”

The war tended to shape people; especially Frank Lewis (Lew) DeMone! *Lew enrolled in the Nova Scotia Technical College Contingent, Canadian Officers Training Corps, in the rank of Private in September of 1936. Lew was commissioned Second Lieutenant Royal Canadian Artillery April 1940 and promoted Lieutenant 1941. He rose to the rank of Captain in 1947 and after the war to Major 1954.*

Lew held many prominent positions. Returning from a 14- month tour of duty in Korea 1952-1953, Lew held appointments as Deputy Commander Electrical and Mechanical Engineer, Eastern Command; and, Deputy Assistant Director (Organization and Plans) (Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) Army Headquarters, Ottawa. He was also for a time responsible for Area Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island; and finally, Commanding Officer 6 Coy Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Halifax, NS.

After serving 30 years in the Canadian Army, Lew retired in 1966. Lew garnered for his service to his country the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, the War Medal 1939-1945, the United Nations Service Medal, and the Canadian Forces Decoration, also the Canadian Efficiency Medal.

Retirement did not slow Lew down. In fact, he became an active member of his community. Prior to his retirement from the Canadian Army, Lew moved to Isaac’s Harbour with his wife, Dorothy and his mother, Leona and step-father, Morris. Here he became very active in community affairs.

Lew headed the group responsible for organizing the Goldboro-Bayview District Board of Trade. He became President of this organization which was a Corporate body representing 10 communities. He was Vice-President of the Guysborough County Industrial Development Association; a Director of the Nova Scotia Heart Foundation; and was elected to the Council of the Municipality of the District of Guysborough in 1970.

Lew was a driving force behind the construction of the road and ferry boat service between Isaac’s Harbour and Fisherman’s Harbour, the development and staffing of the Bayview District Medical Centre, a Government Pier at Country Harbour, and the Senior Citizen’s Home in Isaac’s Harbour.⁶

“Stand by me”

Lew shared many of Morris’s life’s experiences. Both lost their fathers at a very early age never knowing them. Both married devoted partners late in life. Both married slightly older women.

⁶ ibid Norma Cooke, **Notes on the Life of Capt Morris O’Hara**, 12 Sep 2018

Sometime during Lew's service, he met Lieut. Dorothy Kathleen Gerow. Dorothy was a very distinguished Army officer in her own right.

Dorothy, a daughter of Mr. & Mrs. J.C. Gerow, was born in Blenheim, Ontario on May 14, 1912. She took nursing training at the Women's College Hospital, Toronto. After graduating in 1935, she worked as a nurse in Toronto until she enlisted in the Canadian Army in May 1942.

She served at Camp Borden, Ont before proceeding overseas in September 1943 to No. 9 General Hospital, England.



Nursing sisters of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps (R.C.A.M.C.) aboard the hospital ship LADY NELSON, Naples, Italy, 29 January 1944

Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence fonds/a163661

From England Dorothy went on to Italy. After nine months in Italy she returned to England in 1945 and back to Canada to the Toronto Military Hospital. In 1948 Dorothy was transferred to Wolseley Barracks, London., Ontario to take charge of the New Hospital.

She took her release from the Army in 1951.

Dorothy was a remarkable woman who served her country well. It could be said her whole life was full of love and sacrifices, always putting the needs of others ahead of her own without complaint.

She nursed and cared for Lewis' step-father Capt. Morris O'Hara after he became disabled until such time that he required more extensive care and was admitted to Camp Hill Hospital in Halifax, where he passed away.

Family was everything to Dorothy, and for many years she provided love, companionship and towards the end nursing care for her mother-in-law so that she was able to remain in her home in Isaac's Harbour until the end.

Dorothy was also very active in community events. The Church played an important role in her life. She was a member of the Women's Auxiliary and participated in many fund raising functions in aid of the Church. She also took part in most community activities and was always willing to lend a helping hand.

Dorothy was very creative. She hand-stitched and quilted many beautiful quilts. One in particular was of the famous "Bluenose" which she designed herself with help from a friend and neighbour Gordon Sutherland. She also stitched many other lovely things, many of which she donated to various organizations for fund raising events.

She will always be remembered as a well liked and respected member of the community.

In the Late 1980s Lew and Dorothy sold their home in Isaac's Harbour and moved to Halifax. He passed away at home, while Dorothy passed in Camp Hill Hospital. They were both cremated, and their ashes buried in Camp Hill Cemetery. They had no children.⁷

"In Retrospection"

Guysborough County has been blessed with its share of distinguished people who have worked not only for the betterment of their community but also on the world stage. They may now be long gone, a distant memory to some, but they should not be forgotten.

It was their industry to community and family that should be of inspiration to us today in our hope and desire to restore our rural communities to their rightful place, where they become home and place for opportunity, for us and our loved ones.

It's up to us to make a difference whether that be big or small. It is that community difference and caring that makes Guysborough County and other small communities like it, unique and better places to live. It should also remind us to remember the lives of our predecessors and "the ties that bind".

⁷ ibid Norma Cooke, **Notes on the Life of Capt Morris O'Hara**, 12 Sep 2018

(This and other stories are available for your reading pleasure at madiganstories.com)