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NEWS

## A REMARKABLE LIFE LIVED; SAYING GOODBYE TO JOHN MACFIE

AUTHOR, HISTORIAN AND PHOTOGRAPHER

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**PARRY SOUND** - Few have reached nonagenarian prestige. Even fewer with the gumption, wit, and charisma to pack as much abundance into those years as John Macfie.

To sum up Macfie's accomplishments, accolades and bountiful life in a handful of mediocre, strung-together sentences is simultaneously an impossible undertaking and an honourable challenge.

John (Jack) Alvin Macfie died on Friday, Oct. 26. He was 93.

Born in 1925 on the family's Sunny Slope farm near Dundur Macfie was one of seven children - James, Frank, Catherine, Donald, Jean, and Edwin - born to Edith and Roy Macfie.

You might guess Macfie's natural gift for storytelling was created



Linda McLellan photo

John Macfie chopping wood in his Parry Sound backyard.

See MACFIE'S, page 4

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Stunt driving, open liquor charges for driver in Seguin

Remembering the sacrifices and heroes from Canada's Hundred Days

## MEET PARRY SOUND'S NEW SCHOOL BOARD REP

JOHN COCHRANE WANTS BETTER ENGLISH AND MATH RESULTS

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**PARRY SOUND** - John Cochrane wants to see improved math and English results and wants the board to keep small, rural schools.

Cochrane was elected in the Oct. 22 election to the Near North District School Board to represent an area that includes Parry Sound, Seguin and the southern portion of The Archipelago.

He and Rob Learn will share in representing West Parry Sound on the nine-person board for the next four years. Cochrane beat out Howard Wesley 3,393 votes to 3,145, whom he thanked for the campaign process.

"I have a grandson in ... (Rainbow District School Board) if you



John Cochrane photo

New Parry Sound and area representative on the Near North District School Board John Cochrane celebrates election night, Oct. 22, with his wife Dr. Sandra Ausma.

were to compare the results for math and English at a small school like MacLeod and compare it to Parry Sound or anywhere in the Near North District School Board, results here are abysmal, shocking. We're talking 83 per cent in Sudbury, Rainbow, and compare it to Parry Sound 63 to 67 per cent," he said.

Cochrane said the Rainbow school board had similar results decades ago but managed to turn it around. The change, he said, will take time but starts at the board level, with trustees ensuring funding for additional teachers and teaching assistants.

"What I see is hope, because the new PC government is talking

about the same sort of initiatives that I'm talking about," he said. "My experience when I was chair of the board (at Cambrian College) I had several discussions with the minister of education at the time, and we squeezed money out of him at the time, but you have to pressure them. They are so Toronto-centric it's disgusting."

He sees the province singling funding for technical training and maintaining rural schools. "When you look at a place like Whitestone, (the school is) their whole reason for being. When a school is shut down, you have to bus kids ... I think that's terrible," he said. "Ask the school board to have to look at that, at the impact to the parents and the kids. How is a kid going to learn when they're sitting on a bus, wasting an hour of their time each way every day. That to me is insane."

The 2018-2022 board includes incumbents Al Bottomley and Louise Sargent, and the return of former chair and former Nipissing-Timiskaming MP Jay Aspin.

## COUNCIL MOVES AHEAD WITH TRAIN WHISTLE STOPPAGE IN TOWN

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**PARRY SOUND** - The town is moving ahead with its plans to silence train whistles at its crossings.

At a meeting earlier this month, council approved the hiring of CIMA+ engineering to assess the town's five level crossings for train whistle cessation, as required by Transport Canada and the Railway Safety Act, at a cost of \$22,950, plus tax.

Last year, town staff were directed to look into silencing the whistles that are used as a warning device by the Canadian National Railway and Canadian Pacific Railway to alert drivers, cyclists and pedestrians that a train is approaching a level crossing. This is a requirement by Canadian Rail Operating Rules.

During an Oct. 16 meeting, Coun. Bonnie Keith wanted to know if the noise cancellation could include the squealing and grinding of the wheels.

"We hear the train whistle and we know that the squeaking is a part of the issue," Keith said.

Coun. Paul Borneman said, "The whistle is a short, 'toot, toot,' the grinding goes on for the duration of the length of the train."

Peter Brown, director of public works, said this project just deals with the whistle itself, but he said he requested more grease on the rails and more inspections on the rail lines themselves during talks with CN and CP.

"(I can) advise them that this is an ongoing issue as well and they



need to work on making the rail lines quieter, shall we say. It's going to be difficult because there's a lot of curves on those rail lines," Brown said.

Borneman wanted to know: if the town was successful in stopping the whistles, what impact would that have on the town's liability insurance?

"What impact previous acci-

See TRAIN, page 4

## CRIME CASH STOLEN IN PARRY SOUND BUSINESS BREAK-IN

**PARRY SOUND** - On Sunday, Oct. 21, West Parry Sound OPP responded to a break, enter and theft from a business on Gibson Street in Parry Sound. Shortly before 6 a.m. a suspect(s), gained entry into the business through a locked front door, stole a quantity of cash and was seen leaving the business. The suspect is described as approximately five foot five inches tall wearing dark clothing with a backpack.

Any person with information regarding the person(s) responsible for this incident should immediately contact the Ontario Provincial Police at 1-888-310-1122 or your nearest police authority.

OPP would like to remind the public to always lock your doors and close your windows every time you leave your residence.

Should you wish to remain anonymous, you may call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS) or submit information online at tipsubmit.com where you may be eligible to receive a cash reward of up to \$2,000.



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# MACFIE'S DEATH CREATES HUGE VACANCY IN COMMUNITY

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ed and nurtured on that farm and around Listening Rock, where the family would often gather for storytelling. Macfie came by the talent honestly through his mother, who went to school to be a teacher, and owned a camera, passing on her love of writing and photography.

In 1943, at the age of 18, and with a thirst for adventure beyond the farm, Macfie enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

In a 2015 North Star interview, Macfie surmised of his recruitment, "I kept impressing them, I guess. I only had a Grade 10 education, which put me at a disadvantage, which I was acutely aware of in his grade 10 complex coming from the farm with all these slick city boys."

After being selected to complete pilot training, Macfie attended Initial Training School in Toronto. Following that stint, Macfie went to flying school in Windsor, at Number Seven Elementary Flying Training School. There, he was able to choose pilot training over navigator training, due to his grades at Initial Training School.

However, Macfie never saw active duty during the Second World War. Having retrained as a bomb aimer, he was in western Canada destined to join his bomber squadron bound for the Pacific war theatre when the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese, essentially concluding the war.

Disheartened and aimless, Macfie returned home at 20, trying his hand at "various things," including meteorology and working as a technician plotting weather maps.

And although he learned to type - a skill that would prove to be invaluable in his later life - Macfie found the work terribly boring.

"I rattled around like a lot of other people after the war trying this and that and joined the department of lands and forest in 1949," Macfie said in a 2017 interview with YourTV Muskoka.

In 1950, after working in the Forest Protection and Timber branches of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Macfie moved into the Wildlife department and won a job competition that had him move to Sioux Lookout to become a trap management officer, where he spent the next decade travelling the woods behind Aboriginal trappers



John Macfie photo



Linda McLellan photo



John Macfie photo

(Clockwise from above) John Macfie in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1943; John Macfie inside his home office in Parry Sound; John Macfie interviewing Guy Smith in 1980 on a bridge crossing the Seguin River.

**"His work provided texture and definition for the phrase 'community newspaper.' He wrote about us: our origins, sorrows and celebrations."**

— Jim Hanna, former Parry Sound North Star editor

between Lake Superior and Hudson's Bay.

"I had taken up writing very early in my career in the north, because I was seeing and taking pictures of stuff and other people and I got the notion of doing photo stories," Macfie said in 2017.

In 1954, Macfie married Joan Ramsay and the two had three children, Robert, Elizabeth and Ian.

Following the Sioux Lookout stint, Macfie moved further south to Goma, where he was promoted to fish and wildlife supervisor, and then from 1960 to 1981, he completed his career as a fish and wildlife supervisor in the Parry Sound District.

In conjunction with taking photographs, during his travels Macfie would often jot down stories from old-timers bragging about the glory days of the lumber camps and river drives.

When he returned to the Parry Sound area in 1960, Macfie went back and tape recorded some of those experiences from those wise elders.

Andy Houser, who had known Macfie for nearly 50 years, met him as a co-worker with the ministry

and considers him a hero and a friend.

"John provided practical experience, common sense and wisdom to the team that developed a new approach to moose management and new system of wildlife management units that provide the basis of wildlife management in the province to this day," Houser said. "Wherever John went, whether working with First Nations in northwestern Ontario or here in Parry Sound, he not only listened, he specifically engaged people and sought their stories. He captured those stories in writing, on tape, in photos and through his art ... my father-in-law was many of the people interviewed by John and featured by him in his books. Because of John, my children and grandchildren can read about their grandfather's experiences, in his own words."

With historical stories of the area's pioneering history, along with real and anecdotal tales from locals who lived them, Macfie began writing regular columns in 1981, first with the Georgian Bay Beacon and later, the Parry Sound North Star.

Former publisher Fred Heidman said Macfie's pieces were a colourful addition to the newspaper, providing the public with not only historically accurate information, but information that was also fascinating to read.

"It was a good working relationship. John was a very straightforward and upfront individual. If he said he was going to do something, he did it. The community was very important to him - the whole community," Heidman said. "He was a man of many talents, who wore many hats during his life."

Like many writers, Macfie never planned out his pieces well in advance, nor was he short on ideas.

"This life is cooking ideas that are sitting there for columns," Macfie said in 2007 of a stack of papers in his home office. "For a lot of them, their time will never come, but sometimes something happens that will

bring them into focus, or I've assembled pages for a future column and may never use them."

Former North Star editor Jim Hannasaid Macfie's death creates a huge vacancy within the community.

"The passing of a beloved local historian is an apt headline but would fall far short of the mark considering John's outstanding citizenship and public contribution here and throughout the province. During my time as editor of the North Star, I was honoured to be the first reader of his column," Hanna said. "His work provided texture and definition for the phrase 'community newspaper.' He wrote about us: our origins, sorrows and celebrations. He recognized history when he lived it. His stories were grainy and pebbled, like the people he wrote about, like the handles of their homemade tools - worn to shape by a commitment to sur-

pose. John has left a vacancy that is noticed by many."

In his extraordinary life, Macfie authored 13 books, wrote more than 1,000 newspaper and magazine pieces and provided some 1,400 of his photographs to the Archives of Ontario.

2017 marked Canada's 150th anniversary and the Museum on Tower Hill's unveiled the exhibit, John Macfie: Now and Then. Curated by his niece, Mandy Macfie, the exhibit offered a look inside Macfie's life, career and commitment to telling Parry Sound's rich history.

At the opening of his show, Macfie gave a speech and he said with that trademark mischievous twinkle in his eye, "It ain't braggin' if you've done it ... and these are some of the things I've done."

Read many of John Macfie's Parry Sound North Star columns in our hot topic Columns by Parry Sound's John Macfie.

**THE ISSUE:**  
THE TOWN WANTS TO SILENCE TRAIN WHISTLES  
LOCAL IMPACT:  
THE ASSESSMENT WILL COST TAXPAYERS \$22,950



Stephanie Johnson/Metroland

Cascade Street at the CN crossing will be closed May 10 to May 11 for remedial work.

## TRAIN WHISTLE STUDY TO COST COST TAXPAYERS \$22,950

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dents and fatalities at those sites might have on our ability to achieve this outcome, because I have to think that those have huge impacts on this, and there's no point in going further. I don't like the whistle any better than anybody else,

and I live a few doors away from it, but there's no point in going further if our likelihood of success is not very high," he said.

Since the inception of

the whistle-cessation procedure in November 2014, just two other Canadian cities have successfully completed the process - Alton, Sask. and Viking, Alta.

### STORY BEHIND THE STORY

The North Star has been following the proposed whistle cessation since 2009.

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