

## **SECTION A**

# **FAMILIARIZATION**



*“Puzzle of the Live-Oaks – Illusion of the Spanish Main and the age when piracy was in flower comes from the presence of half a dozen live-oak trees. You’d swear they were palms on the sand spit. They are without branches or foliage low down and their spreading tops have a palm tree look. These oaks are a part of the island mystery. Where did they come from? How did they grow here? These lived-oaks, it is said, are southern trees, not found north of Texas or Louisiana. Yet here they are on Oak Island. None was ever found on the other 354 islands in Mahone Bay which are, in many cases, crested with the trees of the region, including many northern conifers. Fifty years ago (1884), old Chester people remember, there was a regular little grove of these lived-oaks on a spit at Smith’s Cove. Most of them have died. Now a mere half dozen hoary and moribund old-timers remain with a kind of struggling majesty. He referred to the presence of live-oaks, foreign oaks he called them, on Oak Island. Why were they there? His father told him when he was a boy the island had been all oaks.”*

**“Oak Island Mystery” by Frederick Griffin, 1934.**

## Chapter One

# GETTING LOGGED IN

When someone looks up the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* definition of the word '**conundrum**' (noun), they may read this enigmatically ironic response to their search; co·nun·drum |\kə'nəndrəm... **a:** an intricate and difficult problem. **b:** a question or problem having only a conjectural answer. Early 1600s spellings include: *conimbrum, quonundrum, conuncrum, & quadundrum*. **See:** *Oak Island*.

Oak Island indeed! Quite fitting when you realize in the 1600s and 1700s, Oak Island was also known to be *Smith's Island, Island #28, & Gloucester Isle*. The island earned its final keepsake from the locals who saw the island from just offshore. It was covered with very tall oak trees exhibiting a strange canopied-crown. They were unique to that singular island in a bay of hundreds more islands. Yet a repressed controversy swirling around the island exists; *were those oak trees? Was it an island? Or two?*



Courtesy of Nova Scotia Archives

There are *TWO* Oak Islands in Nova Scotia, *THREE* in the Canadian maritime provinces. With *EIGHT* more Oak Islands in North America; Sweden's Oak Island rounds out the dozen islands who may *or may not* have oak trees on them. This particular island has always admitted those trees were '*not from here.*' They were

found nowhere else in Nova Scotia and definitely were nonnative, as this book proves in later chapters. So why these trees and why on this one-of-365-islands, in this one bay, along an Atlantic coast with dozens of bays? That alone is an enigma!

**L**egendary Oak Island is an amazing story with many levels of both historical and archeological mystery. Complete with engineering and logistical intrigue, this saga has so many angles to it, Euclid himself would throw up his hands with frustration. Therefore, if you are new to the whole ‘*Oak Island treasure story*,’ I recommend you first read any of the dozen or more excellent books on this tale. Authors like D’Arcy O’Connor, Graham Harris & Les MacPhie, James A. McQuiston, Hammerson Peters, and Randall Sullivan have produced very detailed primers about Oak Island. Writers like Joy A. Steele & Gordon Fader, Lee Lamb, Kerrin Margiano, and others walk you through the story from particular points of view and exploration. In addition, anyone reading this book who has yet to watch any of the 9 seasons and hundreds of episodes of The History Channel’s No. 1 cable show “*Curse of Oak Island*,” may not fully enjoy my approach to this story through investigative forensics.

**‘forensic’**(noun) - fo·ren·sic | \ fə-ˈren(t)-sɪk, -ˈren-zɪk...

**b:** 3, forensics *plural in form but singular or plural in construction* : the application of scientific knowledge to legal problems, *especially* : scientific analysis of physical evidence (as from a crime scene). **c:** the art or study of argumentative discourse using examined physical evidence.

Every exploration has a *who*, a *what*, a *when*, a *where*, a *why*, and a *how* to its formulation. As searchers have been digging for over 227 years, the *where* to this treasure story is assumed to be known. The recent determinations by geo & chemical scientists of “dump truck loads” of silver coins being somewhere below Oak Island have brought the first true evidence answering – *the where*.

But that is all so far! Until that hammergrab comes up with a chest filled with coins and precious relics, and a review of the contents can tell us *what*, which should easily reveal the *who*, and *when* and *why* of this enigma... we are all just guessing. I believe knowing the *when* of this formula with other anecdotal forensics related to the island will point us to *who*, thereby, offering us a *what* and a *why*. Further exploration will be needed to eventually answer the *how* to this amazing legend.

The *Oak Island Mystery Trees* is written to examine forensic issues that will assign a *when* to this tale. It is not written to retell the entire Oak Island Treasure story. Nor will its pages enhance any of the dozens of theories that bob up and down in the currents of conjecture of *who*. Once the *when* is identified, it is then applied to a meticulous timeline of historical activities and dated artefacts. Then the reader can select the *theory au jus* to further surmise the next hammergrabs holdings. Within this book, the pages will provide forensic answers to the 19 questions posed in the “*Oak Island Mystery Trees Introduction*.” This should significantly help you answer the 20<sup>th</sup> question on your own – *Who*?

## Setting the Scene

### Alexa – Where are WE?

If your Alexa is missing a Canadian accent, you may already be lost. Though this saga has been going on for 227 years – or perhaps much longer, geography plays important impacts on why so much is so weird with Oak Island. Throughout this book, you will read how the moniker '*Location, Location, Location*' effects why the legend, is more than an enigma and qualifies as a true conundrum. Here we will plant you firmly into the terrain of the tale and give an abbreviated background of the players and the lay of the land.

### Ye "O Canada"

The North American Continent is primarily made up of the United States, Mexico, and Canada with the latter being larger. Canada is divided into thirteen provinces and territories of which three, *Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick*, are called Canada's Maritime Provinces.

All three are located in the far north-eastern end of the country and are nestled in or adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean.

As early seafarers explored "around" the Atlantic Ocean, they ventured from land masses they were well familiar –



Courtesy of IStock.com

Iberian Peninsula, Scandinavia, England, Ireland, Orkney Islands, and Iceland to name a few. The hunt was primarily to find a shorter

route to East Asia and the mercantilism that made men rich. Who was first in this exploration is subject to much debate, but definitely the Vikings, the Portuguese, and major European powers all ventured out to the ends of the world.

Yet today, there is growing evidence that even earlier voyagers ventured into the Atlantic Ocean. These include the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, and other Mediterranean societies to name several. The likely route many assume they took, was via the 'stepping-stone' approach. Explorers sailed up and around the Northern Atlantic connecting to faraway places like Iceland, Greenland, Labrador, Newfoundland and beyond.

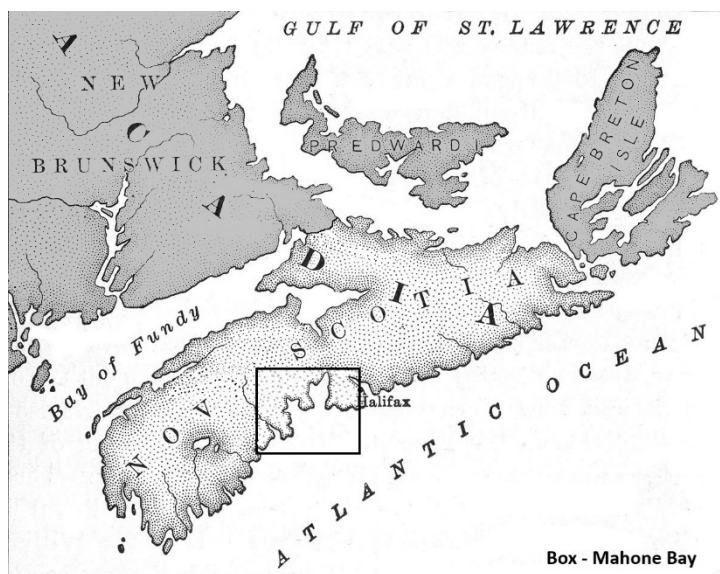
It is believed others may have tried the direct route with a stop in the Azores approximately 1,240 miles out into the Atlantic. The southern route from the west coast of Africa was preferred by those who were aware of and schooled in the trade winds route blowing east to west toward South America and the Caribbean. Yet few were aware in those earliest of travelers of this route - *or it is so assumed*.

The destination for most of the 'advertised' explorers was not a new continent smack dab in the way, but trade routes to exotic lands of China and India. For some, claiming land for Country and King was paramount; others seemed to have done it as a consolation prize to keep their financiers satisfied. In either case, these voyagers found themselves in the mysterious waters of Canada, most frequently Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

### New Scotland

Nova Scotia – *or New Scotland* is the provincial home to our area of interest, specifically along the eastern Atlantic coastal area. When looking at a map of Nova Scotia, it appears to be an island with bodies of water almost completely surrounding it. This entire province sits atop the geological formation known as the Scotian Shelf, a sunken land mass jutting into the Atlantic Ocean as part of

the Continental shelf. In many cases, this may be the first viewed shoreline of the new continent by northern route seafarers.



Courtesy of BritishBattles.com

The Atlantic Coastal Region of Nova Scotia as it is known has strong coastal influence on weather, producing the coolest summers and the warmest winters in the province. This effect extends only a few kilometers inland. Be not mistaken, this area is not missing deep freezes, heavy snows, and debilitating ice conditions. These weather events frequently render the islands and bay inaccessible and occasionally locked in ice. Rainfall amounts are high, and there is frequent, heavy sea fog. The warmer, northward flowing Atlantic Ocean Current for the most part is more than 200 kilometers off the coast of Nova Scotia. Waters that directly impact Oak Island and the Atlantic Coastal Region within which it resides flow parallel and southward and are colder. These waters have come from the Gulf of St. Lawrence from the north.

The Portuguese, French, Spanish, and English were not looking for land perse, as they were motivated by the wealth in mercantilism offered in the Far East. Later, the secondary prize was defined as finding cities of gold much farther south. Declaring ownership of



land masses for this king or that Queen was great, but as they say - *it did not bring home the gold.*

Once the explorers paid attention to the actual land mass they were trying to bypass, they discovered a tremendous, bounty-rich land and waters. Initially, it was the abundant fisheries that attracted explorers and follow-up expeditions. Eventually, the forests upon the lands made Nova Scotia a place to settle and a conquest to obtain. But with the exception of the Indigenous peoples hidden within the land, New Scotland was not a friend to inhabitants attempting to tame it and gather its riches.

Not that these countries didn't make some mediocre attempts at establishing settlements! Portuguese, Spanish, French, Scottish and British settlements were attempted, failed, re-attempted, destroyed, re-settled, and renamed through the period of 1524 to 1671. That year, the first census counted 400 surviving colonists in Nova Scotia. During this period of exploration, Nova Scotia was not a high priority in any royal court - *at first*. Eventually the royals of Europe realized Canada offered other bounty, primarily timber. War was a reoccurring, almost cyclic event throughout Europe and the British Isles, and each dynasty or newly enacted monarchy had to maintain its military machine to stay in power. In those days, the military machine of choice was naval power, which is built on ships! Ships are made of wood – lots of wood, and Europe had more or less plundered its stock of high quality lumber and was forced to buy it abroad.

Suddenly, long forgotten Canada became an important storehouse of fish to eat and wood to build ships – both necessary to continue those ever-lasting wars.

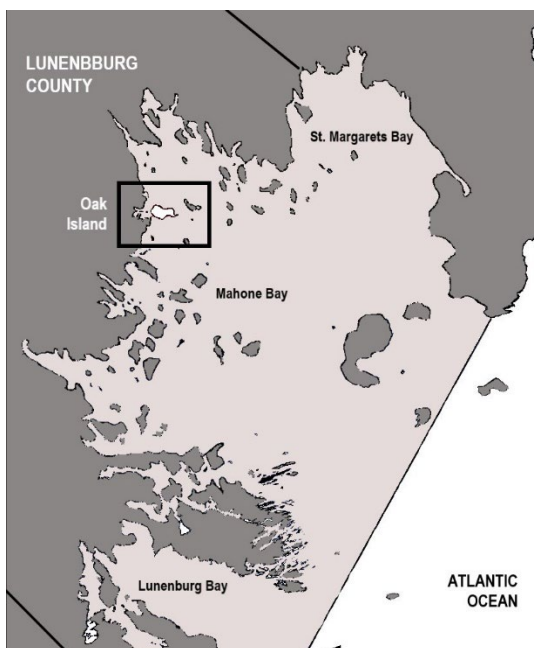
Nova Scotia had a front row seat to watch expedition after expedition float on by looking for the promised passage. Later those expeditions headed to-and-fro to the plundering of South America. Nova Scotia was the ignored 'rest stop' along the way to greatness! Yes, people for hundreds of years had come to scoop up

endless schools of fish massing in the coves, streams, rivers, and bays all throughout the Atlantic Coastal Regions of Nova Scotia. However, no one successfully stayed for very long.

The topography of Nova Scotia specifically was definitely impacted by the existence and end of a cool period, known as the Little Ice Age. This climate period existed from 1300 to 1800 and began to wane around 1600. The geology of a large area of central Nova Scotia was underlain by gypsum-anhydrite evaporite deposits from the Mississippian Windsor Formation. Therefore, the country and coastal areas became a crucible between glacial forces and water from rapid rise in sea level. The byproduct of these evolutionary forces created the karstification (Erosion of rock by dissolution, producing ridges, towers, and other landforms characteristic of karst) of the subterranean and sea level land geology. Today, we can see how those unique elements bring new twists and concerns in the hunt for treasure on Oak Island.

### Mahone Bay

Centered along the Atlantic Coastal Region of Nova Scotia, and filled with more than 360 islands, the French called it "*La Baie des Toutes Iles*"- Bay of Many Islands. Today, Mahone Bay is the larger bay sandwiched between St. Margarets Bay on the eastern side, and Lunenburg Bay to the south.



Created by David H. Neisen

This defines the greater bay area between the eastern Chebucto Peninsula and Lunenburg's First Peninsula to the south. In general, the bay area's represent a sheltered area some 20 miles across by 18 miles in depth. It is located 54 miles from the Capital of Halifax. This area of Lunenburg county that includes Mahone Bay and Lunenburg Bay, was home to the Indigenous Mi'kmaq tribe of the Mi'kmaw group. They were the only inhabitants known in the area prior to 1604. This is our 'area of interest.'

### Oak Island

Here is a place like no other. Stranger than Easter Island, as condemning as Alcatraz Island, and apparently as manufactured as Manhattan Island – *Oak Island* is an enigma wrapped so tightly around centuries of lore that even the obvious is a mystery. Where did those strange trees come from? Why were those stones brought from elsewhere and where exactly did they come from? Why were those nonnative plants there at that specific time? How and why was coconut fiber buried in the island?

Never mind the endless list of theories of treasure or the countless prominent figures and periods for which spoils are thought to have been buried. This place itself has been hidden within geography and history through name changes, changing sovereignty, and placename swaps. The record of those who have owned a piece of this island are just as mysterious, disguised, and confusing. What is Oak Island? Is it one or two islands? Why was it geologically formed differently? Why has its name changed at least four times, and why do parts of the island have interchanging names? For any researcher, Oak Island has become a truly confounding place.

The island had previously been called Rochester Isle, Smith's Island, Island #28, Gloucester Isle, and the current mistaken moniker of - *Oak Island*. The name obfuscation includes its location in... *Segepenegatig*, *Larcadia*, *La Cadie*, *Acadia*, *Arcadia*, *New France*, *New England*, and *New Scotland*. It has been found in *La Baye de Toutes Iles*, *King's Bay*, *Charlotte Bay*, *Mecklenburgh Bay*, *Chester Bay*, and now *Mahone Bay*. The island itself seems to have gotten

'name-change-fever' as well, with revisions such as *Joudrey's Cove* was *Sellers Cove*, *South Shore Cove* was *Smith's Cove*, and *Smith's Cove* was *Sheerdam Cove* - previously known as *Smuggler's Cove*.

As fascinating as the hunt for treasure has been *on* Oak Island, or as frustrating in researching this place is, the makeup *of* Oak Island is truly a geologist 'fantasy island.' Knowing about the island's makeup will reveal its importance as we examine the canopied trees, red clover, coconut fiber, the filtration system, and the money pit itself. So, let us take a closer look 'inside' the island first.

A complex explanation with the proper lingo of the formation and geology of Oak Island that will tantalize earth scientists can be found in Appendix A, "*Dissecting Dumbo Drumlin*." For those of us who search for clarity and brevity in descriptions, I have compiled from that same reportage, this summary for you,

As glaciers advanced and retreated over the topography, they cut and scraped piles of deposits, minerals, and sediments, and with their weight and pressure, produced drumlins. Drumlins are large, usually oval-shaped mounds of this glacial till left behind as they moved on; Like leaving speed bumps across the landscape. The County of Lunenburg where Oak Island resides, is a region in Nova Scotia where Pleistocene Period (2,580,000 to 11,700 years ago) glacial events produced a field of hundreds of drumlins. Prior to the Holocene Transgression (when glaciers melt increased ocean rise), Mahone Bay, and her bevy of over 400 drumlins sat high and dry. 6000 years ago however, this area was flooded from barrier breaches of the Scotian Ocean Shelf basin. The oceanic waters flooded the area, leaving 365 drumlins trying to keep their heads above the tide - *becoming islands, isles, shoals, and rock outcroppings*.

Oak Island is a compilation of as few as two drumlins, previously created by different glacial events. The highest drumlin is the eastern drumlin at 52 ft above sea-level. It is made up of andesite, anhydrite, clastics, dolomite, gypsum, limestone, sandstone - *and hopefully gold and silver coins!* The western drumlin of Oak Island is 33 ft above sea-level

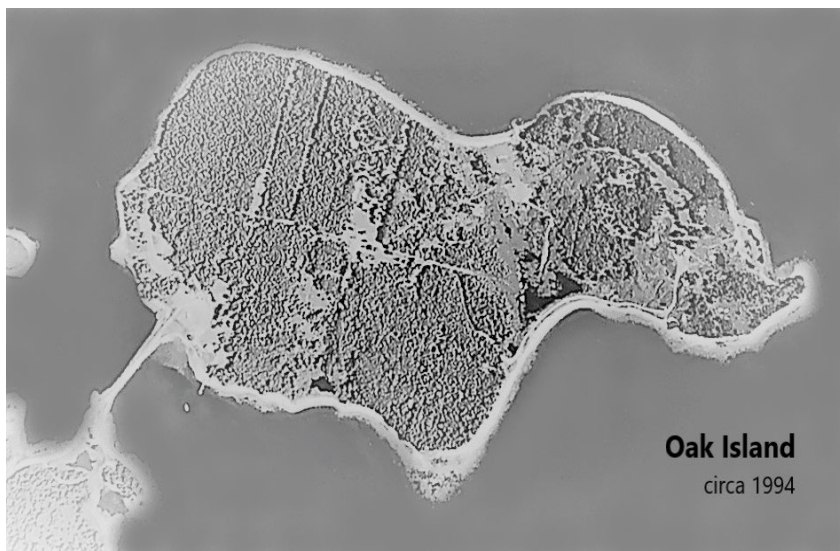
and is comprised of laminated slate, metasiltstone, and metagraywacke. The entire island is covered with sandy clay loam to coarse sandy loam and heavily mixed with gravel, cobbles, and boulders called erratics.

**E**ven more startling is the recent geologic determination - *Oak Island has at least two sinkholes*. The largest of the two sinkholes on the island is where the Money Pit was dug, and the treasure hunt started! This larger sinkhole was measured to be as much as +210 ft deep and is backfilled with breccia composed of angular fragments of anhydrite and glacial deposits of clay and sand. Shaped like a tornados' cone, this sinkhole's width at the top is 55 x 45 ft across and tapers down to approximately 10 ft or less and in an elliptical shape. The original Money Pit appears to have been excavated on the northeastern corner of this sinkhole, with portions of its diameter reaching the farthest of this sinkhole's depth.

Illustrations of the sinkhole, bedrock formations, cross-section of the island and Mahone Bay, as well as sea-level changes based on radiocarbon dating data, can all be found in Appendix A, *"Dissecting Dumbo Drumlín."*

It should also be noted that within the bedrock of the uppermost part of the Windsor Group land formation (creation of geology), which is also under Oak Island, is what are called "dissolution" anomalies. These are pockets, holes or voids caused by the rock dissolving over time. This specific section of the formation would commence at 170 ft deep to 220 ft in depth. As is in the entire Lunenburg County area, this 60 ft wide swath of underground is riddled with bedrock fractures, vugs, karsts, caves, cavities, caverns, and sinkholes – *imbedded into the layers of gypsum and anhydrate*. Many of these are underground. Yet places like 'The Ovens' are above-ground dissolution caverns or 'sea caves.' These particular sea caves are in Rose Bay at the southwestern most coastal area in Lunenburg County. They also have been found throughout our area of interest. Oak Island sits but 200 yards from

the mainland near an area known as Western Shores. It is four miles from the primary Mahone Bay town of Chester. Of some 140 acres in size, the 1-ish mile long and .5 mile wide Island resembles when viewed from the air as a baby elephant. Complete with its trunk pointing southeast to the freedom of the open ocean and its tail an actual causeway, it appears tethered to the continent. It is located at 44.5123 Degrees North – 64.2949 Degrees West. I lovingly refer to it as “Dumbo.”



Satellite view of Oak Island, Courtesy of Google Maps

### *The Flora, the Fauna, and the Farming*

After spending weeks investigating Oak Island the previous year, in April 1996, The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI) issued a report entitled “*Oak Island Hydrogeology, Hydrography and Nearshore Morphology, July-August 1995: Field Observations.*” This report noted only generic vegetation of the island as that was not their primary mission. Their field researchers found mixed stands of Hemlock, Oak, Spruce, Pine, Maple, Birch, and Beech. Specific species were not further identified at that time. This book, however, has documented the known native tree species of Nova Scotia back between 1600 and 1795! In Appendix B, “*The Truth in Timber and Timing,*” we review tree species surveys and discuss the

implications of historical activities and events that impacted the native tree populations and ranges in and around Oak Island. Appendix E, “*Known NEAF Neighbors*,” further details the native tree species’ taxonomic characteristics that lived in our area of interest. All of the types of trees found by WHOI in 1996 were native to our area of interest. Yet these species were not necessarily ancestral to the trees on Oak Island at the time the Money Pit was discovered.

All the organisms associated with the natural community types of the New England Acadian Forest (NEAF) have been dramatically influenced over the last three centuries of land exploitation. Although as an island close to shore, Oak Island is part of the NEAF and did not escape these influences. In 1750, at the onset of development around the island and throughout Nova Scotia, it was a common occurrence to see moose, timber wolves, wolverines, cougars, beavers, lynx, otters, and caribou. White-tailed deer on the other hand disappeared around the 1100-1200s. This is believed to be due to the advent of the Little Ice Age, and they did not return to this area until they were repopulated in the late 1800s. Coyotes were latecomers trotting into this biome in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of these animal families have ‘extirpated’ (*Having reached a state of population, where the species is not growing in an area, close to extinction*) from Nova Scotia. Some animal families have reduced populations elsewhere within the NEAF.

Decline and extirpation was primarily caused by hunting, trapping, logging, fires, and land clearing, which eliminated main food and habitat sources.

Other residents or visitors to Oak island may have included musk rats, foxes, beavers, deer mice, woodchucks, moles, shrews, black bears, martens, fishers, weasels, skunks, otters, or seals. the American Red Squirrel, Northern Flying Squirrel, and the Eastern Chipmunk round out the native furbearers who may know more of the islands secrets then they seem willing to share.

Besides fauna, Nova Scotian old growth forests were rich in flora. Whether they be found in the rich tolerant hardwood forests, or wetlands of moisture-rich bottom lands, or the wet cedar stands throughout the NEAF, vascular plants were flourishing in 1600. Today, botanists have found that 31 species have extirpated, and another 105 species are listed as rare from the original NEAF. Oak Island shares aspects of all three of these different biomes and has experienced similar declines. Today, the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History recognizes 149 species as rare with 11 vascular species as endangered. This is based on the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Unfortunately, this is an incomplete recordation of the flora within our area of interest. We do know as we will show that red clover was not a native vascular plant within the NEAF before 1800. This flora will be examined much more closely for why it was found on Oak Island, on top of the depression – *or Money Pit*.



Much more was happening and growing on Oak Island than just a variety of trees and plants. Prior to the known treasure mining interest on Oak Island, the island was home to many families and farms. *It was not at all uninhabited!*

Oak Island has had a history of agricultural development prior to the discovery of the depression and subsequent Money Pit dig. Timothy Hay, timber, and cabbage seem to have been the predominant types of farming on the island. Yet having livestock usually requires farmers to raise other fodder crops. Livestock on Oak Island, known through poll tax and census records, included goats, cattle, horses, pigs, and poultry. They require more acreage per se for raising feed than land needed for the farming family and crown emoluments. Often, as was the case in Nova Scotia and Mahone Bay at the time, livestock were left to forage in the forest.



Naturally, the shoreline acted as fencing. Unfortunately, however, constant livestock poaching by American pirates forced fencing even on Oak Island.

When field observations conducted in 1995 by the WHOI researchers, they examined the island for its geological makeup and commented,

*“How anyone could farm on Oak Island is hard to imagine since surficial deposits consist of stony till with abundant sand, gravel, cobbles, and boulders.”*

Though by the time of this WHOI field investigation, many, many shafts had been dug with the spoils dumped wherever they may. Such practice surely contaminated their topography findings.

Nor was farming and proper agriculture even understood or applied in Nova Scotia between 1600 and 1800. Those original settlers were given the dubious title of “Planters,” which was completely based on their being the first to clear forests and prepare the land for farming. In most cases they were new to this way of life and clueless as to how to be self-sustaining planters. As an example of their lack of horticultural education, it was customary for farmers to fill their barns with livestock manure. They did not spread it out as fertilizer in their fields. When the barn was full, they simply built another barn! On the coast, settlers used seaweed as a fertilizer, but in the most simplistic of ways. They simply placed potatoes within piles of raked seaweed on the shore and waited.

It was not long before the thin soils under which the cleared old growth forests had resided had become nitrogen-starved, eroded, and unable to produce enough for the farmer, his family – *and his livestock*. Coupled with frequent 8-month long miserable winter seasons, Nova Scotians did all they could do to simply stay warm. Firewood was a prized commodity. Venturing out in miserable conditions to get it meant subjecting yourself to death by scalping

and the disappearance of your oxen. Even when a valuable tree was felled, often times it lay to rot upon the ground, waiting for change of season to allow easier access to harvest it. The life of the farmer became slave to his livestock. Feeding them took up so much acreage that planting was prioritized by the needs of the farm animals. So too on Oak Island. As the island offered free fencing for wondering herds, it meant the forested areas were their living quarters. As convenient as this sounds there were several drawbacks during these troubled times. Cows and oxen are not the most agile of critters. Tree roots, fallen boles and branches, rodent holes and an assortment of other hazards awaited wondering bovine. As mentioned, Islanders were frequently plundered by pirates, privateers, and would-be anti-Crown goons. Just about anyone could bring in a sweep, smack, or a sloop and abscond with chickens, firewood, tools, and livestock – *and they frequently did!*

When it comes to farms and farming on Oak Island, we immediately cite Samuel Ball. The American slave gone north to freedom and profitability by way of cabbage patches and hard work is a story rich in morals if not in facts. We forget that cabbage, as an agricultural commodity, did not make its way to Mahone Bay until it was first introduced in 1800. Jacob Clattenburg first brought and grew cabbage on the farm occupied by William Hennaberry, east of Chester. This anecdote is told by Mathers Byles DesBrisay, Lunenburg Judge of County Courts and member of the Historical Society of Nova Scotia in his “oft” referred to, *“History of the County of Lunenburg.”* He recites many societal elements of that time and in our place of interest. We will frequently visit his writings. Also here note, his Nanny of sixteen years would turn out to be none other than Mrs. Thomas Whitford, a.k.a. Mary Smith. She was the daughter of John Smith of Oak Island fame. John Smith would come to own Lot #18 where the Money Pit is located. He also acquired Lots #15, 16 and 20, as pointed out in Appendix D, *“Obscure Owners of Oak Island.”*

Yet prior to Samuel Ball first harvesting his trees on his lots then clearing them of rocks and boulders and actually plowing his fields

for cabbage, others had established farms with livestock roaming on Oak Island.

Cabbage of all stinky things was not new to Nova Scotia in 1800. Not to be confused with Skunk Cabbage, which is native to the Atlantic province, the real cabbage was enjoyed by French settlers in Port Royal back in 1699, as observed by French Surgeon Di`Areville. In 1713, Fort Louisbourg, was established on Cape Breton Island (far up the coast from Mahone Bay), and residents grew cabbage in their personal gardens. More notably, they also enjoyed imported coconuts, which is a very interesting factoid for later in this book!

Cabbage is high in Vitamin C, which prevents Scurvy, an affliction from the lack of the vitamin frequently affecting sailors long at sea.

Yet for DesBrisay, cabbage was new to his domain until he announced its first arrival in Petit La Riviere, Lunenburg County in 1795. From there, cabbage amongst German settlers became a big thing in Lunenburg. So much so, other county dwellers slighted them by derogatorily calling them “Lunenburgers.” This was for their competitive growing and ravenous consumption of the ‘German’ vegetable. Cabbage eventually made Tancook Island of Mahone Bay an internationally recognized cabbage hybrid producer. Finally, cabbage was served up in Chester, arriving on many a plate at the start of 1800.

### *My Island Home*

There is nothing clear about anything related to Oak Island as we have already seen regarding the island itself. So too is the recordation of who owned what of Oak Island and when. Whether obtained by land grant, purchase, marriage, secret assignment, relative, or death, transactional records of property ownership is very scant and at times - *abstruse*. Family bibles, wills, journals, and church baptismal records were helpful, but often deaths were not recorded. At least 20 people have died on Oak Island. To greatly complicate and confound researchers, family given and



# Mystery Guests

Some of the evidence discussed and outlined in this book have not been fully researched by either a previous author or the ongoing *Curse of Oak Island* TV show. However, the TV show's expanded use of archeology, chemistry, and geology in their quest is advancing the similar approaches used here. These chapters and appendices will utilize dendrology, hydrology, lithology, plant morphology, plant taxonomy, phytopathology, phytogeography, pomology and pedology, as well as models in soil sciences and physical oceanography, all to ascertain the answers we seek. These disciplines and fields of study use formulations, equations, and case studies that will be applied to map out the actual historical record of Oak Island. With no soils, no fibers, no logs, no leaves, no bark, no stones to examine, we can still examine information that powers the forensics in application for answering this mystery. This is the approach utilized in this book using those scientific tools and methodologies.

## Mystery Canopied Trees

In answering what those famous "Mystery Canopied Trees" were on Oak Island, we will identify and examine the tree species native to Nova Scotia at the time the Money Pit was discovered. We examine the taxonomy of those native trees and other species that have been posited as *being* those trees. This book will clearly distinguish the plausibility and probability of those tree species having been morphologically altered or affected by other tropisms. These alterations and morphologies, it is argued, have caused "that" species to develop into the unique shape and characteristics seen in these mystery trees. This is the basis for the argument that the mystery canopied trees are perhaps, native trees. Foreign candidate tree species that meet taxonomical similarities will be vetted for their historical, natural, geographical range. The goal is to identify where those particular trees came from. Once the canopied trees are forensically identified, we further examine the growth and longevity of that species. This research will attempt to

give a “planted date” to those identified canopied-trees. Applied to the timeline of the historical record, those dates further bolster the *who* and the *why* those trees may have been planted on Oak Island.



Smith's Cove. Artistry by Robert W. Cook, B/W version.

***It is those mystery trees of Oak Island above now long gone that we seek to identify.***

In addition, this book features a special chapter written by famed Artist, Robert W. Cook, whose depictions of Oak Island have been prominently featured by other Oak Island authors. Robert's artistic eye has focused more than a dozen years in looking to find what species those mysterious canopied-trees were that were seen on the island so long ago. Finally, through studying Freemason ritualistic riddles and those writings of a revengeful rogue, Robert has unwrapped his answer. Mr. Cook has been able to parse the known narrative and provides you the reader, with actual proof of what species those canopied-trees may have been. This conundrum may no longer be a thorny issue. Robert graciously and enigmatically decorates part of the cover of this book - *Oak Island Mystery Trees and other Forensic Answers*. Thank you also Gordon Fader, P.Geo for helping find the evidence at hand!

### Mystery Money Pit

Taking a “Crime Scene Investigation” approach to the Money Pit (MP) and its surroundings, we will ‘dig up’ all the evidence and clues that others have overlooked. The varied descriptions of the Money Pit area will be identified, discussed, and forensically investigated. Issues regarding red clover, big oak trees, ancient road, Serpent Mound and flagstones found, will be discussed and analyzed to explain how they help determine the *when* of this mystery. Additional forensic investigations are made from evidence within the MP itself. This examination includes models on soil settlement, soil compaction, and soil consolidation. Also, scientific experts have modeled rates of rot and decay of the wooden logs making up the platforms of the MP. These applications of scientific formulations will create equations that provide ‘rates-of-elapsed-time’ for each individual example found. From the depression itself, the soils within, coconut fibers, and the log platforms, the Money Pit is the primary evidentiary bank that will yield the date of *when* it was refilled. This starts the clock ticking on our odyssey. Everything else is tangential to the timetables created. The timetables that were created by the forensic formulas from experts were developed using the evidence found within the pit. In addition, this writing will describe the engineering aspects of initial digging and then refilling of the Money Pit and the construction of the platforms, etc.

### Mystery Coconut Fibers

There is nothing as confounding to the Oak Island story as the coconut fibers! Here, we will examine the coconut fibers found within the filtration system in Smith’s Cove as well as deep within the Money Pit itself. We identify the historical record of how much coconut fiber was dug up, but also extrapolate the necessary volume of coconut fiber, or coir, would have been required to build such systems. The book chronicles the dates of distribution of coconut palm trees throughout the world. What sources would be available to provide the volume of fiber used, and what coconut fiber type is even involved. As previously mentioned, the prestigious *Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute* (WHOI) published

a 151-page report in 1996 about Oak Island. Their draft report determined there are only four logical explanations as to how coconut fibers were found on Oak Island. This book addresses each one of those pathways to their conclusion. We foil false reasons given by others attempting to minimize the magnitude of the WHOI findings. Finally, we add the laboratory dated samples of coconut fiber to the historical timeline of activities. We further explore the conundrum swirling around those fibers of Oak Island.

The chapters of *Oak Island Mystery Trees...* will concentrate extensively on the three previously descriptive paragraphs. Each tells of a fascinating, evidentiary-laced crime scene investigation of mundane observations made by those on site. Bit by bit, the forensic evidence is compiled, and the reader is led to a fact-based conclusion of when visitors to the island planted those mystery trees, when they refilled the Money Pit, and what coconut fiber was doing on Oak Island. For the sceptics who are looking for greater “details” and “proof,” the book provides the level of detail and forensic exploration which led to that proof in subject-specific appendices. These appendices further introduce the reader to the level of investigation and research performed to offer scientific conclusions on these topics. Most of the photos, historical records, lab findings, and referenced research sources are shown in those respective appendices. The reader can dive in as deep into the forensics as they would like. This book is written to generate an understanding of how science can be used to see when there is so little to touch. If this book doesn’t launch controversy or motivate researchers to study and verify my findings, then this book should end up at the thrift store. However, if you believe the mystery of Oak Island is solvable, then grab a pad of paper and pull up a chair. Let’s not wait for the next hammergrab – *let’s pitch in and give the Lagina’s as much help as they can handle!*



## Knock, Knock – Who’s There

Briefly, as the story goes, in 1795 a ‘group’ or ‘individual’ was on Oak Island doing ‘something’ and stumbled upon a depression in the ground. Perhaps noticing other oddities, the trespasser(s) believed that buried treasure was lying below within that depression. And the 227 year conundrum immediately began!

This book is less concerned who was doing what on that day on Oak Island. This book centers on the descriptions given of that depression and what lay around it. However, in the spirit of giving a primer, we identify who was said to be there for familiarization. Appendix D, *“Obscure Owners of Oak Island,”* delves into these people, their families, and neighbors in much greater detail.

Different Oak Island treasure stories identify different people involved with finding the MP and describing its appearance. So we will include them all in this very brief summary. The spelling of their names is still up for argument as is the level of their involvement. This brief summary covers those characters involved, which are: Samuel Ball, Daniel & Mary McGinnis, John Smith, and Anthony Vaughan, Junior & Senior.

### Samuel Ball

As previously described, he was a Colonial slave from South Carolina who won his freedom through his loyalties and fighting for the British Crown. As promised, the crown offered those in the colonies, land grants for helping them in the fight. Samuel Ball ventured with others to Nova Scotia awaiting said reward. Eventually, Mr. Ball befriended lot owners on Oak Island, and started purchasing lots as he expanded his farm and cabbage business. We return to Judge DesBrisay’s 1870 (first) version of *“History of the County of Lunenburg.”* This is the only written record that includes Samuel Ball as one of the three males to have been involved in digging in the depression. In his second rendition in 1895, including the previously mentioned history, Samuel Ball

was replaced by Anthony Vaughan as the third participant. Some of the speculation regarding this change 45 years later may be a refinement in the story's narrative. DesBrisay says in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, "McInnis made known his find to his neighbors." Is this a reference to Samuel Ball? Later we learn of the probable ages of McInnis, Smith, and Vaughan. Did they seek the help of the older Samuel Ball, or borrow his tools? Samuel Ball at this time owned Oak Island lot #9 in 1793, Lot #25 in 1787 and Lot #26 in 1788 and would have been the closest "neighbor" to the Lot #18 find. He married in 1795, so was he even on the island at this time?

It is more likely Samuel Ball pleaded to be kept out of the notoriety that would come to swirl around the treasure hunt. He was known to be a private man and did not relinquish much about his existence. Being a Black man did not automatically bestow equal treatment, even in Nova Scotia. Furthermore, Mahone Bay was still a dangerous place to live. Whether by Mi'kmaq warriors or anyone with a boat to plunder - being associated with treasure hunting was simply too dangerous.

I personally believe Samuel Ball WAS involved in the initial digging at the depression, and he was given or had taken the flagstone that was unearthed two feet below at the MP. I also believe Samuel Ball used that flagstone to top a trench he dug on his property. In Season #7, Episode #22 on History Channels' *"The Curse of Oak island,"* this trench was uncovered. There is speculation what the trench was used for, but regardless, the flagstone found and removed by the shows' participants would not have been found on the island naturally. Samuel Ball would have seen the value in so many flagstone pieces regardless of whether he was a participant in any recovered treasure. This is often the speculation to his lot purchasing and successful cabbage farming. Either way, Samuel Ball adds yet more layers of mystery and intrigue to the story.

To learn about Samuel Ball's life prior to Oak Island, read *"The Enduring Journey of Samuel Ball, From Slavery to Freedom, Part One: 1766-1785,"* by Chipp Reid.

### Daniel & Mary McGinnis

The McGinnis clan is rife with misdirection, confusion, and obfuscation! No one has the complete handle on exactly which McInnis (McGinnis, McKennis, McKinnis, Macinnes, McInnes, McTinnis, etc.) family tree we are talking about for sure. My research says we are talking about three different families, though interrelated. I, however, enjoyed and thought plausible the version told by Kerrin Margiano, daughter of Jean McGinnis and a group of the descendants of the McGinnis family. The story of their reflections are told in the book, *"Oak Island Connection."* The book explains the family dynamics and most hinges on the stories told by their grandfather, George William "Bill" McGinnis (1893-1966), a.k.a. McGinnis, McGinnes, McGinness, McGinnes m. He grew up on Oak Island as a child, and several of the descendants did visit the McGinnis homestead over the period of their lives. His storytelling dates to circa 1950's.

The most important tale told by Grandpa Bill was the story of who found the depression that would become the Money Pit. Bill states that Capt. Donald Daniel McInnis (1762-1824) and his newly wed wife Mary, "Ana Maria Barbara Sawler McInnis" (1774-1870) (a.k.a. Sellers, Siler, Seiler, Saller, Zellers), were spending the afternoon flirtatiously chasing each other on the eastern drumlin. Daniel and Mary were married on September 8, 1795. So were they really married when they discovered the depression, or preparing to wed? Perhaps their frolicking was in anticipation of the nuptials. Either way, the book *Oak Island Connection* recalls Uncle Bill telling a romantic story of cat-and-mouse and discovery!

*... "One lovely afternoon the young married couple chased each other in the woods. Daniel caught Mary and lifted her high and swung her around till they were dizzy, and both fell to the ground laughing... She said she thought she was seeing things, but the arrow was still there even after she squinted a little harder. It looked odd how the line pointed straight down while following the natural curve of the bark. She was drawn closer, and Daniel asked Mary where she was going, but she did not say a word and just walked as if in a trance to the tree. ...and*

*she held his hand so that they walked backwards a few feet. Never taking her eyes off of the mark she guided her husband to lie down next to her; from this perspective the arrow was there before them and Daniel said, "Keep the heid" [stay calm]."*

What did she see? Was that mark a hundred-year old *Broad Arrow* mark atop the shiny bark stripe commonly found on Northern Red Oak trees? A Broad Arrow mark would only have been placed on trees with a diameter larger than 24 inches. With that in mind, over one hundred years later this would have been one heck-of-a big tree! If, as legend has it, there was a large branch protruding from an oak over the depression, 15 ft up... would Daniel really think of "*lifting her high and swinging her around?*" Did they know they were on neighbor John Smith's Lot #18, or had he not purchased it yet? To understand the conversation about 'Broad Arrow' markings, check out Appendix B, "*The Truth in Timber and Timing.*" To learn more about Northern Red Oaks, turn to Appendix G, "*Dendro Disguised.*"

### John Smith

A resident of Oak Island for nearly his entire life, John Smith has been part of the Money Pit legend from the very beginning... well, kinda, sorta. John Smith's father, Duncan Smith, came to Nova Scotia along with thousands of other British Loyalist refugees fleeing America. After a stay in Halifax, Duncan brought his family to settle in Chester with a grant of land somewhere past the East River. In 1784, Duncan Smith drew for a lot on Oak Island, which he sold to Ambrose Allen in 1785 sometime before Allen's unrecorded death.

By 1788, John Smith's mother, Margarette McLean-Smith, had remarried Neil McMullan and the remains of Smith's family moved to Oak Island. John Smith appeared to prosper on Oak Island and over the years he began acquiring more lots on the island, slowly expanding the family farm. In 1799 he married Anne Floyd, and they raised a total of 13 children on Oak Island between 1800-1829. John Smith built a new house not far from the Money Pit site and

by his death in 1857, he had acquired some nine lots on Oak Island. He acquired Lot #24 in 1784, Lot #11 in 1789, Lots #9 & #10 in 1794, Lot #18 in 1795, Lot #16 in 1798, Lot #17 in 1806, Lot #20 in 1807, and Lot #19 in 1825.

One of John Smith's daughters, Mary Smith, was first mentioned in 1870 by Mather B. DesBrisay in his first edition work "History of the County of Lunenburg". According to DesBrisay, Mary was associated with his family household when he was a child and was very well thought of by him and his family. In this first edition DesBrisay, describes the works he saw on the island with his own eyes and relates the story of the discovery as told to him by Mary. In this version McGinnis makes his discovery of the Money Pit and recruits two friends, Anthony Vaughn and Samuel Ball, to help him excavate the site. Strangely enough, in this first edition story Mary Smith makes no mention of her father being involved in the original discovery of the Money Pit. Then twenty-five years later in 1895, DesBrisay published his vastly expanded second edition in which he goes into much more detail on the Oak Island story. In this "retelling" (which is still attributed to "as told" from Mary Smith to the author), DesBrisay removes Samuel Ball from the original discovery and inserts John Smith. To my knowledge why this was done was never explained by DesBrisay. The search for answers to this question and many others has fueled several theories to be developed concerning the Money Pit's initial discovery. Answers are few and far between. Until a researcher digs up a new document or an old journal is found, we probably will never know which story is closest to the truth.

#### Anthony Vaughan Sr. & Jr.

Another example of family complexity is the Vaughan (Vaughn) family tree. According to local history, the first Vaughan to arrive in Chester, Nova Scotia was John Vaughan in 1768. Hailing from Rhode Island, he had received a grant of some 500 acres in the newly formed village of Chester. Two of his brothers, Daniel and Anthony Vaughan would follow him to Chester in 1772.

No doubt these brothers came to invest in the many new opportunities available in these new lands.

Records show that in 1788 a permit to fell timber on property located in what is now Western Shore, across from Oak Island was issued to Daniel and Anthony Vaughan. And by 1788, they were paying taxes on an additional 900 acres. Anthony Vaughan or senior, as we know him, was father to Anthony Vaughan Jr. of the Money Pit story. Anthony Vaughan Sr. will come to establish his own mainland farm directly across the bay from Oak Island. Together the Vaughan brothers built a profitable lumber business operating a sawmill and a grist mill. Vaughan Lake powered one of their mills and another was within sight of Oak Island.

Years before the Money Pit discovery, Daniel Vaughan sold his mill interest to his brother, Anthony, and left for the new lands being offered in New Brunswick. There in Saint John County he acquired over 1700 acres of land and according to family history became wealthy. Unfortunately, Daniel was killed by natives in 1808, but his sons went on to establish a ship building business in Saint Martin's that did quite well. Another son would establish Vaughan Shipping Co. in England. Anthony Vaughan Sr. would go on to become a considerable landowner in Chester including several lots on Oak Island. While many lots certainly were being held for his mills, Vaughn was listed as a farmer in county records.

Anthony Vaughan Jr. was born on the family farm within sight of Oak Island around 1782. Although he carried the family moniker, he was born within the last batch of five children and received a smaller estate for his inheritance. His brothers included David Vaughan born 1770, James Jackson Vaughan born 1774, John Armstrong Vaughan born 1780, Francis Vaughan born 1784, and a half-brother, Jonathan Vaughan Smith born in 1817. Anthony Jr's biggest claim to fame was his part in the discovery of the Money Pit and his association with treasure seekers over the years.

In 1939, treasure hunter Gilbert Hedden located and interviewed a gentleman known as Captain Anthony Vaughan. Captain Vaughan was 98 years old at the time and claimed to have been born on the Vaughan family farm in Chester. It is unknown which brother this Anthony Vaughan is descended from but being born on the family farm across from Oak Island around 1841 certainly puts him into Anthony Vaughan Jr's timeline as a possible son or grandson. Gilbert Hedden learned that Captain Vaughan had worked in the diggings at Oak Island during the Truro Company's operations from 1849-1853. It was during this expedition that the legend of the flood tunnel system was first considered. Large-scale excavations were carried out in Smith's Cove for the first time including the construction of the first cofferdam. Captain Vaughan told Hedden that at the age of ten or twelve, he witnessed "large quantities of fiber being removed from the beach" at Smith's Cove. Unfortunately, he was hazy on the "canals" or "drains" that were discovered, but he did remember many other island landmarks such as the McGinnis homestead.

Both Captain Vaughan and his granddaughter recounted to Hedden the old story about McGinnis and/or Smith befriending an old sailor in England, who was once part of the crew of Captain Kidd. The old sailor in gratitude for their friendliness told them of a treasure somewhere in "New Anglia" on an island "covered in oaks." Knowing of Oak Island or what was then called Gloucester Island, Smith and/or McGinnis are thought to have explored the island and found the 'depression.' This is now known as the Money Pit. Unfortunately for Hedden and anyone else wanting to learn more about the early excavations in Smith's Cove during the Truro Company's time on Oak Island, Captain Vaughan had run away from the family farm at the age of 15. He never returned to Oak Island or Chester, but he did enjoy a "life of high adventure on the seven seas." Captain Vaughan also went on to tell Gilbert Hedden that the Vaughan family themselves "did not put much stock," in the old sailor's legend. Yet, they did "amass quite a fortune by supplying lumber and other supplies to the various searcher expeditions."

Hedden wrote to his lawyer, R.V. Harris, that overall his interview with Vaughan was “interesting but a bit disappointing.” Obviously, the Vaughan Family’s ‘old sailor story’ had come from the same undocumented source as the McGinnis Family’s ‘old sailor story.’ Hedden concluded in his letter to R.V. Harris that he considered “the Vaughan matter” to be closed at that time.

The Vaughan’s were a large family that was very much respected by their neighbors. Today many descendants of brothers John, Daniel, and Anthony Vaughan still live in the Lunenburg County area and many more extended relatives are spread throughout Nova Scotia. As we touched on earlier, ownership documentation is vague, missing, and downright open-ended in answering who owned what parts of Oak Island and through what period. Even finding a historic document did not mean the section of the page you’ve been searching for would be legible, not marked over or missing follow-on pages. Further, descriptions of lots, acreage or parcels were subject to interpretation. I have read a dozen other Oak Island books attempting to nail down this question with confidence. Even the descendants of the McGinnis family have with the help of Kerrin Margiano, authored a book called “*Oak Island Connection*” in 2016. Yet I am not convinced the family tree in their rendition is completely 100% accurate. I did add their inclusion of Mary McGinnis to this report, as I found their story closer to being most probable than the proven falsehoods already surrounding the start of the Money Pit saga.

With that caveat out of the way, The ***Oak Island Mystery Trees...*** has assembled a table of ownership for each lot or parcel, over each and every year between 1750 and 2021. This chart notates and codes familial relations between other lot owners and their descendants over time. This represents the ‘actual owners’ of those real estate lots. Through Fred Nolan’s research and review of lot deeds and titles, Fred determined many filed deeds and land transfers were inaccurate or not fully transferred. Mr. Nolan exploited those errors, contacted heirs who thought they had sold the lots, and convinced them to now resell their interests in those



lots to him. This gave Fred Nolan a foothold on the island. Many researchers, I included, spent time chasing these documents and including them in their timelines. Fred Nolan's actions invalidated those deeds and transfers. In other words, only the actual legal lot owner in any given year is notated in this table. This recording of lot ownership is in Appendix D, "*Obscure Owners of Oak Island.*"

I'd like to thank Christopher L. Boze for his diligence in verifying and validating the facts in this ownership chart. Christopher is also a co-author of this book and author of Chapter #2, "*Fishy Business.*" I think you will find the topic of his research is very interesting and starts off with the original owners of Oak Island. Mr. Boze has uncovered many people first arriving in New Scotland, knew how to seize control of aspects of society and turn Nova Scotia into a 'cash cow' and a 'money tree' – *puns intended.*

If you thought the 'sacred bark' of the Quina-Quina tree was the biggest smuggling episode in British Empire history, his chapter will surprise you. *Surely*, they would not want the ever vigilant Judge DeBrisay to know of their kind of historic accomplishment. For having known, he would have made note of them in his historical volumes of the time. I can attest *Shirley* had nothing to do with it!

