

Quaker Love Letters – Thomas Sylvester *excerpt* of 'The Amherst Island Beacon,' February 1996.

Valentine's Day may be past, most of us have shelved the promises and affection of the day until '97 or the millennium. But our ancestors loved for the year, their lives, and even longer. Forty love letters dated 1818-1821 of one betrothed couple were recently donated to the Lennox & Addington County Archives.²

The Island connection of the correspondents Mary B Sweatman and Thomas Nash was that their families immigrated to Amherst Island in 1821. Five families of Friends, or Quakers, from the Bristol area, England, joined their resources and chartered a vessel to Montreal. Their surnames included Boone, Lamson, Moffat, Nash, Shepherd, and Sweatman. They collectively bought 500 acres, sometimes known as the Rev John Stuart plot (Lots 23-27, Concession I *or* west of Wolfreys to Whitings). The Island Quaker community lasted for ten years before moving on to Prince Edward County and points west. Their descendents include Jane Foster, manager of the Lennox & Addington County Museum. We should pity Jane who was willing to book time off, to read these letters in her work place!

The collection of love-letters record the trials of Mary's health. Thomas had proposed by November 1818, "her illness [tuberculous] was her only damper." The letters record she was prescribed essence of English Poppy. Mary succumbed to the disease by Christmas 1819; yet their professed love would bring them together after this world. One particularly interesting letter was, "An Inventory of the Valuable Relicks of Mary B Sweatman," listing 33 items, 14 named books and 4 larger items.

Thomas Nash, the devoted suitor married Hannah, Mary's younger sister. Thomas and Hannah lived on the Island into the 1830's. Their six children and 23 grandchildren were listed in *Pioneer Life on the Bay of Quinte*, 1904.

Obviously, the collection of letters were cherished by one of the immigrants, carefully preserved in a Victorian letter folder, and then apparently forgotten in a mainland attic for numerous generations. How many other attics contain Island history treasures?

² Letters, Sweatman/Nash 1818-1821, Lennox & Addington County Archives, Napanee, Ontario.