

Captain John Alexander Pratt

My grandmother, Bernice Macomber, had a lifelong connection to Maitland, Nova Scotia. As a child she resided in this quaint little town with our ancestors and, after relocating to New York City, she returned every year for the month of August with her children: Elizabeth, Joan and Paul. I doubt she realized that her loyalty to the town would trickle down to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren who all developed a desire to learn more about Maitland and our ancestry. Recently, I was able to travel to Maitland for the first time with my cousins (Joe Cortelli, Terrence Cortelli, Christian Cortelli, Catherine Cortelli, Debbie Reid, and Brad Reid) and my aunt, Joan Cortelli, who spent her summers in Maitland.

During our exploration of the town, my aunt fondly drizzled stories of her childhood all over the sights like maple syrup on pancakes. We visited her old church (Holy Trinity Anglican Church on Cedar Road), the old cemeteries, the general store (thank you Frieze & Roy, the oldest general store in Canada, for the sweatshirts), and the family home she stayed in for the summer on Cedar Road. We all felt a connection to the little town that was so deep and meaningful knowing our ancestors had lived their lives on that land and sea. We had the pleasure of visiting the bed and breakfast known as Cresthaven by the Sea on the Shubenacadie River which was built by Frederick Macomber, our forebear.

Although there were so many highlights (which included a homemade lunch made by our cousin Carol Macomber, resident of Maitland) who was a perfect host), one of the most memorable experiences was the Maritime Museum in Halifax. We were greeted by Kirby and Jacob who were so enthusiastic and gave us the opportunity to view a medal that was presented to my great-great-grandfather, Captain John A. Pratt, by Italian King Umberto I.

At the museum we learned that on November 10, 1887, Captain Pratt, sea captain of the brig *Cupid*, received word that the Italian brigantine *Pietro Marano* was in distress in the Atlantic Ocean. He then took an unprecedented action of leaving his ship, the *Cupid*, to his First Mate and commanded a lifeboat which successfully rescued the crew on the *Pietro Marano*. The medal was presented to Captain Pratt in 1888 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, approximately one year after the rescue date. The medal travelled to Australia and the United States before reaching Pratt. Apparently, this sea captain was not easy to locate! We are so pleased that he was found and the medal was presented to him. What an honor to have a family member who was the first sea captain to be presented with such a medal in America by the Italian King!

Thank you to the historical society and to Kirby and Jacob from the museum for providing us with this information about the medal and such hospitality at the museum. A second visit to Maitland is definitely in our future!

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