Binocular donation recalls heroism of Capt. George Macaulay and crew of Golden Fleece

A long-lost pair of binoculars, presented by the Federal Government to the captain of a Southampton fishing boat that rescued four Port Elgin sailors almost 110 years ago, has been donated to the Bruce County Museum’s new Marine Gallery.

George Becker, Anne Schwandt and George Macaulay made the presentation to Bruce County Museum curator Barb Ribey last week. The binoculars were discovered among the estate of the late Isabel Boundy of Southampton.

The Boundy home at 32 Grosvenor St. N. was once the

George Becker, Bruce County Museum curator Barb Ribey, Anne Schwandt and George Macaulay view the binoculars donated to the marine gallery of the Museum. (Photos by Randy Derry)
home of Isabel Budy’s grandfa-
ther, Capt. George Macaulay, 
owner of the sailing boat Golden 
Fleece, which was used in the re-
cue. (George Becker and Anne 
Schwandt are the great-grandson 
and great-granddaughter, and 
George Macaulay, the grandson, of 
Capt. Macaulay.) Three other 
men, Kenneth McDonald, Alex 
Graham and Kenneth McLeod also 
received binoculars for their part as 
crew of the Golden Fleece. (This 
Kenneth McLeod was not the local 
fisherman Kenneth McLeod who died 
just a few years ago.)

The story of the rescue was told 
in the Port Elgin Times of Sept. 3, 
1883. The headline said: “Rescued 
at the Point of Death by a Gallant 
Crew who Put our From 
Southampton.”

Capt. Sandy McLean and three 
others had left in the sailing yacht 
Annabell for a trip to Pleasant 
Harbour, near the tip of the 
Peninsula. When they were barely 
off Southampton, the weather 
changed and a “rough and treacher-
ous sea” began to break.

The men decided to come about 
and head for Southampton, but 
when they reached Indian Reef, 
which is said to be about two 
and one-half miles north of 
Southampton and about half a mile 
from shore, they were overcome by 
the waves.

The Times reports says they 
“were struck by a heavy sea which 
filled the sail, snapped the mast and 
landed the boat on its side.”

The four men were left clinging 
to the side of the boat and rigging, 
with the heavy seas breaking over 
them as they drifted toward shore.

The Times continued:

“Fortunately, however, they were 
seen from Southampton, and 
although a wild sea was running at 
the time, a boat, the Golden Fleece, 
was speedily manned a crew of as 
gallant fellows as ever put out to 
save perishing men, composed of 
Capt. Geo. Macaulay, owner of the 
boat, Kenneth McDonald, Alex 
Graham and another whose name 
we have been unable to learn, and 
under great difficulty and at the 
peril of their own lives succeeded in 
reaching the wrecked vessel and 
taking of the, by this time, almost 
illese occupants.

The Annabell was left a prey to 
the raging sea, and the run back to 
Southampton was made in good 
time. When picked up the men were 
neary perished and clung to the 
boat with a death grip, which their 
rescuers found difficult to break. 
Happy Billy Douglass, as he is 
known here, being the only one able 
to help himself. When taken back to 
Southampton they were cared for 
with the utmost kindness at the resi-
dences of Finlay McLennan, 
Norman McAulay and John’s 
Hotel, and in the evening all but 
Capt. Sandy McLean were able to 
return home to Port. He has since 
fully recovered and all are now 
apparently none the worse for their 
hard experience, although Mr. 
Baker received a severe cut over 
one of his eyes.

Too much praise cannot be 
bestowed upon Capt. Macaulay 
and the party who went out with 
him. Their bravery has been seldom 
equalled, and their conduct in rescu-
ing the men, who, but for them, 
would undoubtedly have been lost, 
is deserving of very substantial 
recognition by the government, 
under whose notice the circum-
stances should be brought. The loss 
of the Annabell will be severely felt 
by Capt. Sandy, as the profits in his 
little boat were his whole depen-
dence.”

The following year, Capt. George 
Macaulay and each of the rescuers 
with him in his Golden Fleece were 
presented with field glasses for their 
gallant exertions, as the letter 
from Alexander McNeil, the local 
member of Parliament wrote.

It is more than likely that the 
Golden Fleece was the early style of 
fishing boat built in Southampton 
and along the Bruce Coast, known as 
the Huron boat. It would have 
been between 30 and 40 feet long, 
with two masts and a substantial 
yardage of sail.

The men on the Annabell were 
Capt. Sandy McLean, Billy 
Douglass and Herbert Heller, both 
of Port Elgin and John Baker of 
Berlin.

The Annabell was recovered, for 
it is mentioned in the Times of Aug. 
16, 1887:

“...being well supplied with pro-
visions, rods and fish hooks, with 
other refreshments for men and 
weapons of war against fish, made a 
pleasant run to Chantry Island. 
where, after inspecting the light 
house, fog horn and government 
works at that place, a few hours 
were pleasantly spent in picnicking, 
fishing etc.”

The Annabell is regarded as the 
finest yacht now on our waters and 
under the management of Capt. 
Sandy McLean cannot be beat for 
either speed, safety or pleasure. 
The run was made from Port Elgin 
docks to the landing at the Island in 
less than half an hour, and although 
the wind was not so favorable the 
return trip was made with compara-
tive speed.

Mr. Cargill (the member of 
Parliament)...presented Capt. Sandy 
with a beautiful hunting case silver 
watch, purchased at Moffat’s, as a 
token of esteem and remembrance of 
the occasion.”

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