
THE ELIZABETH BISHOP SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA NEWSLETTER

The EBSNS was formed in 1994 to celebrate the life and work of the poet Elizabeth Bishop. The society seeks through various activities and projects, to promote the appreciation and study of Elizabeth Bishop, as a Nova Scotia writer. The EBSNS publishes an annual newsletter and holds an AGM in Great Village in June of each year. For more information about EBSNS and about membership, visit our website www.elizabethbishop.org.

Editorial

Since our 2024 AGM, which marked the 30th anniversary of the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia, the society has been working on a small booklet, a collection of Bishop-inspired poems by fifteen Nova Scotia poets. This booklet will be a fund-raiser for the society. Details are still pending and a timeline for the booklet remains open. When the board has the particulars, it will share them with members and the wider public.

Global interest in Bishop continues. The “Elizabeth Bishop Postcards” exhibit began a journey in April, opening in Key West, Florida, in the Elizabeth Bishop House there. The exhibit will then cross the Atlantic to France in 2026 (see more details below). We have learned that a documentary, “[Elizabeth Bishop: From Brazil with Love](#),” by avant-garde film-maker [Vivian Ostrovsky](#), will be released this summer. It is hoped that this film will find its way online eventually. Any information we learn about this film will be passed on to our members and readers.

The EBSNS AGM will be held on Saturday 21 June 2025, at the Elizabeth Bishop House in Great Village. See more information in these pages. Everyone is welcome. In advance of the AGM, one of our guest speakers, EBSNS Vice President Laura Schwarz offers a teaser for her talk about the Dominion Chair Company in Bass River, a business that was certainly going strong during Bishop’s childhood in Great Village.



(Photo by Brenda Barry)

**Elizabeth Bishop Society Annual General Meeting,
21 June 2025, 1:30 p.m.
Elizabeth Bishop House, Great Village, N.S.
Guest speakers: Emma FitzGerald and Laura Schwarz**



(Photo by Kim Campbell Sullivan)

Emma FitzGerald, trained as both an artist and architect, celebrates people and places in her “Hand Drawn” series, which has taken her from coast to coast in Canada, starting with *Hand-Drawn Halifax* (Formac Publishing) and most recently with *Hand-Drawn Victoria* (Penguin Random House). She has illustrated several children’s books, including the Elizabeth Mrazick Cleaver Award nominated *A Pocket of Time: The Poetic Childhood of Elizabeth Bishop* (words by Rita Wilson, Nimbus Publishing). She is currently working on illustrations for *The Man in Motion: How Rick Hansen’s World Tour Broke Down Barriers for People with Disabilities*, a picture book written by Hansen and Lorna Schutlz Nickerson, to be published in April 2026 with Owl Kids. Emma lives and draws in Lunenburg, N.S.



(Photo by Brandon Schwarz)

Laura Schwarz is a longtime resident of Great Village, N.S. Having spent her childhood and teenage years in the village, she is well aware of the enduring impact that Great Village can have on its inhabitants. After living, learning and working in the Annapolis Valley for seven years, Laura was happy to return to the village in the fall of 2023. As manager of the [Bass River Heritage Museum](#), she is overjoyed that she now gets to explore her love of history on a daily basis. She has also begun to put down roots of her own in Great Village with her husband, Brandon, and their three mischievous but endearing cats: Gus (shown in image), Hubert, and Catbus.



(EB Postcards Exhibit, Key West, FL, April 2025. Photo by Jonathan Ellis)

Elizabeth Bishop's Postcards Exhibit

In September-October 2024, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, presented the “Elizabeth Bishop’s Postcards” exhibit, co-curated by Jonathan Ellis (University of Sheffield) and Susan Rosenbaum (University of Georgia). Vassar published a beautiful catalogue with an online version at: <https://vclibrary.vassarspaces.net/elizabeth-bishops-postcards-an-exhibition/index>

Most recently, the exhibit went to Key West, FL, where it opened on 1 April and ran until 8 May, 2025, at the Elizabeth Bishop House, 624 White St. Publicity for this show read: “It celebrates what the curators call Bishop’s ‘fifth art’, adding to the widespread recognition of her poems, prose, letters, and paintings.” Noting that after this stint, it “travels abroad for an exhibition at the Sorbonne in Paris” in 2026. The co-curators gave a talk about the exhibit on 25 April.



(Elizabeth Bishop House, Key West, FL, April 2025. Photo by Jonathan Ellis)

Dominion Chair Company by Laura Schwarz

Many people have heard of the *Dominion Chair Company*, sometimes known by the nickname “Bass River Chairs” due to their headquarters and manufacturing location in Bass River, Nova Scotia. However, not many realize the true legacy of this company, and the many trials and tribulations that it faced throughout its years of operation.

Founded under the name *Union Furniture and Merchandise Company* in 1860, it was not until 1903 that the company adopted the name *Dominion Chair Company*. The company was founded by brothers George and William Fulton, and the original factory sat at the base of Maple Avenue, right where the new Bass River bridge is currently being built. In fact, bricks from the second or third factory have been found on site during the construction of the new bridge! You heard me right, this company had more than one factory over the course of its 129+ years in operation. They actually had six factories, all of which suffered the same fate.



(Dominion Chair Company. First Factory. [Bass River Heritage Museum](#).)

When the first factory burned down in 1885, it marked the beginning of what was to become an unfortunate trend for the company, as all six of the company’s factories have burned down over the years. The first three factories stood on the site at the base of Maple Avenue, while the later three were located across the river, on the site of what is now the Bass River Heritage Museum. Each fire was determined to be an accident, and after each of the first five factory fires, the company rebuilt. None of the factory losses were ever completely covered by insurance, and with each fire, the community and shareholders of the company would pitch in to make rebuilding possible.

Unfortunately, despite surviving five previous fires, with the economic downturn created by the Great Depression and the material and labour shortages caused by both World Wars, the 1989 fire marked the beginning of the end of the company. Operations temporarily picked up again in the neighbouring community of Debert, but the company was unable to recover following this last fire. Even so, the legacy of the company continues as the general store in Bass River continues to be housed in the former company store, and even still operates under the name of *Dominion Chair Company Store*.



(Dominion Chair Company. Third Factory. Bass River Heritage Museum.)

So what is it that makes the name *Dominion Chair* so enduring? It is not without reason that one of the old taglines used by the company was “Bass River Chairs are Good Chairs.” These chairs can be passed down through generations, as I have seen chairs from the 1870s which are still as sturdy as they were when they were made. These chairs can also be found in family homes, museums, and historic sites throughout Nova Scotia, showcasing the role which they have played in many people’s lives. I hope that you will join me at the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia’s AGM this year, where I will be speaking on the history of the *Dominion Chair Company*, the challenges the company faced, and the impact that it had on communities stretching from Bass River to Londonderry.



(Dominion Chair Company. Sixth Factory. Bass River Heritage Museum.)

Elizabeth Bishop House Update by Cheryl MacRae

In early 2024, Laurie Gunn asked me to assist with the care of, and the bookings for, artist residencies at Elizabeth Bishop House. In 2024, we originally had 18 bookings. However, seven cancelled last minute or just didn't show up. Unfortunately, none of the bookings had provided non-refundable security deposits, therefore revenue from the security deposits for the "no shows" (and subsequently the full residency) are not reflected in the property income.

For 2025, we currently have 16 confirmed bookings for residencies (and \$100 security deposits from all of them) — and some are for multiple weeks at a time. There are some prime dates available in July and August and right through to November, if you are able to spread the word for us at EBH. We have some fabulous reviews which can be read in the House journal.

There have been a few updates and issues at the House this past year. In spring 2024, the aging water heater sprung a leak and had to be replaced. The roof continues to leak and is causing interior wall and ceiling damage. We are currently getting quotes for replacement of the roof (which will be expensive) and working with Heritage Nova Scotia with an application for a \$10,000 grant to replace the roof. We have had issues with the furnace since December 2024 when we had to delay the arrival of an artist by 2 weeks while we resolved the issue of an oil smell in the House. This was caused by a rusting pipe from the furnace to the chimney. It was discovered in March during the annual cleaning of the furnace, that the pipe from the furnace inside the chimney was no longer attached to the chimney liner due to rust as well. This was quickly replaced. These expenses all added up to a high maintenance cost in 2024. We are also investigating preventative measures for the basement where dampness is causing the rusting of anything metal.



(Elizabeth Bishop's childhood desk at the EBH. Photo by Brenda Barry, 2024)

On a bright note, Cameron Gunn has replaced the back steps (which Sandra Barry has told me were rebuilt in 2007). Cameron used local timber which he planed on his personal mill to build the steps. When the weather dries and we don't have a residency, the steps will be painted.

The gardens are beginning to bloom and if anyone is interested in helping us to rejuvenate these gardens, pick some apples or rhubarb, please feel free to let me know.

We are hopeful of a good year for residencies and ask you to pass the word along to your colleagues and artist friends that the House is a beautiful, inexpensive, resourceful and inspiring retreat location.

The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia is most interested in Cheryl MacRae's EB House update. The society's AGM will take place on 21 June and this update will be one of the items of business that will be discussed, and the various issues that it outlines, especially the significant matter of the roof. We are hoping that Cheryl will be able to attend the EBSNS AGM and talk with the board and members directly. The EBSNS also hopes that our members will also pass on word about the availability of residencies still available for 2025.

The society is most grateful to the St. James Church of Great Village Preservation Society for all its hard work and good stewardship of the EB House.



(Parlour in the EB House. Photo by Brenda Barry, 2024)