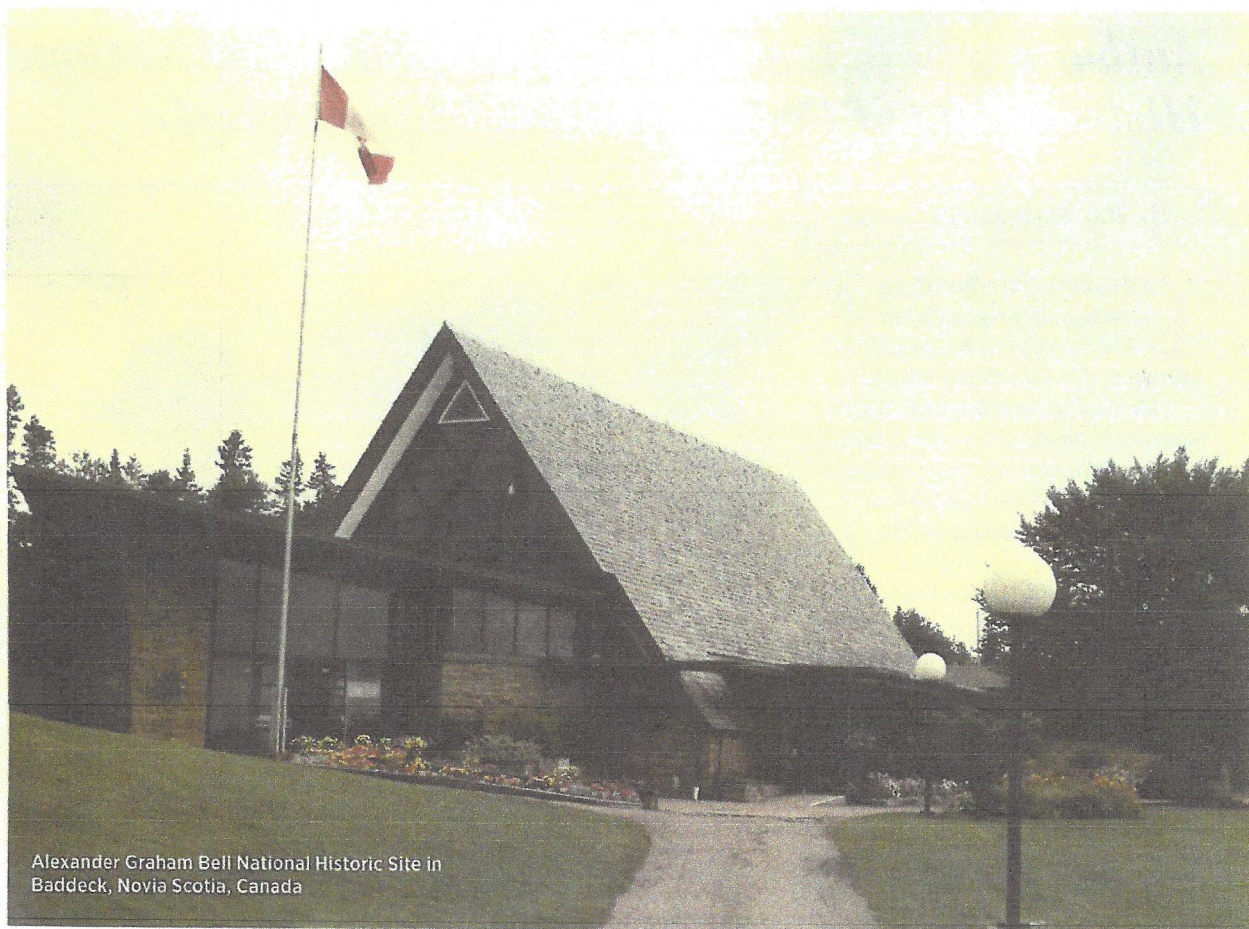


# JOURNEY



Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site in Baddeck, Nova Scotia, Canada

Four decades later, after I had relocated to Florida, I was given the miracle of restored hearing when I received my first cochlear implant in 1996 and my second in 2008 in Tampa by Dr. Loren Bartels.

Over the years, I promoted Bell's philosophy by lecturing, writing, teaching and advocating.

But I longed to visit the Alexander Graham Bell Museum, and in early August, I boarded a cruise ship to Nova Scotia and fulfilled my dream!

At the museum, where AG Bell arranged for me to have a private tour, I learned that 35 years after his death, Bell's daughters, Elsie May (who married Gilbert Grosvenor) and Marian Hubbard (who married David Fairchild), generously donated artifacts and authentic records of their father's work to the Canadian government. The museum, set on a 25-acre property with its distinctive design, is fashioned after the four-sided triangular structure, the tetrahedron, used by Bell in his flight experiments with kites.

Designated a national historic site in 1952 and opened in 1956, the museum overlooks the beautiful Bras d'Or Lake and is across the bay from Beinn Bhreagh (Gaelic for beautiful mountain), near the village of Baddeck where Bell spent the last 37 years of his life. Here, he conducted aviation, marine and sheep breeding experiments. His two daughters and their families, including 10 grandchildren, visited frequently.

The site, through films, artifacts, presentations, photographs and special

programs, tells the story of this remarkable man and his lifelong pursuit of knowledge, scientific invention and humanitarian work. Bell's ideas about air and water led him from transmitting sound on light and creating a treadle-powered (operated by using the foot) music machine to man-carrying kites, airplanes and a record-setting hydrofoil boat, which set a world marine speed record that lasted for 10 years.

Bell's invention of the telephone, patented in 1876, brought him fame and fortune at age 29. At the same time, he spent many years giving testimony to the many challenges to his telephone patent. Yet, his concern for deaf people never waned.

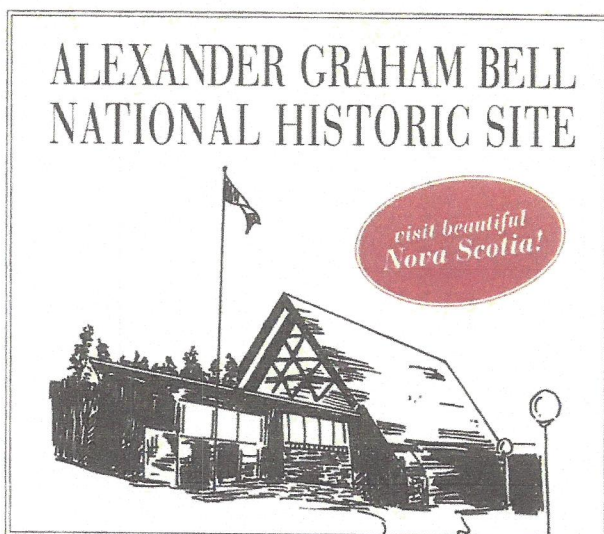
Bell's invention was supported financially by Gardiner Greene Hubbard and Thomas Sanders, who both had deaf children taught by Bell.

Bell's mother, Eliza, had a severe hearing disability, but he was very thoughtful of his mother's hearing needs, spelling out words for her and providing her with an ear trumpet.

Mabel Hubbard, having become totally deaf at age five from scarlet fever, became an elocution student of Bell's when she was 9. When Bell was 27 and Mabel was 16, he fell in love with her. Her family thought she was too young to marry, so Bell courted her for three more years before they wed in 1877. His wedding present to his bride was to turn over 1,487 of his 1,497 shares in the newly formed Bell Telephone Company.

Mabel played a vital role in her husband's career, providing him with financial and moral support to pursue his endeavors. She was primarily responsible for the management of Beinn Bhreagh and was deeply involved in village life. She helped establish the local public library and the Home and School Association, as well as The Young Ladies Club to promote sociability and the acquisition of general knowledge. Established in 1891, it still operates today.

Bell's work with the deaf was a lifelong occupation and concern. His father, Alexander Melville Bell, was more than just a teacher of speech and elocution, and, in 1862, he devised a complete system of phonetic notation which he called "Visible Speech." His son mastered this technique and later used it in teaching the deaf to speak.



Author Barbara Chertok (middle) with museum staff

Bell felt that his work with the deaf was the most important contribution he could make to society.

Bell did not separate his world of invention from his teaching of the deaf. In 1879, Bell's invention of the audiometer contributed to the detection of unsuspected hearing impairment and of unsuspected residual hearing. The degrees of loudness later came to be measured in bells and decibels in honor of his work.

Bell felt that his work with the deaf was the most important contribution he could make to society. Bell was proud to see the number of deaf children and adults taught to speak rise from 40 percent in 1890 to 80 percent when he died in 1922.

Alexander Graham Bell would be thrilled and amazed if he were alive today and could witness deaf toddlers, with bilateral cochlear implants, attending mainstream preschools, chatting away and learning on par with their peers—proof that his philosophy to teach deaf children to speak is now a reality.

In retrospect, one can't help but ponder: Had Bell lived in this century, he may very well have invented some of the technology that has restored hearing to the deaf and hard of hearing community. 