

BETA READER SPOT HANDBOOK



WRITER'S EDITION



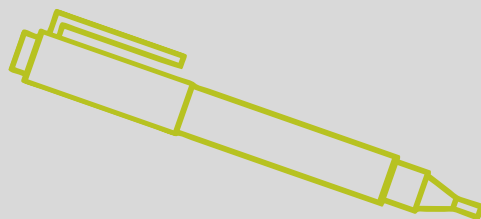
Pictou-Antigonish
Regional Library

THIS BOOKLET
IS BROUGHT
TO YOU BY

Thekla Martina Altmann

Thekla has been with the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library since 2018 and works out of the Trenton branch.

With a masters degree in Literary Translation and extensive editing experience, Thekla knows what is involved in the editing and proofreading process. Thekla writes poetry and prose, and is an active member of the Pictou County Writers.



THANKS FOR SUBMITTING A MANUSCRIPT!

Putting your writing out
there is brave -
congratulations on
taking the leap!

What you need:

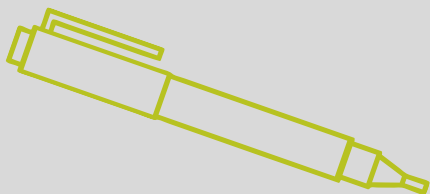
a finished manuscript

spellcheck

filled in cover sheet

patience

willingness to hear
feedback



The Beta Reader Spot

is a project piloted by the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library. To our knowledge, this is the first of its kind in Nova Scotia.

It is an exchange hub located at the Trenton Library where writers can test out their work on their target audience, and readers can get involved in the development of a book.

Physically, it looks like a shelf of spiral-bound manuscripts with empty pages at the back. Those pages will gradually fill up with comments before they get back to the original author.

The idea was born in the Trenton Library, and is supported by the Pictou County Writers. You can find and contact them on facebook, or you can come to one of their regular get-togethers at the Trenton Library.

There are many writers in the area, you are not alone!

Will Write For Chocolate

BY DEBBIE RIDPATH OHI



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WillWriteForChocolate.com

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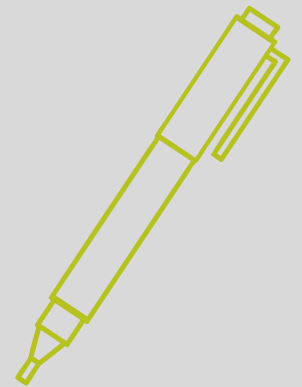
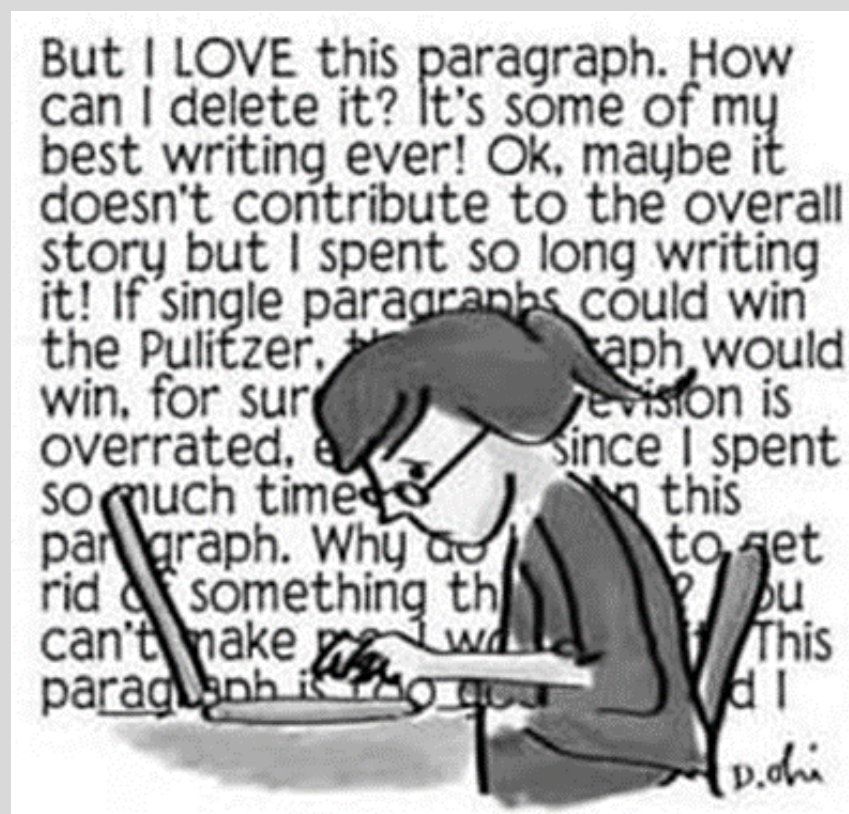
First of all, congratulations! You've sat down and written something. And whatever that something might be, and however you might feel about it, that is an amazing thing. So, well done you. Second, thank you. Thank you for putting your trust and faith in an audience that goes beyond immediate family, and for putting your writing out there. For strangers. That is a truly amazing thing! You are very brave – especially if this is your first time!

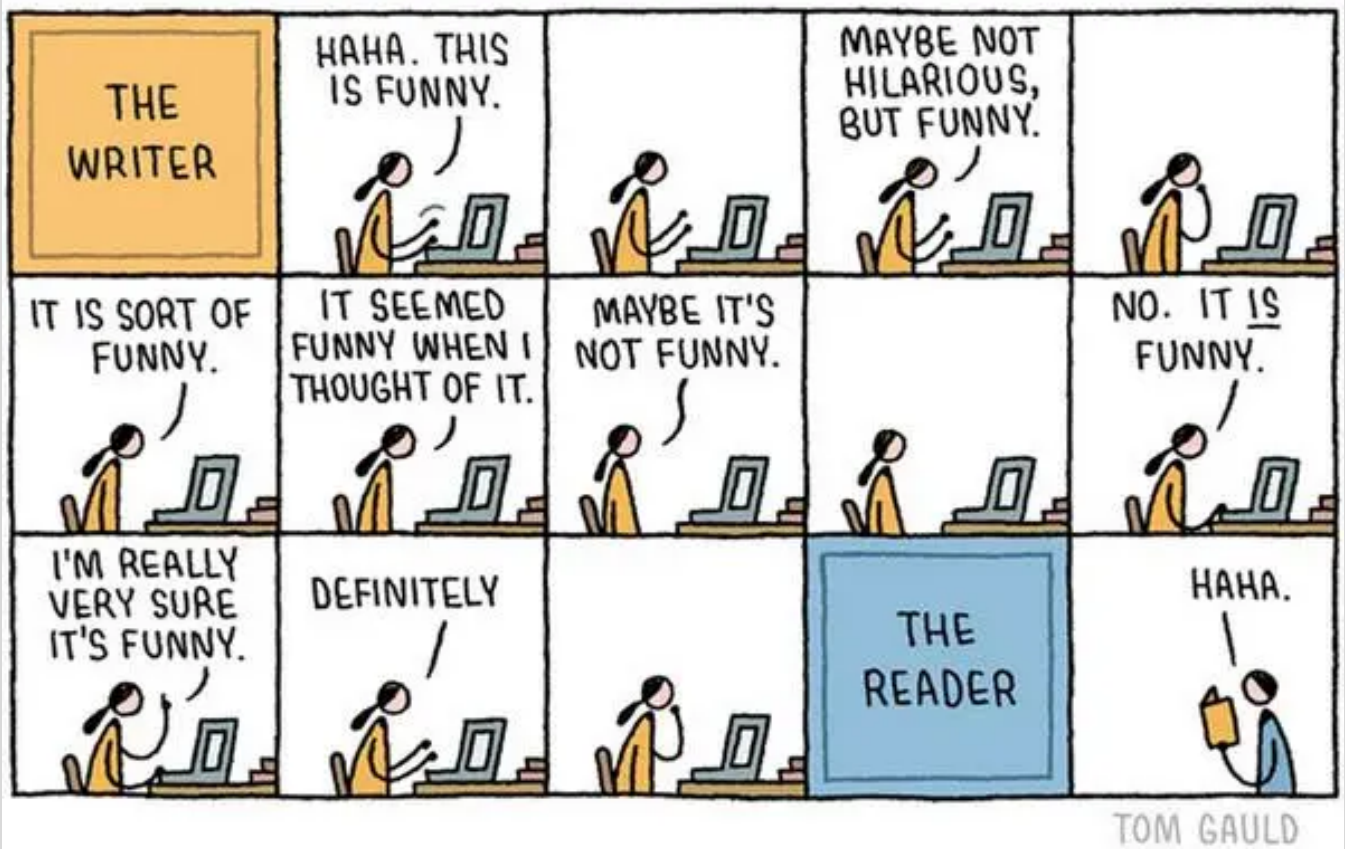
Third, be patient. Not just because this is a pilot project and we haven't ever actually done this before, but also because your perfect beta reader match might not show up on day one, or read 100 pages per hour. Give it time.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU:

If you want to be a better writer, and if you are serious about improving yourself, then taking an honest look at what you do is an important step. But aren't we all a little biased? There are some amazing writers whose work might never have seen the light of publishing, had it not been for the executors of their wills. And there are also books we pick up and we think, how in the world did anybody think this was good to print?

Tastes differ, as they should. So if you have an idea of who your ideal readership is, the Beta Reader Spot is a good way to figure out if you're reaching them - or if you need to take better aim.

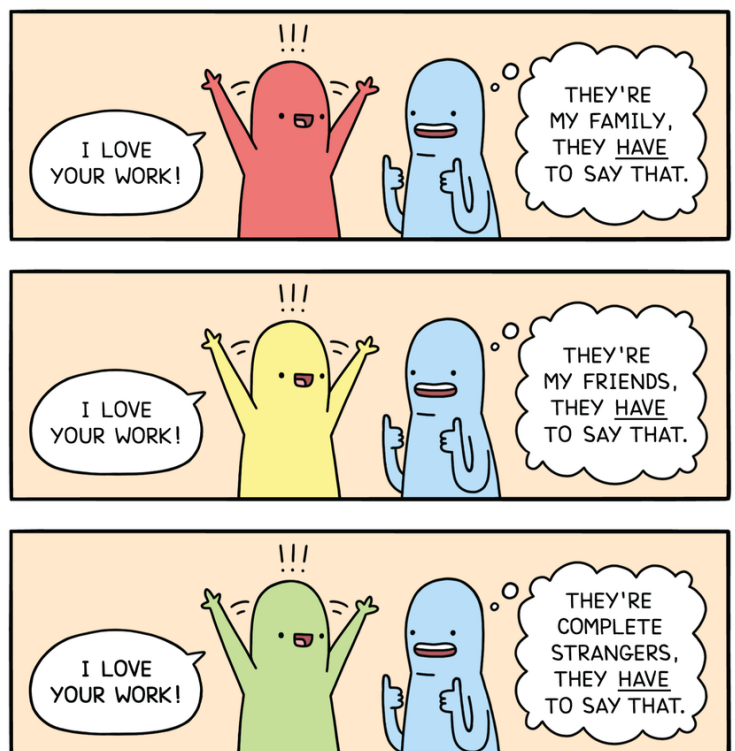




A writer can never be objective about their own work, but publishing means putting it out there for objective consumption. So, while tastes differ, and standards differ, if you want to get a better idea of where you stand, then beta readers are your friends.

They might have opinions on whether they liked the characters, could follow the plot, thought the jokes were funny, the romance steamy, or the murder grisly enough. Ideally, you will walk away with valuable feedback on what is missing, what might be too much, and even if – gasp – it’s publishable.

IMPOSTER SYNDROME



HOW IT WORKS:

Take what you've written to your closest library. Printed pages are best (and of course we have printers at the library), since they are the most legible. But if you have a graphic novel or a picture book, we'll find a way! The central spot for this project is the Trenton Library, but any other branch will accept it and send it on.

We will ring-bind it along with your cover questionnaire, and then it will – hopefully soon – be picked up by an enthusiastic reader who loves the genre you write in, and they will read it and leave you comments.

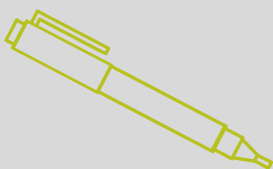
Call or email any time to check in on your manuscript, or drop in at the Trenton branch. If you have any questions, send an email to trenton@parl.ns.ca or call 902-752-5181.

You can take your manuscript back any time you want, or you can leave it at the BetaSpot to catch more readers, it's up to you.

You can proudly proclaim your authorship, or

**YOU CAN REMAIN
ANONYMOUS**

(although please tell us how to contact you).



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE PROCESS:

The next few pages have a number of guidelines on them that will ease the process for everyone involved, giving you the best results.

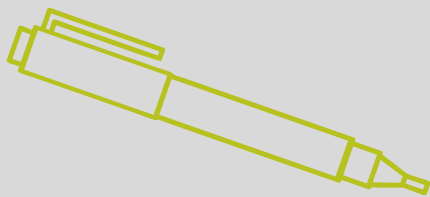
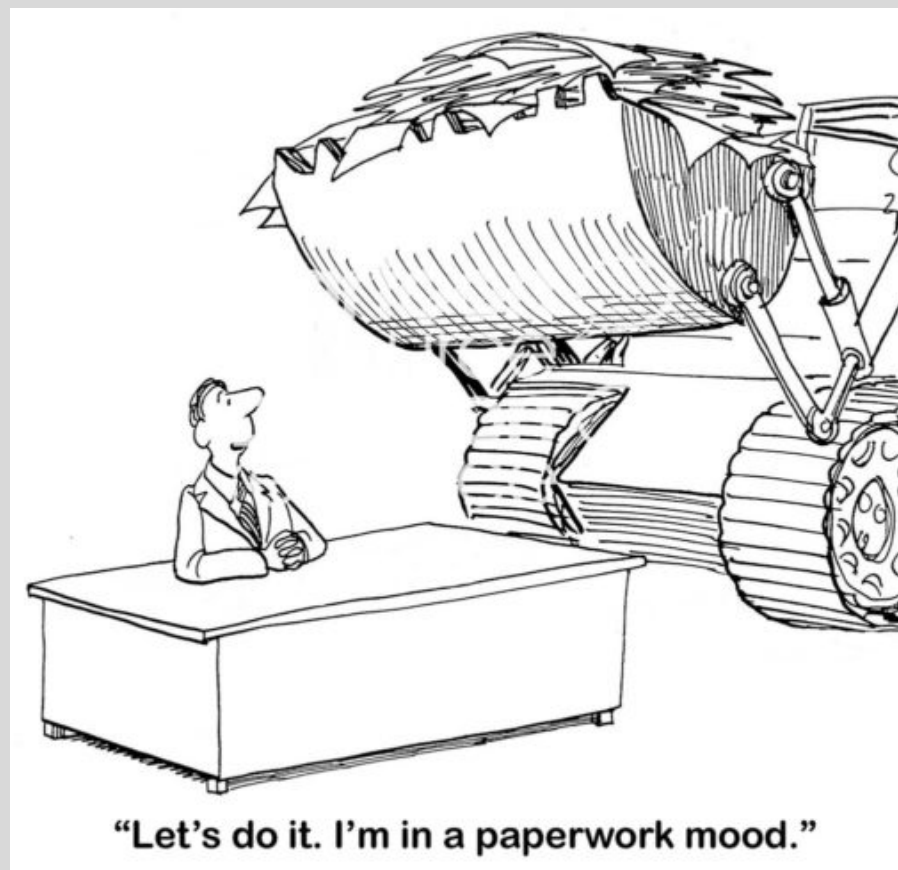
Please make sure you follow them as closely as you can.

If you encounter any issues or don't know what to do - call and ask.

DO NOT FORGET THE ONE STEP TO GET YOU STARTED:

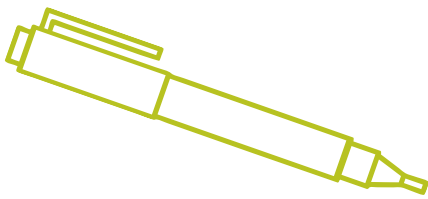
FILL IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE!!!

Honestly, it's not that much. You'll find a sample of it in the middle of this booklet.



OPTICS FIRST.

Not everyone needs reading glasses. However, printing your manuscript without margins or visible paragraphs at font size 8 just to save a page is not going to help anyone actually read it. Give your beta readers some space to leave a comment in the margins here or there, and take it easy on their eyes. Ideally, use a font at least 12pt, space your lines 1.5 or double, and leave wide margins and plenty of space between your paragraphs and chapters.



INKYGIRL.COM: Daily Diversions For Writers
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PROOFREADING.

If you are honest to goodness just looking for a proofreader, be clear about that. But even then, it is only polite to do a spellcheck and read over your grammar to the best of your abilities before dropping it off. We know that this is easier for some people than for others, and that's okay. If you're getting stuck, ask for help. If your beta reader spots anything, they'll probably mark it – but do what you can before you put it out there. No need to use human readers for what a computer can do.

MAKE IT OBVIOUS.

There is a cover page questionnaire for you. Take it seriously. Not every book is every reader's cup of tea, so make sure you indicate your ideal audience: Is this book for kids, youth, or adults? Is it romance or sci-fi? Any trigger or content warnings your readers should know about?



Don't hold back in your writing and be as explicit as you like - but be upfront about it.

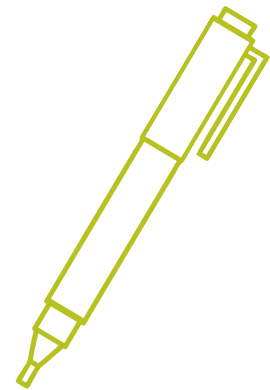
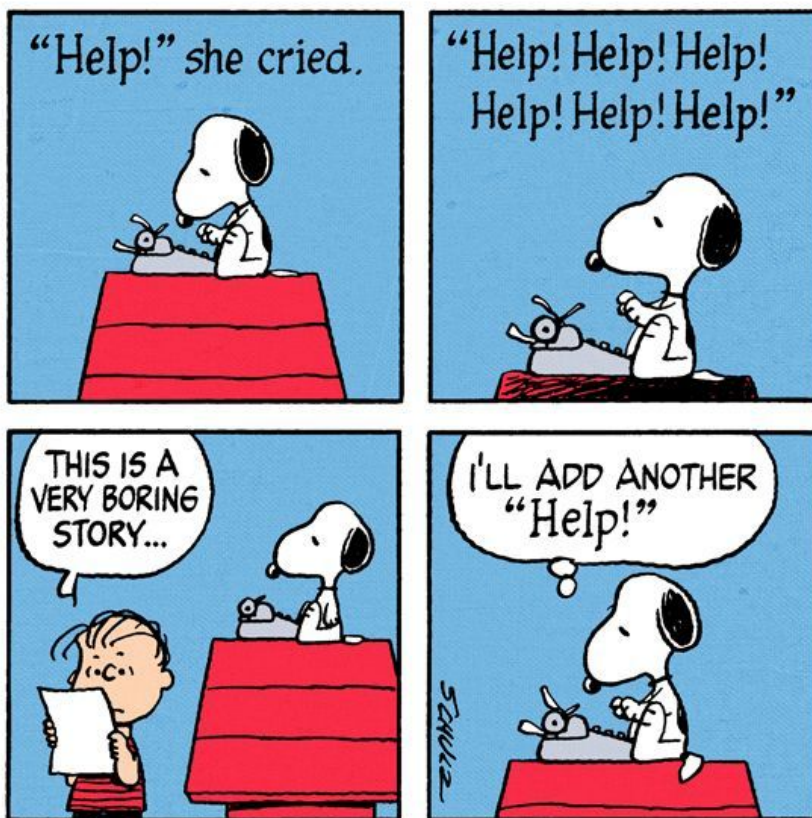
Indicate the general themes your writing deals with, and the overall shape you imagine for it once it's all done (for instance, tell us if it's the first 2 chapters of a 70000 words novel, which will be part one of a trilogy, and you also have the prequel mapped out, or just a short story). This will help you find a better match for your ideal beta-reader.



ASKING FOR FEEDBACK.

Be specific about what kind of feedback you want. This mostly means, be honest with yourself. Harsh criticism is different from nice compliments, obviously – but know that if you ask people to be honest, they just might be more than you are comfortable with. Then again, if you ask people to be nice about it, you might be missing out of valuable pointers. Think about what balance is right for you, and indicate it on the questionnaire.

Similarly, if you have some kind of plot or character dilemma, be clear about looking for opinions. An open-ended “What did you think?” might get you great answers, but not necessarily the ones you need. If you have detailed or specific questions, you need to ask them in order to get detailed and specific answers.



ACCEPTING FEEDBACK.



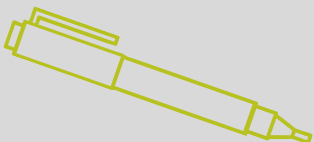
Once you get your manuscript back with all the comments, take a deep breath. Remember that critique is helpful, and that it is not personal. Detach yourself as best you can from fear or hurt feelings. Know that you can choose to take and incorporate all those tips and comments you collect, or you can opt to ignore them. You can also take them home, and simply take your time looking at them. All of this is your choice.

Expect a mixed bag when it comes to feedback. There might be a beta reader out there who exactly gets you, and exactly tells you what you need to hear. If that happens, treasure that person and get them their favorite treats. You want to keep them around! But more likely is that you'll end up weighing various comments and suggestions, comparing them to how strongly you feel about your own vision. That is as it should be.

What does she mean,
the character of Jimmy
the Pancake was a little flat?!

Of COURSE he was flat!

He's a PANCAKE!!!!



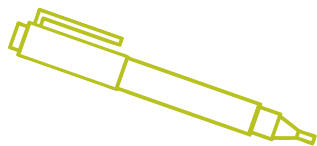
If all goes well, the next draft of your manuscript should be much, much better than your previous one. Feel free to repeat the process at this point. Be proud of yourself! You took a big step.

If you find you're still stuck, and don't know what to do next, write something completely different to give your mind a rest. Look up a few pep talks online. Read a few books about writing. Talk to other writers – there's a regular get-together every 2nd Tuesday 6pm and every 4th Saturday 11am at the Trenton Library. Maybe we'll see you there!

DON'T THINK I HAVEN'T NOTICED HOW YOUR WRITING HAS SUDDENLY IMPROVED. YOU...YOU'VE BEEN CRITIQUING WITH **SOMEONE ELSE**, HAVEN'T YOU, FRANK?



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If you're still not sure about taking the leap, here are a few online resources that might help you make a decision:

<https://www.tckpublishing.com/complete-guide-to-beta-readers/>

<https://writersedit.com/fiction-writing/ultimate-guide-work-beta-readers/>

<https://smallbluedog.com/what-is-a-beta-reader-and-why-do-i-need-one.html>

Please circle whatever comes closest:



How finished do you think your book is?

1. First draft, first time I've written anything down. Still rough.
2. Gone over it a few times, but it's still in the early stages.
3. It's shaping up after I've changed a few things, but not yet done.
4. This is at least draft 2, and I think I'm moving in the right direction.
5. At least draft 4, after some major re-writes and changes.
6. I've gone over it many times, I think I'm almost done.
7. This is done, no more changes, ready to publish. I think.

How receptive are you to feedback? Please indicate:

1. I'm pretty sensitive about it. Encouragement only please.
2. Be nice, but ideas for minor improvements are welcome.
3. Please stay polite, but if you spot something major, I'd rather know!
4. I'd rather know than not know if it's any good, but I'm still scared.
5. I need an opinion. Tell me what you think. No, really.
6. Give me the brunt of it, I want to hear it all.
7. Rip it apart. Do not hold back.

Beta Reader Spot Questionnaire

Title:

Target audience:

Genre:

Length (of excerpt and/or overall):

Content or trigger warnings:

Blurb:



NOTE: If you want to remain anonymous to your beta readers, that's fine. But do not forget to submit contact details, so the library can get a hold of you!

TRENTON LIBRARY CONTACT DETAILS

Phone: 902-752-5181
Email: trenton@parl.ns.ca

Open Hours:

Tuesday 1:00pm - 5:00pm & 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Wednesday 10:00 am - 12:00pm & 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm
Thursday 1:00pm - 5:00pm & 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Friday 10:00 am - 12:00pm & 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm
Saturday 10:00am - 2:00pm



1 Forge Street, Trenton, NS