

History and Cultural Landscape

Introduction to Prince Edward County: the natural/cultural mix, linked with pastoral, coastal and rural settlement vistas

Prince Edward County, famous as a part of United Empire Loyalist settlement, is an island community encompassing less than 700 square kilometers, which boasts of over 800 kms of shoreline with varying geological features. The relative isolation of the island has nurtured a special rural culture, with overlays back through time as this culture evolved according to the natural setting and proximity to various markets. Within the County are to be found a remarkable mixture of heritage features (natural, architectural, archeological, historical), each meeting defined criteria for heritage significance.

Yet, to suggest that the County simply holds a collection of heritage assets is to sell it short. What makes the County unique, are the "webs of life" that link these assets to each other through time. These include the pastoral vistas, the historic allure of streetscapes with designated heritage buildings, the quiet harbours nestled into the geological features, and the natural shoreline as seen from the south which is the haven sought by migrating birds every spring. These examples identify only a few of the key links that bring the heritage of the County to life and make it the fascinating landscape that it is, rather than just an outdoor museum containing a variety of different artifacts. It is this combination of special places and events and their interwoven connections with the life of the County that sets Prince Edward apart as a potential National Cultural Landscape.

The notion of a "Sunday drive" perhaps explains this best. It is not so much the idea of rushing from one "artifact" site to another that makes a drive interesting, but the overall impression of seeing the mixture of places and what links them. Prince Edward County is not an outdoor museum with a scattering of artifacts, but a place that presents its heritage assets in a setting that brings them to life through an evolving economy and culture having long term respect and human involvement within a vibrant ecosystem.

Cultural Heritage

Early History as portrayed by Archeological Sites

Although it is difficult to conceive now, The County had a tundra ecology after the glaciers receded. The earliest residents were Paleo-Indians who hunted in the area and left behind evidence of their presence in the form of fluted chert spear points, which date back some 12,000 years.

As the earth warmed following the ice age, trees began to grow in the County, and three cultures followed one another: the ARCHAIC, hunter gatherers; MOUNDBUILDERS, who were larger groups with some agricultural activities; and EARLY IROQUOIS, who formed small villages with some farming; followed by LATER IROQUOIS with larger villages and more extensive farming in the Devils Punch Bowl area.

During the latter half of the 1700's and 1800's, however, the Mississauga Indians (Waupoos Island was named after Chief Waupoos) of Prince Edward were decimated by diseases brought from Europe.

Cultural Heritage as influenced by Natural Heritage

With over 800 kilometers of shoreline, it is no surprise that Prince Edward County can trace water transportation back to its early days. Carrying Place portage was used by Indian people long before European explorers arrived.

The shores and offshore areas to the south of the island, known as "the Graveyard of Lake Ontario", are littered with the wrecks of ships from the earliest of time to the present, far more numerous than those in the Fathom Five area. The shoals of scraped underwater table rock in this area are extensions of the limestone rock carved by glaciers.

The French Connection

Champlain crossed The County in 1615, beginning at the False Ducks Islands. French fur traders passed through the area on their trade route up the Trent to Lake Huron. In 1668 Sulpician Priests established a Mission in the Lake

Consecon area called Kente. It served the Iriquois villages on the north shore of Lake Ontario. It was abandoned in 1680. A 1757 French map named Prince Edward "Presquille de Quintee". British, French and Dutch trade wars erupted from time to time. Finally under British rule in 1763, Prince Edward and beyond was declared "Indian Country" and no formal settlement by Europeans was allowed.

The United Empire Loyalists

This changed with the arrival of some 500 Loyalists (plus disbanded British and German allied troops) subsequent to the American Revolution. Captain Justus Sherwood carried out a reconnaissance survey of Prince Edward in 1783, and the following year, surveyor Collins came ashore at Prinyer's Cove, erected a log cabin and began to survey the "5th township", now Marysburg, the first to be done in the County. The first Loyalist settlers, led by Lieutenant Archibald MacDonnell, arrived in the fall of 1784 at MacDonnell's Cove, later named Prinyer's Cove after his son-in-law, and began to build their cabins and clear the land.

This early settlement was followed by similar activity in the area up the shores of Picton Bay, then called Grand Bay, across the old portage to East and West Lakes and to Wellington. The Daniel Reynold's Loyalist house was finished and he and his new bride moved there in 1792. It has been carefully restored and still functions as a residence. Interestingly, both these areas, although not tilled until the early 1800's, reflected the influence of nature: they are easily accessible by water, and have good soils.

Throughout the 1800's, Prinyer's Cove was used by commercial schooners as a safe haven. There were several docks, where local products could be loaded onto the ships. Many other safe harbours in The County received similar use throughout that Century, including Picton Bay, Weller's Bay, Bay of Quinte, Smiths Bay and South Bay.

The Realities of Island Life

Although most access to The County is now by bridge, a variety of ferries served over two centuries. The Glenora ferry, in different forms, has operated from the Adolphustown area to Glenora for over 200 years. Initially operated by oars for passengers only, it evolved to its present form. The Glenora mill was built by Peter Van Alstine in the early 1800's. The flour and carding mill were operated by Hugh Macdonald, Sir John A's father, between 1829 and 1836. The current fisheries research station was originally constructed in 1870 by James C. Wilson to manufacture water turbines. The machinery in both buildings was powered by the overflow water from the Lake on the Mountain 200 feet above.

Newly arrived settlers from Europe and the US had to have their needs met locally, as transportation of the day was sporadic. Consequently, in addition to food, manufactured goods had to be produced nearby, thus setting off The County's very own "industrial revolution". The head of Picton Bay became a manufacturing and distribution town. Hallowell Township had the second highest assessment in the Midland District, about half of that of Kingston. The first settlers in Bloomfield, Abraham and James Barker, established a grist mill and a general merchandise business. Abraham's son David started a foundry. Stewart Wilson set up a business making harness, wagons, ploughs, other agricultural machinery, stoves and castings. Hallowell produced everything required: furniture, leather boots, hats, clothing, books, beer and whiskey. Predictably, demand for locally manufactured products tapered off as transportation matured, the limited market became saturated and new sales were replacements only.

Agriculture

Agriculture has played an important role in The County since the early 1800's. Initially, the main cash crop was wheat exported to Great Britain. The USA became a major customer during the Civil War, and these trade links were retained until near the end of the century. A saying of the times was "wheat bought the farm and barley paid the mortgage". The Picton Fair Grounds played roles complementary to the agricultural industry of the times. The Prince Edward Agricultural Society, formed in 1831, held its first Fair in 1836, and purchased the present grounds from the Picton Driving Park Association in 1886. Initially, the Grandstand became the focus for trotting horse racing, symbolic of the export of trotting horses to the USA. In 1890, passage of the McKinley Tariff put a stop to all agricultural and fisheries exports to the US.

When the Tariff killed their market, farmers switched to dairying and growing canning crops. As many as 30 butter and cheese manufacturing plants operated at one time. By 1902, it is estimated that one third of all Canada's canned fruits and vegetables came from "The Garden County". Apples continue to be a significant crop, with County cider and maple syrup even being sold in gourmet food stores in Toronto such as Shay Gourmet.

Social Centres

Schools and churches became the social hubs of the communities, which were small in area due to the nature of transportation of the day (horse and buggy). A lasting tribute to these times is the historic Bethesda United Church and its "drive sheds".

1920 to 1940

Economic growth elsewhere and the role of the automobile brought the recreational assets of The County to the fore in the "Twenties". This was somewhat short-lived as the Depression caused widespread unemployment. Somewhat of an economic bridge from the Roaring Twenties into the Depression years was provided by rum running. Farmers lived off the land as best they could, but others had no choice but to leave. The population of the County dropped to 16,700. World War 11 changed that in a hurry. The Hasty Pees were mobilized for active service in September, 1939. The establishment of the British Commonwealth Air Training Program, as an old doctor reported to Dave Taylor, "brought in a welcomed addition to the gene pool".

The natural resources of The County continue to provide an economic base. Agriculture flourishes. Mineral extraction and processing continues. Tourism is again becoming a major industry, with B & B facilities providing many full and part time jobs. Moreover, the tranquil setting provided by The County is found attractive by self employed and retiring "Baby Boomers". The reputation of The County in terms of beauty, culture and serenity continues to attract many persons planning to live and retire in The County. Modern communication technology makes it possible for many persons to live where they choose, rather than this being dictated by "where" they work. These residents make considerable investments in real estate and bring their cultural wealth and well as their financial capacity and business acumen to The County, contributing to the business and cultural wealth and helping to perpetuate the evolution of this island cultural landscape.

Rural Settings

- Horses at one time powered the ferry to Waupoos Island.
- The Ameliasburg octagonal house was one of four in the County, two remain in Picton.
- The Ameliasburg Museum evolved around the Methodist Church, constructed in 1868.
- Northport was once a major port on the Bay of Quinte.
- White Chapel was first Methodist Church in Prince Edward County, constructed in 1809. It has been maintained as a place of worship longer than any other church of Methodist origin in Ontario.

PEC continues to evolve as people interact with the natural resource base: the webs that bring it all together.

- Loyalist Parkway...a drive through history (heritage barns; farms vistas; mixed architecture rural residences and yards; historic plaques).
- Prince Edward County Trail System...a system of hiking and cycling trails is under development, with major portions of the old rail bed being readied for the spring of 2000.
- Picton Harbour; Prinyer's Cove; West Lake ... transportation and recreational activities today make use of the same waterways used in the past.
- Special Activities celebrate history (eg. Picton fair; Wellington "pumpkin festival; Bloomfield Christmas Parade of Lights; Cherry Valley Plowing Match; Prince Edward Yacht Club Regatta) and our linkages with our natural resource base.
- Five museums bring together memories of the past (Mariner's Park Museum; Macaulay Heritage Park, etc.) for the education and enjoyment of both residents and tourists who wish they were.

Prince Edward County continues to evolve as a cultural landscape.

- New communication technology frees people to work where they choose to live.
- Artists find the area attractive and offer frequent studio tours and shows.
- Heritage conservation and education continues to be important.
- We are building on all the assets of the past (Little Bluff; Sandbanks; heritage barns; rural vistas; heritage homes;

water vistas)

- And our respect for our history is celebrated as the future unfolds (agricultural fair; museums; modern plays; Sandbanks beach; fishing derbies; main streets of Picton and Bloomfield; Cenotaph)

Jim Collinson, with research material from David Taylor
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