

CATHERINE'S RIVER

Along the seaward tip of the peninsula which lies between Port Mouton and Port Joli stretches a beach of white sand, two miles long. Behind it is a shallow lagoon, dotted with small islands, and joined to the sea by a narrow gully in the beach. A small stream flows out of the wild moorland into the head of the lagoon, which is of course salt and subject to the tides. This stream and the lagoon have been known as Catherine's River or Saint Catherine's River from a very early time, possibly ~~going~~ right back to the French exploring expedition in 1604 under De Monts.

The lagoon was a favorite haunt of wild fowl in autumn, especially wild geese and ducks. The peninsula, seared by ancient and modern forest fires, is now a rough area of boulders, covered with a tangle of wire birch, alder, rhododendron and huckleberry bushes, and here and there a small patch of ~~swamp~~ with a clump of spindling black spruce trees. The shores of the lagoon have a dense cover of black spruce, of the short, knotty kind known as "cat spruce"; and black spruce of the same tough kind grows on the bluff at the end of the beach, and in the angle between the lagoon, the outlet, and the sea.

To this lonely spot, frequented only by lawless wild-fowlers from South West Port Mouton, came in the ~~year 1914~~ ^{early 1900's} a stranger named Kinney, with his wife and son. Little was ever known about him, but he was then about 50 or 60, he said he had lived many years in the Hawaiian Islands and made some money there, and that he was a native of Yarmouth N.S. The son was a young man in the twenties.

Kinney ~~at once~~ began to build an ~~elaborate~~ home at Catherine's River. ^{in 1914} He chose the low bluff for the site, with a fine view to seaward. Little Hope lighthouse rose like a finger from its lonely rock ~~XXXXXXMILESXXXXXX~~ a few miles offshore to the south-east. There was a side view along the white beach for two miles, and a back view over the bird-haunted lagoon. *The house was completed in 1918.*

The house was a storey-and-half structure of wood, covered with patent tin siding painted red -- something new in Nova Scotia at the time. There was a long living-room, with oak wainscoting topped by wallpaper showing marine scenes, and at the north end long curving divans led the eye to a huge fireplace. There were several bedrooms,

Kinney had purchased this land some time prior to 1897, evidently planning to retire there

all opening upon a glassed-in verandah which commanded a view of the lagoon, sheltered from the sea winds and catching the full glory of a fine sunset. There were four bathrooms, tiled, with showers and bath-tubs and towel closets. All the water pipes were of brass. There was a large kitchen, equipped with a capacious ice-chest, etc. The floors were all of fitted hardwood. Altogether it was magnificent in the Nova Scotia of that time.

For a supply of fresh water Kinney blasted a great square shaft in the bed rock. He set up a windmill to pump water up to the house tank. To do the pumping when there was no wind he built an engine-house containing a powerful gasoline engine. The same engine drove a dynamo to provide the establishment with electric light.

He decided to go in for sheep raising, and built a wire fence 8 feet high, right across the peninsula -- to keep out bears and wildcats, he said. Local belief is that the fence was to keep out human intruders upon his privacy. Nevertheless he went headlong into the sheep raising business. They could forage on the wild grass behind the beach in summer, but there had to be some arrangement for winter feed. He heard that the wild beach pea made excellent sheep fodder, and that it could be stored in silage. He hired a schooner to bring wild pea plants from Sable Island, where they grew profusely on the sand dunes. These he planted on the dunes behind his beach, and they flourished. He built a silo for winter storage of this fodder.

He fetched a pair of Scotch shepherds and their families from the Orkney Islands to look after his sheep, and because he did not want them close about him he built two frame-and-shingle homes for them at the farther end of the beach, two miles away. He bought an expensive and powerful motor boat for shopping expeditions to Liverpool, and made a quay of the rock reef by the outlet of the lagoon.

Much of ~~All~~ this was done during the First World War, when prices of labor and material of all kinds went up to the sky. Every board and every nail had ^{to} be carted to the spot by a very bad road from South West Port Mouton, which required several wooden bridges over the creeks -- or brought to the spot by boats. Local people estimated his expenditures at \$50,000. It seems an under-estimate.

At times during the war he apparently ran short of funds for this constantly

growing establishment. Then he would depart "for Boston" and stay some time. When he returned he was in funds again. The son enlisted in the Canadian army about 1915 and went overseas. He was never seen at Catherine's River again. ~~He~~ Perhaps he was killed in the war. At any rate, towards the end of the war Mrs. Kinney herself departed for the United States, and never came back.

Kinney announced his wife's death soon afterwards, and went through a form of marriage with the house-maid, a Macdonald girl from Port Joli. Soon after 1919 his funds apparently came to an end. He departed with the new "wife" and was never heard of again, although the Macdonald woman and her mother were living in Boston in the 1930's.

The Queens County tax assessors had not missed this expensive property, of course, and after Kinney's departure the taxes mounted rapidly. In 1923 or '24 the Sheriff held a tax sale on the furniture, and a party of Liverpool merchants, notably John More and Edgar Inness, went out there and bought the whole lot, shipping it around to Liverpool in a small schooner. They sold the stuff at auction and made a fat profit.

This satisfied the tax collectors for a period of years. Meanwhile the roof had begun to leak, marauders from "Sou'-West" broke in and stole such things as taps and other interior fittings, including some of the brass pipe. The ^{property} ~~house~~ was in very bad shape when (about 1935) the County tax authorities sold the house, ~~and~~ the other buildings including the silo, the engine-house, and the two cottages of the shepherds, most of which were falling down. The shepherds and sheep had vanished long since, of course, and the great wire fence across the wilderness had fallen down as the sea winds snapped off the rotten posts.

Howard Burgess, ^{of} ~~the~~ South-West Port Mouton, bought the entire ~~property~~ at the tax sale. He was the only bidder and his bid was \$300. He patched the house roof, having a notion that he might sell the property to American sportsmen for the wild fowl shooting. However none appeared. The house was now isolated, owing to the rotting-down of the crude wooden bridges Kinney had built across the various creeks on the way from South West Port Mouton. Also the "Sou'-Westers" had

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slaughtered the wild fowl, in and out of season, using the house and alternatively the engine-room as a camp.

The little hamlet called Catherine's River is actually on the eastern shore of Port Joli, and is connected with the main South Shore highway by a winding gravel road. Beyond the hamlet a rough wagon ~~road~~^{track}, impassable for motor cars, leads to the ruins of the shepherds' cottages at the western end of the long beach.

One day in July 1937, when our families were picnicking on the Port Joli shore near the hamlet of Catherine's River, I walked with some companions over the old wagon road to the twin ruins of the shepherds' homes. Howard Burgess happened to be just off the shore in a decrepit old motorboat. He mistook us for an exploring party of American sportsmen, invited us to get in the boat, and took us along the shore and showed us through the Kinney house.

All the hardwood flooring had heaved, so that we walked over a rough and rotten wooden sea. In the living room the paper was drooping off the walls, the cushions of the long divans were mouldy and bursting. The house had been stripped of everything except the tiling and fixtures in one or two of the bathrooms. The barns were gone. The empty silo still stood. The gasoline engine, with its pump and dynamo, had gone. So had the windmill. The patent tin sheets covering the outer walls of the house ~~and~~ had been stripped of their red paint by the blast of sand from the beach in winter storms; they were rusty and pitted and peeling away, like the scales of a decomposing fish. The cat-spruce trees, which Kinney had cut down or trimmed to give a view, were now flourishing again, shutting off much of that vista of beach and lagoon.

Something of his unhappy spirit seemed to haunt the echoing emptiness of the house. It seem^{ed}, especially strong in the bedrooms and on that glassed verandah which he had built, I suppose, out of his memories of Hawaiian lanais. The only objects left on the walls were a photograph of a goodlooking young man in the Canadian army uniform of The First World War -- the son[!], I presume -- and a calendar (in English) for the year 1915, advertising the Japanese steamship line Nippon Yusen Kaisha, which used to run a passenger and freight service between Yokohama, Hawaii and San Francisco.

April 23, 1970

Non-resident owners multiplying

Growing conflict over recreational land

By LINDEN MACINTYRE

PORT HOOD — Nova Scotians may soon have to challenge that fundamental North American heritage, the right to hold private property.

People who live in the crowded cities of central Canada and the U. S. are literally starving for fresh air and open space.

Their hard cash and passion for shoreline and wilderness has led to a relentless push into the north, west and east; and they have had little difficulty persuading their country cousins to part with large blocks of real estate.

But now a frightening confrontation is developing between the people who own prime recreation land and the people who don't.

It is made all the more bitter by the fact that, in the majority of cases, the 'haves' are Americans and the 'have nots' are local people whose roots in Nova Scotia go back for generations.

Inverness County is probably one of the best examples in Nova Scotia and probably Canada of how first-class recreation land can pass into private, non-resident hands.

At least eight per cent of the county's total assessment — excluding the town of Port Hawkesburg and the former town of Inverness — is owned by people who list their residences as being in central Canada or the U. S.

The figure is considered low because a number of land owners list Nova Scotia addresses while, in fact, they live elsewhere. A new provincial law, however, will require them to register their actual place of residence within the next year.

Most of the non-resident holdings are in the county's prime tourist areas — the Northumberland shoreline between Port Hood and Margaree, up the Margaree River, around Lake Ainslie, the shores and islands of the Bras d'Or Lakes and the land adjacent to the Cape Breton Highlands National Park.

Non-resident land ownership has become a major issue in this part of the county and, in the Mabou, Inverness area, it has developed into a direct conflict between local residents and the "summer people."

The basic issue here is whether there should be a national park in the breathtaking Sight Point area on the coast between the two communities.

Residents in the Inverness and Mabou areas have been pushing federal and provincial politicians for a number of years to have the area developed into a park and to get a paved road along the shoreline.

They recently acquired a powerful ally in Allan Mac-

Eachin, Nova Scotia's representative in the federal cabinet. Mr. MacEachin is anxious that the area remain in the public domain, and has an added sentimental reason for wanting to keep it accessible — his family settled there when they first came from a croft in Scotland several generations ago.

Lined up against this array of political power and citizen pressure is a school teacher from Concord, Mass., Mrs. Jean Rossner, who has taken on the role of spokesman for property owners in the area, all but one or two of whom are from the U. S.

She argues that tourist development in Sight Point will lead to desecration of its natural features. A paved highway will open up the area to speeding rubber-necks and litterbugs.

She and other property owners have launched an energetic lobby which is aimed at Mr. MacEachin, the Cape Breton Development Corp., and the Cape Breton Tourist Association.

It is easy to sympathize with their sentiments, but one is taken aback by the vested interest that Mrs. Rossner and the other non-residents involved in the lobby have in Sight Point.

For example, Mrs. Rossner herself owns 970 acres of land in the area and almost all of it has shore frontage. Her associates in Sight Point, Cape Mabou, and Finlay's Point own easily another 1,000 acres of land, all bordering on the sea.

Other big landowners in the area, none of whom own less than 50 acres, come from New York, Massachusetts, Chicago, Maryland and Connecticut. One 201-acre lot is owned by a Martha Frey who lives in Saudi Arabia.

The big land rush seems to have started about 10 years ago when prime land was going dirt cheap. Old land grants, held by families since they came to Canada — many of them expelled from Scotland in the late 18th century — began to break up as the young left the farms and the old could no longer cope with rural life.

Trading in properties in the county has now grown beyond the stage of impulsive purchasing by the occasional awe-struck tourist. Values are rising year by year and the point is near where the supply-demand squeeze will cause prices to rock.

"Hardly a day goes by," says Angus MacRae, director of assessment for Inverness-Richmond-Victoria district, "without somebody wandering in looking for land."

The prospective buyers range from young social dropouts, to wealthy American and Canadian businessmen, to pensioners looking for a place of their own in the fresh air.

County tax sales have drawn increasing attention from outside the province, and big land speculators have recently been getting in on the action.

A firm from Toronto, H. M. Dignam Corp., has been active in Inverness County for 10 years, buying land at tax sales and selling it to people in Missouri, Maryland, Connecticut, New York, New Mexico, Ohio, Massachusetts, California, Michigan, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, (and Saudi Arabia).

Dignam either owns or has sold at least 40 properties, ranging in assessed value between \$400 and \$3,000 in Inverness County alone. The firm is understood to be active all over Cape Breton.

Individuals, recognizing the potential value of the scenic Cape Breton shoreline and countryside, have also snapped up many prime pieces of property.

Madeline Prentice Gilbert, of New York, has a property at Broad Cove, near Inverness, assessed at \$13,000. She also owns three properties near Pleasant Bay on the Cabot Trail. She just recently sold 183-acre Henry Island, off Port Hood, to Jack B. Middleton of New Hampshire.

A prominent Montreal lawyer, Marc Lapointe, owns 283 acres of land on beautiful Port Hood Island. His total assessment there is \$7,900.

Mr. Middleton's holdings include, besides Henry Island, two prime properties near Mabou and another in Port Hood.

The best areas in the Whycocomagh-Marble Mountain district bordering on the Bras d'Or Lakes have almost all been bought by non-residents. John Van Pelt of Chicago has bought close to 600 acres of land, including a small island, on the River Denis Basin.

In all, about five islands in the part of the Bras d'Or bordering Inverness County have been purchased by non-residents.

Hundreds of acres around Big Harbour and Millia Island have been bought by non-residents.

Further up the lake, near Iona in Victoria County, a medical doctor from the U.S. has bought almost all of Gillis Point, a total of 900 acres.

Mr. Van Pelt is now a permanent resident of Cape Breton, and according to his neighbors, a first-rate addition to the community. For example, he and another American, from New Jersey, have been instrumental in organizing a volunteer fire department in the area. The gentleman from New Jersey, a Mr. Edmunds, has already supplied a fire truck and is planning an ambulance service.

Inverness County, while possibly the most attractive vacation site because it borders on the warm waters of the Northumberland Strait, is far from the only spot on the buyers' lists.

Similar tales of large scale land hunting are heard in Antigonish County, Pictou County, Halifax County and all along the southern shore.

There was an almost unbelievable confrontation, for example, in the Shelburne-Queens assessment district two months ago when an assessment officer valued a property belonging to Mrs. H. P. Kosling, Cleveland, Ohio, at the case value.

Mrs. Kosling appealed the assessment and the case was heard in Liverpool, February 23. Here are the high points.

—The assessor originally valued the property at \$133,950 but, after objections from the owner, lowered his figure to \$100,000 in an attempt to settle the appeal.

—The owner appealed anyway and called witnesses who fixed the value of the property well below \$100,000.

The municipality called witnesses who established that the total area of the property was "in excess of 5,000 acres" and that it had a 10.7 mile shore frontage, and that it had an approximate market value of \$250,000.

—A real estate dealer told the appeal court he could sell the property for \$125,000 in 30 days.

The court fixed the assessment at \$130,000.

Non-resident ownership of recreation land has reached problem proportions in Cape Breton, not because of the emotional overtones of absenteeism, but because it runs against the grain of government regional development policy.

At the Strait of Canso, two levels of government are busily building an industrial complex that could, someday, support over 50,000 people.

If current trends continue, they will be trapped in what Allan MacEachin fears could become a "dirty, miserable industrial slum".

The only answer is expropriation, but as every year goes by the value of recreation land will take on more startling proportions and, in the end, the taxpayer will have to pay astronomical prices for property which, 15 years ago, the old timers couldn't give away.

There is a danger, too, that in an orgy of hostility to "outsiders", Nova Scotians will lose sight of their real objective which should be to preserve enough recreation land for residents and itinerant tourists and not to turn back the clock to a poorer, but prouder era.

Many Cape Bretoners are adopting a curious double standard about non-resident ownership. In one sweep they condemn individuals who hold large blocks of recreation property and applaud industrial pigging around in such areas as Lake Ainslie, Cheticum, Marble Mountain, and Irish Cove.

Cape Breton is supposed to be an industrial development showcase. Cape Bretoners want the development but also want an environment that started to disappear the day they opened the Canso Causeway.

It's up to the planners and the governments, at all levels, to see if we can have our cake and eat it too.

The former Kinney property, extending from Port Mouton Head to Port Joli.

The wild pea plants that Kinney imported from Sable Island were still flourishing on the dunes behind the long beach.

I saw the place again, November 1942, when I was a lieutenant commanding a rifle platoon in G Company, 2nd Bn. West Nova Scotia Regiment, formed the previous spring for coastal patrol and defence. German submarines had been operating along our part of the coast since December 1941, and had torpedoed several ships, including two right off Little Hope. On other parts of the Canadian and U.S. east coasts the submarines had landed parties of spies and saboteurs, most of ~~which~~^{whom} had been caught. On our own section of coast the peninsula between Port ~~Hope~~^{Morton} and Port Joli was most vulnerable, because several miles of the seaward face, including ~~most of~~^{the} the old Kinney property, were entirely uninhabited. The lightkeepers on Little Hope had no means of communicating with the shore except by boat in smooth weather.

On Nov. 15, 1942, I was ordered to take part of my platoon, fully armed with rifles and automatic carbines, to investigate and patrol the beach at Catherine's River. We drove in an army truck as far as the St. Catherine's River hamlet on the shore of Port Joli, then marched by compass course through the scrub woods to Cadden Bay. We followed the beach to the old Kinney house, which Burgess had boarded up against intruders from Sou'West. It was a cold day, with specks of snow flying, and we ate our rations in the shelter of the old engine house. We saw nothing suspicious, carried out shooting practice with rifles and carbines, and returned to the truck at dark.

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About the year 1950 a wealthy American and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Burdett Wood~~s~~, were staying the summer at White Point Lodge. They hired local fishermen to take them out for sea-angling, and on one of their excursions they went ashore at Catherine's River and saw the old Kinney place. The magnificent beach and the apparent privacy of the spot appealed to them enormously, and it did not take them long to find Howard Burgess and buy the whole property.

During the next few years the Woods spent a lot of money on their find. They restored, or practically rebuilt the house on a smaller and simpler scale, and

furnished it with every modern comfort, including bathroom and electric light. They bulldozed a new road through the woods and barrens from South West Port Mouton, and built four bridges over the creeks, including a long one over the Catherine's River itself. Along this road they put up poles and wire, connecting their new summer home with the main electric supply and telephone system at Port Mouton.

For several years they spent most of the summer here, occasionally entertaining guests from Liverpool; and sometimes in the Fall their two grown-up sons came down for the duck shooting.

Burdett Wood died, I believe by suicide, about 1955. His widow then married H. P. Kosling, of Cleveland, Ohio. About 1968 one of her sons, Windsor Wood, took up permanent residence at the Catherine's River house, & kept a small flock of sheep. Probably this "sheep farm" was a front, to avoid a new and large tax assessment, but in 1970 the property was assessed at \$100,000. It contained more than 5,000 acres, and (including the salt creeks and inlets) had 10.7 miles of shoreline. A long litigation followed. Windsor Wood insisted he was just a poor sheep-farmer, with no other income, and he needed all this semi-barren land to pasture his flock. In the Liverpool Courthouse, Feb. 23, 1970, the court rejected Woods' plea, & raised the assessment to \$130,000. Woods then engaged Frank Covert, one of the best lawyers in Halifax, to dispute this figure. So the litigation went on.

A note re Indian Gardens, on the Mersey River, N.S.

Note from an article in Canadian Historical Review, Vol. XLIII, December, 1962.

Article by D.B. Quinn, entitled "The Voyage of Etienne Bellenger to the Maritimes in 1583: A New Document".

Bellenger was a Rouen merchant, concerned in the financing and victualling of overseas voyages. He had personally voyaged twice to Cape Breton, to study the codfishery conducted by the Bretons and Basques. What he saw evidently made him anxious to investigate further, even, it seems, to take the risk of establishing a shore station, well to the southwest of Cape Breton, where the fur trade might be exploited more profitably. In January 1583, Bellenger sailed in the 50-ton bark "Chardon", Captain Michel Costé. The captain had signed an agreement to convey Bellenger to an undisclosed destination, with 20 men, and whatever victuals they would need. It was not unknown for Breton fishermen to make a western crossing in January. The northerly movement of the Azores high-pressure system, which made this practicable, was more frequent in February. In early or mid-March the vessel reached Cape Breton. A pinnace had been carried on deck for coastal discovery and charting. Under Costé's pilotage the vessel moved down the coast, penetrating harbours and rivers as she went, and sending frequent shore parties to make contact with the Indians, and where possible to trade with them. One hundred leagues from Cape Breton, not far from Cape Sable, Bellenger penetrated up a river to an Indian village of 80 houses, covered with bark. If these were long houses rather than summer shelters, this tribe might amount to 800 people or more.

Note by THR:- This must have been the camp at Indian Gardens on the Mersey River. No other river in Nova Scotia has a camp site so large or so rich in artifacts.