

ST. PETERS CANAL

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



Attend the
Open House
Details available
on last page.

**Spring 2000
Issue 1**

This Parks Canada
newsletter is a
joint effort of the
Cape Breton Field
Unit and the Atlantic
Service Centre

Help us plan the Future.

You are invited to help us develop the first Management
Plan for St. Peter's Canal National Historic Site.

We want to hear your views on the future management of
the site and any potential cooperative opportunities.



An Invitation

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED to help us develop the first Management Plan for St. Peters Canal National Historic Site. We recently began a planning program to develop direction for operating the site and working with the community. Inside this newsletter, you will find some initial results of our work and a number of questions and opportunities we would like to discuss with the public.

This spring, we would like to hear your views on the future management of the site and any potential cooperative opportunities so we can prepare draft management proposals. In a few months we will submit these proposals to the public for review.

These consultations will help us prepare a management plan that reflects both Parks Canada's policies and the views of the public. We thank you in advance for helping us to protect and present this priceless site.

Carol Whitfield
Field Unit Superintendent
Cape Breton Island

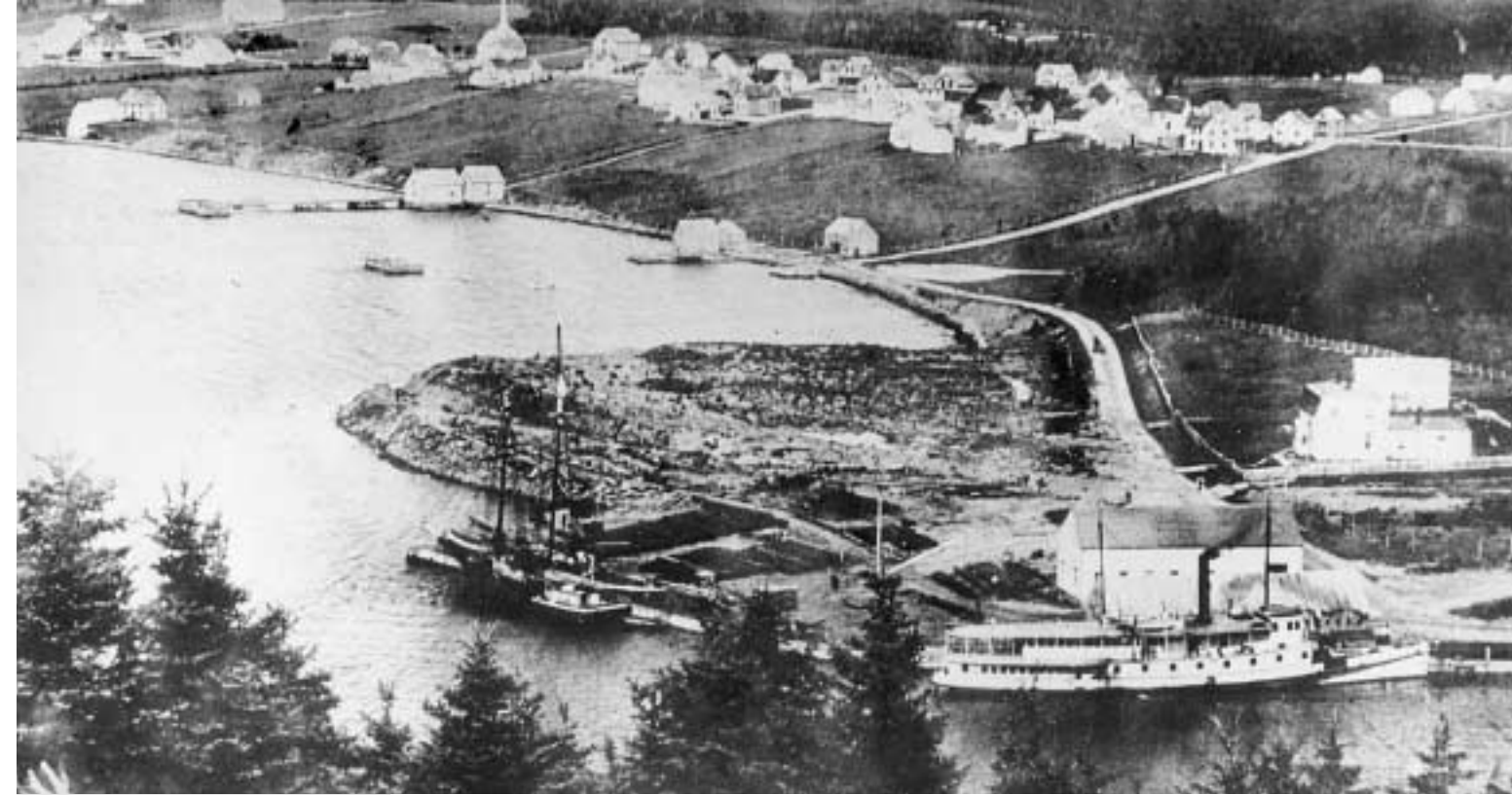
Cover Photos *background:* View of St. Peters Canal on August, 1912. *top left and right:* The typical navigation season runs from May to October servicing pleasure craft and commercial and government vessels. More than 1200 lockages were reported for 1999.

Why get involved?

If you are a user of the canal or a resident of the area, or are interested in the commemoration of its history, then you have a vested

interest in the management of St. Peters Canal and its cultural resources. Please take some time to read this newsletter and see how

you can share your views with us. Details of the open house are given on the last page.



View of the entrance of the canal and the Lockmaster's house in 1915. Parks Canada

A word about Parks Canada's Mandate

Parks Canada administers an internationally renowned "Family of National Historic Sites" on behalf of all Canadians. Its mandate is:

- To foster knowledge and appreciation of Canada's past.
- To ensure commemorative integrity of national historic sites by protecting and presenting them for the benefit, education and enjoyment of this and future generations, in a manner that respects these places and their associated resources.

The national historic significance of St. Peters Canal is tied to its role as a transportation corridor which dates back hundreds if not thousands of years.

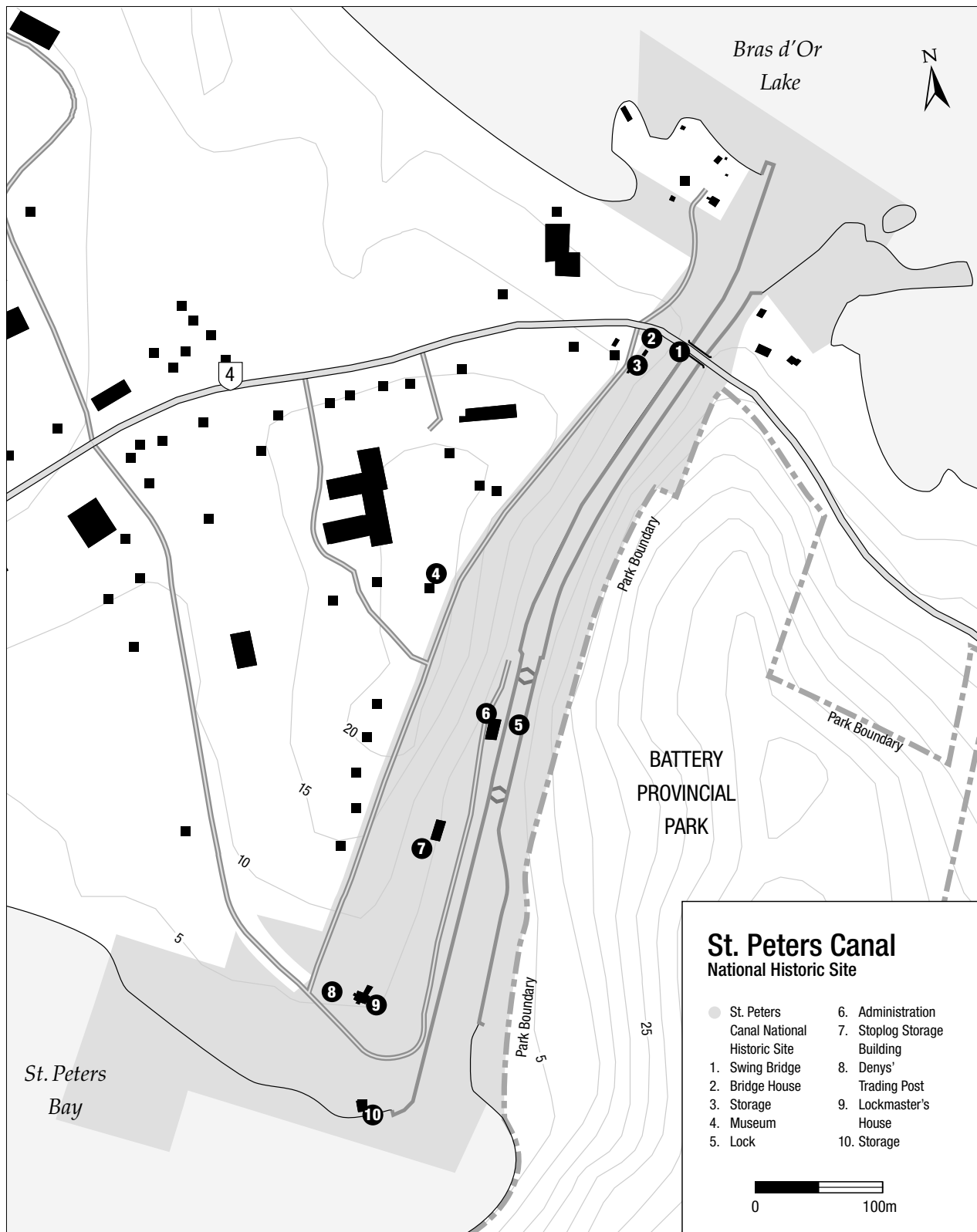
Why St. Peters Canal is a national historic site

In 1929 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada designated St. Peters Canal as having national historic importance. The same year, the Board also recognized the national historic significance of the French settlement of Saint-Pierre. In 1931 both sites were commemorated with plaques.

The national historic significance of St. Peters Canal is tied to its role as a transportation corridor which dates back hundreds if not thousands of years. It has evolved from a land-based portage route to a canal waterway.

St. Peters Canal National Historic Site is of national historic significance for the following reasons:

- It is part of Canada's national system of canals. It was constructed between 1845 and 1869 to connect the Atlantic Ocean with the Bras d'Or Lake along a traditional Mi'kmaq portage route.
- It is the site of Saint-Pierre, a 17th-century fortified trading post acquired by Nicolas Denys in 1650 to trade with the Mi'kmaq, who had used the portage for hundreds of years.
- It was part of Port Toulouse, one of the three principal ports established by the French on Cape Breton Island during the period 1713-58.



A word about
Commemorative Integrity

Commemorative integrity refers to the health or desired state of a site. Commemorative integrity is ensured when:

1. the resources that symbolize its importance are not impaired or under threat;
2. the reasons for its national historic significance are effectively communicated to the public;
3. and its heritage values are respected by all whose decisions or actions affect the site.

A word about
Cultural Resources

We define a cultural resource as an object, a structure or an area of historic value that gives evidence of human activity or has cultural meaning. For example, St. Peters Canal encompasses the Nicolas Denys fort which is evidence of the historic evolution of the site.

Telling the story of St. Peters and protecting its significant cultural resources.

A shared responsibility

At St. Peters Canal, Parks Canada's mandate is to maintain the commemorative integrity of the site. We fulfill this responsibility first by explaining to Canadians and visitors why this site is of national historic significance. Secondly, we must ensure the protection of its cultural resources. We cannot, however, meet this challenge alone. We need the help and participation of our neighbors and the community. During this consultation, we wish to discuss ways of taking up this challenge in cooperation with the public.

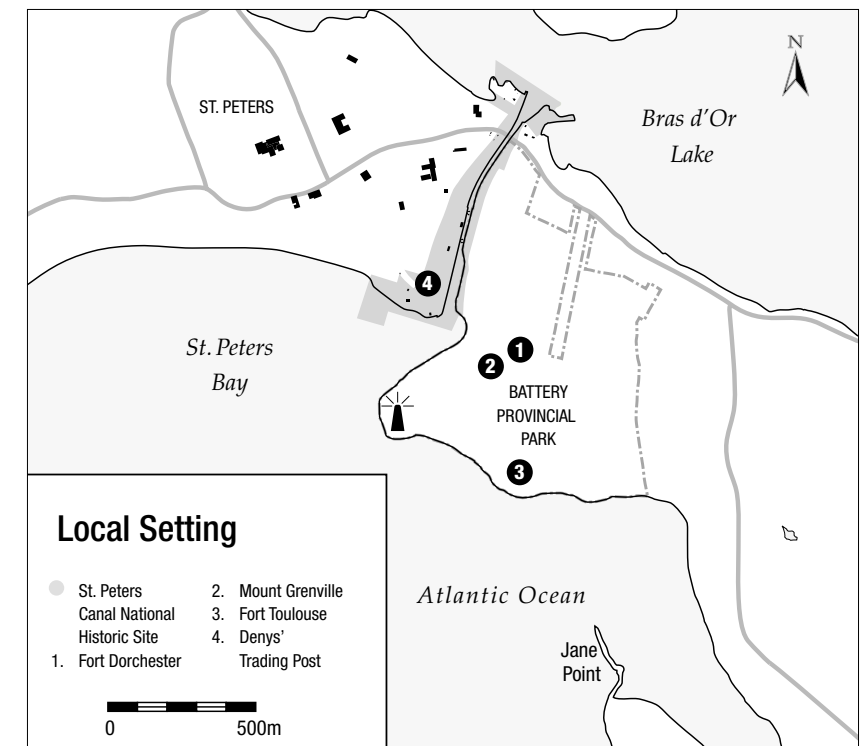
Cultural resources of the site

St. Peters Canal encompasses many significant cultural resources. Some are related to the national historic significance of the canal. They include the Lockmaster's House,

built in 1876, a number of masonry features and structures associated with the original canal and the role of the swing bridge.

St. Peters Canal National Historic Site is also enriched by the presence of cultural resources associated with Saint-Pierre. The remains of the 17th-century fortified trading post of Saint-Pierre as well as the excavated artifacts associated with the fort represent this period. Vestiges of the "haulover road" constructed by Nicolas Denys may be present as well.

The remains of the 18th-century small fort and settlement of Port Toulouse are also of national historic significance. The government of Nova Scotia values these below-ground resources and protects them within Battery Provincial Park.



A Transportation Corridor

Since Time Immemorial

Tied to its role as a transportation corridor between the Bras d'Or Lake and the Atlantic Ocean, here is a brief review of the St. Peters Canal Story.



Historic postcard, not dated.
Entrance of the canal, circa 1920. Parks Canada

The Mi'kmaq

The area was used for thousands of years by the Mi'kmaq, who portaged their canoes across the isthmus separating Bras d'Or Lake from the ocean. Access to the sea-coast allowed them to reach other parts of their territory throughout Atlantic Canada. As well, they

established seasonal camps here. It is likely that the presence of the Mi'kmaq brought Portuguese, Basque and French fishermen to the area as early as the 1500s. The Portuguese may have established San Pedro in the area in 1520.

Saint-Pierre and Nicolas Denys

In the 1630s, merchants from France built a small fortified settlement on St. Peters Bay, and named it Saint-Pierre. They were granted the rights to the fur trade and fishery in the region by the New France Company. In 1650, Nicolas Denys, an entrepreneur and merchant, took possession of the post. During his stay, Denys traded with the Mi'kmaq. To facilitate shipping and transportation, the traditional portage trail became a "haulover" road where oxen, or people, could pull Denys' ships from one shore to the other.

During the winter of 1668/69 a fire destroyed all the structures at Saint-Pierre. The post was abandoned and Denys moved to New Brunswick. In 1924, Nicolas Denys was declared to be of national historic significance because of his pioneering role in the fur trade and fishing industries in the Gulf region.



View of the shore of St. Peters Bay at Battery Provincial Park, site of the former settlement of Port Toulouse. F. Marineau

Port Toulouse

The next chapter in the St. Peters story began in 1713 when the French established themselves on Cape Breton Island following the loss of mainland Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to the British. Saint-Pierre was renamed Port Toulouse. The core of the settlement was located about 1 km east of the old 17th-century trading post, within the current boundaries of Battery Provincial Park. The area of the trading post was renamed Petit Saint-Pierre.

Port Toulouse became one of the three principal ports established on Isle Royale. It was a major supply center for Louisbourg. To protect the settlement, the French built a small fort on the shore. In spite of optimistic plans for masonry walls, Fort Toulouse had to settle for earthworks protected by palisades. Inside the defenses were the com-

mandant's quarters, soldiers barracks, a chapel and other structures.

During that period the French maintained close contact with the Mi'kmaq. In 1745 and 1758, both the fort and the settlement were destroyed by the British during the wars for control of North America. In 1793, the British built Fort Dorchester on the summit of Mount Grenville, the highest point in the region. A prominent Irish merchant, Lawrence Kavanaugh Jr., whose family contributed significantly to the growth of St. Peters, established himself close to the ruins of Port Toulouse.

The Construction of the Canal

The present village of St. Peters was founded in the 19th century. The new residents used Denys' haulover road to transport craft across the isthmus. Plans were soon



Beginning of the construction of the present-day canal, August 1913. Parks Canada

made to replace the old portage road with a navigation channel. Work on the canal began in 1854. After 15 years of digging, blasting, and drilling, a passage about 800m long and about 8m wide had been cut through a solid granite hill 20m high. In 1869 the canal finally became a reality. Additions and renovations, which included widening the channel and lengthening the lock, continued until 1917.

St. Peters Canal Still in Use

In 1985, Parks Canada completed a major restoration of the canal, which is used by pleasure craft and some commercial vessels. Today, St. Peters Canal is the only working canal of national historic significance in Atlantic Canada.

The only surviving structure from the 19th century is the Lockmaster's House. Nicolas Denys' fort lies buried in the garden of this house. To the east, archaeological work has confirmed the presence of the ruins of some structures of Fort Toulouse along the shoreline of Battery Provincial Park. In the same park, the ruins of Fort Dorchester atop Mount Grenville overlook the canal.





left: The mounds of Denys' fort. F. Marineau above: The Lockmaster's House today, built in 1876. Parks Canada

left: The canal today, 1999. F. Marineau above: View of the bridge located at the north end of the canal, July 1915. Parks Canada

Messages of national historic significance

The messages of national historic significance explain why St. Peters Canal is commemorated. They can be communicated through exhibits, educational programs, publications or other media aimed at visitors and the public.

Our goal is to ensure that the residents of Richmond County, as well as visitors, understand and appreciate the roles St. Peters Canal played in the history of Cape Breton Island and of Canada. The messages describing the national historic significance of St. Peters Canal are:

The Mi'kmaq Portage

- The site was used as a transportation corridor between the Atlantic Ocean and the Bras d'Or Lake since time immemorial.

The French/Acadian Period

- The major alliances between the French and the Mi'kmaq were fostered by the military, social and commercial relationships that established and maintained Saint-Pierre.
- Saint-Pierre was the site of a 17th-century fortified trading post acquired by Nicolas Denys in 1650 to trade with the Mi'kmaq who used the portage.

- Between 1713 and 1758 Saint-Pierre was known as the settlement of Port Toulouse, one of the three principal ports established by the French on Cape Breton Island.
- Saint-Pierre (then known as Port Toulouse) was the scene of conflicts between the French and British during the struggle for empire in the 18th century.
- The area was a largely Acadian settlement between 1713 and 1758. The Acadian and other French inhabitants were deported by the British in 1745 and 1758.

The Canal

- St. Peters Canal is part of Canada's system of canals.
- St. Peters Canal is a working canal that crosses a narrow isthmus of land separating the Atlantic Ocean from the Bras d'Or Lake along a traditional Mi'kmaq portage route.

- St. Peters Canal was constructed between 1854 and 1869, and was subsequently enlarged and modified in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to accommodate changes in the size of vessels utilizing the canal.
- The presence and interrelationship of the canal waterway, works, buildings and landscape features, are tangible evidence of the historical evolution of the site.

What Do You Think?

Feel free to comment on these messages. Do you have any ideas on how best we can present them? Are there other messages that should be communicated on site and/or offsite?

Messages of local and regional historic importance

The messages of local and regional significance link the history of the canal to the history of the surrounding area. They are generally of great interest to the community because they reveal the story of the local heritage. They can be presented in much the same way as those of national historic significance.

We Need Your Feedback.

We would like to discuss these messages with the public and interest groups. Here are some examples of messages we are considering:

The Mi'kmaq Presence

- The Mi'kmaq used this place for hundreds if not thousands of years, right into the 20th century, establishing seasonal camps.

The French/Acadian Settlement

- In the early 16th century, Portuguese fishers may have used this place and called it San Pedro.
- Saint-Pierre National Historic Site is thematically related to many other French/Acadian sites in Atlantic Canada; including Port-Royal, Fort Anne, Grassy Island, Fort Amherst – Port-la-Joye, Fort Beauséjour, the Fortress of Louisbourg, Grand-Pré, Beaubears Island, and Castle Hill National Historic Sites.
- The Acadian and French heritage is visible in the nearby local area.

The Design and Role of the Canal

- There are historical and chronological relationships between the Mi'kmaq portage, the 17th-century fortified trading post and haulover road, the settlement of Saint-Pierre and Port Toulouse and the St. Peters Canal.

- The design of the canal and lock is adapted to the tidal fluctuations of the sea level.
- St. Peters Canal played an important role as a waterway in Cape Breton in the mid 19th and early 20th centuries and in national and international trade and commerce.

The Development of the Community

- Saint-Pierre had an interesting history in the post-1758 period, when the British settlers established the modern village of St. Peters.
- The canal played a critical role in the development of the community of St. Peters.
- The Kavanaugh family contributed significantly to the establishment and growth of St. Peters.
- A nationally recognized photographer, Wallace MacAskill, was born in St. Peters.

You may want to suggest types of facilities or cooperative initiatives with potential partners which could help visitors learn about the rich local heritage. Please share your views with us.

Planning Issues and Opportunities to Address

Later this year we will prepare draft management proposals. Initially, we will study a number of questions we have identified on this page. Before we start, however, we would like to consult the community. This consultation will be an opportunity to find out the public's views on these issues. It will also help us identify other issues and opportunities.

Ensuring the Commemorative Integrity of the Site

It is Parks Canada's mandate to ensure protection of the site's cultural resources. One of our challenges is to protect the Lockmaster's House. Major conservation work will be required to preserve its integrity.

A second issue pertains to the below-ground cultural resources such as the vestiges of the Nicolas Denys Fort. We will develop management strategies to ensure that these buried resources are not threatened either by natural elements or human interventions.

There are important resources located outside Parks Canada's property such as the remnants of Port Toulouse. We will continue providing information on historical and archaeological research, conservation measures or other aspects of interest to the public. What kind of cooperation should we explore to ensure adequate protection to these resources?

Presenting the story of St. Peters

Communicating the reasons for the historic significance of St. Peters is also an important goal. Some interpretation services are available at the site but we would like to review

them as part of this planning project. Interpretation messages and visitor needs are examples of issues we want to address in the plan.

Local and regional messages are important in our presentation. Which messages would best reflect your community, its history, and the links to the canal? For example, should we emphasize the centuries of Mi'kmaq presence, the establishment and growth of the village of St. Peters, and Fort Dorchester? How can we present these messages cooperatively with partners?

Providing Quality Visitor Services

Some facilities are presently offered at the site such as picnic tables, benches, and washrooms. What types of service do people need when using the canal or visiting the site? Are there potential partners interested in providing new services?

Over the last five years, in accordance with Government of Canada policy, Parks Canada has established service fees at national parks, national historic sites and historic canals. At historic canals, fees are in place for passing through the lock and other services. This policy must be implemented at St. Peters so fees will be established for use of the

canal and revenues will be reinvested in the maintenance of the canal. It is Parks Canada's intention to ensure that fees will be fair, appropriate and in line with the value of the service offered. We want to discuss this topic with users of the canal and the community during the public consultation. There are various ways of structuring the fee schedule, particularly for frequent users, so we need your input.

Encouraging Community Involvement

Interest groups, partners, and community groups can make important contributions to the management of historic sites. How should we build on existing cooperative arrangements with others such as the Nicolas Denys Museum, the Chapel Island community, and the N.S. Department of Natural Resources? Are there projects you would like to explore with us? This planning program is a good occasion to discuss these opportunities with you.



left inset: Detail from historic map of Port Toulouse, 1734. Parks Canada

What happens next?

What are your views? Are there other issues or opportunities you would like us to address in the plan?

Your input at this stage is very important to us and we are looking forward to receiving your suggestions.

Wednesday, March 29, we will be holding an open house. The public is invited to meet with members of the planning team and discuss the information presented in this newsletter. We also plan to contact a number of organizations to seek their views.

After the consultation, we will analyze all the comments and prepare preliminary management pro-

posals to address the issues and opportunities. These proposals will be submitted to the public for review and comments late in the year.

After this second consultation, we will integrate public comments into the preliminary proposals and prepare the Management Plan.

All these steps will allow us to achieve the goal of this planning program: to prepare a sound Management Plan which will reflect the views and expectations of the community.

A word about Management Plans

A Management Plan outlines what Parks Canada will do to protect as well as promote and present St. Peters Canal National Historic Site. It also explains how Parks Canada will serve visitors and work with the community. When completed in the year 2001, the Management Plan will be submitted to the Minister of Canadian Heritage for approval, tabled in the House of Commons, then distributed to the public.

How you can participate

Attend The Open House

We invite you to visit us at the open house being held in St. Peters at the United Church Hall, 9917 Grenville Street, on March 29, 2000. The open house will be held from 2:00 to 8:30 pm.

Write

You can either write a letter or send in a written brief. We would appreciate receiving your comments and briefs before April 28, 2000.

Please send them to:

Carol Whitfield, Field Unit
Superintendent, c/o Fortress of
Louisbourg NHS, PO Box 160,
Louisbourg, Nova Scotia B0A 1M0
or send an email to:
anne_marie_coutinho@pch.gc.ca

Get More Information

If you would like more information about Parks Canada programs, St. Peters Canal National Historic Site, the site's cultural resources or any other information relating to the commemoration of St. Peters Canal, you may contact us by calling (902) 733-3551.

Surf The Web

You may visit the site's website at:
<http://fortress.uccb.ns.ca/stpeters>
Or Parks Canada's website at:
<http://parkscanada.pch.gc.ca>

