A Brief Overview of the History of Micou's Island



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A happy spring deer on Micou's Island

Introduction to Micou's Island

Micou's Island, located off of Indian Point in Glen Haven, Nova Scotia, is not only one of the most visited Islands in St. Margaret's Bay it is also one of the most unique. This is due to its interesting history by the Mi'kmaq, the European house that still stands and the strong relationship that many locals have built with the island over the years.

Micou's Island is situated within St. Margaret's Bay at a latitude of 44 38'05"N and longitude of 63 56'28"W. The island is just under 23 acres (9 ha).

Have you ever found yourself exploring Micou's Island and wondering about some of the interesting features that can be found there? I know I have! To quench my thirst for answers to some of the burning questions that I had a decided to do some digging and uncover the truth that lay in local-traditional knowledge, or oral history, previous studies that have been performed and historical documents. This document is the cumulative efforts of my digging: a

compilation of some of the history of Micou's Island.



Mi'kmaq History and Use - Pre 1700s

The surrounding area of Micou's Island, communities that are now known as Glen Haven, French Village and Seabright, has historically seen a large presence of Mi'kmaq people over the years. Their use of Micou's Island as a seasonal residence and fishing camp pre-dates that of any Europeans by at least 2,000 years and upwards of 12,500 years, as in other parts of the province.

Because of the Mi'kmaq history of the area many regions were given what were to be deemed as a reflective names. Did you know that Micou's Island used to be known as "Indian Island"? The little island off-of Micou's Islands Western shore is often called "Little Indian" as well but it is also known as "Sheep Island".

Groups of Mi'kmaq were observed spending time camping in the areas surrounding Micou's Island into the 1930s. Their presence, and history, on Micou's can be observed through two shell middens that can be found there. These seemingly insignificant piles of shells are actually ancient refuse piles, left over from centuries of the seasonal harvest of shellfish in the area. The piles have endured the stand of time as those who deposited them would have used them as indicators to mark the spots that were good for harvest.

With the help of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History, there has been confirmation of Mi'kmaq burial sites upon Micou's Island. Micou's Island is therefore a very special place to the Mi'kmaq community. There are also burials on Sheep (Little Indian) Island. The oral history of that burial is that it was that of a Mi'kmaq chieftain. Legend has it that you will always find an eagle feather if you travel to the island.

There are also those who remember times when you could visit Micou's and find Mi'kmaq artifacts such as arrow heads.



The most-visible shell midden

European Settlement - Post 1700s-1930s

The area surrounding Micou's Island, Indian Point, was first settled by Europeans in 1785 by James Dauphinee. Their family farm is still located on Indian Point and Clifton Dauphinee, who is the great-great grandson of James still lives there.

The Dauphinee families used Micou's Island for the purposes of farming and harvest. They "hayed" the fields in spring and summer, grazed sheep and cattle and harvested the majority of the trees from the forests. Evidence of this is still present as you can see the cleared fence-line in the forest (seen below). Also, the forest that remains on the island is almost entirely that of an early successional, or immature, forest which is an indicator of previous harvest or disturbance.

To get an idea of what the forests of Micou's Island probably would have looked like before they were harvested you can visit Troop Island (an island just several km South-South-East of Micou's) where there still remains coastal old growth Acadian forest.

During the 1800s and early 1900s several members of the Dauphinee family lived in the house year-round. This would have been quite a feat as the house is barely insulated and an open wood-burning fireplace and a wood stove were the only sources of heat.



The old fence line, covered in ferns

The Micou Family - 1930 - 2005

Andrina and her husband Cranswell were an American couple from New York. During their honeymoon they visited Micou's Island and fell in love with it and subsequently purchased it from at-the-time-owner Walter Boutlier. Over the next the next 75 years the Micou, and later Winsor, family used the island and house as a summer home.

As the Micous were not always able to spend their summers there the house was periodically rented the house out to locals. Including fishermen, other vacationers and WWII air-pilots at one point. Some still have memories of their jets flying around the bay!

The Micous had always let the locals know that they were free to visit the island, swim at the beaches and camp on the island. In exchange the community looked after the island and the house. It is from these seeds that the idea of Micou's as the community-stewarded island began.

In the early 2000s the Micou-Winsor family had grown tired of the distance-upkeep of the island and the vandalism and break-ins that they would often return to find. They decided to put the house and Island up for sale in 2005.



The main circumnavigation trail on Micou's Island

The St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association

Formed in 2003, the SMBSA is a non-profit organization that transcends the simple label of an environmental NGO. As leaders in the community of St. Margaret's Bay they have striven to further countless community issues and interests such as transportation, community and economic development, local sustainability, water resources, education and, of course, environmental protection and the securing of islands, in particular, as community spaces.

When Micou's Island went up for sale in 2005 the SMBSA was concerned that the new owner may not have the same community values that the Micou family had. It was certainly a real danger that the new owners may not want people on their property or allow the same level of community use that had been the constant on Micou's for the past 70+ years At the time there was also talk of bolstering the causeway large, and structurally sound, enough for cars to pass to and from the island and the intent to build a large house on the West side of the island (what is now the camp site that overlooks Little Indian (Sheep Island))

Residents of Indian Point spearheaded a Save Micou's Committee and quickly raised enough funds to gain attention of the NS Heritage Trust and commitment of SMBSA to support the idea of public purchase of the island as a nature site and the cottage as a heritage site and the formation of a "Stewardship Agreement" with Nova Scotia's Department of Natural Resources (NSDNR) many of the terms of what the vision and management, or Stewardship, of the island would be were set. Within this agreement the title of the island belongs to NSDNR and the island is thus designated as "Crown land". Because of this anyone may visit Micou's Island at any time of the year.

The vision that was set forth was that of a constant seasonal residence program wherein "Island Stewards" would spend nights in the house and fill the role of the aforementioned title. Through the sterling efforts of Alex Day and Petra Mudie, the first Island Stewards, a program was gradually shaped to outline the responsibilities of stewards. The program included the education of visitors to the island in regards to its features, history, status, flora and fauna and the provision of guidelines for ecologically conscientious environmental recreation in St. Margaret's Bay. The idea is that Micou's Island is a community place that all can come to enjoy but we must ensure that the activities of visitors have as little as an impact as possible on the island ecologically. Island Stewards are also present to provide security for the house and island as well as filling a role as an environmental monitor, observing and reporting on the flora and fauna of Micou's.

Features of the Island

Upon Micou's Island there is a wide-range of habitats and species of both flora and fauna, Mi'kmaq, European and community history and elements of spirituality that are celebrated by many whom are familiar with this special place.

Among Micou's Islands most sought-after features are that of its sandy beaches. As the most-visited beach on the East side of St. Margaret's Bay, the beaches may receive up to 2,000 visitors over the course of a year.

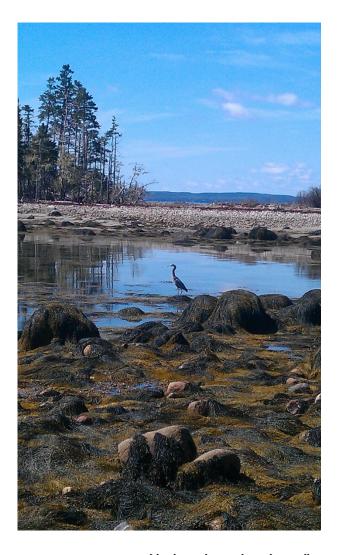


The Eastern shore of Micou's Island

The sandbar

The sand bar on that connects Micou's Island to the mainland of the Indian Pt. peninsula is walkable (without getting wet) for a 5-hour window that is 2.5 hours on either side of low tide.

In the past, the sand bar was more than just that: it used to always be above the water and even had grasses growing on it. Locals would drive cars, cattle and goods back-and-forth as they pleased. In the 1930s there was a series of storms that washed-out the majority of the land that connected the island to the mainland and so that is how Micou's Island became the tidal-island we know today.



A Great blue heron hunts along the sandbar

The Micou's Memorial Site

On the North-Eastern portion of the island there is a region that is generally referred to as the "nubic". This is a small point of land that extends out in a North-Eastern direction from the island. On the far side of the nubic lays the brackish marsh that the island holds. Many have told me that the nubic has eroded heavily over the years and used to extend further into the ocean.

Just in from the shoreline of the nubic lays a memorial site for Creswell MacMurray Micou and his wife Andrina McIntyre Micou which is marked by two plaques that have been secured to a rock. The ashes of both of the aforementioned Micous were spread here during a memorial service.

Getting to the bottom of the truth behind the site was one of my first endeavours. I had asked around and had locals tell me it was a grave and others tell me it was simply a plaque to remember them. When I asked a member of the family and he was unable to confirm either story I knew I had to get to the bottom of it.



The Cottage

In the late 1800s the cottage was brought to Micou's Island upon a barge as timber and was later assembled. Oxen were used to drag the timber to the location that the house now sits.

The land of what is now Micou's Island was owned by members of the Dauphinee family from 1785 until 1921. During that time various members of the family used the house as a main residence, living there year-round.

The island had been subdivided between different members of the family but was later amalgamated by Noah Dauphinee who bought-out other family members portions.

In 1921 Noah sold the island to Walter Boutilier for \$500 (a value of around \$6,000 today). Walter then sold the island to Andrina Micou in 1931 for just \$1!

Seeing its fair-share of work, the house has been heavily renovated and restored during at least three sessions: in the 1920s, 2007 and 2012-2013. As this house is in the range of being 200-years-old there is often smaller-scale projects and continual upkeep to keep it safe and liveable.

The house is often the subject of much speculation and estimations by the visitors whom are not familiar with the goings-on of the island. Some are under the impression that you can rent the house as a vacation destination while others believe a caretaker lives within it full-time. The truth is somewhere is the middle as the house is now used to allow residence for our Stewardship program. In other words, it houses those that are preforming "Stewardship Duty" by staying in the house and "Stewarding" the island.



The Brackish Marsh

A brackish marsh is a type of wetland is in-close proximity to salt water that it has a higher salt content then that of fresh water but it also has a great enough influx or freshwater to allow for many fresh water species and some salt water.

The marsh used to cover a much greater area and it was more of a pond than a marsh as such. Due to the constant forces of erosion the topography of the land has changed and the pond was confined more and more until it reached the marsh we have today.

The waters are sometimes used in the winter as a skating surface. In the summer we keep dogs out of this sensitive habitat for the purpose of protecting the area for ground-nesting bird habitat. We also educate visitors on the uniqueness and sensitivity of this habitat and try and ensure that they ensure that their actions have as little of an impact as possible.



Remnants of Old Structures

There are the remnants of several structures on Micou's Island that are currently mere skeletons of what they once were. The most prominent of these is the remainder of what was once a wharf that came-out from the Islands East shore, close to the end of the main beach and trail entrance. Upon exploration you may also come across the remnants of the old boat house which once stood further down the shore from the old wharf, the old fence-line that the Dauphinee family used to keep their cattle and sheep in or the outhouse which once stood to the South of the house.



The Trails

There are two main trail systems that are present on Micou's Island: one that circumnavigates the island and one that explores some of the interior.

For the most-part, the trails have been maintained by locals who use them. The SMBSA does not actively manage the trails that exist throughout the island. It is not entirely in-keeping with the idea of Stewardship to do so and thus they are now left alone by the SMBSA. The idea is to move the people around the environment rather than the environment around the people but we do, however, remove partially fallen trees or branches if they are deemed to be a safety hazard.



Acknowledgments

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My thanks to all of you for your time and contributions!



The oldest living tree on 'Micou's Island - a sugar maple known as "Strong Arm"

Pictures of Micou's Island



A raven resting in a spruce snag



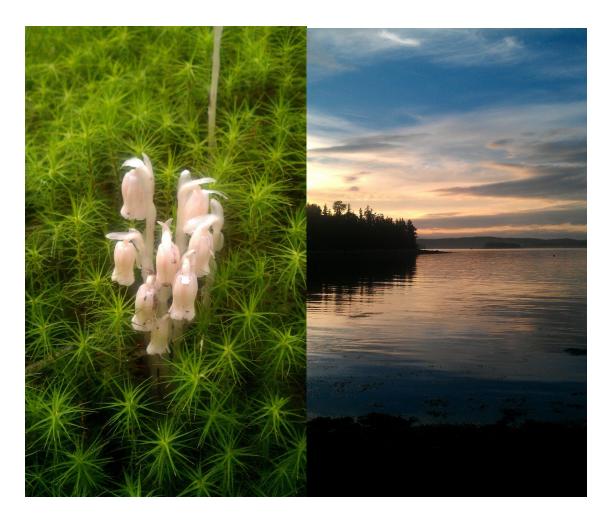
Chanterelle mushrooms



Parts of the Micou's Island forests



Little Indian/Sheep Island





Тор, left to right: 1. Indian pipe (a plant devoid of pigment) amongst hair cap moss 2. Micou's East side at sunset

3. The northward view from the sand bar.