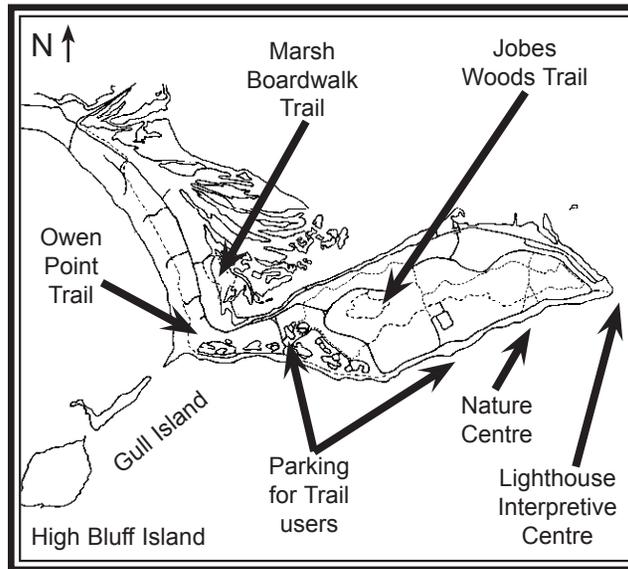


# How Did It All Begin?

Presqu'ile Provincial Park has always been a hit with visitors as a recreational haven. The park is a place where people can come to camp, swim, enjoy campfires, go on walks or become involved in interpretive programs. However Presqu'ile has not always been a recreational paradise, in 1797 Presqu'ile was actually being designated as a townsite. The new town was to be called Newcastle, the capital of a district with the same name.



Plans were going well until the sinking of the H.M.S. Speedy on October 8, 1804. The Speedy was transporting many important government officials to this new town from York to hold a trail. The disappearance of the Speedy made officials skeptical about the suitability of the new town's location and in 1805 they moved the town to Amherst, what is now known as Cobourg. This saved the peninsula from development and allowed recreational opportunities to be established like the Presqu'ile Summer Hotel.



## Presqu'ile Provincial Park

is located on the north shore of Lake Ontario, five minutes south of the town of Brighton. For more information about Presqu'ile or its programs, contact:

Presqu'ile Provincial Park

328 Presqu'ile Parkway

Brighton, Ontario

KOK 1H0

Telephone- (613) 475-4324

Fax- (613) 475-2209

[www.ontarioparks.com](http://www.ontarioparks.com)

[www.friendsofpresquile.on.ca](http://www.friendsofpresquile.on.ca)



Presqu'ile's  
interpretive programs  
are supported by:



# Presqu'ile



## 100 Years Of The Presqu'ile Summer Hotel

# History 100 Years In The Making

The year 2005 marked 100 years since the establishment of the Presqu'île Summer Hotel. The hotel, which is no longer standing, is worth celebrating because it brought people here for more than just our beaches. The hotel paved the way for new forms of recreation on the peninsula and also made Presqu'île popular in the United States.

In 1905 a fish and fruit exporter from Brighton named Peter Covell opened "Hotel Presqu'île" west of the current government dock. When the hotel opened it had no hydro, water and not even road access! It could accommodate a maximum of 50 guests which arrived by boat. Covell also had built a dance pavilion behind the hotel where live bands would often play to a full crowd ready to dance the night away. Some famous acts frequented the pavilion like Guy Lombardo and Herbie Bell and the Solidaires.

The interior of the hotel had a rustic look and feel. It had dark walls and unfinished floors. Small rugs were placed in the upstairs hall and there was a fireplace in the east end of the building at a central location. The front entrance of the hotel had a half circle counter and a grand staircase. The hotel had many sporting facilities including a riding stable, tennis and badminton courts.

In the early years the hotel was open seasonally. A grand opening would be held every July 1st, but times were changing and so was the hotel. In 1913 competition opened up across the road. Grant Quick's dance pavilion, "Quick's Pleasure Palace" proved a hit. After one year of competition Grant Quick took over management of the hotel and re-named it the "Presqu'île Summer Hotel". He managed to bring running water to the point and in 1923 he brought electricity to the hotel.

With Quick now running the operation people could enjoy lawn bowling, baseball, volleyball, croquet and boat racing. In 1930 the cost to stay at the hotel was \$7 per person, per night.

In the late 1920's Quick was allegedly involved in rumrunning along with Ben Kerr (pictured below). Ben Kerr was known as the "King of Rumrunners". Ben illegally ran alcohol across the lake to Oswego, NY, which was under prohibition, to sell it for a hefty profit. He stored his alcohol in the basement of one of Quick's cottages. When Ben was lost out on the lake in February 1929 Grant Quick was the person who identified Ben's body after it washed ashore badly mangled.



Many annual traditions were started at the Presqu'île Hotel. One of the most famous of those was the annual Rochester to Presqu'île yacht race held every July 4th. The race would begin in Rochester, NY, as part of their Independence Day celebrations.

With the removal of Covell's pavilion the "Pleasure Palace" became the main pavilion now and had some very 'strict' rules. No bare feet, no bathing suits, no shorts and no dancing in "suggestive" ways. In the 1940's admission to the pavilion was \$1 and cottagers could get a season pass for \$10.00. On a good evening there would be 700-800 people in and out of the pavilion and young people called it the PAV.



The hotel was now at its peak with people coming to enjoy canoeing, kayaking, golfing, dancing, rowing, sailing and just about any other watersport. There was even a landing strip put in place for people who wanted to make "an entrance". In the late 1960's popularity declined. Quick couldn't keep up with new demands and maintaining the hotel. After his death in 1971 the hotel was torn down and the land was divided into smaller lots and sold off. All that remains of the hotel are the memories shared by many local residents who visited to hotel in its glory days!

# Presqu'ile: A Provincial Park for 50 Years

Looking back at the roots of Presqu'ile Provincial Park reveals not only the rich heritage of this park, but the system of Ontario Parks as a whole. As of 2001, Ontario's 280 provincial parks covered over 7.1 million hectares of land, equal in size to Nova Scotia's total landmass. With over 25 500 campsites, Ontario's provincial parks are visited by millions of campers and day-trippers from all across the world. Presqu'ile Provincial Park has been a part of this ever-growing system for fifty years. However, the story of Presqu'ile's beginnings as a park does not start in 1956, but in 1896.

The Presqu'ile peninsula has been presumably inhabited since 1796, with the arrival of the United Empire Loyalist family of Obediah Simpson. Presqu'ile was being used for mainly agricultural purposes until a July 31, 1896 article in the *Beauties of the Point* claimed that 'the beauties of the Point are not as fully known as they should be' and if some 'enterprising citizens' took over the property, a greater number of 'pleasure seekers would avail themselves of a season of rest.' In 1893, Algonquin National Park (now Provincial Park) was designed for light recreation and mainly resource management, as was Rondeau Provincial Park in 1894. The other original parks in the province were Quetico (1913), Long Point (1921), Presqu'ile (1922), and Ipperwash (1938); Sibley (Sleeping Giant), and Lake Superior were formed in 1944 during the war period. The initial days of the park system were much different from what we would expect today.

Parks initially appealed to the upper class interests, evident through the various resort hotels and lodges built in parks. In Algonquin, a railway was put in place from Toronto to service the increase in tourism to the lodges. Presqu'ile also experienced an increase in visitors and recreational opportunities. In 1905, the Presqu'ile Summer Hotel was opened up by Peter Covell. The hotel, located near the present day government dock, saw many visitors from the United States, mostly New York State. When it opened, the hotel had no running water, electricity or indoor plumbing, but it drew many people to Presqu'ile, where they enjoyed boating, swimming, live music and dancing.

To protect the excellent natural harbour and operate the lighthouse, the Presqu'ile peninsula had been under federal jurisdiction since 1871. The government opposed development at Presqu'ile, sighting the need to protect the forest that sheltered the harbour. However, with the

weakening of the schooner industry and growing public demand for holiday facilities, the authorities allowed land to be surveyed and leased for cottage lots and gave control of the peninsula to the province in 1920.

Realizing the popularity of automobiles and the benefits of the growing travel tourism industry, local residents petitioned the province to designate the peninsula as a park in 1921. In 1922, the Department of Lands and Forests (DLF) passed the Presqu'ile Park Act declaring 837 hectares of the peninsula a park. The federal government controlled 125 acres of land as a lighthouse keepers' reserve.

Though the government of Ontario already ran the existing six provincial parks, it did not want to assume the costs of developing Presqu'ile. Parks were not financially self-sufficient; in fact, the 1913 Parks Act allowed profits from logging, hunting and trapping in the park to be used to defray administrative costs. For example, Algonquin Park Rangers would trap beavers and sell their fur and in its early days, Rondeau raised and sold exotic birds and their eggs from its own aviary. Hence, much like the park created at Long Point in 1921, the obligation of running Presqu'ile fell on an appointed commission of five local men.

The Presqu'ile Park Commission was to manage the peninsula as parkland, a forest reserve and a health resort for the general public. They purchased farms, planted 90,000 trees, stocked the park with deer, maintained the camping areas, sold firewood and collected garbage. They also built a golf course and clubhouse near the present day Park Store to attract settlers to the peninsula. It was a challenge for the commission to serve the public as well as the close-knit community of leaseholders, who opposed the development of public facilities with their taxes.

After World War II, public demand increased for parks with picnic and camping facilities. The Presqu'ile Park Commission lacked the funding to cater to the public's needs and asked the Department of Lands and Forests to take control of the park in 1946. The provincial government recognized that, like Long Point, Presqu'ile was not meeting its original objectives of conservation and public recreation. After a tour of American parks in 1953, the minister of lands and forests also realized that Ontario was falling behind in providing public recreational facilities. He created a Division of Parks with the DLF and planned to expand the system of parklands within the province. The Parks



**Presqu'ile Hotel: Built in 1905, the Presqu'ile Hotel drew many pleasure-seekers to the peninsula.**

Act of 1954 designated Presqu'ile as a park within this provincial system, but it was still to be run by the commission. However, this decision was quickly reversed, eliminating the commission and assigning Presqu'ile its first Park Superintendent in 1956.

Dramatic changes came to Presqu'ile in 1957, when the land on the north shore of the peninsula was transferred to Brighton Township, interpretive programs were first offered, and a Park Museum was created at the current location of the Lighthouse Interpretive Centre. Further realization and appreciation of the natural heritage of Presqu'ile has occurred since then. In 1972, the Ministry of Natural Resources, formed out of the Department of Lands and Forests, reduced parking on Presqu'ile's beach from over 2000 down to 1200 and reduced campsite numbers from 800 sites to 400. Today, Presqu'ile is recognized as having provincially significant wetlands, being part of an Important Bird Area and

one of the most diverse parks in the province, as well as a great place to camp, swim, learn, hike, bike and skate. Now under the banner of Ontario Parks, a branch within the MNR, the goal for Ontario's provincial parks remains to protect significant natural, cultural, and recreational environments, while providing ample opportunities for visitors to participate in recreational activities.

In fifty years, Presqu'ile has come a long way from being a resort to a destination for camping, nature appreciation and outdoor recreation, but one thing hasn't changed: people love to come to Presqu'ile to enjoy the outdoors and the company of their family and friends. To help us celebrate our 50th anniversary we invite you to appreciate the wonderful treasure that is Presqu'ile: use our many trails, spend a night in our campgrounds, check out our visitor centres and attend our famed interpretive programs.

## The last 50 years

### 1950s

**1954-** The Provincial Parks Act is introduced. All existing parks in Ontario are brought under a single authority. Three different types of park were created:

- I) Parks administered directly by the Department of Lands and Forests,
- II) Parks like Presqu'ile that will continue to be administered by previously established commissions;
- III) Smaller parks and picnic areas.

**January 1, 1956-** Presqu'ile's first Superintendent was appointed to administer the park, develop facilities, supervise, and act as a liaison between the Department and the 150 residents on the point.

**March 28, 1957-** Park lands along Presqu'ile Bay are transferred to Brighton Township.

**November 1957-** The lighthouse keeper's residence is purchased by Presqu'ile.  
**1957-** The Presqu'ile Provincial Park nature interpretation program was initiated to introduce visitors to the park's many exceptional natural features.

**July, 1959-** The former lighthouse keeper's residence is renovated and expanded and opened to the public as the park's Visitor Centre.

### 1960s

**1966-** High Bluff and Gull Island designated as Wilderness areas under the

Wilderness Areas Act of 1959.

### 1970s

**1972-** The old Department of Lands and Forests is reorganized and renamed the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

**1970's-** Presqu'ile is designated as a Natural Environment Park. Beach parking facilities are reduced and the number of campsites is decreased to 400.

### 1980s

**1988-** The Friends of Presqu'ile Park is incorporated.

### 1990s

**1993-** Centennial of the Ontario Parks System.

### 2000s

**2000-** The Lighthouse Interpretive Center is opened. This facility guides visitors through the rich cultural history of the area. The original lighthouse keeper's cottage is incorporated into the building and now houses the theatre.

**2004 -** The Remembering Speedy Committee marks the 200th anniversary of the sinking of HMS Speedy off Presqu'ile with commemorative events, signage and publications.

**2006 -** Presqu'ile marks 50 years as a provincial park.



**Atkins farm: The Atkins family farm at Calf Pasture was the last farm running on the peninsula when it became a provincial park. Jack Atkins worked for the park as a foreman, until his farmland was purchased by the park and he moved into Brighton.**

Presqu'ile Hotel  
June 28th, 1924

Dear Virginia

I know I told you that I would write as soon as I got here but time has simply flown by. I thought that I would be bored, but I have actually been having an enjoyable time. My parents and I arrived last Friday by train to Brighton and were picked up by the hotel bus. You can imagine what I initially thought about spending the summer with my grandmother and parents! Yet, to my surprise there are a lot of kids my age here. Some stay in cottages, others are at the hotel. My family has rented one of the hotel cottages and I found out we are paying \$16.00 a week for each person! It's very nice though and they just got in electricity here last year so there is electric light in the main hotel though we use kerosene light in the cottage.

I just adore going over to the big hotel to visit my friends there and to have dinner. I feel very sophisticated and important as I stroll through the hallways. Everyone is friendly and relaxed, and the food is to die for! Last night we had a delightful dinner. The dining room is huge, it can hold over 200 people. The appetizer was cream of tomato soup, then roasted chicken and mashed potatoes for the entrée, and to top it all off, warm apple pie – Oh My Virginia, it was fantastic.

I just love it here! People from all over stay here, not just from Toronto. There is a couple from Philadelphia and lots of people from Rochester, some come over on their boats! On weekends all kinds of interesting boys come to the hotel for the dances at the pavilion. The cottager's here call themselves "The Gang" and have taken me under their wing. One of the girls in The Gang is Mindy, you would like her. She is going steady with a boy named Edward, they met at the cottage last summer. They will likely end up getting married. The rest of the The Gang is unattached but there are lots of handsome boys to meet at the dance pavilion. It is a real swinging time and I've already learned to do the Charleston and Fox Trot – pretty easy actually.

We do all kinds of things together, play tennis, go swimming in the lake. There is a nice beach on the other side of the point you can drive the cars right up on but with no car we have to walk, and it is a bit far so we often swim off the dock here. We have also gone sailing and canoeing – you can rent these boats from the hotel but Mindy's father has a small sailboat we can use. When you get hot you can go to the snack bar and get a coke and an ice cream at 5¢ each. The coke is ice cold from the ice they cut right out of the bay in the winter.

My parents and I visited the Presqu'ile Golf Club yesterday. Mother and I



To: Buffalo, N.Y.  
July 18, 1942

Dear Grant

We sit here like a bunch of nuts wondering what to do next. Whip, dad and Jr. are out fishing. It is 2pm now and they haven't been in yet for lunch. I guess we will go back home around the other way by 1000 islands. It will be a lot of fun. Sure wish you could be here. See ya soon.

Love Madelyn and Whip.



To: Toronto  
August 15, 1961  
Dear Eva + Bob

Just arrived here near Brighton. Wish you could come down – we'll be here for about a week then into TO. See you soon  
Love All the Family



To: Victoria, B.C.  
August 25, 1970

Andy and I having a nice quiet week at a Cottage here, offered to us by one of the ladies at work, it was quite an unexpected thing and we only had two days to get ready etc. We came Sat. only 90 miles from Toronto. We are alone and enjoying it. Got your letters and will write very soon.

Much love Jean and Andy.

played crib in the clubhouse while dad played his nine holes with some of the cottagers – lots of sand traps I'm told.

I'm really looking forward to the holiday weekend coming up, Dominion Day and the 4th of July. Saturday is regatta day and there will be all kinds of boat and swimming races. We are going to enter into the "hand-paddle, fours" race. It's a canoe race with-out paddles! It should be great fun though it's advised to wear a bathing suit. Mindy and Edward are also going to try the Mixed Tandem Canoe Race. On Sunday is the weekly baseball game. Cottagers against hotel guests and I think we have a good chance this time. Some very athletic looking young men have recently checked in! Before the game starts the hotel orchestra parades down the road, leading the players to the field.

Of course the big event will be the dance on Saturday night which I am definitely going to. I'm hoping some of those athletic young men will be there! I'll write again soon and tell you how the weekend went.

Your Friend Olivia



To: Toronto  
August 17, 1948  
Hi old dear!  
Mon. Eve.

Landed in sat. P.M. + have really kept things rolling ever since. Perfect weather, delicious food + wealthy Yanks so what more could one ask for? Sure wish you could be here to share in the "hellery". maybe next year somewhere – I'm going down to Toronto Sun. I think so I'll phone you on Mon. if I can locate your office. I have to be back for work on the 27th – darn it all!

Bye for now Ellie. Love Winnie



## Wish You Were Here!

(Postcards and the Post Office at Presqu'ile)

The use of picture postcards took off at the beginning of the 20th century. During the Golden Age of postcards (1901-1913) tens of thousands of different cards were printed showing Ontario scenes. Use peaked in 1913 when 60 million cards were handled by the Canadian post office. Back then postcards were generally not used the way we use them today, as announcements of our vacation. In that era of next day mail delivery throughout southern Ontario and before widespread telephone use, postcards were used to set up appointments, send holiday greetings, send friendly reminders to write soon, and generally just stay in touch. The message "wish you were here" didn't become a postcard mainstay until the 1950s. Presqu'ile postcards however are often the exception to the rule. People that came here were on vacation, and wanted to let people back home know how well they were doing! "Wish you were here" was heard from Presqu'ile at least as early as 1910.

Most Presqu'ile postcards were mailed from Brighton or from the Presqu'ile Point post office. The Presqu'ile office was established on July 1, 1908 as a summer office, open in July and August, with W.M. Ketchum as the postmaster. In 1912 the job went to R.Y. Leslie and the post office was located in his store along the cottage row. Residents would be expected to come into the store to get their mail but apparently Mr. Leslie would often give some child an ice cream to deliver mail to someone he knew was waiting for a letter. In 1932 the post office started opening in June, July and August. Obviously Presqu'ile was extending its season.

In 1936 Mary Agnes Atkinson became the postmistress and the post office moved to her store just east of the hotel. From 1944 the post office was open four months, closing at the end of September. Mary Agnes remained postmistress until 1966 when she retired. A. Vanderwater ran the post office for its last three summers. After 1969, with many cottages now full-time residences, everyone was switched to year-round rural delivery.

The use of postcards dropped off considerably during the First World War and as the telephone became more common fewer postcards were needed to stay in touch. The vacation postcard lived on, however, and throughout its life of 61 years the Presqu'ile Point summer post office continued to handle many postcards to friends back home "wishing you were here".

We hope you enjoyed your glimpse into the past. All postcard notes are actual messages from the collection of David Bree. The letter is a modern composite. If you have any postcards or letters from Presqu'ile you could share with us we would appreciate it. Please contact David at the park.

