



Royal Island History

Royal Island, Honey Harbour - A special place on Georgian Bay

As you approach Royal Island, just imagine the first Native or European explorers seeking refuge from a storm. Reminisce about the smell of baked cakes coming from the Royal Honey Harbour Island Hotel, or the clamour at the dock at 3 p.m. as the mail boat arrived. Almost four centuries have passed since Samuel de Champlain visited Royal Island and the modern era of Canadian history began.

Treasure hunters may have been attracted to the area as the folklore stories have evolved from the time of the Jesuits at Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons. After the Iroquois destroyed the village, the Jesuits and many of the Huron fled to hide on one of the many 30,000 islands. The Jesuits took with them and buried a Eucharist, a pot of French and Spanish coins and a collection of artifacts from the mission at Sainte-Marie. To mark the spot, a large two-foot long stone was laid with a Latin inscription rumoured to say: "A saviour will restore all that belongs to the earth - Look for the one with the initials of MF." The treasure, never found, remains on one of the islands - perhaps on Royal Island.

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The timber rights to Royal Island, known to the lumbermen as Island 12, were designated by the Georgian Bay Lumbering Company. The Island has been logged three times since Champlain's first visit. The third cut on Royal Island was used for the wooden mine sweepers that were built in Honey Harbour and used during the Second World War.

The Hotel was the site for the Royal Honey Harbour Post Office which provided postal service by boat or dog sled to the residents of the Honey Harbour area. Today, a new use of hiking, camp overnight stays, and environmental education for the Delawana Inn guests are returning the island to a more natural setting.

The legendary Glass Beach is named for the glass and trash dumped over the years. Although the area has been cleared of most of the debris, hikers should use caution and keep their eyes open, as an antique bottle may resurface.

Many of the families that settled the area were attracted by the commercial hunting and fishing and then for the harvesting of timber. As the tourism industry developed in the late 1800s, the accommodation industry became a source of jobs along with the opportunities for hunting and fishing guides. The trails have been named to reflect the history and the families of the Honey Harbour area.

Grisé Trail: In honour of one of Midland's pioneer businessmen, Didace Grisé. He arrived in the area in 1879 from Quebec via Fenelon Falls and built the The Royal Honey Harbour Hotel after purchasing the island in 1902. When completed it was known as the grandest accommodation in the area and expanded to over 100 rooms. The hotel operated until 1975 and was demolished in 1981. The Grisé family purchased the Delawana Inn from the Nickerson family.

Nickerson Nook: In honour of Nathan Nathaniel Nickerson who first built the Victoria House, now the site of Delawana Inn Resort. The only access in 1897 was by boat from Midland.

Tobey Trail: The Tobey heritage dates back to the Pottawatomi Band that was relocated from Kansas in the United States. John Tobey received a medal from Queen Victoria and was responsible for establishing the first church and school in Honey Harbour. Legend says that the Tobey's were such prolific fishermen they could tell the type of fish by dipping their hands in the water, waiting a moment, sniffing the water, and then stating "no fish here today", or "great Musky today".

King's Court: The King family arrived from Three Rivers in Quebec and contributed to the farming in the area. Peter King works at the Delawana as our night watchman.

Lamoureux Lane: Eli Lamoureux led an exhilarating life, first as a deputy for the Department of Game and Fisheries, where his only pay was a percentage of the fines levied against poachers. Eli worked in lumber camps, trapped, hunted, cut ice for ice houses, and guided at the Delawana for 50 years. The Lamoureux family has several members working at the Delawana today.

Corbière Crossing: Joe Corbière was a legend in the community; born in 1873 he was adopted by a voyageur and settled on Beausoleil Island. He was fluent in English, French, and Ojibwa. With his deafness in later years, Joe learned to lip read in all three languages. He was renowned for his knowledge of weather, as he could predict storms well in advance.

Notice to Hikers: We encourage you to wander off the trails, but please watch out for Poison Ivy and Poison Oak. We encourage you to leave the island with the things that you brought, and dispose of any bottles or paper back on the mainland. Please respect the wildlife as we are trying to re-establish the natural flora and fauna to the island.

Enjoy your hike on Royal Island.