



Skmaqn-Port-la-Joye-Fort Amherst National Historic Site



Welcome to Skmaqn-Port-la-Joye-Fort Amherst National Historic Site

Home to the Mi'kmaq for over 10,000 years, *Epekwitk* – named *Isle Saint-Jean* by the French in the 17th Century – boasts this monumental site where four cultures converged: The Mi'kmaq, French, Acadian and British. Along with their friendships, conflicts and alliances, they set the stage for what would become Prince Edward Island.

This harbour, and landscape, plays an integral role in the history of the first permanent European settlements on the Island; serving as the port of entry, a colonial outpost in the Franco-British struggle for North America, and the seat of government until 1768.

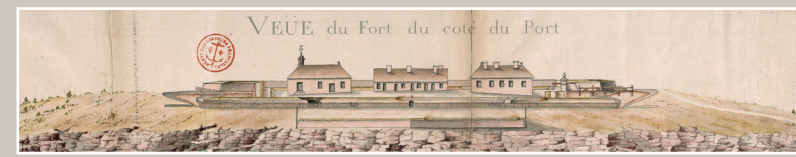
Skmaqn

Meaning “the waiting place” in Mi'kmaq, Skmaqn (pronounced Ska-MAA-kin) is named for the important practice whereby Mi'kmaq leaders and Elders from various parts of Mi'kma'ki – which stretched from present-day Cape Breton Island to the Gaspé Peninsula, including Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, much of New Brunswick, parts of Newfoundland, and into the state of Maine – would assemble annually during the French regime at Port-la-Joye, to renew their political and military alliance with the French. Grand ceremonies of feasting, as well as speeches, and presentation of French gifts would take place in the area.

Port-la-Joye

This harbour provided an ideal setting for the strategic defence of a small colonial outpost. In 1720, three ships, owned by *la Compagnie de l'Isle Saint-Jean*, set sail from Rochefort, France, carrying 300 settlers. Upon arrival, some of these newcomers began construction of Port-la-Joye, while others decided to settle elsewhere on the Island.

Michel Haché dit Gallant and his family came to Port-la-Joye from Beaubassin, becoming one of the first known Acadian families to settle on Isle Saint-Jean. They settled between the French outpost and the creek flowing into the cove, an area which soon developed as the heart of Port-la-Joye's civilian community. It was hoped that this settlement would become a thriving agricultural



community, capable of supplying the French colonial stronghold at Louisbourg. The settlers constructed structures at Port-la-Joye to accommodate the small garrison of *la Compagnie Franche de la Marine* and civil authorities. These included a chapel, a storehouse, a bakery, a forge, a powder magazine, barracks, and the commandant's lodgings. The future of the colony looked promising, and, in 1721, the French naval officer, Louis Denys de la Ronde, exclaimed that Port-la-Joye was: “One of the most beautiful harbours the eye can behold!”

Taking advantage of the natural river highways, settlers established farms along the Rivière-du-Nord-Est (now the Hillsborough River, a Canadian Heritage River), extending as far as Havre Saint-Pierre (now St. Peter's Bay). They also delved into aquaculture, establishing fishing settlements by following the most lucrative stocks.

Mi'kmaq: Neighbours and Allies

The Mi'kmaq people moved seasonally throughout Mi'kma'ki, where they also helped the French settlers adapt to their new environment. This forged close relationships with the settlers, and a good alliance with French officials.

In recognition of the assistance provided by the Mi'kmaq, French officials travelled from the Fortress of Louisbourg to attend the gatherings held here, at Skmaqn-Port-la-Joye-Fort Amherst. Speeches, feasts and a presentation of gifts to the Mi'kmaq were all included as part of these annual celebrations.



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Skmaqñ Port-la-Joye–Fort Amherst National Historic Site

191 Haché Gallant Drive
Rocky Point, PE

Getting Here

Skmaqñ–Port-la-Joye–Fort Amherst is located on Route 19. Follow Route #1, the Trans Canada Highway, west from Charlottetown to Cornwall. Then follow Route 19 for approximately 15 km.

How to Reach Us

2 Palmers Lane
Charlottetown, PE C1A 5V8
Tel: (902) 675-2220
pc.skmaqñ.pc@canada.ca
www.parkscanada.ca/skmaqñ

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Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.



Struggle for Dominion

With the fall of Fortress Louisbourg in 1745, British troops from New England took possession of Isle Saint-Jean, burning settlements at Port-la-Joye and Trois-Rivières (now Brudenell Point). By this time, Acadia had been under British rule for more than thirty years. With the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, the Island returned to French possession.



Parks Canada, artist: Claude Picard

With mounting tensions in British-controlled Acadia, Isle Saint-Jean received an influx of mainland Acadian refugees, increasing the population to an estimated 2,246. In 1755, the Great Upheaval saw most mainland Acadians deported to the Thirteen Colonies. The *Acadian Odyssey* ensued, including migrations from Virginia to England, a return for some to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, as well as migrations to Quebec and Spanish-controlled Louisiana by 1764.

Deportation

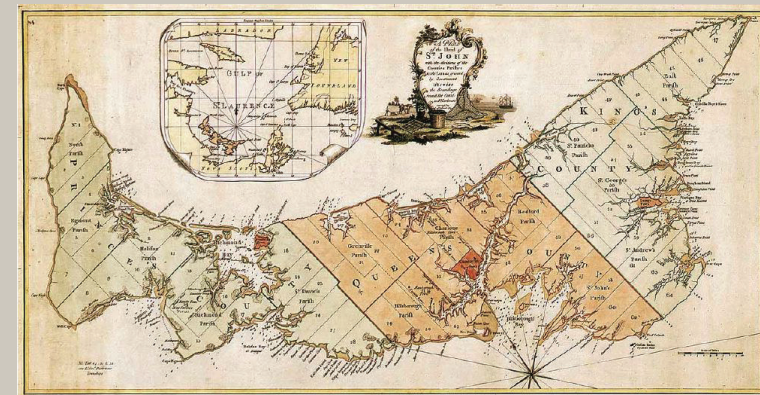
In 1758, the British took final and decisive possession of Isle Saint-Jean, and ordered a mass deportation of the French and Acadian population. Colonel Lord Andrew Rollo issued the terms of take-over to the French commandant, and deployed a contingent of his forces to gather ~4,100 French and Acadians living on Isle Saint-Jean. While approximately 3,000 were assembled at Port-la-Joye for deportation to France, a significant number, located in Malpeque, escaped. They were assisted by the Mi'kmaq in evading the British, while others fled to the mainland in their own vessels. More than half of those deported perished en route, many drowning when three of the thirteen transport vessels sank. Others died aboard the overcrowded and undersupplied vessels, or shortly after their arrival to French ports, from dehydration and malnutrition.

Fort Amherst

A contingent of Rollo's forces began construction of a new fort using materials from the former French fortifications at Port-la-Joye. It was named after the commander of the British Forces in North America: Major General Lord Jeffery Amherst. While not as large as many British colonial forts, it was protected by 18 cannons, a waterless moat, and a drawbridge. When, in 1768, Charlottetown became the colonial capital of St. John's Island, the military moved across the harbour and established Fort Edward (now Victoria Park). Fort Amherst was abandoned and only the earthworks remain visible today.

Holland Survey

Captain Samuel Johannes Holland was commissioned as Surveyor General to survey much of British North America. Starting with St. John's Island, and using new innovations (such as the astronomical clock and the refracting telescope), he set out to survey and map the entire Island, laying it out in lots and parishes. He began the survey from his home, adjacent to Fort Amherst at Observation Cove (now Holland Cove), in October 1764. He completed it in 1766, and was then granted Lot 28 (Tryon area) as payment during the 1767 land lottery. Ensuring it was settled by farmers and former soldiers, Holland went on to other commissions, administering the lot as an absentee landlord. By 1798, there were 136 tenants on the lot.



Samuel Holland's 1765 Survey and Map of St. John's Island
National Archives of Canada.



Skmaqn–Port-la-Joye–Fort Amherst

National Historic Site



Walking Trails

① Old Harbour Path

This paved and accessible 0.3 km interpretive trail shares the stories of Skmaqn–Port-la-Joye–Fort Amherst. Learn about its role in early European settlement during the Franco-British struggle for imperial dominance.

② DePensens Path

This 0.2 km path connects the Old Harbour Path to the Skmaqn Trail. Named for Jacques d’Espiet de Pensens, esquire, officer of the colonial regular troops in Acadia, Placentia (Plaisance), and Isle Royale (Cape Breton Island); councillor of the Conseil Supérieur of Isle Royale; king’s lieutenant and commandant of Isle Saint-Jean; knight of the order of Saint-Louis, who was instrumental in the early development of the French colony.

③ Farmscapes Trail

This 3 km trail boasts previously inaccessible landscapes, where historic farm properties dating from 18th century French and Acadian settlement era, and 19th century British settlement era, that were later established when cannon gave way to plough.

④ Alliance Alley

This 0.5 km path connects the Old Harbour Path and the Skmaqn Trail, and refers to the historic political alliance once formed between the Mi’kmaq and French officials.



Exhibit



Hiking



Lookout



Washroom



Range Light



Parking



Picnic Area



Accessible Trail



Visitor Centre



Wigwam

Monument

Visitor Centre

⑤ Rangelight Row

This 0.6 km trail highlights two range lights; beacons of navigation that allow for safe entry to and exit from Charlottetown Harbour.

⑥ Skmaqn Trail

This 0.8 km trail, meaning “the waiting place” in Mi’kmaq, is named for the annual practice where grand ceremonies of feasting, as well as speeches and presentation of French gifts, would take place in the area along this trail. As French leaders were often delayed in arriving from Fortress Louisbourg, the Mi’kmaq would wait here.

⑦ Coastal Forest Path

This 0.3 km wood chip trail connects the Skmaqn Trail to the Visitor Reception Centre and weaves through a forested area along a section of Prince Edward Island’s south shore coastline.

⑧ Survey Lane

This 0.3 km path is named for the fact that Samuel Johannes Holland began his survey of the British possession in North America from this small island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. His home and base command was located just adjacent to Fort Amherst.

⑨ Warren Farm Path

This 0.6 km gravel path is named Warren Farm after Walter Patterson’s wife’s family name. Patterson was St. John’s Island’s first Governor (appointed in 1769), and acquired farmland in this area.



Spend the day at Skmaqn–Port-la-Joye–Fort Amherst National Historic Site

As you take in panoramic views of Charlottetown Harbour, pack a picnic basket and savour lunch atop the footings of the old British fort. Spend the day surrounded by history and nature as you explore over 6 km of scenic trails. Bring a kite and ride the wind as it rushes over lush green fields and rolling meadows.

Services for Visitors with Disabilities

The Old Harbour Path interpretive trail and portions of the grounds are wheelchair accessible.

Pets

Only pets on a leash are permitted on the grounds.

Enjoy Your Visit

Although the earthworks of the British fort are the only visible reminder of the diverse history of this site, it still has many stories to tell. Discover why it remains a special place, where you will feel the courageous and determined spirits of our ancestors, and experience the breathtaking beauty and rich history here.

Are you a descendant of Michel Haché dit Gallant and Anne Cormier? If so, like thousands of their descendants, Skmaqn–Port-la-Joye–Fort Amherst is a very special place for you and your family.

Learn about the site’s history by exploring the Old Harbour Path interpretive trail.

Enjoy a picnic overlooking the panoramic and majestic view of the Charlottetown Harbour.

Walk the Rangelight Row trail and see the beacons that help ships to navigate safely in and out of the Charlottetown Harbour.

Explore the 6 km trail system, which boasts the newly-opened areas of an 18th century Acadian settlement and 19th century British farmlands.

Fly a kite and enjoy the open green space, rolling fields and meadows, as well as the spectacular vistas of the Charlottetown Harbour.

Enjoy a spectacular view, including the Charlottetown Canada Day fireworks display, as it soars into the sky, and admire the colourful reflection in the waters surrounding Skmaqn–Port-la-Joye–Fort Amherst.

Do a pastel or crayon rubbing of the Tribute Monument, erected by local descendants in the 1980s, and bring the rubbing back home with you.

Check out the traditional birch bark wigwam, built by Mi’kmaq Elders in collaboration with the Mi’kmaq Confederacy of PEI, and ask friendly staff about offered summer programming.

Take pause at the Acadian Odyssey Monument and learn about the tragic implications of the Franco-British struggle for imperial dominance of 18th century North America, and the story of the deportation of the French and Acadian population.

Participate in special events, such as the festivities of Acadian National Feast Day and the commemorative event, Jour du Souvenir Acadien (Acadian Day of Remembrance), which marks the 1758 Acadian Deportation from the shores of Isle Saint-Jean.

Visit parks.canada.gc.ca/spljfa to learn more.

Before you leave Rocky Point

There’s much more to see and do following your visit to Skmaqn–Port-la-Joye–Fort Amherst National Historical Site: You may wish to visit the Blockhouse Lighthouse, the Holland Survey Monument, and go on to enjoy a spectacular coastal drive along Prince Edward Island’s scenic Route 19.

During your travels, you will discover warm beaches and great food, as well as unique experiences ranging from honey and lavender farms to a French-style terroir vineyard, antique shops, artists’ studios, and more!

