

Palliser Restaurant, Motel and Gifts Site

Historical Review

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4 DISTINCT TIME PERIODS

Mi'kmaq Period (10000 BCE – 1500s)

- Not much is known or documented about his group, only that they may have been to the area to hunt and fish before the Europeans arrived.
- Had summer camps (tents) all along the Salmon River for hunting and fishing. Since they were semi-nomadic, they travelled inland to Stewiacke and Shubenacadie during the winter months¹.
- Made birch bark canoes for hunting and river crossings at the summer camps².
- The Mi'kmaq provided the names for most of the geography in the area.
- Taught the Acadians about the land, there was a strong relationship between the two groups.

¹ S. F. Creighton, *Colchester County: A Pictorial History: Revised Edition*. (Oxford, NS: Municipality of Colchester Recreation, 1979), p. 11.

² Creighton, S. F., *Colchester County: A Pictorial History (Revised Edition)*, p. 11.

French Acadian Period (Late 16th Century – 1775)

- Settlement called Vil le Bourge / Vil la Bourg, or “Townsville” (located around present day Lower Truro) was founded in 1714¹. Another French Acadian settlement was located in Old Barns². The village was burnt down by the British under control of Abijah Willard in 1755, and only two structures were left standing in the area by the British, leading to the origin of the name of Old Barns³. The Colchester region remained desolate for around 10 years until the Planters arrived ten years later.
- The French created dike systems that were built to turn salt marshes into farmland in Lower Truro. No fertilizer was needed due to the high organic content of the mud and water in the area. Agriculture is still in use in Lower Truro today and the fields and dikes are protected by the Agricultural Marshland Conservation Act (2000), showing how important these lands are to the Provincial Government. 17 thousand hectares of marshland surrounded by 240km of dikes constructed in the early 1700s in the Fundy region are protected⁴.
- The “finest farms” were located in Lower Truro, with agricultural operations including apple orchards, Indian corn stands and tobacco fields. The French stuck to Lower Truro, not venturing into the forests where Truro is today, simply because they stayed where the best farms were⁵. Today the land around the site is labeled as Ac4/A soil.

- It is possible that there are remaining Acadian *aboiteaux* located on or near the site. They are wooden drainage pipes built by the Acadians in the dikes with a flap at the end that would let water leave the pipe but not the high tide water enter.

¹ Colchester County, *Central Colchester Communities: Lower Truro*, p. 1. Retrieved from <http://www.colchester.ca/communities-cc>.

² Colchester County, *Central Colchester Communities: Old Barns*, p.1. Retrieved from <http://www.colchester.ca/communities-cc>.

³ Colchester County, *Central Colchester Communities: Lower Truro*, p. 1. Retrieved from <http://www.colchester.ca/communities-cc>.

⁴ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Agricultural Marshland Conservation Act Introduced*, November 7th, 2000, p. 1. Retrieved from <http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20001107007>

⁵ Creighton, S. F., *Colchester County: A Pictorial History (Revised Edition)*, p. 14-15.

British Loyalist Period (1761-1786)

- Settlers arrived in 1761 from New England, Ireland and Scotland and landed near the Palliser site in Old Barns¹. The group of people who arrived on Savage's Island are considered to be the founders of the town of Truro.
- It is disputed that the actual landing site may have been at Board Landing or Fort Belcher. However, the site is not 100% certain, according to members of the Colchester Archives.
- Savage's Island (Figure 1), named after John Savage, the man who was later granted the land, was the site of the original landing party². The piece of land is less than a mile away from the Palliser site (Figure 2). Today it is no longer an island, it is connected to the mainland north west of the treatment plant on the Glooscap Trail in Lower Truro.
- The British Loyalists brought industry, hard work, religion (Protestantism) and social life to Colchester County³, and leading to the boom of shipbuilding in the coming years.



Figure 1



Figure 2

¹ Town of Truro, *Truro's Past*. Retrieved from <http://www.truro.ca/truro-past.html>.

² Town of Truro, *Truro's Past*. Retrieved from <http://www.truro.ca/truro-past.html>.

³ Creighton, S. F., *Colchester County: A Pictorial History (Revised Edition)*, p. 21-28.

Shipbuilding Period (1787 – 1890)

- The first ship built in the Cobequid Bay area was at the Board Landing (Dickson Yard) in Lower Truro in 1787. The boat was a schooner named *Charles* after its builder, Charles Dickson¹. He was a celebrated public figure in Truro. He was not only a shipbuilder, he worked as a local politician in Onslow, a merchant who had a store with his sons, and was an influential landowner. Charles Dickson was touted as “the most influential businessman of his day”². The site was selected at the mouth of Moose Creek (Figure 3), behind and to the right of the current Palliser restaurant³. There was soon a shipyard on both sides of the Salmon River when one was built on the Onslow side a few years later⁴. The Onslow shipyard became much larger than the Lower Truro shipyard over time. In the year 1864, the land where the larger shipbuilding operations was located was sold by Dickson and belonged to a Captain Robert Merriam⁵.
- Charles Dickson, in the year 1796, built his last ship, a 500-ton barque launched from Dickson Yard, an event watched by the whole town. The ship was in full sail, packed with people on the top deck (including a band playing music), which is not proper launch technique (for safety reasons). When it hit the water, it came very close to sinking. The ship almost rolled over into the Salmon River⁶. Some say that launching a ship with people aboard is bad luck, and later that year, after Dickson had travelled to the West Indies on his new ship, he died 3 days after returning to Nova Scotia of yellow fever⁷.

- James Crowe was a shipbuilder and politician from Old Barns who was active in the industry from 27th August 1815 when he built his first ship to the last on 31st October 1890⁸. His ships set sail at Board Landing and Dickson Yard.
- A total of 26 ships were constructed at Board Landing⁹, however an estimated number of around a hundred were christened and first set sail at this location¹⁰.
- Only lasted for around 150 years but was incredibly influential on the local economy at the time. Shipbuilding ended with the age of steam, when rail travel became popular.
- The shipyard at board landing declined in the latter half of the 19th century. There were not many ships built here after 1850. On a map of Colchester County in 1871 collected from the Colchester Archives, the land around board landing is still listed as the “SHIPYARD”. The Forest Princess, launched from board landing in 1873, was the only ship of any importance launched in 15 years¹¹ and was the last ship from board landing to receive media attention in newspapers across the province¹².
- Hundreds of wooden ships produced in this part of the Bay of Fundy. More important than farming at the time and gave everyone in the County employment and opportunity. During the heyday of the shipbuilding industry, the logging industry was also a flourishing business in the region.



Figure 3

¹ Mildred Pulsifer Burrows, *The history of Lower Truro, 1696-1999*. (Truro, NS: L & B Print, 1999). p. 34.

² Thomas Miller, *Historical and Genealogical Record of the First Settlers of Colchester*. (Halifax, NS: A. & W. MacKinlay, 1873). p. 384.

³ Wade Yorke, *Old bridge's fate is unknown*. (Truro Daily, September 25th, 1970). p. 1.

⁴ Burrows, M., *The history of Lower Truro, 1696-1999*. p. 34.

⁵ Burrows, M., *The history of Lower Truro, 1696-1999*. p. 34.

⁶ Carol Campbell & James F. Smith. *Planters of Grantees of Cobequid, Nova Scotia, 1761 – 1780, Volume 1 (A-K)*. (Truro, NS, 2011). p. 261

⁷ Campbell, C. & Smith, J., *Planters of Grantees of Cobequid, Nova Scotia, 1761 – 1780, Volume 1 (A-K)*. p. 261

⁸ John M. Blaikie & William Thomas Hill, *Shipbuilding in Nova Scotia. Canada, 1859-1891: Some vessels built on the Colchester County, Bay of Fundy shore, Nova Scotia, Canada*. p. 1

⁹ Burrows, M., *The history of Lower Truro, 1696-1999*. p. 34.

¹⁰ Miller, T., *Historical and Genealogical Record of the First Settlers of Colchester*. p. 384.

¹¹ Burrows, M., *The history of Lower Truro, 1696-1999*. p. 34.

¹² Halifax Evening Reporter, December 28th, 1872.

TIMELINE OF THE PALLISER PROPERTY

The history of the immediate site begins with the indigenous people of Colchester County. There had been a ferry used on the site, dating back all the way to the time of canoes, before the Board Landing Bridge was constructed in 1860¹. It became an important road connecting not only Truro and Onslow but from Amherst to Halifax as well. The replacement bridge was torn down in the 1970s² and has not been rebuilt since the newly built Highway 102 bridge crossing opened.

The earliest known landowner of the site, Andrew Gammel, was first recorded in 1763, as per the Colchester Archives. He was an original loyalist settler of Truro. He was killed by a falling tree and his sons Archibald and Robert Gammel took over the property. The brothers sold 1000 acres of the land to David McKeen in 1789, around 20 years after their father's death, but did not include the land designated as the *board landing* in the sale³. A year later, in 1790, the half-acre *board landing* was sold to Robert Johnson for £9⁴. This part of town was a very busy spot at this time, since the area was home to farms, Truro's first inn, a shipbuilding hub, and the nautical entry point to the town (a quick and popular form of travel at the time since it would take a minimum of 3 days to get to Halifax by horse⁵).

Stephen Gourley was the owner of the first inn in Truro, located on the property⁶. It is not known if the inn is the current Motel Office structure, since the Palliser's website says it was built in the late 1700s⁷, while members of the Colchester Archives say it is possible that the structure was built in the mid to late 1800s.

The shipbuilding operations that occurred on the site at Moose Creek, on the eastern side of the site, were very important to the community during the age of sail (19th Century). Even though Colchester County is not as well-known as some other shipbuilding communities, such as Lunenburg, some of the most important ships to set sail in Nova Scotia were launched here. One example is the *Charles* (1787), the first ship built in Colchester County, because the builder received a government subsidy to start a business⁸. It started the building boom in the Bay of Fundy area that provided industry to the area for the next Century. Another example is the *Lady Strange*, a ship built for Samuel Cunard in 1827, the Canadian shipping magnate from Halifax⁹.

After the shipyard became unused on both sides of the river in the mid-1800s, the piece of land became better known to the people of Truro as the part of the upland farm of John Bishop. The land was then owned by John Dixon, where a large area of “splendid” marsh had been reclaimed from the Bay for increased farming operations¹⁰.

The first piece of what was to become the motel site we see in 2015 happened in the 1940s when the current sections 11-25 and 26-40 of the motel were built as roadside cabins for travellers. They were then turned into motel rooms ten years later when the site became the Tideview Motel in 1953. The first noted addition to the motel site was the construction of section 1-10 and then the dining room, the banquet room and the gift shop all being built in the same year as the opening of the Tideview Motel. The motel became the Palliser Restaurant, Motel and Gifts when the property was purchased by Allan Bruce in the late 1960s. The operations expanded with the last motel section, section 41-42 was built in the 1970s¹¹. The previous owner had owned the land for 42 years before selling the property to the County of Colchester.

The Tidal Bore Tourist Center that is on the site was built in the last 20 years. It has no historical value.

¹ E.M. Nelson, *Cobequid Bay Bridge: Seen As Important Link 100 Years Ago*. (Truro Daily News, April 30th, 1960). p. 1.

² Yorke, W., *Old bridge's fate is unknown*. p. 1.

³ Colchester County Archives. *Colchester Registry of Deeds Book 2*, 1891. p. 531

⁴ Colchester County Archives. *Colchester Registry of Deeds Book 2*, 1891. p. 449

⁵ Campbell, C. & Smith, J., *Planters of Grantees of Cobequid, Nova Scotia, 1761 – 1780, Volume 1 (A-K)*. p. 261

⁶ Campbell, C. & Smith, J., *Planters of Grantees of Cobequid, Nova Scotia, 1761 – 1780, Volume 1 (A-K)*. p. 411

⁷ Palliser Restaurant, Motel and Gifts, History, p. 1. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20130212070525/http://www.palliserrestaurantmotelandgifts.ca/>

⁸ Burrows, M., *The history of Lower Truro, 1696-1999*. p. 34.

⁹ Burrows, M., *The history of Lower Truro, 1696-1999*. p. 34.

¹⁰ Nova Scotia Historical Society. Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society Volumes 7-10 (1891).

¹¹ Palliser Restaurant, Motel and Gifts, History, p. 1. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20130212070525/http://www.palliserrestaurantmotelandgifts.ca/>