

## A Brief History of the Maple Rest Heritage House

### Sandbanks Provincial Park at West Lake



Maple Rest, about 1965; Image 17-6635

Perhaps the first landowner of Lot 1, (Block D), South Side West Lake (SSWL), shown on the 1835 Hallowell Township settlers map was **Conrad Bongard**. The Bongard family were among the earliest settlers of Prince Edward County, arriving with the Loyalists in 1784.

In 1863 **Daniel Pettet** purchased 210 acres of land on West Lake (Lots 1 and 2) and built the present structure. A late-Victorian brick veneer home, it reflected the growing wealth within the local agricultural economy of Prince Edward County.

Those two lots were just west of the present County Road 18, and extended south from West Lake to the boundary with Athol Township. The lot to the west, on the edge of the dunes, was owned by **Amos McDonald**, and the one parallel to the road and across from the Disciple Church at the junction of County Roads 18 and 12, was owned by **Henry Platt**.

The **McDonald, Platt, Pettet, Hyatt** and other neighbouring farmers left their mark on this area of Block D, not the least being the removal of the existing white pine and cedar that had stabilized the sands across the dunes. As late as 1850, the dunes were said be densely vegetated, but that was certainly not the case after those first settlers started removing those stands of pine for ship-masts and cedar for fencing, and allowing cattle to graze on what was left of the scrub vegetation.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the effects of removing the remaining trees for fencing or firewood, and the grazing of cattle during the Barley Days had continued the inexorable movement of the dunes over the fertile farmland.

**Amos McDonald**, as one of the farmers who had lost the most land to the encroaching sands (and, ironically, whose ancestors had likely exacerbated the problem), petitioned the Ontario government to do something to help.

They appointed naturalist and conservationist **Arthur Herbert Richardson**, who initiated a series of hard fences, mulching with hay and tree plantings on and around the dunes that continued into the 1960s to try to mitigate the sand migration.

The evidence of those plantings can still be seen in the remnants of weathered wooden fences still visible in the southern parts of the dunes, and the poplars and willow trees that flourish in many other areas. Perhaps Richardson's largest extant planting is that of pine trees, now towering in densely packed rows just opposite the exit to the new West Lake Campground.



Above: Movement of sand and remedial plantings by A.H. Richardson, about 1930; top: Image: 12-3104, bottom: Image 12-1981



Front view, about 1973; Image 17-8699



Rear/side view, about 1973; Image 17-8701



The restored house (rear), 1999; Image 17-6221



Maple Rest, 2017; Image 17-6611, John A. Brebner

The house and land were sold to **William Wright**, who lived in the area until his wife **Margaret (Carter)** died in 1924.

In 1926, the house and waterfront was bought by **Mitchell and Florence (Forshee) Kleinsteuber**.

The **Kleinsteuber** family had emigrated from Germany soon after 1855 and first settled in Elzevir Township, Hastings County. Several family members moved to Hallowell in Prince Edward in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to farm adjoining properties bordering the south shore of West Lake.

Later, two men from Rochester, New York, who had previously holidayed in the Wright house, approached Florence for a room. Florence was reluctantly convinced to open the house to tourists, and by the mid-1930s, her tourist business was in full swing.

This was the heyday for many of the private houses, lodges and hotels that had opened up in the late 19th century to cater to a new "20<sup>th</sup> century leisure-class". The Lakeshore Lodge was just west on West Point, the Lakeland Hotel south on Lakeland Point, and many other smaller tourist establishments were scattered around nearby farm properties, and full of summer guests.

By the 1920s, the accessibility of the area by rail, and especially by the now-affordable automobile, had the new "tourists" all clamouring for summer holiday accommodation in the unique Sandbanks area.

By the 1930s, Maple Rest was a bustling summer business. To accommodate the growing demand, Mitchell built nine waterfront cottages, and developed the surrounding area for a hundred tents and trailers.

Meals for the guests were prepared by Florence from the produce grown on the farm, and her summer kitchen and dining area were often crowded with up to 40 guests.

Florence's daughter **Ruth** and her husband **Frank Millard** built a house next door, "*Shady Nook*", also helped to cater meals for the summer tourists.

In 1964, **Ron and Jean Barrett** bought the *Maple Rest Beach Resort*. Jean convinced her brother Bill and his wife Ruby to become partners and expand the business.

But by 1971, the long-simmering issue of sand being removed day and night from the nearby quarry at the largest dune, located only several hundred metres to the west, raised the alarm about increased habitat destruction as well as the prospect of continued industrialization of the area.

The noise and dust from these operations certainly disturbed the tranquility of their guests, who were not expecting their holiday camping to be located next to a 24-hour open-pit mining operation!

Lake Ontario Cement Ltd. of Picton held a 75-year lease on 15.6 acres of Crown land, filled with what they mistakenly thought was a renewable sand resource, and which allowed them to remove as much sand as they wanted for \$1 a year.

Jean and other local tourist operators appealed to the company to limit operations during the summer season, but without success.

In the summer of 1972, the Barrett children, along with visiting campers and newly-minted environmental activists, manned a picket line to block the trucks.

What was initially just a local tourist annoyance, soon became a province-wide rallying call for environmental organizations.

People Against Contaminated Environments (PACE), an environmental group based in Belleville, found allies in national groups such as Pollution Probe and the Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation, and challenged the Ontario Government to cancel the lease.

While the lawsuit was unsuccessful, both the negative publicity and increasing public awareness of the value of unique geological areas and wildlife habitats such as the Sandbanks, convinced the provincial government to appropriate the lease, and by 1973, removal of the sand ceased.

With that began the incorporation of the two separate Sandbanks and Outlet Parks into today's Sandbanks Provincial Park, encompassing the long sand bar from Wellington in the north, through the more recently acquired MacDonald farm lands at West Point, and south to the beaches of the Outlet River to Salmon Point, creating the magical landscape that we enjoy today.



*Oblique aerial view of Sandbanks, looking west, about 1965?, Maple Rest, bottom right, circled in red, Lake Ontario Cement quarry in yellow. Image 17-1221a*

*Note the diagonal fences and tree-lines installed by Richardson to mitigate sand drift, also the many old roads and trails still visible through the dunes.*



*Maple Rest (circled) and hidden by trees in this recent view looking west, 2017; Image 17-7727a, John A. Brebner*



*Mitchell Kleinsteuber (right), with father Charles, daughter Ruth and grandson Ross Millard (17-6629a, courtesy Ruth Millard)*



In 1998, long overdue renovations to the house began.

While much of the original structure was beyond repair, as much as possible of the elaborate decorative woodwork was carefully preserved, as seen in the current restoration.

The basic house plan remained the same, but additional bathrooms were added and doorways were widened. The front porch was rebuilt, a 1960's addition at the rear was removed and the present back porch, and upper deck which provide such a spectacular view of West Lake sunsets, were added.



Finally, the house was decorated and equipped with almost all the period furnishings coming from within Prince Edward County.

[The Friends of Sandbanks](#) contributed the purchase of those furnishings, and the house was reopened as **Maple Rest Heritage House** in June 1999.



[Sandbanks Provincial Park](#) maintains the house for year-round overnight guest rentals, and for many years, the Friends of Sandbanks have held events such as their Annual General Meetings and Family Day SnowFest in this fabulous location. [More details...](#)

The Park also maintains another heritage property for family rentals during the summer, the [Jacques Cottage](#) located on Lake Ontario on West Point.



Top to bottom: Back porch (17-6591), Dining room (17-6588), Living room (17-6594), Master bedroom (17-6596).

Right: Winter view, (16-0583)

All images John A. Brebner, 2017



## Related Information:

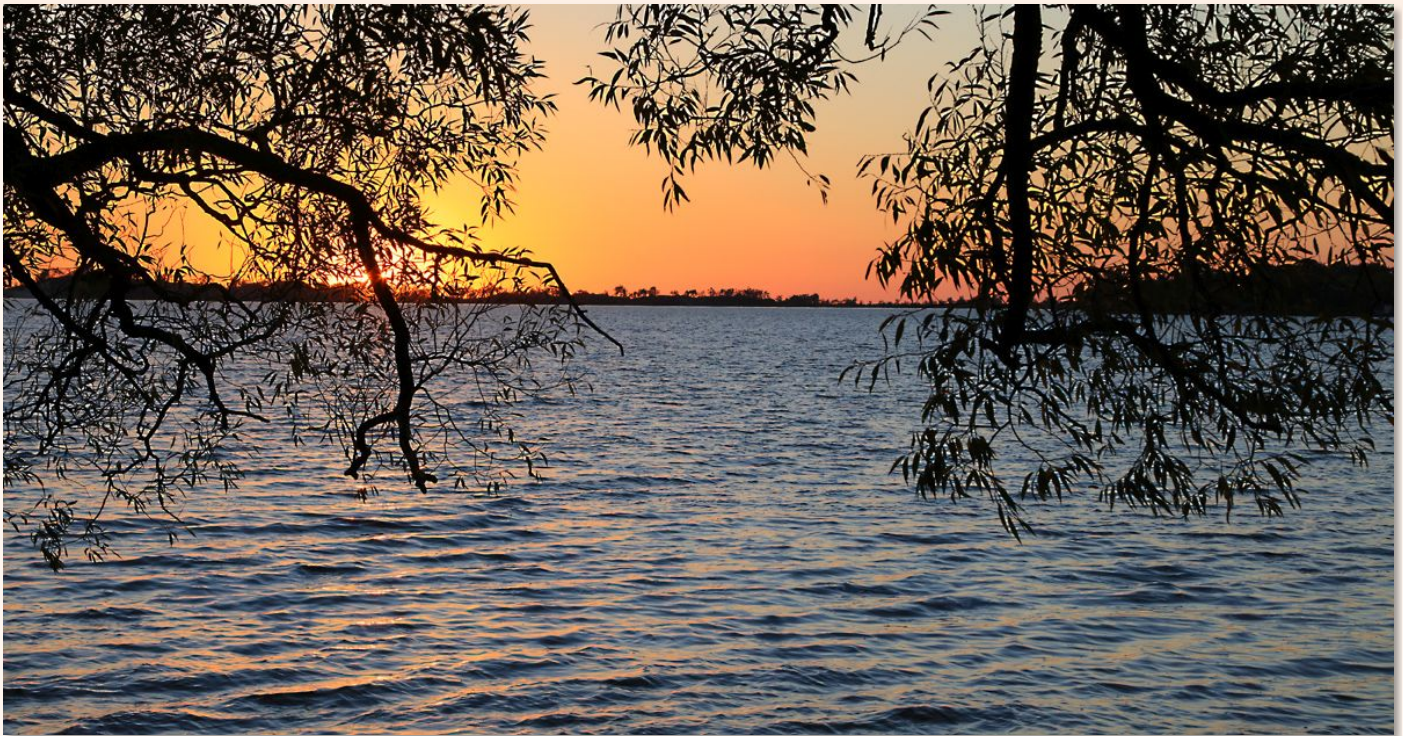
- [1835 Hallowell Township settlers map](#)
- [1863 Tremaine Map, East and West Lakes](#)
- [1852 Roche Map](#)
- [1888 Hallowell Township Map](#)
- [Maple Rest interior photographs](#)
- [Progress of Sand Drift 1852 - 1922](#)
- [1922 Richardson Dunes Images](#)
- [Photo Album, Family Day 2015](#)
- [Photo Album, Family Day 2016](#)

## West Lake Families Genealogies:

- [Genealogy of the Hyatt Family](#)
- [Genealogy of the Kleinsteuber Family](#)
- [Genealogy of the MacDonald Family](#)
- [Genealogy of the Pettet Family](#)
- [Genealogy of the Wright Family](#)

*Please note that these genealogies are very much works in progress!*

*John Brebner is the compiler of these family histories, and can be reached directly at [john.brebner@brebner.com](mailto:john.brebner@brebner.com)*



*Above: Sunset across West Lake, (Image 15-1955, John A. Brebner)*

*Compiled and written by John A. Brebner for the Friends of Sandbanks Park, 2018*

*© Friends of Sandbanks, 2018*

*version 1.4, March 8th, 2018*

Visit our website at: <http://www.friendsofsandbanks.org>