



## The Palace of the Moon

John A. Brebner, March 2018

Extracted from the "**Belleville Intelligencer**"  
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With images from the Eleanor Lindsay MacDonald collection in the Sandbanks Park Archives.

"The name conjures up images of moonlight walks on the beach, and warm summer breezes.

"Perched precariously on a sand dune, supported by long cedar posts on one side, the dance hall was an idyllic spot and perfect for young romance.

"The Palace-of-the-Moon came to life in the mid-1930s when young and old alike were looking for inexpensive entertainment during the summer. It was situated in what is today the Sandbanks Provincial Park in Prince Edward County.

"The hall was going to be something much bigger, says county resident **Raymond Conway**, who worked for [Evans Lumber](#) which supplied the wood for the building. (Evans Lumber was established in Picton in 1933, Ed.)

"This fella had big ideas and I think they were good but I don't think he had any money," says Conway, referring to the hall's first owner, **Shipway Laker**. Laker wasn't a local, and little is known about him, but **Bernard Shannon** came into possession of the business, and it is Shannon's name that is widely associated with the hall.



One of the few extant images of the Palace of the Moon; Image 17-8697a



"Mell-O-Dees" logo; Image 17-8696

"During its heyday it did a thriving business. The simple frame building looked like it would slip off its perch but Conway says it was well constructed and had an excellent dance floor.

"Belleville resident **Bruce Parsons** performed there on Wednesday nights around 1949 or '50 with the Mell-O-Dee's orchestra, led by **Jimmy Davies**. This period was a revival for the hall as it had been closed during the war years.

"I want to tell you, on a moonlit night with the sand around, it was quite pretty."

"Chinese colored lanterns illuminated the place. Wooden shutters were propped open with sticks, it was not a palace but it suited the purpose. At one end was the stage and at the other was a canteen where patrons bought hot dogs and popcorn. There was no alcohol served though some was consumed.

"Says Conway, "It was very, very difficult or maybe impossible in this part of Ontario to get a liquor licence, so I'm sure people were brown-bagging it."

"Another county resident who attended dances at the hall was **Loris Minaker**. He confirms Conway's suspicions about alcohol and recalls county constable **Jim Lovelace** had a keen eye for anyone drinking the grog."

"Poor old Jim Lovelace used to run all over the place to try and catch us drinking beer."

"But Lovelace wasn't averse to a drink either.

"He liked to catch us young fellas with booze and that would supply him with all he wanted to drink for the night," Minaker says with a laugh.

"Like everyone else who remembers the Palace-of-the-Moon, Minaker mentions the hardwood dance floor that was so unique at the time. Most floors were made of inexpensive pine.

"They used to shine that floor up and it looked like a mirror when they were done."

"Then he notes, people would walk in with sand on their feet and ruin it again.

"For a while in the 1930s a second building near the dance hall, that was also owned by Shannon, held "one arm bandits". Patrons who felt lucky dropped nickels into them and pulled the handle. Conway played the slot machines, but never hit the jackpot.

"The dance hall closed about 1952. Some people believe that it later burned but exactly what happened is unclear."

*Do you have memories of being at "The Palace of the Moon"? Any old photographs?*

*We'd be happy to digitize them professionally for you in return for their use on our website.*

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