

The Rockingham Heritage Society's

2025 Summer Newsletter



An issue devoted to Birch Cove

Birch Cove – A Half Billion Year Old Story

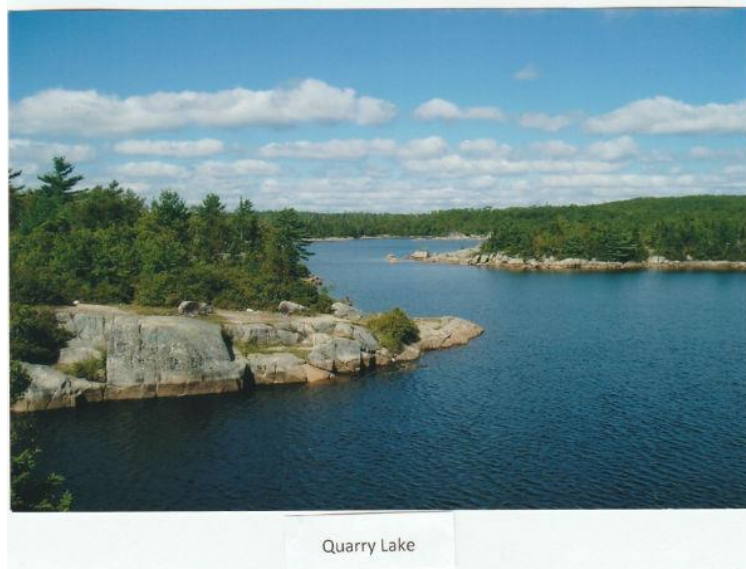
Most people realize Birch Cove has a long and exciting history but few are aware that history is approximately 500 million years old (geologically speaking). Birch Cove is part of the Meguma Terrane, a term which basically refers to the entire southern mainland of Nova Scotia. The Meguma Terrane extends from Yarmouth to the Cobequid Hills north of Truro and from there east as far as Canso. It was once part of the super continent of Gondwana from which it broke off about 470 million years ago. It then basically drifted about, as a small tectonic plate, for about 80 million years until it collided with another terrane (Avalon) which by then had itself become attached to the now extinct continent of Euramerica. The collision between the two terranes was so intense that it turned a lot of Meguma's sedimentary rock into granite. The Meguma Terrane, was once part of what is now northern Africa, Morocco to be exact. Sand blown off the Sahara and onto the seashores of what is now Morocco became slate. There is no better place to see what it looked like, then to check out the former rock quarry at 209 Kearney Lake Road, across Kearney Lake from the swimming beach.



Strata of sedimentary 500 million year old rock near Kearney Lake (photo : Taylor)

However, one doesn't have to go far to see the granite caused by the collision of the Meguma and Avalon Terranes either. The most famous granite caused by the collision of the two terranes is out at Peggy's Cove but one can get a good look at basically the same type of granite at

nearby Quarry Lake. The granite was created when Meguma's slate was melted into magma at a temperature of approximately 800 degrees centigrade roughly 15 km. below the surface. That Quarry Lake granite eventually cooled but lay hidden for another 350 million years under that 15 km. of solid rock. As a result of erosion, but more specifically the result of glacial action, the 15 km. of solid rock was over time, scraped away to expose the granite at Quarry Lake. That's the granite that the Donaldsons extracted in the 1800s and sold to folks in Halifax for curbs, foundations, walls and tombstones.



360 million year old Granite at Quarry Lake (photo: Fairview Historical Society)

The last glacier to cover Birch Cove was a little over a kilometre thick. That's a lot of ice and it did more than just scrape away 15 km. of rock to expose the granite at Quarry Lake. The ice sheet in the last ice event (there were at least five) extended all the way to Sable Island! When that glacier finished melting between 12,000 and 14,000 years ago it not only revealed what we see today in Birch Cove, it also caused a lot of what we don't see . That's because water from the melting ice raised the level of the Atlantic Ocean . It is estimated that over a period of 9000 years the sea rose approximately 120 metres; that's the height of a ten story building. That's when Birch Cove was created because that's when Bedford Basin was created.

Originally Bedford Basin was more like a saucer shaped piece of land with lakes, islands, waterfalls and a river- the Sackville River, flowing from today's Bedford through the Narrows and out to sea. As the Atlantic Ocean rose, seawater flooded into Halifax Harbour and eventually through the Narrows to where the Basin lies today.

After the last ice age, soil began accumulating. It takes about a thousand years for an inch of soil to form. Gradually there was enough soil in Birch Cove to support plants and then trees and grasses. The blueberries on the old CHNS lands arrived between 9 and 12 thousand years ago. This provided a habitat for animals and birds. The return of animals and birds in turn supported the return to the Birch Cove area of humans. It is almost for certain that evidence of early Mi'kmaq settlements near those lakes and river, in what is now Bedford Basin, was covered by the invading sea when sea levels rose.

When plants started returning, it was tundra vegetation at first and then trees such as oak and pine. Eventually hemlock and beach and birch trees set down roots in Birch Cove. While birch trees may have been growing in the area for thousands of years , Birch Cove didn't become officially Birch Cove until local land owner, James Monk gave it the name in 1762.

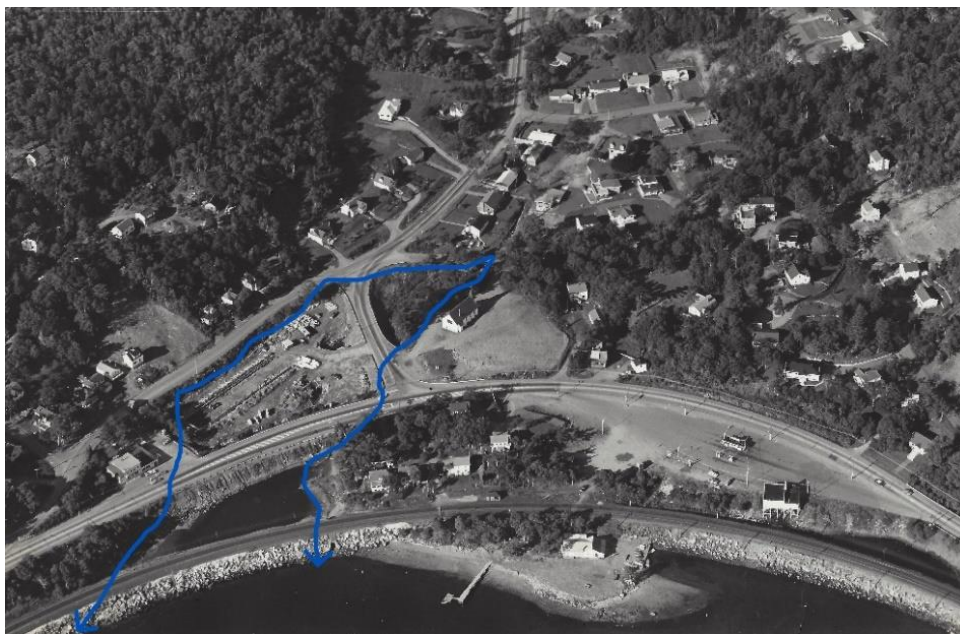
It's amazing to think about how long it took for Birch Cove to get to where it was when the Donaldsons arrived , like a half billion years and when changes did take place during those 500 million years how long they took to occur. In 1811 the area was a pristine forest growing by a pristine salt water cove into which fresh water rushed from several brooks. Then starting in 1855, what had taken half a billion years to form started to disappear. The Nova Scotia Railway cut Birch Cove in half. Later the Bedford Road , which followed the Basin's shoreline, was replaced by the Bedford Highway. That highway cut the inner part of Birch Cove in half again. In 1957 a causeway cut what was left of the inner portion of Birch Cove into two more sections. That causeway joined the Bedford Highway near St. Peter's Church, to the old Bedford Road where today Dakin Drive meets the Kearney Lake Road.



Photo (circa 1957) showing St. Peter's and half of Pine Hill near new causeway (photo : Ainslie)

If that wasn't enough, the portions of the original cove between the railroad and the intersection of Dakin Drive and the Kearney Lake Road were filled in, starting with the construction of the Wedgewood Motel in 1958. Florence Daking's picnic grounds were removed when Saint Peter's Church was built in 1951. Pine Hill which stood beside the picnic grounds was levelled in 1958 with some of its 500 million year old rock going to help fill the tidal marsh on which the Wedgewood Motel was built.

Now in 2025 the speed at which changes have been occurring in Birch Cove since 1855 seems faster than ever. Even the name ' Birch Cove ' is disappearing. As late as 1960 Birch Cove was used as the postal address for people living in the immediate area of St. Peter's – Wedgewood Ave., Donaldson Avenue, Grosvenor Road and Castle Hill Drive for example. That was changed to Rockingham in the sixties. Now in 2025 even the name Rockingham is losing ground to Bedford. A story a half billion years in the making is rapidly disappearing. It's incumbent on all of us to keep what is Birch Cove more than just a memory and the case for a national urban park incorporating Blue Mountain and the Birch Cove Lakes is obviously ROCK SOLID, all 500 million years of it!



Aerial Photo (circa 1958) showing Wedgewood Motel Under Construction (photo: Dept. of Natural Resources)

The original inner section of Birch Cove's shoreline outlined in blue

Saint Peter`s Anglican Church to Celebrate 75 years in 2026

At eleven AM on October 21st, 1951, 215 people crammed into St. Peter`s Anglican Church to participate in the first worship service held in the new church. Bishop R. H. Waterman led the service assisted by Rev. J Stead and Rev. George Arnold. That evening Rev. B.J. Davis led 96 worshippers in Evening Prayer. St. Peter`s, as a chapel of ease of St. John`s Fairview , had become a reality. The over four years of dreams and plans and just plain hard work of Anglicans living in the Rockingham- Birch Cove- Kearney Lake – Prince`s Lodge area of Halifax County had finally paid off.



Saint Peter`s 1951 (photo: Anglican Diocese of NS archives)

On October 17th 1947 Florence Daking willed a piece of property, that had been in her family for close to 225 years, to the Parish of Saint John`s Fairview. The intent was to give Anglicans living in the Rockingham, Birch Cove and Kearney Lake area, land on which they could build a church. Unfortunately , the memory of Florence has all but disappeared. The street, originally

named in honour of her 'Daking' family, was misspelled as Dakin and remains so to this day. That misspelled street and the St. Peter's church hall (Daking Hall) remain the only two public acknowledgements of Florence's existence, generosity and vision. Following World War Two the demand for land on which to build homes exploded. In Birch Cove large pieces of land , originally part of the Donaldson estate, became available. Florence Daking, a descendent of the Donaldsons, owned land between Daking Drive and Bedford Basin. Her cousin, Minnie Dickson, owned property where Silverwood Terrace now lies. Minnie's brother Norman and his wife Bessie owned land in the Kearney Lake Road/Pinewood Terrace area. Florence died in 1948, Bessie in 1950. Minnie died in 1954 and Norman died in 1957. Their collective passings brought to an end an incredible chapter in the history of Birch Cove; however, the Donaldson legacy continues today in part through Saint Peter's. Minnie willed her home and property to the Anglican Diocese . She also willed land for Saint Peter's to build a rectory which the parish did in 1960. It was Florence's dream that an Anglican church be built on her picnic grounds. It was in 1951. Bessie Dickson (Norman's wife) is remembered in one of the three stained glass windows above the altar at Saint Peters.



Bishop Waterman blessing cornerstone Apr. 30, 1951

There was a strong Anglican presence in the Rockingham to Prince's Lodge area of Halifax County in the late 1940's, early 50s. However, many Anglicans, unable or unwilling to travel to Saint John's Fairview chose to attend the United Church in Rockingham. With the promise of land, local Anglicans started collecting donations and pledges to finance their own church. A Sunday School was established in a local Rockingham home. In June 1950 a decision was made to build Saint Peter's and by early 1951 land had been cleared. On April 30th the cornerstone was laid and blessed by Bishop Waterman.

Saint Peter's was initially one of the only places in Birch Cove for community meetings. In 1955 Saint Peter's sponsored a scout group and built a camp at Millers Lake that could sleep 48. The Sunday School grew to over 100 children at one point and that was one of the reasons why

the building of Daking Hall became so crucial. George Messervey was the parish's first Sunday school superintendent with Dr. Marion Dauphinee, the headmistress at Armbrae Academy, teaching the confirmation class.

By 1960 the congregation was financially able to stand on its own. It became a separate parish and was no longer a chapel of ease of Saint John's. The parish's first incumbent priest was Rev. Doug Haviland. The Haviland family was the first to occupy the parish's new rectory which was built across Dakin Drive from the church.

During its first two decades, Saint Peter's was served by four priests. Its first priest Rev George Arnold (1951-53) , would go on to become Bishop. Rev. Arnold was followed by Rev. Wilfred Meadus (1953-1960). He was in turn followed by Rev. Douglas Haviland (1960-1965). When Rev. Haviland had to retire due to ill health, Rev. Meadus returned to Saint Peter's for another four years from 1966 to 1970. In 1970 Rev. Vern Cluett was asked to become priest at Saint Peter's . His tenure at Saint Peter's lasted an incredible twenty-two years! Rev. Cluett retired in 1992.



Choir members circa 1954(photo: Jane Murphy)

Following Rev. Cluett's retirement, Canon Philip and Rev. Ruth Jefferson served as interim priests until the Rev. Dr. Tim Appleton arrived in 1993. When Rev. Appleton became ill and passed away, Rev. James Purchase became priest-in-charge. Rev. Purchase's tenure was followed by Rev. Jane Clattenburg (2003-2008) , Rev. Robert Richmond (2008-2013) and Rev. David Dellapinna (2013-2017). Rev. Elliott Siteman arrived just before covid hit. He left after a short period of time and with covid at its peak, the parish basically ran itself for two years before Rev. Arran Thorpe accepted the parish's call to become its priest.

As the communities around Saint Peter's grew, so did the parish. A church hall was erected in the early

sixties and named in honour of its major benefactor- Florence Daking. The hall was remodelled in 1989 along with the addition of a parish office and narthex.

Parishioners no longer need to live as close to their church as they once did. Today St. Peter's parishioners come from as far away as Dartmouth, Bedford and downtown Halifax. In the fifties and sixties almost all parishioners lived within close proximity to Saint Peter's. The names of those families were synonymous with those found in the local phone directory: Hamshaw, Curren, Duncan, Murphy, Connor, Carnell, Clayton, Taylor, Hollett, Gwynn-Timothy, Boutilier, Francis, McAuley and Gray to name just a few.

Today Saint Peter's continues to serve its parishioners and the Birch Cove-Rockingham-Prince's Lodge-Kearney Lake area, as it has for almost 75 years. Its annual Christmas Craft Fair is slated for November 15th this year. The Birch Cove Christmas Tree will be lit November 30th.

Saint Peter's will be celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2026. Those interested in the parish's special events and opportunities should monitor the St. Peter's website at www.stpetersbirchcove.org



Remodelled Daking Hall 1989



Photo of Birch Cove circa 1964- St. Peter's circled in green; Florence Daking's home in red (photo: Dept. of Public Works)

Rockingham Heritage Society News

Marking the Spot: Researching Buildings & the How and Why of Heritage Registration

Sunday, September 21, 2025

3:00 PM 4:30 PM

Keshen Goodman Library (Thomas Raddall Room)

330 Lacewood Drive Halifax, NS, B3S 0A3 Canada

Ever wondered how to research the history of a building?

Ever wondered what it means to register a heritage property?

Do you own a registered property and want to know what that means in practical terms?

Join us for a free presentation that will address these questions and more.

No registration is required.

This workshop is a partnership between the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia and the Rockingham Heritage Society.

2025 Brenton Trophy Quilts Tournament at Scott Manor House Wednesday August 20th

1-3:30 PM

Rockingham is defending its title as current champions against teams from Waverley, Sackville and Bedford

Canada Strong Programme - Free Entry to National Historic Sites & National Parks

Until Sept. 2nd-

Annual Rockingham Heritage Fall Walk

Belchers Marsh Sunday Oct. 19th 2 PM