

## Early History of Prospect, 1500 - 1754

Settled in 1754 by mostly Irish and English fishermen the village of Prospect, Nova Scotia has endured 250 years of strong winds and salt spray as it sits perched along the rocky shores of the Western Shore of Halifax County. Prior to the settlement of the village by these brave souls the site was considered by sailors and fishermen as a place of refuge during storms and a good place to fish. Characterized by small islands protecting a large deep harbour Prospect has been a place of shelter for centuries.

The original inhabitants of the area were most likely the Mi'kmaq people who populated Nova Scotia prior to European settlement in the early decades of the sixteenth century. Mi'kmaq settlement in the area was probably on a seasonal basis and was primarily based around fishing in the area surrounding Prospect Bay. There was, throughout the late nineteenth century, a family of Mi'kmaq that lived and fished out of the Shad Bay/Blind Bay area. Silas Rand, Baptist minister to the native population of the Maritimes during the mid to late nineteenth century, was one of the first people to collect and document the words of the Mi'kmaq. In his dictionary of their language he provides two words that he attributes to meaning Prospect:

- Prospect, Kunek nemedoomk
- Prospect, pr. n., Naspadakun

It is not clear exactly how he arrived at these words or where his source for these words comes from. However, Rand states that:

**" The word [Naspadakun] refers to any place, person, or thing of Prospect. It doesn't necessarily refer to the area in which the village of Prospect is located. But someone speaking Micmac would call Prospect – [Naspadakun] <sup>1</sup> "**

The first word [Kunek nemedoomk] is quite clearly a place name, while the second is a pronoun. Another set of Mi'kmaq words is provided to us through the work of Elizabeth Frame. In Frame's *List of Micmac Names of Places, Rivers, Etc.*, she states that the words Paspege'ak and Paspebeek are the words that Mi'kmaq used to describe the place where the current village of Prospect is situated. However, after some examination there is some doubt in this attribution as in 1746 Duc D'Anville creates a map showing the location of 'Paspebiac' as being east of Halifax Harbour when in fact it is west. This mistake is carried through in the work *Acadians of the Maritimes* in a chapter detailing the resettlement of Acadians in Nova Scotia after the expulsion of 1755. It states that some of the first returnees on the Nova Scotia peninsula settled first at Chezzetcook and also Prospect. It goes further to show that some 520 Acadians were living in Chezzetcook and Prospect in 1803. However, it is quite clear that this is an obvious mistake and they are referring to the village of Petpeswick which is located on the Eastern Shore not far from the village of Chezzetcook. This argument is carried further by the complete lack of documentary evidence in the Prospect area of any Acadian settlement after 1755. This mistake could quite easily have been an error due to the confusion of the names originating from their Mi'kmaq roots . <sup>2</sup> This brief discussion does not however attempt to disprove either set of names as being accurately attributed to the location of the current village of Prospect, however, it attempts to merely point out some plausible inaccuracies in the interpretation of these words by historians in the past.

The first European reference to Prospect appears on a map likely drawn by Portuguese cartographer Diogo Homem. This Homem-like map, drawn sometime between 1554 and 1568, shows the area labeled as "Ribeira de Jardines" or translated into English as "River of Gardens". William F. Ganong in his exhaustive study of early

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1. Rand, Silas Tertius. *The Dictionary of the Language of the Micmac, who reside in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton and Newfoundland*. Halifax: Nova Scotia Printing Co., 1888 (from New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1972 edition), 207.

2. Daigle, Jean. *The Acadians of the Maritimes: Thematic Studies*. Moncton: Centre d'etudes Acadiennes, 1982. 159.

maps in Canada states that he believes this "River of Gardens" to be the area known as Prospect and though no trace of the name exists today or has since the creation of this map he attributes the name to Prospect due to its relative proximity to another well defined location along the Western Shore, that of Cape Sambro or in this case Cape St. James.<sup>3</sup>

The "River of Gardens" was next visited by the Jesuit priests who were slowly migrating to the new world to work with the aboriginal populations. In their Relations of 1612-1614 the priests make note of two ships which are anchored at 'Passepec' and getting ready to head back to France .<sup>4</sup> The Jesuits were quickly followed by the French explorer Nicolas Deny. Deny's first tour of Nova Scotia in 1632 included a stop in Prospect. In his journal he states that:

***" [after leaving Lunenburg Harbour] leaving the bay and going along the coast, at three or four leagues distance there is found a river having two entrances formed by an island which is between them. On the shore of the first entrance there are fine and good lands covered with big and beautiful trees. At the other entrance on the right one does not find good woods until one ascends into the river. There is nothing here but bald rocks, rather high. Among these rocks there is a little harbour where vessels anchor, and where men are often found making their fishery and drying their fish upon these islands the fishery is very good, and abounds in Cod, Mackerel and Herring are very abundant on the coast. This place is called Passepec. <sup>5</sup> "***

It is quite clear from this description that Deny was entering the mouth of Prospect Bay, commonly mistake for a river in early descriptions due to what appears to be a lack of interest on the part of explorers to go further than its mouth. Also worth mentioning is that Deny describes the landscape as consisting of small islands full of "big and beautiful trees" which could allude to what the Homem-like map of the late 1500s was referring to when it labeled the area as the "River of Gardens". Another interesting fact is that besides the mention of ships anchoring in the harbour by the Jesuits this is the first mention of the place being used as a fishing outpost. Though it is not clear whether these fishermen were here on a permanent basis it does establish Prospect as an area of settlement, even if it was only on a seasonal basis. This places habitation of the area as being as early as 1632.

For the next seventy years there are scattered references to Prospect in the documentary and cartographic history. An interesting example pops up in the journal of an anonymous passenger on the Acadian ship La Marianne, who for two months along with another ship he sailed around Nova Scotia. After having spent sometime at LaHave they left the sheltered harbour and traveled on the morning of 8 September 1784 towards Canso. They traveled as far as Passepeq the first night, anchoring in the "lee of a large island", leaving the next morning.<sup>6</sup> The name evolved throughout this period finally taking its anglicized form in about 1744 when the cartographer Bellin published his map of Acadia.<sup>7</sup>

The 1740s saw a dramatic change in control over Nova Scotia. First, with the fall of Louisbourg to British and American forces in 1745 and secondly with the establishment of Halifax in 1749 Nova Scotia was put

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3. Ganong, William F. *Crucial Maps In the Early Cartography and Place Nomenclature of the Atlantic Coast of Canada* . Toronto: University of Toronto, 1941. 166, 176.

4. Thwaites, Reuben Gold. *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791: the original French, Latin, and Italian texts, with English translations and notes* . Cleveland: Burrows, 1896. 263, 310.

5. *Ganong, William F. The Description and Natural History of the Coasts of North America (Acadia)* , Nicolas Deny, 1672. Toronto: Champlain Society, 1908.

6. Dawson, Joan. "Voyage from LaHave: A Journal of Summer, 1684." *Nova Scotia Historical Review* . Vol. 4, No. 1, 1984. 93. Original map located in the Special Collections, Killam Library, Dalhousie University, 1684 Acadian Manuscript.

7. Pritchard, James. "Acadia, Bellin, 1744." *Anatomy of a Naval Disaster: The 1746 French Naval Expedition to North America* . Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995.

under British rule. The signing of the 1763 Treaty of Paris enshrined British rule of this part of North America culminating with the expulsion of the Acadians from the Nova Scotia mainland. It was at this time that we see an increase in the number of English and Irish settlers emigrating to the province. Between 1750 – 1752 a large scale campaign to recruit German speaking Protestants took place bringing some 2000 so-called "Foreign Protestants" to the province. This group of people would eventually be moved from Halifax in the spring of 1753 to settle the town of Lunenburg.<sup>8</sup> In an April edition of the Halifax Royal Gazette there appeared a brief note mentioning the wreck of a vessel off the coast of Prospect where a settlement is intended. It is with this article that we get the first mention of a permanent settlement in the area. Since 1754 and with the beginning of land grants, fishing licenses and other types of land records we can establish a consistent pattern of settlement in the village of Prospect.

### Royal Gazette - Halifax, Nova Scotia - April 1754

#### Halifax

We are inform'd by a Gentleman who lately arriv'd from a Place call'd PROSPECT, a little to the Westward of this Harbour, (Where a new Settlement is intended) that they met with exceeding bad Weather, in which they carried away their Jibb, and had like to have been cast away among the Breakers: That they saw some Beams and other Pieces of Wreck floating upon the water, which they judg'd to be Parts of a Ship or other large Vessel lately cast away upon this Coast.<sup>9</sup>

From the earliest Mi'kmaq inhabitants to those Irish and English settlers in 1754 we have a continual pattern of land use in Prospect dating some five hundred years, if not more. The name Prospect has evolved from its earlier Mi'kmaq name and through subsequent mutilations by Portuguese, French and English explorers, cartographers and fishermen to evolve into its final anglicized version by the mid-eighteenth century at a time when we see efforts to establish a permanent settlement.

## Timeline Summary

- 1554-1568 – Homem map – Ribeira de Jardines (River of Gardens)
- 1612 – Jesuit Relations - Passepec
- 1656 – Nicholas Sanson d'Abbeville – Paspay
- 1692 – Cadillac Journals – Paspeq
- 1684 – Lalanne - Passepeq
- 1744 – Acadia, Bellin H. - Prospec
- 1750 – Thomsa Jefferys – Prospect Harbour
- 1754 – Royal Gazette – Prospect
- 1755 – Charles Morris map – Prospect Harbour
- 1755 – map from Port Maltois to Lawrencetown – Prospect Harbour
- 1757 – Acadia, Bellin – not shown
- 1787 – map showing port houses – Prospect

8. Bell, Winthrop Pickard. The "Foreign Protestants" and the Settlement of Nova Scotia: The History of a Piece of Arrested British Colonial Policy in the Eighteenth Century . Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990.

