

IMPORTANT DATES IN PRESQU'ILE PARK'S HISTORY

- 1784: Thousands of Loyalists arrived in the Bay of Quinte area.
- 1795: Governor John Graves Simcoe orders a survey of Presqu'ile: 'an excellent harbour'.
- 1796: Obadiah and Mary Simpson are the first settlers in this area.
- 1797: 'Plan of Newcastle in the Home District' drawn by Alexander Aiken.
- 1802: An act was passed to build a District Town named Newcastle at Presqu'ile.
- 1804: On its way to the first trial at the Newcastle courthouse, *The Speedy* sinks.
- 1805: Location of the district capital of Newcastle moved to Cobourg from Presqu'ile.
- 1812: Presqu'ile used as shelter along the military supply route in the War of 1812.
- 1840: Construction of Presqu'ile's lighthouse completed.
- 1846: Lighthouse keepers residence was built.
- 1889: Construction of the Murray Canal completed, linking Presqu'ile Bay to the Trent-Severn Waterway.
- 1894: Presqu'ile's lighthouse covered in planks and shingles to protect the stonework.
- 1905: The Presqu'ile Summer Hotel opened at Calf Pasture.
- 1907: A fog station, with a steam-powered foghorn, was built beside the lighthouse.
- 1920: Most of Presqu'ile, except the lighthouse area, was transferred from federal to provincial jurisdiction.
- 1922: Presqu'ile Park Act was passed, allowing a private commission to run the Park.
- 1922: Presqu'ile Park Commission purchases four farms, constructs new roads and a golf course in the Park.
- 1935: Lighthouse was electrified.
- 1948: Fog station dismantled.
- 1952: Lighthouse converted to fully automatic operation.
- 1954: Provincial Parks Act was introduced, bringing all parks under a single authority.
- 1956: Presqu'ile's first Park Superintendent was appointed.
- 1957: Presqu'ile's nature interpretation program began.
- 1959: Calf Pasture was purchased by the Park.
- 1997: The Lighthouse Interpretive Centre was opened.
- 2009: Construction of new Marsh Boardwalk completed.

For more information about The Speedy please visit the Nature and History Section on our website
www.friendsofpresquile.on.ca/speedy/



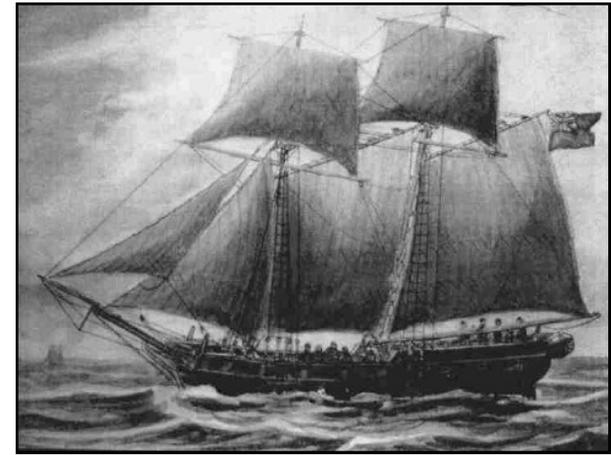
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HMS SPEEDY

Murder and a Mystery



Courtesy C H J Snider



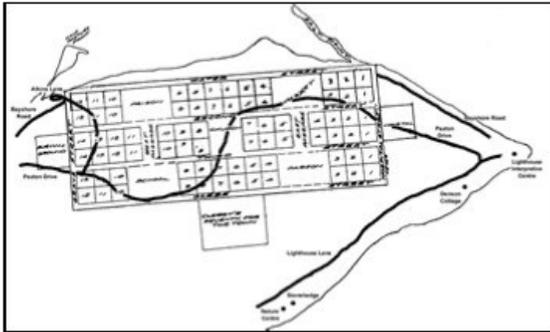
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It could be argued that October 8, 1804 was the most significant day in the history of the Northumberland area. The events of this day dramatically changed the planned settlement patterns in the newly developing colony in Upper Canada.

That night the HMS Speedy, travelling from York (Toronto) to the proposed district town of Newcastle for a trial, sank off Presqu'ile Point. The twenty passengers on the ship, including several of Upper Canada's most influential officials were lost and plans for the settlement in the area were then scrapped.

If not for the sinking of the HMS Speedy, the local area would have become developed and have no resemblance to what we have today.



Proposed plan of Newcastle

In 1804, Upper Canada was little more than a well-behaved child. Established only 13 years earlier by the Constitutional Act of 1791, the settlement was seen by its distant British rulers but certainly not heard. John A. MacDonald wouldn't be born for another 11 years, and William Lyon Mackenzie was still a Scottish schoolboy in short pants. Still, the colony's leaders were beginning to emerge, and it was showing at least some potential.

In the summer of that year, Ogetonicut, a member of the Muskrat branch of the Chippewa, allegedly killed John Sharp, a white man assisting two American brothers, the Farewells, with their fur trapping operation on Lake Scugog. The native man — who had previously sworn to avenge the murder of his brother, was immediately suspected and quickly apprehended on Toronto Island.

The defence successfully argued that the trial be held in the district of Newcastle at Presqu'ile Point. The murder had occurred just within Newcastle's borders, and under English common law, no one could be tried in one district for a crime allegedly committed in another. Although an inconvenience, government officials decided to make the most of the technicality. The area still needed a capital.

If the native man were tried, found guilty (which seemed, shamefully, to be a foregone conclusion), and hanged at Presqu'ile, the events would serve nicely to establish Newcastle as the District Town.



'Last Flight of the Speedy' by Peter Rindlisbacher

On October 7, 1804, the principals of the trial boarded the government-commissioned Speedy, an 80-foot, two-masted schooner - or 'fore-and-aft' - built in Catarqui in 1776.

In addition to the prisoner, they included some of the most prominent figures in Upper Canada. Justice Thomas Cochrane, the judge for the trial, was a 27-year-old phenom with a promising legal career stretching out before him.

United Empire Loyalist Robert Isaac Dey Gray, had been appointed first Solicitor-General of Upper Canada in 1794, and in 1796 was elected to the Legislative Assembly. He had practiced law in Cornwall and was one of nine founding members of the Law Society of Upper Canada.

Also on board was Angus McDonnell, counsel for the accused, first clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and Treasurer for the Upper Canada Law Society. John Stegman, the provincial land surveyor for the Surveyor-General's Office, was also required to make the trip. Rounding out this 'who's who' of Upper Canada society was John Fisk, the High Constable of York, and Jacob Herchmer, a wealthy York businessman and prominent Loyalist.

Of less political importance were the two young children of a couple obscurely linked to the case. Unable to afford fare for their own passage, the couple tucked their children aboard and turned away to begin the 100-mile hike from York to Presqu'ile. In all, the Speedy's passengers and crew totalled between 20 and 39. Before she set sail that evening, a storm swept in off the lake.

Captain Lieutenant Thomas Paxton suggested the voyage be postponed. Incredibly, the schooner was widely considered unseaworthy, and the experienced Paxton, formerly of the British navy, was loath to sail her in bad weather. Government officials ordered him to proceed.

Several hours into the voyage, the Speedy reached Port Oshawa, where she stopped to pick up the Farewell brothers, the trial's chief witnesses. The brothers flatly refused to board her saying she was already overcrowded. They would accompany her by open canoe. Perhaps they had another reason not to board. The Speedy and the Farewells maintained contact throughout the night and into the next day.

By the evening of October 8, both had reached Colborne. As they continued their voyage overnight, the storm worsened and the vessels were separated. By the morning of October 9, the brothers had managed to reach Newcastle harbour but the Speedy had not. She never would. She was last seen pitching in high seas on her approach to Presqu'ile Point.



The 'Sophiasburg Triangle' lies between Presqu'ile Point, Bald Head Island and Scotch Bonnet Island

Aside from a chicken coop, no trace of ship, passengers, or crew has ever been found. While claims of discovery have been made in recent years, all remain unconfirmed.

Steps from the Presqu'ile lighthouse, a plaque commemorating the Speedy's fate concludes 'the loss of so many prominent persons was a severe blow to the small colony.' The tragedy changed local history, as well.

Quarter session meetings were never held at Presqu'ile's courthouse, a government act of 1805 deemed Newcastle an 'inconvenient' site for a District Town, and Cobourg was eventually chosen District Town in Newcastle's place.

Henry David Thoreau once observed, 'There are more consequences to a shipwreck than the underwriters notice.'

(Written by David Bojarzin. Reprinted from Watershed Magazine with kind permission from Shelter Fell