

# Lennox Island First Nation

## First Reserve in Canada to be owned by its people

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Lennox Island First Nation is a Mi'kmaq community located on a small island sitting close to the western shores of Malpeque Bay on the north central side of Prince Edward Island. The island was known to the Mi'kmaq as "Lnu'k Mniku" (ill-newg min-nah-goo) which in English is translated to "the peoples island". For over 10,000 years the Mi'kmaq people have maintained



permanent summer village sites along the shores of Malpeque Bay. Lnu'k Mniku was one of the largest village sites in the bay and was probably home to the head Chief in that area. Prince Edward Island was known to the Mi'kmaw as, Epekwitk (ah-beg-wee-ick), which in English translates to "Floating on water" or "cradles on water". The entire Mi'kmaq territory, known to the Mi'kmaw as Mi'kma'kik, was divided into seven (7) districts. Epekwitk is part of the district Piktuk aqq Epekwitk which in English is translated to "Explosive land floating on water".

During the 1500s the Mi'kmaq in Malpeque Bay became heavily involved in the seal and walrus fur trade. After two centuries of European contact, the Mi'kmaq population in Epekwitk was drastically reduced by European borne illness and disease. The French who settled on Epekwitk named the island "Isle Saint-Jean", which was later translated by the British to "St. John's Island". Even though the Mi'kmaq had never ceded or sold their lands in Epekwitk to either the French or the British, Epekwitk was transferred over by the French to the United Kingdom in the 1763 Treaty of Paris. Epekwitk was later spelled Abegweit by the British colonist who settled there after the French were expelled.

When Captain Samuel Johannes Holland mapped St. Johns island in 1766, he named Lnu'k Mniku "Lennox Island" after the British Duke Charles Lennox. In 1767 the British government divided all land on St. Johns Island (PEI) into lots to be owned by British 'proprietors' who would collect rent from the settlers. However, Lennox Island was not allotted to any landlords until 1772 when it was assigned to lot 12 which was owned by Sir James Montgomery. Montgomery was aware that Mi'kmaq were still living on Lennox Island and left them undisturbed.



In 1799, St. John's Island was renamed Prince Edward Island after the Duke of Kent, Prince Edward. During the early 1800's Mi'kmaq all over Abegweit would come to Lennox Island each year during the month of July for Saint Anne Celebrations. However, Mi'kmaq populations were continually on a decline because of the loss of traditional hunting and fishing grounds and the other negative effects of European Colonialization. Over time, less and less Mi'kmaq visited Lennox Island and the permanent population was reduced to four to six families.

By the mid-1800s neighbouring landlords were attempting to purchase Lennox Island and remove the remaining Mi'kmaq's from the lands. However, Theophilus Stewart of the Micmac Society of Charlottetown with the help of the Aboriginal Protection Society intervened and prevented the purchases from going through. The Aboriginal Protection Society was an international human rights organization, founded in 1837, to ensure the health and well-being and the sovereign, legal and religious rights of the indigenous people. Because of the work by Theophilus Stewart in protecting the Mi'kmaq in Abegweit, the number of Mi'kmaq families on Lennox Island steadily increased. To provide even more protection for the Mi'kmaq in Abegweit, the Aboriginal Protection Society along with the London Society, purchased Lennox Island in trust for the Mi'kmaq in 1870.

In 1873, Prince Edward Island joined the Canadian Confederation. One of the terms of joining the Confederation allowed the residents the opportunity to purchase the land they lived on from their British appointed landlords. In 1875 the lands of Lennox Island were officially declared reserve lands and the title to the Island was handed over to the then 300 Mi'kmaq who held permanent residence there. The transfer of title was completed in 1878, making Lennox Island the first reserve in Canada to be owned entirely by its people.

Today, Lennox island First Nation is the largest first nation community on Prince Edward Island, with a total population of 1056 registered band members, around 450 of which live on reserve. Over the last 10 years Lennox Island has seen a major increase in their economic development growth and has been a major contributor to the over all Prince Edward Island economy. Much of Lennox Island's economic development growth has been around the fisheries and tourism.

Over the last four years Lennox Island Tourism has increased substantially which has in turn created more employment opportunities for band members. Two of the biggest events held each year on Lennox Island are the powwow and the Saint Anne's Sunday celebration. The community hosts the Saint Anne's Sunday celebration, just as it did during the 1800s where it was held each year on the last Sunday of June. Over the last two years each event attracted over 1000 visitors to the community.

In the last two years the community included 15 new experiences for visitors, including birch bark and porcupine quill work workshops, traditional story-telling, rattle and drum making workshops, beading workshops, and bannock making workshops, just to name a few.



Lennox Island's Director of Economic Development Mike Randell stated that the community wanted to improve relationship with the Province. Moreover, they looked at ways of rebuilding and mending old relationships within the tourism industry. "We wanted to create those partnerships that are beneficial for both of us." Mike Randell stated.

Lennox Island Economic Strategy was based on three pillars of economic growth. These pillars include tourism, fisheries (including aquaculture), and natural resources such as the forestry industry.

Much like other Mi'kmaq communities, the commercial fishery has been the main driver of economic growth and development for Lennox Island First Nation. The money generated from the fisheries has allowed Lennox Island to prosper. Today there are over 30 commercial fishing



vessels in the community, 10 of which are owned by the band itself and the rest are owned by community members. All commercial fishing boats crew are 100% First Nation fishermen and fisherwoman including Mi'kmaq captains on all vessels. To accommodate the communities commercial fishing vessels the band built their own commercial fishing wharf.

The community also prides themselves in having the very first Mi'kmaq owned and operated commercial seafood processing plant which now employs 20 band members. Much of the lobster caught by community members is sent to the band's processing plant. The process plant is called Minigoo Fisheries. It is 100% owned and operated by the Lennox Island First Nation and is recognized as being the first lobster processing plant in Canada owned and operated completely by First Nation.



The band has also improved their aquaculture operations, their main one being a shellfish seeding operation primarily focusing on oysters but also includes muscles and scallops. The seeding operation, also known as Bideford Shellfish Hatchery, employs seven band members at the seeding facility. Lennox Island's seeding facility is the only 100% Band owned and operated oyster, scallops, and other shellfish aquaculture seed provider in Atlantic Canada.

The Lennox Island First Nation also created a commercial corporate entity, named Lennox Island Development Corporation. First formed in 2006 to further economic development on Lennox Island First Nation, the Lennox Island Development Corporation was mandated to identify, prospect, develop and commercialize business opportunities for the First Nation. The Lennox Island Development Corporation actively pursues business initiatives that benefit all Lennox Island First Nation band members. They also assist in establishing commercial business ventures and investing in joint venture enterprises.

Today, the Lennox Island Development Corporation's portfolio of business ventures includes enterprises in fisheries, seafood processing, culture-based tourism and eco-tourism, property management, natural product research facilities, commercial real estate, rental property holdings, public utilities, aquaculture, health care, and arts and crafts. Moreover, in the last decade, Lennox Island has made significant innovative contribution to Prince Edward Island's over all economy.

