



Heritage Notes

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LOUISBOURG NAVY LEAGUE HUT (A Provincial Heritage Property)

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In May 1994 the Louisbourg Navy League building was designated a Provincial Heritage Property. Cecil Crant, President, and Michael Burke, Past President, of the Louisbourg & Area Lions Club recognized the heritage value of the Lions Den, formerly the Louisbourg Navy League Hostel. At a meeting held in November 1993, I explained the process to the Lions Club membership. As a result, the Lions asked the Louisbourg Heritage Society to prepare the application to the Advisory Council on Heritage Property.

Introduction

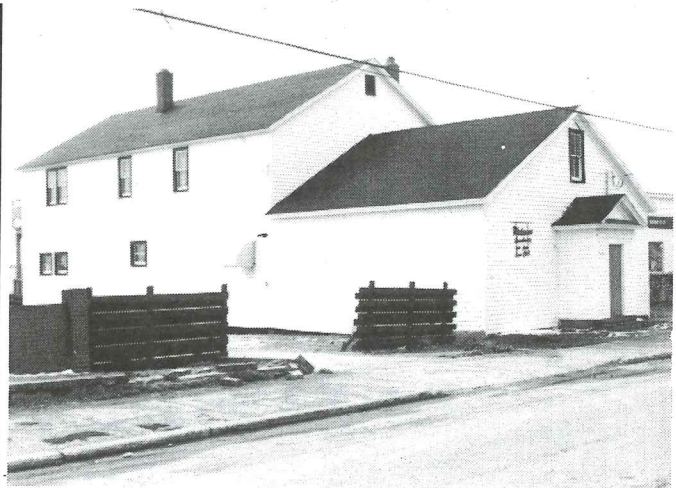
Louisbourg harbour has been a destination of seafarers for hundreds of years. The earliest recorded European visit to the *English Port*, is that of Captain Leigh who sailed into the harbour in the summer of 1597.¹

Thousands of anonymous fishermen - Portuguese, Spanish, French, English and Basque - fished out of this harbour in the 17th century. From 1713 until 1758, with one period of English occupation, Louisbourg was the capital of the French colony of Isle Royale, the centre of a significant fishery and an important transhipment point.

Throughout the 19th century Louisbourg harbour was a stopover for fishing schooners and coal boats. Its significance was marked by a lighthouse in 1842.²

In 1895 the harbour became the focus of industrial activity as the terminus of the Sydney & Louisburg Railway (the S&L Station is a Provincial Heritage Property). The construction of a coal loading pier and a freight wharf brought regular employment to the town. A fleet of Dominion Coal Company boats loaded coal year round and sailed from Louisbourg to New England, Newfoundland, Quebec and Montreal.

World War II saw a serious effort at securing the harbour because, "*The ice-free haven of Louisbourg was to be a reserved anchorage whenever Sydney Harbour was closed off by ice or enemy mines.*"³ Louisbourg was also a terminus for coastal convoys and the base for a refitting operation for corvettes, frigates and other naval craft.⁴



Navy League Hut/Lions Den in April 1994. (W. O'Shea)

As a result, in 1942, the Navy asked that Louisbourg be secured by a coastal artillery unit during the winter months. This led to Wolfe Battery with two 18-pounder guns and two search lights staffed by 41 personnel.⁵ There was also a Naval detachment and an Air Force group. One of the purposes of the naval detachment was to monitor and manage the anti-torpedo net which was installed in Louisbourg Harbour in August 1943.⁶

The Louisbourg Navy League - 1941

A local women's group anticipated this increased activity in and around the harbour. In September 1941 the Louisbourg Community Club called a meeting to discuss, ". . . ways and means of providing entertainment for the men (of) the merchant navy who visit Louisbourg, particularly during the winter months." This committee consisting of Mrs. A. W. Cameron, Mrs. D.M. Johnston, Mrs. William MacKinnon and Mrs. L. H. Cann invited the Sydney Branch of the Navy League of Canada to send a delegation to Louisbourg.⁷

The Navy League began in England in 1895 as a Society, ". . . with the primary aim of ensuring adequate naval defence." The first Canadian branch was formed in 1895 and was soon active in making submissions to the Federal government on the need for maritime defence and a naval reserve training programme. During World War I the