

The Places

Ward's Island

Ward's Island is named after David Ward, a fisherman who settled there with his family in the early 1830s. Some of his descendants still live on the Toronto Islands after five generations.

In the 1880s, William E. Ward built the Ward's Hotel plus other houses, and rented tents to visitors from the mainland. In 1899 there was a colony of eight summer tenants on Ward's Island each paying \$10 ground rent for the season.

Shortly before World War I, the City of Toronto organized the popular "tent city" area into streets. Campers began arriving with wood-burning stoves, dressers, beds, tables and chairs. Enterprising individuals built storage sheds so as not to have to carry their belongings back to the city. Soon the tents were mounted on sturdy wooden floors. Wooden kitchens, porches and rigid roofs replaced flapping canvas. Before 1920 there was a sprinkling of one-storey summer cottages. By 1937, cottage structures had entirely replaced tents.

By the mid-1930s, the City of Toronto was offering annual leases for lots on Ward's Island. Later, during the housing crisis of the late 1940s and 50s, Island residents were encouraged to winterize their homes and use them on a year-round basis. They were also asked to add on rooms and rent them to returning war veterans.

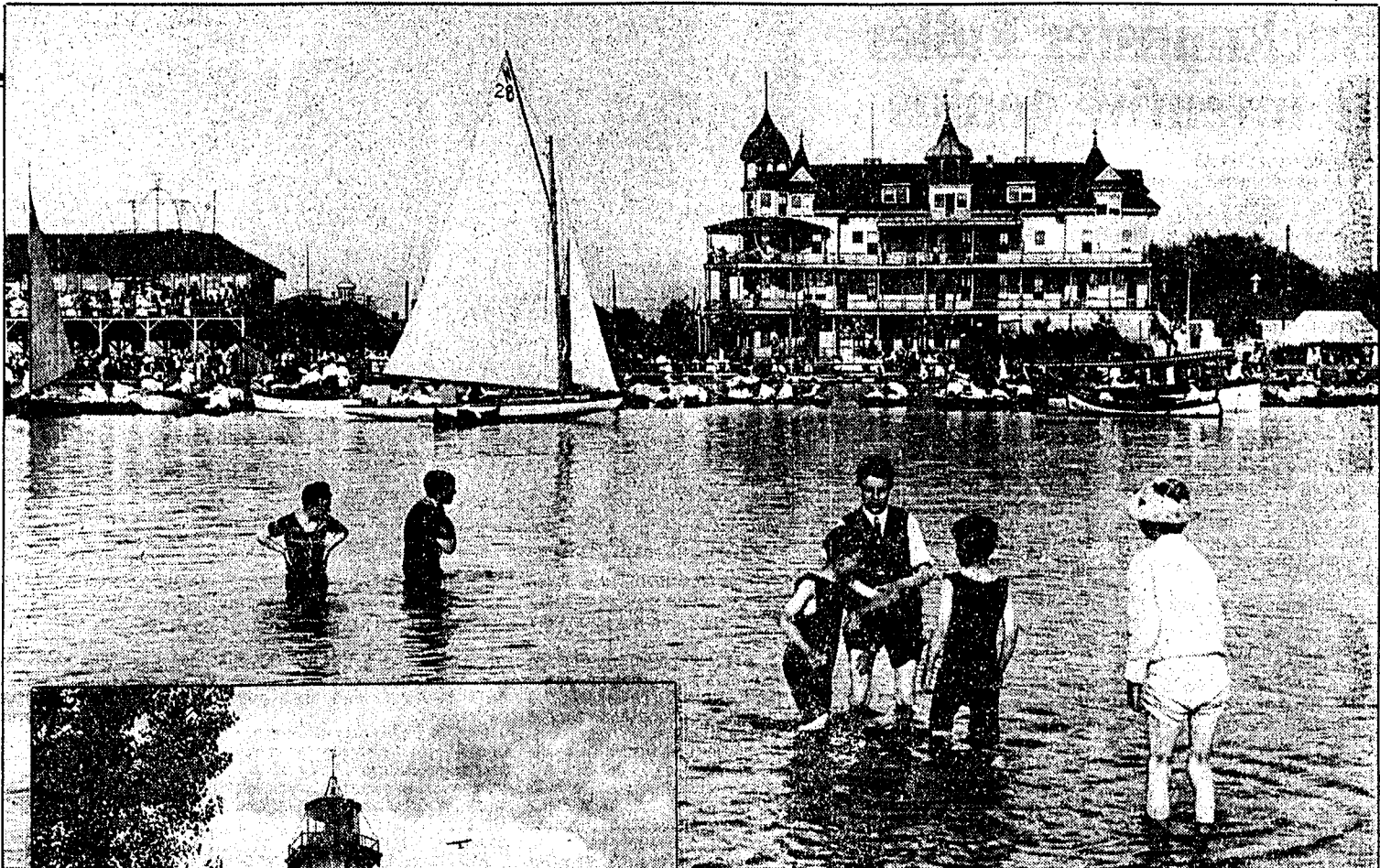
By 1960 Metro Toronto Parks made clear its determination to bulldoze the houses on Ward's and Algonquin islands and make the area into park land. Islanders, faced with eviction — and no compensation for the loss of their homes — dug in their heels, fought for and won yearly lease extensions.

Centre Island

Victorian rococo, some called it. Centre Island architecture has been described as "new antique" or hodge-podge old style. The front yards of some homes sloped into a lagoon, and the term "a touch of Venice" came into use for that reason.

Following the floods of 1952 and Hurricane Hazel in 1954, Metro acquired 250 leasehold properties on Centre Island. All the old English-style gardens and magical, rococo gingerbread cottages were then bulldozed in order to make more park land. Manitou Road, the commercial heart of Centre Island, was also flattened. Pierson's Hotel, a well-known summer resort, was bulldozed. The elegant Manitou Hotel (originally known as Spanner's Hotel) was destroyed as was the tobacconists' shop, the pharmacy, Parisian laundry, the two dairy stores and the Island Movie Theatre.

The lighthouse on Centre Island the oldest landmark in Toronto still on its original site, was erected in 1808. It stands 82 feet high, from the ground to the top of the vane. In 1832, after the tower was



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Landmarks: The ornate frame building above is Hanlan's Hotel, circa 1909, the focal point for an amusement area. The Centre Island lighthouse was built in 1808.



AL SCHOENBORN

raised from its original 52 feet to its present elevation, coal oil was used in place of sperm oil.

Canadian farmers in parts of the 19th and 20th centuries found they could get better prices for their harvests in the U.S. than in Canada. The same is true of bootleggers who made regular shipments of whisky and other alcoholic beverages to the U.S. Few were experienced sailors and when storms developed they sometimes lost their bearings. Many farmers and

bootleggers, it is said, owe their lives to the Toronto Island lighthouse.

The lighthouse, after 150 years of operation, is now a Metropolitan Toronto Parks historic monument. Schoolchildren, counting 13 steps to the first landing, say it is haunted by the ghost of J. P. Rademuller, the first lighthouse keeper (from 1809 to 1815), who was allegedly murdered by drunk and angry soldiers from nearby Fort York and secretly buried nearby.

Algonquin Island

Algonquin Island in 1909 was simply a convenient sandbar which helped form a protected channel for small boats. It was expanded by landfill operations in the late 1930s. In 1937, when Hanlan's Point was cleared for the construction of the Toronto Island Airport, approximately 30 houses were floated from Hanlan's to the renamed Algonquin Island and the wooden bridge linking the residential communities at Ward's and Algonquin islands was built about the same time.

Like Ward's Island, Algonquin has over 100 homes and is almost totally occupied by permanent, year-round residents and their families. While there are some service vehicles such as the milk truck, library-on-wheels, police jeeps and fire engine, private cars are not allowed on the Island.

Hanlan's Point

In the late 1870s, Hanlan's Wharf was the most frequented of the ferry landings. Hanlan's Point or West Point, as it was known until renamed after the celebrated Island family, was the CNE of its day. At Hanlan's one found bands, circus per-

formers, dance halls, a vaudeville theatre, a restaurant and a merry-go-round with hand-carved wooden horses which, when the amusement park was demolished, were purchased by Disneyland.

In 1897 a baseball and lacrosse stadium was built at Hanlan's Point which accommodated crowds of over 10,000 people. Destroyed by fire in 1903, it was rebuilt. Destroyed again by fire in 1909, it was again rebuilt. The Toronto Maple Leaf baseball team played here until 1926 when they relocated in the city. More fans turned out for some games held at the Island stadium than now turn out to watch the Blue Jays. The site is now occupied by the Toronto Island Airport.

In 1874 John Hanlan, father of the famous oarsman, built a four-storey frame hotel with steep dormered mansards, open-balconied balconies and board and batten walls at Hanlan's Point. The hotel was built on piles driven into the sand, to prevent the structure from subsiding. Enlarged in the 1880s, Hanlan's Hotel also became the centrepiece of a large amusement park. Eventually, Ned Hanlan himself took over management of the hotel. Fire destroyed Hanlan's Hotel in 1909.



URSULA HELLER



DOUG GANTON

Islanders: At left Peter Dean, Penny Lawler and daughter Alison. Above, Elizabeth Amer, Island's unofficial mayor. And, below, Daddy Frank Staneland.



URSULA HELLER

The People

'Daddy Frank' Staneland

An Island resident until his death in 1981.

"I was born in 1889 by Trinity Square in Toronto, and have lived 81 years on the Island. My address is Number One Fourth Street. I was the seventh tent on this side of Ward's Island. Yep, right here was a tent, 12 by 24. In the old days this Island was like a tent city. In the beginning of summer a group of men working together, going from site to site, raised 15 tents a day.

"It wasn't until 1931 that we got permission to put permanent roofs on the tents. . . . We had a choice of 720-square-foot lots with a ground rent of \$50 per summer or 840-square-foot lots for \$60.

"Some people built summer cottages right off the ground. Others converted their tents into year-round homes and a lot of those homes are still around. No foundations. They sit right on the ground.

"The children call me Daddy Frank and come to my door and I give them candy. There's no candy store on the Island so I

go over to the city to buy treats for the children — 14 pounds a year and a gross of popsicles.

"As a young man, I was a gymnast and a YMCA leader. I worked for many years in the plumbing and supply business. When the time came to build the Ward's Island clubhouse, I supplied 12 of the 450 chairs and donated some plumbing fixtures. The spirit of the Island is cooperation. Some of us bought a case of beer. Each person was given a brush and a little paint and assigned a certain section and the whole community worked together. That was how we painted the clubhouse. Everyone supplied something.

"To this day Island people don't bother to lock their houses. Everyone protects everyone else's home. There's been very little trouble in the 80 years I've lived here. If anyone comes around who's a problem, the whole Island knows about it and acts together."

Peter Dean and Penny Lawler

"When I first visited Toronto, I found the city depressing and gray and closed in. The second day I was here, we came to walk around the Island. I wasn't much struck by Hanlan's, Centre Island or the

amusement park, but on that late autumn afternoon we came to Algonquin Island and there was the smell of leaves burning and smoke coming out of the chimneys and the sound of children playing before dinner. I recognized this as a place where I would want to live. Later we watched people getting off the ferry boat with their bundle buggies filled with groceries and for me it was so clear that if I came to live in Toronto it would be here. . . .

"I enjoy seeing the Island dogs showing up in the evening at the ferry docks to greet their masters or mistresses. And the Island children turning out to greet their parents. And the laughter and the sound of people coming home from work on Friday carrying lumber and roofing material and all the crazy things Islanders carry over from the City. And there's a special zest of life and living to it."

Elizabeth Amer

A leading figure in the battle to save Island homes.

"My history here began when my grandmother and her sister came to Ward's Island about 1919 and rented a tent site. They lived there until shortly

after World War I when they were given a building permit by the City and built their cottage at 11 Willow Avenue. They lived in that house until my grandfather — who sold plumbing equipment — retired, and then they insulated and lived there the year-round.

"After World War II more people became year-round residents because of the housing shortage. By the early 1950s the Island was at its peak in terms of population. There were 2,000 year-round people and at least 10,000 came for the summer.

"I started living with my grandparents in the summer when I was seven. My mother was tied to the house in the city and she couldn't bring me to the Island so I came here by myself. And I did that all the time I was growing up. I became a year-round Islander in 1953 when I was 15 and I've been here ever since.

"When I was 13 there was a gang I belonged to — we all liked music and had banjos, ukuleles and other instruments. We played on the beach, at Island gatherings and were so fond of traditional jazz that rock and roll, when it started up, just went by us. . . . Summers, one of the things we did was to put on a minstrel show. . . .

"And we all had a great time during the floods. Every 17 or 20 years the lake level reaches a peak and shoreline settlements are threatened. Our parents were all up-tight about the flooding, but for the kids the floods were just another form of entertainment. . . .

"It's hard to define, in the abstract, what a community is. For example, I always know where I can go to get a cup of sugar or a vise grip. If I need a dress made, a pipe threaded, or if I need to know something about geology there is always someone I can telephone. Sometimes I feel as if I own this community. I don't, but it's as if it belongs to me and I certainly feel as if I belong to it. It is the opposite of alienation. And I don't think the feeling I'm describing is unique to me or to this Island."