



Annapolis Royal, N.S.

Its history reads like a novel

BY ROB & WENDY LINDSAY

Annapolis Royal is the type of place you plan to return to, even before you have left. It's a wonderful spot to relax and enjoy quality time. The pace is a little slower, the sea air refreshingly revitalizing and the people wonderfully warm and welcoming. To top it off, the food seems to taste better. Little wonder, then, that it was once named World's Most Livable Small Community. The charming small town lies near the northwest coast of Nova Scotia, just off the Bay of Fundy at the southern tip of the verdant Annapolis Valley. The town (population approx. 1,360) is the heart of a collection of small communities along both banks of the Annapolis River. The area's population swells in the summer with seasonal residents and B&B guests. The region has been attracting visitors for centuries. In fact, it's the oldest permanent European

settlement in Canada. It's been known by many names over the centuries — each moniker reflecting a different chapter in its varied past. As a native Mi'kmaq encampment over 3,500 years ago, it was called Te'wapskik, meaning "flowing waters." In 1604 a small band of French explorers named it Port-Royal. Three years before the founding of Quebec City, two years before the Jamestown settlement in Virginia, and a full 15 years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, these brave Frenchmen, under the leadership of Samuel de Champlain, built a wooden fort-like settlement, known as the Habitation at Port-Royal, on the north shore of the Annapolis Basin. Today an authentic reconstructed Habitation is the centrepiece of the Port-Royal National Historic Site. It's definitely worth the 30-minute drive from downtown Annapolis Royal across the bridge and along

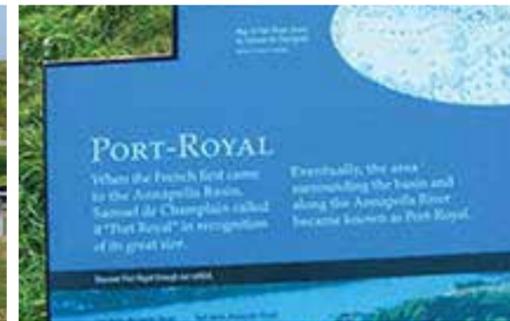
the picturesque north shore. You may recall learning about the Order of Good Cheer in school. Well, Port-Royal is where it all began. In order to relieve the monotony of the harsh winters, Champlain founded L'Ordre de Bon Temps. His men took turns being the master of the feast, for which they planned the meal, secured all the food and planned entertainment. As one can imagine, the rivalry and feasting likely livened up the winter months considerably. Today, as it was in 1605, the Habitation is made up of wooden buildings grouped French-style on four sides of a central courtyard — all within a wooden stockade. Jovial costumed interpreters bring it alive. In 1629 a hardy band of Scots constructed a small stone fort across the bay from the Habitation after a European treaty granted all the land to Scotland, and Nova Scotia ("New Scotland") was born. But in 1632

Photography, Lindsay Editorial



The Historic Gardens trace more than 400 years of history and is home to the largest rose garden in the Maritime region.

(Opposite page, left to right) Aerial view of Fort Anne and interior view of Habitation (both now National Historic Sites). Garrison House Inn (circa 1854). (Below) Three scenes from historic Fort Anne, which is in amazingly good shape considering it was founded in 1629 and changed hands between the French and English forces at least seven times.



another treaty gave the land back to France, and it became known as Acadia. Serious French settlement began in 1636, with Port-Royal becoming the birthplace of Acadian culture. When the English recaptured it for the final time in 1710, Port-Royal was renamed Annapolis Royal after England's Queen Anne, and the stout stone fort that stands stoically on the edge of the historic district was also named after her. Sadly, 45 years after England regained control of

Annapolis Royal, it became the site of the second-largest deportation of Acadians from its shores. Evangeline, from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poignant poem of two lovers separated by the deportation, became the symbol of this era, and the present-day highway through the Acadian area of Nova Scotia to Annapolis Royal is called the Evangeline Trail. The land around present-day Annapolis Royal changed hands between the French and the English

seven times and has the distinction of being the most fought over area in Canadian history during the 150-year power struggle between the French and the English for control of the continent. The two remnants from that turbulent period are Fort Anne and the adjoining historic graveyard, the oldest English cemetery in Canada, and both are within sight of the first B&B we stayed at, the Garrison House Inn (circa 1854). A registered heritage building, the inn was faithfully restored by innkeeper



The exterior and parlour of the Hillsdale House B&B, the site of many VIP guests over the years. (Right) A sumptuous seafood platter at the Garrison House dining room.

Patrick Redgrave and captures all of the old-world ambience of the 1800s while still providing a generous dose of modern amenities. Redgrave's background in Toronto's wine and restaurant trade shines through in his popular dining room, which showcases local seafood.

Before dinner we happily spent the afternoon exploring the 37 acres of the Fort Anne National Historic Site. From its grassy ramparts there are stunning views of the Annapolis Basin, and it was fun to imagine what it would have looked like with schooners riding at anchor. The first fort built on the site by the Scots was replaced by four forts built at different periods by the French starting in 1643. The English also occupied the spot and added to the fort a number of times. The historical interpretation, therefore, reflects both cultures with replicas of both English and French uniforms for visitors to try on in the Officers' Quarters Museum. Since Fort Anne was designed and built as a military fort, it wasn't surprising to discover cannons, a powder magazine and thick 300-year-old walls and earthworks designed to repel hostile cannon fire. On a lighter note, the huge Fort Anne Heritage Tapestry that hangs in the museum colourfully depicts 400 years of history in the area.

After a delicious seafood dinner in the Garrison House dining room, we had only to walk across the street to join our pre-booked Candlelight Tour of the Garrison Graveyard that night. We were each given an antique lantern and asked to follow

our guide through the graveyard. By the lantern light, we could make out his billowing black cape, black top hat and black mourning scarf blowing in the wind as he waited for us in the shadow of a big tree. It was a bit spooky at first, but we were soon caught up in the fascinating stories of those who lived and died in Annapolis Royal hundreds of years ago. The brochure described our guide as an Acadian historian, but our group thought he was a good actor bringing the history alive for us.

Annapolis Royal is a treasure of heritage buildings. There are over 135 Municipal Heritage Properties, one of the largest National Historic Districts in the country, plus many registered Provincial Heritage Properties. It was the first capital of Nova Scotia and has many fine old public buildings from that era. Historic homes include humble Acadian cottages, some of the oldest wooden-frame buildings in Canada, and elegant three-storey manors. Over a dozen of the larger heritage houses are now charming B&Bs. Anyone interested in architecture will have a wonderful time strolling the tree-lined streets of the heritage district.

Those with a green thumb won't want to miss the Historic Gardens. They cover 17 acres, with historically themed areas telling the story of Nova Scotia's settlement. The gardening methods, designs and materials represent more than 400 years of local history. One of the most pleasant areas is the fragrant Rose Collection, the largest

in the Maritime region, with more than 270 varieties — from the ancient Apothecary Rose through to selections from the Canadian Explorer, Parkland and Artist series.

Our second B&B, Hillsdale House (circa 1859), is one of the few inns actually built for use as an inn and sits regally within 12 acres of gardens, orchards and manicured lawns. It, too, is a registered Provincial Heritage Property. Its size and setting make it a popular spot for weddings and reunions. Despite the elegance of three mid-Victorian parlours, the atmosphere is casual and friendly. There are 13 very grand antique-furnished guest rooms that over the years have hosted such noteworthy folks as George, Prince of Wales (later King George V), two Governors General and Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King. On request, innkeeper Paul Stackhouse is happy to show guests their signatures in the antique guest book. In the morning, fellow innkeeper and breakfast chef Val Peterson treats guests royally with an enormous freshly baked breakfast featuring fresh fruit and jams from the Annapolis Valley, as well as their own orchard.

Unfortunately, our days in lovely Annapolis Royal drew to an end before we had the chance to visit all the shops and studios along the boardwalk, try sea kayaking or golf any of the three nearby courses — all good reasons to plan for a return trip to this thoroughly charming spot. ■
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