

= Melville Island (Nova Scotia) =

Melville Island is a small peninsula in Nova Scotia , Canada , located in the Northwest Arm of Halifax Harbour , west of Deadman 's Island . It is part of the Halifax Regional Municipality . The land is rocky , with thin , acidic soil , but supports a limited woodland habitat .

The site was discovered by Europeans in the 17th century , though it was likely earlier explored by aboriginals . It was initially used for storehouses before being purchased by the British , who built a prisoner @-@ of @-@ war camp to hold captives from the Napoleonic Wars and later the War of 1812 . The burial ground for prisoners was on the adjacent Deadman 's Island .

Later , Melville Island was used as a receiving depot for black refugees escaping slavery in the United States , then as a quarantine hospital for immigrants arriving from Europe (particularly Ireland) . It briefly served as a recruitment centre for the British Foreign Legion during the Crimean War , and was then sold to the British for use as a military prison . In 1907 the land was granted to the Canadian government , which used it to detain German and Austro @-@ Hungarian nationals during the First World War . During the Second World War , prisoners were sent to McNabs Island instead , and ammunition depots were kept on Melville Island .

The peninsula now houses the clubhouse and marina of the Armdale Yacht Club . Melville Island has been the subject of a number of cultural works , most of which concern its use as a prison .

= = Geography = =

Melville Island is part of the Halifax Regional Municipality , on the southeast coast of Nova Scotia . The peninsula lies on the eastern boundary of Melville Cove in the Northwest Arm , an inlet between the Halifax Peninsula and Mainland Halifax . It has a total area of approximately 2 @, @ 000 square metres (22 @, @ 000 sq ft) . Melville Island is 200 metres (660 ft) west of Deadman 's Island , and southeast of Regatta Point . The peninsula lies on a fracture zone trending northwest ? southeast , and is located at the border between the Halifax Slate Formation and a granite @-@ based formation . There is evidence of glacial scouring in the area . The surrounding seabed ranges from gravel to muddy gravel , and the shore is rocky .

The water surrounding Melville Island is salty and ranges from 15 ° C (59 ° F) in summer to partially or completely frozen in winter . The water is polluted by sewage discharges from Halifax and is considered heavily contaminated . Water colour ranges from olive brown to greenish black , with little current . The water depth around Melville Island is 4 @. @ 5 to 10 @. @ 5 metres (15 to 34 ft) .

The peninsula features thin and acidic soil , and hosts plants like witherod , Indian pear , Labrador tea , wintergreen , and blueberry shrubs . It is a woodland area , with birch , tamarack , maple , oak , beech , and white pine trees . Given the development of the land by the Armdale Yacht Club , plant growth is now largely limited to the hill on which the main clubhouse sits ; most of the peninsula was paved in 1971 . Fish caught from Melville Island include cod and mackerel . Local birds include grebes , loons , and alcids .

There is no weather monitoring station on Melville Island (the closest is the Halifax dockyards) ; however , as with most of the surrounding area , Melville has a humid continental climate heavily influenced by the water temperature in Halifax Harbour . Average air temperatures range from ? 4 @. @ 4 ° C (24 @. @ 1 ° F) in January to 18 @. @ 9 ° C (66 @. @ 0 ° F) in August . It receives about 1 @, @ 500 mm (59 in) of precipitation per year , and may receive snow from October through April . Though the area is fairly sheltered , it is subject to damage from hurricanes and other storms , notably Hurricane Juan in 2003 .

= = Early use = =

Though the Halifax area was settled by aboriginals , particularly the Mi 'kmaq people , as early as 7000 BC , there is no archaeological evidence of native habitation on Melville Island prior to the arrival of the Europeans . The first Europeans to reach the land were likely French traders and

missionaries in the 17th century . Halifax was founded by the British in 1749 . The first documented use of Melville Island was by Robert Cowie and John Aubony , who obtained a Crown grant in 1752 to allow them to build a storehouse . After Cowie 's death in 1781 , John Butler Kelly purchased what was then known as Cowie 's Island and quickly resold it in 1784 to James Kavanagh , the head of a prosperous family fishery , for £ 65 . Kavanagh used the land , known as Kavanagh 's Island according to the then @-@ prevalent tradition of place naming , to dry and store fish that he would then sell from his Halifax store .

= = French Revolutionary Wars = =

After the 1793 beheading of Louis XVI sparked a war between Britain and France (see the French Revolutionary Wars) , Nova Scotia Governor John Wentworth rented Kavanagh 's Island to house 600 French prisoners that had been captured on St. Pierre and Miquelon . The commander of the Halifax garrison , Brigadier General James Ogilvie , objected to the plan , and instead housed the prisoners at Cornwallis Barracks in Halifax . Several prisoners were able to escape from the makeshift prison , and the rest were sent to Guernsey in June 1794 .

In August 1794 , a French ship captured in St. Domingo arrived in Halifax . A plan to house these prisoners in Halifax met with opposition from the citizenry because of a fear of " fever " ; indeed , surgeon John Halliburton suggested that if the plan was carried out , " the popular would burn down [the housing] with the sick prisoners inside " . Halliburton rented Kavanagh 's Island , likely on the suggestion of Governor John Wentworth , and by June 1795 had sent 70 sick and wounded prisoners to its makeshift prison hospital . The other prisoners were kept on the La Felix prison ship . Sixteen soldiers of the Royal Nova Scotia Regiment acted as guards for the hospital beginning in 1796 . Because of overcrowding aboard La Felix , some of its prisoners were allowed to live in Halifax , where some created such a disturbance that they were sent to Kavanagh 's Island to be imprisoned . In 1801 , the Treaty of Amiens resulted in most of the prisoners being returned to France , and the site was abandoned .

= = Napoleonic Wars (1803 ? 1811) = =

The site was formally leased for prisoner housing in 1803 after fifteen French fishermen , three surgeons , and 188 seamen were brought to Halifax as prisoners during the Napoleonic Wars . Though many of these prisoners were later sent to England or Bermuda , one of the surgeons (Antoine Noel) was hired to care for the prisoners , while at least sixteen other prisoners were able to escape . Melville was purchased for £ 1000 in 1804 (£ 68 @, @ 634 as of 2010) by Robert Murray , appointed by the British Admiralty as prison agent ; he was replaced shortly thereafter by John MacKellar . At the time , the facility had a maximum capacity of 200 prisoners . The makeshift prison was noted for discipline problems .

The land was officially renamed Melville Island in late 1804 or early 1805 in honour of Henry Dundas , Viscount Melville (who at the time had just been appointed First Lord of the Admiralty) . A wooden barracks @-@ style military prison was constructed to house common prisoners , the cornerstone of which was laid in 1808 and is today preserved as a monument , while a multi @-@ storey building was designed to hold officers . As no exchange system was established with the French , the prison quickly became overcrowded . Some Spanish prisoners were also housed in the prison at this time .

Upon their arrival on Melville , prisoners had their name and other details recorded in an entry book . Inmates were given yellow clothing that clearly identified them as prisoners of war , and were supplied with provisions of beef , bread , potatoes and salt from a local contractor " reputed to own most of the livestock in the region " . Some officers were allowed to send trade goods to Halifax , or even work in the city as domestic servants or handymen . There were also prisoner @-@ run shops and a " small town fair " on Melville Island , frequented by British officers and residents of Halifax . Other prisoner pursuits included prison lotteries , model shipbuilding , beer @-@ brewing , fishing , and making molasses candy . Some prisoners were known to have pets or keep chickens .

In late 1805 , a group of officers broke parole and escaped ; this led the garrison captain to restrict the purchase of prisoner @-@ made goods as a means of punishment and enforcing discipline . More serious punishments included flogging or being confined to a barred hole in the prison cellar , known as the " Black Hole " , with only bread and water . One of the prisoners , Pierre Poulin , stabbed another to death in April 1805 , and was tried and hanged for murder in Halifax . The prisoners also maintained their own Grand Council (Grand Conseil) with which to impose discipline , though with a different focus than the British : anyone who disclosed a planned escape attempt to the guards was subject to being stoned to death (though historian Brian Cuthbertson disputes the likelihood of this claim) . Escapes and attempts were frequent , and attempted escapees were regarded " with high esteem " by the other prisoners . Before 1812 , approximately 130 prisoners , including 25 officers , escaped , of whom only 11 were recaptured despite advertised rewards in local newspapers . Many others were either sent to prisons in England or the West Indies , or were released after pledging allegiance to the British Crown . Approximately 1535 French prisoners were incarcerated at Melville between 1803 and 1813 , and an unknown number were held during Napoleon 's Hundred Days . Sixty @-@ six Frenchmen are known to have died in the prison , ten of whom were prisoners from the Hundred Days . Nine Spanish prisoners also died during this period .

= = War of 1812 = =

The War of 1812 brought an influx of American prisoners to Melville Island ; up to 1800 at a time were housed in its barracks or on a nearby 350 @-@ person prison ship , the Magnet . Most of the French prisoners were released or paroled to make room for the Americans , who were seen as more of a risk . David Stickney was the first recorded American prisoner , arriving on 4 July 1812 . Early in the war , many Americans were exchanged for British prisoners in Boston or Salem , Massachusetts , in an arrangement known as a " cartel " ; 1981 of the captives taken before October 1812 were thus exchanged , while another seventeen , accused of killing a Canadian farmer and raping his wife , were sent to England and imprisoned . African @-@ American captives were never considered for exchange , and were instead commonly released under the 1807 Abolition Act .

By the end of 1812 , maps of the peninsula showed a marked increase in buildings : a two @-@ story common prison , a small hospital , officers ' quarters , a gunner 's house , a turnkey store , fuel sheds , the agent 's office and guard house , a bell house , nine sentry boxes , and four oceanside outhouses . Despite this , the facility was severely overcrowded , a problem compounded by attempts at segregating the remaining French prisoners and the few African @-@ Americans from the majority white American population . 2078 prisoners were recorded by the end of 1812 , including 1412 privateers and 572 merchant seamen . More than 3000 arrived over the next two years , including nearly 1000 soldiers captured in the Niagara area .

Accounts of prison life vary : Cuthbertson says that the prisoners were " reportedly well treated " , but prisoner complaints suggested they were " wretched indeed " . Because of the crowded conditions , " the authorities did everything they could to keep the prisoners quiet , " including lying to them . Captured privateers were sent to England in large numbers " to harass and distress that description of prisoners " . All letters sent to and by prisoners were read . Residents of the Melville prison barracks were lice @-@ infested and slept in tier @-@ hung hammocks (first three , and later four tiers) , and their activities were more restricted than those of earlier French prisoners . A strict cleaning regimen was observed in an attempt to promote sanitary conditions , and prisoners could be sent to solitary confinement for uncleanness . Rations were considered " robust " : prisoners were given 0 @.@ 45 kilograms (1 lb) each of bread and beef and a gill (0 @.@ 1421 litres) of peas daily .

In October 1812 , John Mitchell was appointed as an " American agent " to oversee the treatment of the American prisoners at Melville and to arrange prisoner exchanges . He gave the Americans coffee , sugar , potatoes , tobacco , newspapers , and soap , and also provided money for other purchases . Mitchell was responsible for buying clothing , but lacked the funds to meet demand : in late 1813 , almost 1000 of the prisoners were shoeless , and many more had no jackets . Staff at the prison hospital attributed a tuberculosis outbreak to " want of comfortable clothing " . Though

Mitchell visited Melville Island regularly , he was primarily concerned with speaking to the officers , not the common prisoners . Mitchell was removed in October 1814 in retaliation for the treatment of the British prisoner agent , Thomas Barclay , by the United States government .

Despite the conditions in the prison , the Americans continued the French tradition of establishing shops within the prison . Goods sold included cigars and smuggled rum . Gambling was a popular pastime , particularly backgammon and other dice games , as well as dancing , singing , and storytelling . One prisoner was able to counterfeit Spanish coins , which found their way into the Halifax economy . On Sundays , church services were conducted and visitors were allowed , though many visiting Haligonians were United Empire Loyalists who came " to gratify their eyes ... with sight of what they called ' rebels ' " .

The 320 American survivors of the Battle of Boston Harbor were interned on Melville Island in 1813 , and their ship , renamed the HMS Chesapeake , was used to ferry prisoners from Melville to England 's Dartmoor Prison . Many officers were paroled to Halifax , but some began a riot at a performance of a patriotic song about the Chesapeake 's defeat . Parole restrictions were tightened : beginning in 1814 , paroled officers were required to attend a monthly muster on Melville Island , and those who violated their parole were confined to the prison . After foiled escape plots in 1813 and 1814 , fears of a mass escape led to increased security and a 600 @-@ prisoner transport to England . Around this time , Lieutenant William Miller , who had been in charge of the prisoners , was replaced by Captain J. Crochet ; Miller had been noted for his rudeness , including one occasion when he told the prisoners to " die and be damned , as there is one hundred and fifty acres of land to bury you in , God damn you . " He had also been accused of cruelty by American newspapers , though some prisoners defended him and the veracity of the media claims is questionable .

The crowded and insanitary prison led to frequent outbreaks of infectious diseases , including smallpox , typhoid , pneumonia , and dysentery , and a corresponding increase in mortality rates . 195 American prisoners died on Melville Island of various causes , most of whom were buried on Deadman 's Island ; James Brooke suggests a death rate of one per week . The war ended in December 1814 , but news of this did not reach Melville until March 1815 , during which time about fifty prisoners died . The prisoners were released to " quit Halifax at their own expense " , though some were able to find berths on trade ships . All but 120 had left by mid @-@ April ; most of those remaining were hospital patients , who were sent to the Naval Hospital in Halifax in early May . Melville Island was decommissioned in May 1815 , and its goods , including 1170 hammocks , were sold at auction in Halifax .

By the decommissioning , over 10 @,@ 000 French , Spanish and American prisoners had been held at the prison . The vast majority had been Americans : there were 8148 recorded US prisoners , 3542 of whom were privateers from the 92 such ships brought to Halifax .

= = Receiving depot = =

After the decommissioning of the military prison , Melville Island was used as a receiving depot for some of the black refugees , the estimated 1600 ? 2000 escaped slaves who arrived in Halifax between 1815 and 1818 . In April 1815 , seventy @-@ six refugees were moved to Melville from the Halifax Poor House , many ill with smallpox . The refugees were given blankets , " colourful " clothing (often the uniforms of captured or demobilized soldiers) , and children 's shoes . Rations included pork or beef , potatoes , rice , cornmeal , molasses , spruce beer (to prevent scurvy) , and sometimes coffee . To discourage men from leaving their families at the depot as they worked in Halifax , rations were only given to heads of families . Thomas Jeffery was granted a salary of £ 1500 (£ 86 @,@ 655 as of 2010) for administering the depot . Eighty @-@ two refugees died during the smallpox outbreak , and 500 were vaccinated to prevent the further spread of the disease . An increasing number passed through Melville Island on their way to Canadian settlements : between 727 and 798 are recorded from April to July 1815 . Most of these found work in Halifax or moved to land grants , but some returned the following winter " when in distress " . At least 107 of these refugees died on Melville Island . The province 's lieutenant @-@ governor ordered that the

refugees be moved to Preston or Halifax in May 1816 , and put the land up for lease to " a person of unexceptionable character " , but no lease is recorded during this period . The hospital was officially closed in June 1816 .

Beginning in 1818 , Melville Island was used as a quarantine hospital for ill immigrants arriving in Nova Scotia . The hospital was operational for short periods in 1818 , 1831 , and 1846 . By 1829 , ten buildings were left on Melville Island , all " in a state of neglect and decay " . In 1831 , three doctors (Matthias Hoffman , Samuel Head and John Stirling) were paid £ 30 each (£ 2125 as of 2010) to care for patients at the quarantine hospital ; a nurse later arrived as Matron , bringing with her two teenaged children . In 1847 , over 1200 Irish immigrants fleeing the Irish Potato Famine were ordered quarantined on Melville Island by the Board of Health ; of these , 203 were held in the " fever hospital " , and 30 died . Typhus victims were also held at Melville , during which time the medical staff were not allowed to leave for fear of spreading the infection .

Diseases encountered among the immigrants included smallpox , typhus , and yellow fever . There were 37 recorded deaths .

= = British Army = =

In 1855 , Nova Scotia politician Joseph Howe developed a plan to use Melville Island as a recruitment and training centre for American soldiers to fight for the British in the Crimean War . US neutrality laws prevented Americans from participating in overseas wars , so recruiters sent to the US advertised for men to work on the Nova Scotia Railway , and faced arrest if their true purpose was discovered . Upon arrival in Halifax , the men were sent to Melville Island for enlistment and basic training . The first group of 66 men arrived on 6 April 1855 , but all refused to join the British Foreign Legion . However , by the end of May there were 71 newly recruited soldiers on the peninsula , and up to 158 total had enlisted . American discontent with the project forced its abandonment in June ; the Melville Island depot closed , and the recruits were sent first to Halifax and then to England . Overall the recruitment project enlisted between 500 and 700 men , mostly German and Irish nationals .

After the recruitment project ended , the Admiralty sold the land to the British army for £ 2800 (£ 204 @, @ 081 as of 2010) for use as a military prison . The first 70 prisoners arrived in 1856 . At this time , flogging was gradually being phased out as a punishment for military members , who were instead imprisoned under the Mutiny Act of 1844 ; the purchase of Melville Island allowed these prisoners to be removed from the overcrowded Halifax Citadel . A 22 @-@ man military guard supervised the prisoners , who were subjected to hard labour : the chief warder imported 500 tonnes (492 long tons ; 551 short tons) of granite from Purcell 's Cove for them to break . Punishments included solitary confinement or " shot drill " , where an inmate was made to carry 11 @-@ kilogram (24 lb) cannonballs from one end of the yard to the other . A new 34 @-@ cell prison building was constructed in 1884 to alleviate overcrowding . There were some escape attempts during this period , the most violent of which involved the stone hammers used to break stone being repurposed as projectiles and weapons .

British officers from the Halifax garrison conducted inspections of the prison four times per year , and maintenance was carried out either by the prisoners themselves or by soldiers from the Halifax garrison . The prison also housed a schoolroom and chapel , both staffed by army personnel . A new stone prison was built before 1905 next to the older wooden barracks , as well as housing for warders and their families . The new building alleviated reported problems with lack of lighting and ventilation in the previous structure . In December of that year , the Canadian Permanent Force took over wardenship of the prison , at which time there were three remaining prisoners . The land was granted to the Canadian Government as the British left Nova Scotia in 1907 . The name was changed in 1909 from " military prison " to " detention barracks " , reflecting a shift in attitude towards incarcerated military personnel : inmates were known as detainees , not prisoners , and after their discharge from the military they maintained no permanent criminal record .

= = First and Second World Wars = =

When the First World War began in 1914 , Canadian police were given the ability to detain German and Austro -@- Hungarian nationals , and incarcerate any who refused to agree not to support their homelands in the war . In September , a Spanish ship carrying a large number of men en route to Germany to report for military service was intercepted by the HMS Glory , which brought the ship to Halifax Harbour . Once there , the Germans aboard were taken to Melville Island with a garrison guard , interrogated , and imprisoned under the supervision of the detention barracks staff . Over the next several months , more German nationals were brought to Melville , detained either by British ships or by Canadian police forces . Escape attempts began in October , and a procedure to count prisoners twice daily was instituted in an attempt to prevent them . The anglophone guards often could not communicate with the prisoners or even pronounce their names , resorting to nicknames and complicating efforts in prisoner management . Repairs were made to the prison buildings after several inmates escaped by sawing a hole through the floor of the wooden barracks .

Initially there was no system in place to allow prisoners to send letters ; censorship arrangements were made through the Dominion Police in Ottawa , and the American Consul was designated a representative for prisoner welfare . As the war progressed , groups of detainees were transferred to and from other prisons according to their behaviour or level of risk and the number of inmates per institution . After the 1917 Halifax Explosion , prisoners were transferred to the 800 @-@ man Amherst Internment Camp at Amherst , Nova Scotia . One of the prisoners transferred may have been Leon Trotsky , although this is disputed .

On 10 April 1935 , a fire completely destroyed the old wooden prison barracks , so when the Second World War began in 1939 , the remaining prisoners and guards were sent to McNab 's Island . Melville Island was used first to confine deserters from the army , then from 1941 as a temporary storage facility for Canadian Army ammunition depots . When VE Day caused riots in downtown Halifax , there were rumours of a plan to break into the depots and deploy hand grenades ; a trooper squad was sent to guard against this possibility , but no " invasion " occurred .

= = 1945 ? present = =

After the end of the Second World War , military activities on Melville ended ; the land was initially awarded to the Naval Sailors Association , a decision that prompted some disagreement among members of Parliament . Haligonians pushed for the area to be repurposed for recreation , partially due to anxieties about its use as a storage facility for potentially toxic chemicals . In 1947 , the Canadian Army leased Melville Island to the Armdale Yacht Club for C \$ 1 per year . The club demolished some of the buildings , renovated and expanded others , widened the road , and filled in a new embankment for boating . Further renovations were done in 1952 and the 1960s , adding verandahs to the two clubhouses (one of which dates to 1808 and was used as a warden 's house) and remodelling their interiors . Though the club 's lease was initially year @-@ to @-@ year , in 1956 it began a 99 @-@ year lease from the Department of National Defence . The club dredged Melville Cove , added a " marine railway " , and created a large marina , at which dozens of boats are now docked .

= = Culture = =

During certain periods , Melville Island was a social destination for Halifax residents . Haligonians visited the " town fair " run by French inmates during the Napoleonic period . The peninsula was called a " great resort of the ladies of Halifax " by an 1855 newspaper . However , from the beginning of the First World War to 1947 , visitors to Melville were restricted . Though it was re @-@ opened with the arrival of the Armdale Yacht Club , the area 's history was largely forgotten until the 2000 establishment of Deadman 's Island Park on the adjacent peninsula . Since then , the site has become a tourist attraction , though its historicity is limited by the land 's current use as a marina . A model made from beef and pork bones by French prisoners and a cell key to Melville Island are preserved at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax .

The peninsula has also been the subject of artistic and literary treatments . A number of writings by Melville prisoners have been preserved , including a diary by François @-@ Lambert Bourneuf and an account credited to Benjamin Waterhouse (though historians are unsure of its true authorship) . Politician Joseph Howe wrote a poem describing its use as a military prison (See Poem) . The site 's history has been the subject of a book by Brian Cuthbertson , and another by Iris Shea and Heather Watts . The prison is the subject of a painting held by the UK National Trust and a Nova Scotian folk song , among other cultural works .