

## 5.4 Pembroke Area History

Pembroke Heritage Designation Sub-Committee, led by Marian Patterson

### Geology

Over one half million years ago, the country stretching from Fitzroy Township (known as the Upper Ottawa Valley) was covered by the sea. As the last ice age receded, a long, wide (and in some places, extremely deep) trench was left. The land exposed was rich in minerals, and is well known to mineral collectors. Minerals found in the region include corundum, hematite, magnetite, radioactive minerals, chalcopryrite, graphite, rose quartz, garnet, mica, molybdenite, galena, selenite, tourmaline, brucite, sphalerite, feldspar (including amazonite), apatite, fluorspar, nepheline, zircon, beryl, pyrite, tremolite and celestite.

European settlers in the area quarried limestone, sandstone and feldspar. Many of the fine, older homes are made of locally quarried limestone. The closest lime kilns (for making mortar) were located on Allumette Island, just opposite Morrison's Island. The bricks were made locally from the many deposits of clay found along the banks of the Muskrat, Indian and Ottawa Rivers. Pembroke's City Hall is built from beautiful red sandstone that was quarried on Beckett's Island in the 1880s. These minerals were brought to the Pembroke area by boat. In the case of the feldspar, a short boat ride across Hazley's Bay to the railroad spur was all that was needed.

### The Fur Trade

In 1613 Champlain and his party paddled up the Ottawa River and traveled overland to the foot of Muskrat Lake. They paddled up the lake and walked across to the shore of Lower Allumette Lake, where they met Chief Tessouat, who had a lookout at the foot of Morrison's Island. Champlain's goal was to establish fur trading in the region. Morrison's Island near Pembroke played a key role in the fur trade. As flotillas of furs were transported to Montreal, a major portage was necessary to avoid the rapids at Morrison's Island, where the island's Aboriginal inhabitants were said to have extracted a toll. Two centuries later, the North West Company established a number of trading posts in the Upper Ottawa Valley near Pembroke, including Fort William (1823-1869), Fort Coulonge (1680) and Des Joachims (1600s).

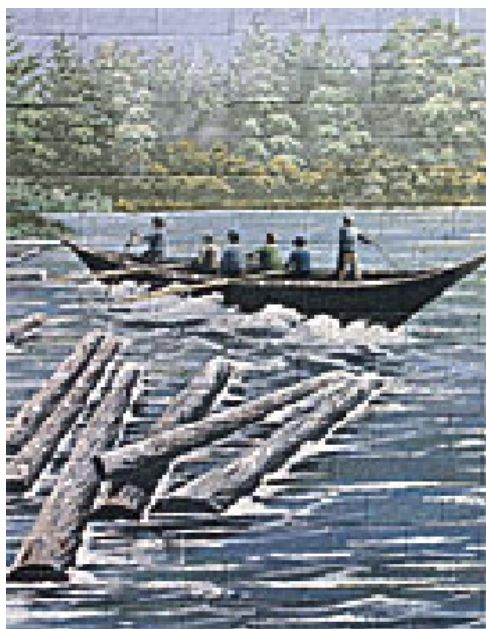
### European Settlement

Many settlers built homesteads along the shores of the Ottawa River at the present site of Pembroke. One notable settler was Colonel Peter White and his family from Scotland, arriving May 24, 1828. He made a clearing and erected a log cabin, which was the beginning of the present city of Pembroke as we know it today. This early settlement on the Upper Allumette Lake was initially called Miramichi. Later, the Pembroke Township area was divided into Lower Town, Middle Town and Upper Town, with the Muskrat River dividing Middle and Upper Town. Upper Town was known by various names over the years: Miramichi, Moffat Town, and Pembroke. In 1839 the communities united to become Pembroke. The boundaries of Pembroke expanded after 1912 to include Fraserville (east of Cecilia Street), Churchville (south of Indian River) and Girouxville (west of Trafalgar Road). Lower Town became part of the city in the late 1950s.

## Lumbering and the Pointer Boat

The Pembroke area began to gain prominence and became an important lumbering centre. Many economic benefits accrued to the area as a result of the Ottawa River being the main artery for the transportation of logs. Massive timber rafts were a common sight floating by Pembroke. Many prominent lumber barons established their operations in the Ottawa Valley, including the McConnell Brothers. In 1939 and 1940, they began cutting logs along the Temiskaming River, which they floated to Pembroke via the Ottawa River.

**Figure 5.4 Pembroke Heritage Mural: The Pointer Boat**



Source: Ottawa River Heritage Legacy Landmark Network

The prestigious Pointer Boat was for many years the “workhorse” of Canadian rivers. John R. Booth commissioned an Ottawa boat builder, John Cockburn, to design and build a strong logging boat. The boats had identically shaped ends, which served as either bow or stern. They were between 5 and 15 metres in length, with 6 to 8 men wielding 3 metre oars. The boats were preserved with boiled oil and jeweller’s rouge, giving them a distinctive red Venetian look. They were famous for being able to “float on a strong dew”.

These boats had to be transported to Pembroke by horse and sleigh over a distance of 166 kilometres for logging operations around Pembroke. Consequently, John Cockburn moved his boat building business to Pembroke in 1858. The property extended to the Ottawa River and was known as Cockburn Bay, the present site of the Cockburn Pointer Boat Monument at the Pembroke Waterfront. Three generations of the Cockburn family built these boats in Pembroke, only stopping in 1969. The Pointer Boat was the subject of two paintings by Tom Thompson – “Le Bateau” and “The Pointers”.

The “Alligator” Boat, also used extensively in the Ottawa Valley, was developed by a Canadian, John Ceburn West, and was made in Simcoe, Ontario. The lumbermen’s steel spike boots were produced by Farmers Brothers Limited in Arnprior. Logging led to a number of spin-off industries, including the Pembroke Axe Factory, the Pembroke Box Factory, the Consolidated Mills, Pembroke Eddy Match and Canada Veneers.

## Steamboating

The development of steamboat travel in the Pembroke area improved communications with communities upstream and downstream. Jason Gould of Smith’s Falls built a steamer named *The Muskrat*, which traveled along the Muskrat River. Gould built a second vessel in 1852, *The North Star*, and a third, *The Jason Gould*, in 1862.

The first steamboat to sail from Pembroke to Rapides-Des-Joachims was the *Pontiac* in 1852. It made daily trips, leaving Pembroke at 1 p.m. The following morning it returned from Des Joachims at 6 o’clock to connect at Pembroke with *The Jason Gould*, which embarked from Pembroke Landing at 2 p.m. This

traveled to the eastern end of Muskrat Lake where the passengers transferred to a stage coach for the balance of the trip to Portage-du-Fort.

Other notable steamboats plying the river from Pembroke included *The John Egan* 1872 built by The Union Forwarding Company, *The E.H. Bronson* in 1895, and *The Victoria*, 1897 which later became *The Oiseau*. Steamboat excursions continued till the mid-twenties. Prominent ferry boats connecting the Pembroke wharf to Allumette Island were *The W.L. Murphy* and *The S.S. Pontiac*. *The S.S. Pontiac* operated from 1943 until 1956 when the inter-provincial bridge between Ontario and Quebec was built.

Hydroelectric power development in the area was established in Bryson in 1925, and in Chenaux and Des Joachims in 1950. In 1882, Pembroke became the first town in Canada to have electric lighting.

### **Recreation and Tourism**

The Ottawa River also enabled Pembroke to flourish through its many opportunities for recreation. In particular, hockey has been an important sport in Pembroke as early as the 1880s on the frozen Ottawa, Muskrat and Indian Rivers. An early hockey team in Pembroke was established by a young lawyer and hockey enthusiast named Lennox Irving who came to Pembroke in the late 1880s. Around 1895, residents started setting up hockey rinks in their backyards. Schools built outdoor rinks. Privately owned buildings soon brought the hockey games indoors. In 1898, the Ottawa Valley Hockey League was created. Suddenly this sport was turning out to be a great economic boost for Pembroke. As early as 1909, Pembroke boasted a girls' hockey team called "The Pembroke Cyclones".

The economy of Pembroke still benefits from this sport in both winter and summer. People from all parts of Ontario and beyond travel to "Hockey Town Canada" (Pembroke) to participate in tournaments such as the House League, Competitive and Old Timers. Pembroke has produced several NHL stars and some have been recorded in the Hockey Hall of Fame, including Frank Nighbor, Hugh Lehman, and Harry Cameron.

The tourism industry in the Pembroke area has greatly benefited from Ottawa River white water and the establishment of several rafting companies.

Every Labour Day weekend, Pembroke's Riverside Park becomes Fiddle Park and hosts the Old Time Fiddling and Stepdancing competitions. Over 1800 recreational vehicles and campers who travel to Pembroke participate in Fiddle Week.