

Heritage Tour of Portland

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**#1. Emmanuel Anglican Church, 1861 -
2767 Hwy #15**

Built upon the crest of Portland Hill, Emmanuel Anglican Church has watched over the scenery and the morality of the village and the Big Rideau through the symphony of many seasons. On land donated by the early farm family of William Sherwood, this lovely church was masoned of locally quarried Cambrian sandstone. Its ashlar were shaped and set by some of the same artisans of stone who came to the wilderness of Upper Canada to help build the Rideau Canal. Finding their Eden, they then stayed and helped build a community and a culture. With its buttressed walls and beautiful windows of stained glass, Emmanuel is a charming example of a mid-nineteenth century rural church. It is a Portland landmark.

a day", or a year. The house situated to the east of the Toffey home was once a shed on the Toffey property. Where is Mr. Toffey's sawmill now? Indeed where are the three hotels, several stores and a number of fine homes that once graced Portland, its economy, its culture? Fire was a frequent visitor here as in all villages in those years before modern fire-fighting equipment and well-trained firefighters. A series of several saw mills have bustled, then burned along Portland's Mill Bay where now marinas and a seniors residence manifest a very different era.

**#12. Portland Public School, 1888 -
2770 Hwy #15**

Mention has already been made of the previous village school, as its sandstone was used in the foundation of the United Church. Built in 1888 to replace a single storey structure that had burned down, this new school of two rooms and storeys, was constructed of red brick. From its imposing location, it provided students especially with minds that wandered from the three R's to that fourth "R", namely Rideau Lake, its vista. And in the decades before Highway 15 interrupted their winter fun, Portland students could slide home for lunch by speedy toboggan. One might wonder if the one o'clock ringing from the high belfry brought them back to their books as speedily after lunch.

You can find further information on heritage life and architecturally significant buildings in the Township of Rideau Lakes at any branch of the Rideau Lakes Library. Ask to peruse: *Cranworth Chronicles* by Barbara Gibson (South Burgess); *History of the Township of North Crosby and Westport* by Neil Patterson; *Hub of the Rideau* by Sue Warren (South Crosby Ward); *My Own Four Walls* by Diane Haskin (Bastard and South Burgess Ward); *South Elmsley in the Making* by James Kennedy; and the many resources illustrating heritage life in North Crosby to be found in the Westport Library and the Westport Museum.

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his bank as a typical and fine example of rural "bank architecture". Its imposing front façade with large arched windows and door instilled a sense of assurance and security on those with surplus shekels to save or loans to seek as they entered the bank offices on the first floor. The living quarters of the manager and his family were on the second floor, where he could stay "on top of the money". The Union Bank and its successor, the Royal Bank of Canada continued to use this building until larger facilities were required. Still of legend in Portland was the day the Bank was robbed.

#9. John Polk Store, 1891 - 4 Main St.

Constructed on the burned-out ruins of a previous store, this imposing structure of solid local sandstone was both home and enterprise of the Polk family for over 90 years.

Customers ascended the stone steps and passed through the recessed entrance with its double doors into a classic general store. Behind the long hardwood counter, bins and shelves from floor to ceiling boasted the best from puffed rice to Rinso. The Polk family lived in fine quarters to the north of the store and on occasions of leisure must have enjoyed the airs and views from either level of their beautiful balconied verandah, now meticulously restored. After 1920, a two-storey wing was added to the south-west. This accommodated the Portland Post Office and upstairs, the home of the post master who was privileged with a separate and private entrance.

**#10. The Gingerbread House -
35 Colborne St.**

Likely dating from the 1880's or 1890's, this house features lively gingerbread trim under the eaves of its front gable. By the end of the 19th century, saw mills were a cornerstone to Portland's prosperity. They were able to mass produce countless functional items and decorative details in wood. For over a century, Portland was a cradle for the craftsmanship of coopers and cartwrights; for products as diverse as fine boats to modern bungalows. The invention of the scroll saw teamed with the talent of a fine artisan made this decorative woodwork highlighting the eaves of this Gothic Revival home.

#11. Harmon Toffey House, 1892

Italianate in style with its exceptionally decorated porch and six-foot-high double window above, projecting eaves with brackets, and attractive wooden trim, this home befitted a prosperous saw mill owner.

Mr. and Mrs. Toffey lived else where in the village for 2 decades prior to the building of this fine residence. It is said that he accumulated the best of lumber from his busy mill for several years in preparation for construction.

Like the Dowcett House (and Rome), this fine home was not "built in

the front façade. This house was later purchased by William Gallagher whose family followed the Cole tradition of owning and managing many businesses in the village. Among these was a very prosperous general store located next door - the original building suffered fire in 1930 and was rebuilt of brick as you now see. Behind the store, beside the lake stands the Gallagher warehouse, now a home. This structure was originally built in the 1870's to store commodities to be shipped such as barrels of maple syrup and boxes of cheddar cheese destined for the outer world. Goods received included barrels of biscuits (now cookies) from the near of Kingston and boxes of tea from the far of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

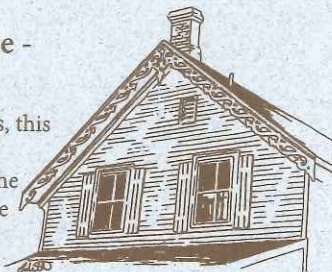
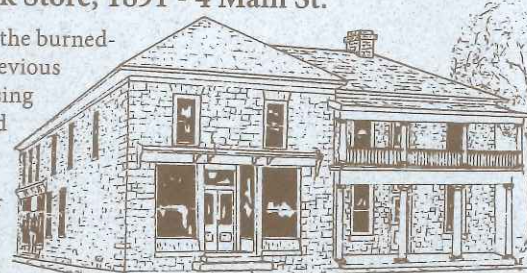
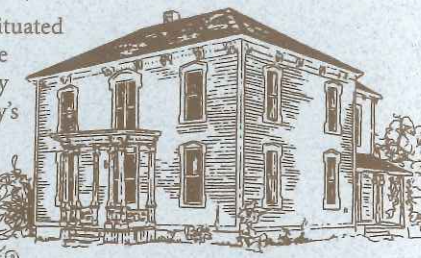
#7. Eliza Hartwell House, c. 1850 - 21 E. Water St.

A house of mystery, this pretty, green-painted building is legendary through association. Nobody seems to know who built it. But it is known that in its early years, it was the home of Eliza Hartwell and

several members of Dowsett name, a family later earning fame across the country and continent as boat wrights. From 1879 to 1924, it was home to a succession of Gallaghers, famous in Portland tradition for their entrepreneurship. And since 1924, it has been owned by the Southam family of newspaper fame. With extensive heritage properties elsewhere on the Big Rideau, the Hartwell House has provided residence for the Southam property managers and a land base for boat access to their other possessions. Note the adjacent storage shed and boathouse that facilitate this role. As such, the Hartwell House is representative of a time when Portland and much of its commerce and population provided service for a number of fine and legendary summer estates among nearby islands and bays. Once Viscounts of navies, executives of Ford Motor Co., senators from Ottawa and Washington, stars from Hollywood summered with many others of fame and fortune. With families and friends, they docked their fine boats at the Portland waterfront and reveled in the annual Portland Regatta. The Hartwell house, though modest in itself, is a nostalgic reminder of that magnificent era.

**#8. Albert Gallagher Bank Building, 1903 -
11 Main St.**

Prior to 1903 and the construction of this first Portland bank, the more prosperous of the village had to take and make their financial arrangements afar and away. In the case of Mr. Gallagher, successful and prosperous burgher, this meant frequent trips to Smiths Falls, some twenty miles distant. He accordingly made an offer to the Union Bank to erect this structure, then lease it to them. Being a wise and shrewd businessman, Mr. Gallagher built



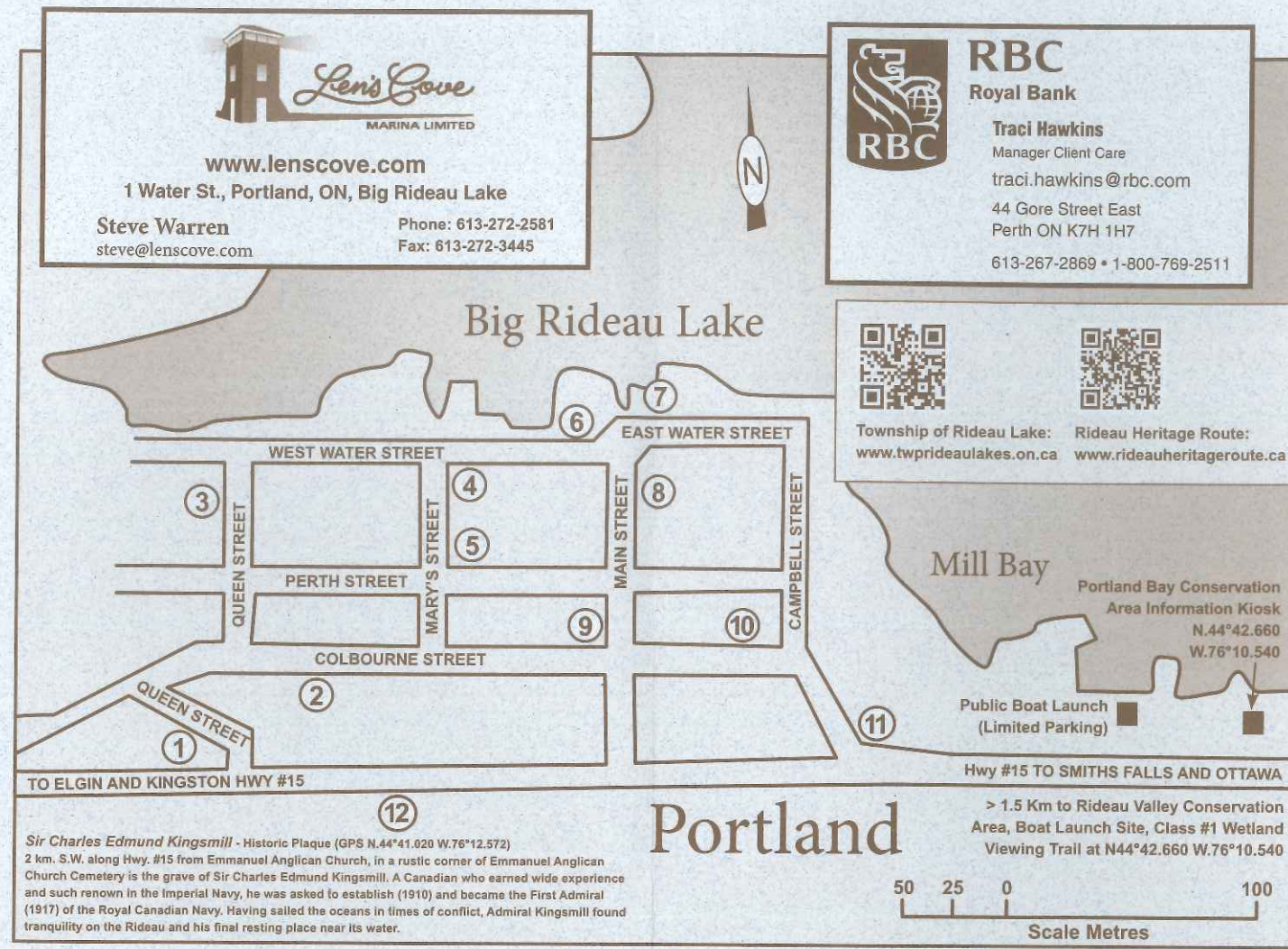
Introduction

Undoubtedly First Canadians frequented the blue water, the shores and portages of Rideau Lake for millennia and it would seem that early European homesteaders were raising their cabins and crops in the vicinity of Portland in the 1790's. It is recorded that a saddle-bag man of the cloth was arrested as a vagabond for visitations and sacraments that the authorities considered prolonged.

The original land grant for the site of Portland is dated 1801. But a community was not born until 1816 when "The Landing" became the major stepping-off point for those intending to homestead in the Perth area. Settlers, the eager, the anxious, arrived from Brockville by bush trail to The Landing, by barge down Rideau Lake and up the Tay Valley to Perth. The completion of the Rideau Canal in 1832 opened the Rideau countryside and "Old Landing" to the world. With the establishment of a post office in 1842, Portland received its official name. Commercial traffic on the Rideau and the growth of agriculture across the hinterland nurtured numerous businesses catering to the needs of farm families and the export of raw materials. Steamers and barges departed from Portland laden with barrels of potash and cords of wood from the clearing of forest, bales of tanned hides and casks of salt beef from the bounty of field. Hence Portland became a thriving village of trade and transshipment. But by 1900, the nature of commercial activity was changing. Advances in rail and road travel and the advent of tourism offset a gradual decline in the role of agriculture. Portland remains today with much of its economic and cultural life focused on Big Rideau Lake. The Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee endeavours with this Walking Tour to illustrate a variety of architectural influences reflected in the buildings of Portland. Amble casually with us. Imagine the welcome clang of steam boat bell, the aromas of outer-world spices and local cheddar in grocer shops, the humming of mills, business being done, the laughter and tears of family and village life as it was ten and fifteen decades ago.

#2. John Grant House, c 1872 - 12 Colborne St.

This sandstone house is a variation of the mid 19th century "Ontario Cottage" with a rectangular shape, 1 1/2 storey and transom and sidelights around the front door. However, instead of the main entrance on the front façade, it is on the gable end, likely because of the shape and slope of the lot. Built by John Grant, local blacksmith, its masons worked with massive and beautiful sandstone quarried from a nearby outcrop. The house was later sold to Stephen Chipman, a cooper whose shop was the board-and-batten barn still to be seen at the rear of the lot. There he crafted barrels and other products of his artistry in wood that were much in demand in rural life in times B.P. (before plastic, that is). Next to the John Grant house is the Portland United Church. Note especially the sandstone foundation - ashlar that were originally part of the village school that was once located here. When the decision was made in the late 1800's to construct a new school, the Methodists purchased the building and lot and used it as their place of worship



until 1890. Then they demolished it and used the sandstone for the foundations of their new church - from foundations of learning to foundations of faith. You will see the village school later in this tour, site #11.

#3 William Snider House, c 1850's - 8 Queen St.

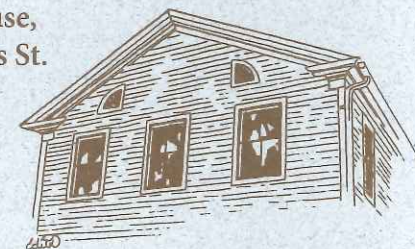
This pleasant home is typical of the third-stage residence of a successful pioneer artisan. William Snider, tanner and shoemaker, built this handsome one and one-half storey house framed with hand-hewn timbers. Initially clad with clapboard, it was later stuccoed in gray. Its medium pitched roof has projecting eaves and verges plus a moulded cornice and frieze. The main



entrance is off-centre. Note the wooden transom and pilasters on the sides, typically to let abundant natural light into the interior hallway in those decades before electric lighting. An open and well-shaded verandah with closed railing provided the Snider family and later residents with a wonderful view of the Big Rideau on sultry summer's eve. Also notice the typical carriage shed with wide double doors at the back of the residence. This tells of a time when many a village burgher boasted their own buggy for summer travel and a sleigh for winter. A resident steed provided horsepower.

#4. Peter Bresee House, mid 1840's - 7 Mary's St.

Peter Bresee who had emigrated from Vermont, was an early farmer in the area and later a store owner. The brown building across Water Street once housed his business. A man of diverse talents and interests, Mr. Bresee was also involved in smithing of black metal and trading of timber. His



successes are marked by his fine home of classical Georgian style with its symmetrical façade. Originally its windows were 12-over-12. But still of particular note are its fine return eaves and in its north gable, two eyebrow windows keep watch over the Big Rideau "from whence Peter's wealth cometh". Peter Bresee resided in his fine new home for only a few years until it became the residence of the Scovil family who for several generations have been legendary in local business and society.

#5. Clare Dowsett House, 1926 - 5 Mary's St.

Once makers of fine wagons and carriages, the Dowsett family adapted their talents to the making of fine boats as summer cottages came to dot the shores and islands of the Big Rideau. Dowsett boats became renowned across the continent and the family continued in this business until the mid-1900's. In 1926, Clare Dowsett and his father built this fine home as the wedding abode for Clare and his bride. Inside and out, this 1 1/2 storey home reflects the meticulous care, craftsmanship and passion of renowned boat-wrights who broke with local architecture of their time. The naturally-dried butternut shiplap siding is still draft-free after three-quarters of a century. Europa-style shingles grace the gables. The wooden sashes of the 9 over 1 windows still rise and close freely for July breezes and seal against the January blasts. Long before energy and conservation were buzz words, the Dowsetts positioned most windows on the south and west sides, away from cold winter gales off the Big Rideau. But on the windward side, two small diamond quarry windows act as nautical port holes through which to view the lake. Another port looks out from the foyer beside the front entrance. The family colours of yellow and green have historic maritime significance and the concrete foundation was once painted blue to represent the sea, nurture and nature for all boats. Truly, love poetry in architecture!



#6. Peter Cole House, 1850's - 17 W. Water St.

Peter Cole was responsible for establishing several enterprises along the Portland waterfront. His large wharf once bustled with shipping and receiving. By 1861, lumber from Peter Cole's saw mill on a creek leading into the Big Rideau Lake was being loaded onto steamers and barges destined for the U.S. North and for Britain. The Cole house is another fine example of the "Ontario Cottage" design. Note its typical front gable window with a semi-circular head and its verandah across

