

## **The Quay to Success: A Look at the Pickering Waterfront**

Before the arrival of European settlers, the Seneca of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy inhabited the area now known as Pickering. One of their most significant villages, Gandatsetiagon, used to stand where our city now does. As a people reliant on this area for hunting, fishing, and agrarian activities, water was a practical component of their daily lives. However, it also had a deeper meaning. As stated by scholar Joyce Tekahnawiiaks King, "The lesson in the Haudenosaunee Creation Story is that water is the primary element of the planet Earth. According to Haudenosaunee teachings, water is sacred on Earth" (King 6).

At any given moment, the average Pickering resident is a few kilometres away from a fine example of the most universal aspect of the human experience. We drink it. We bathe in it. For pleasure and sustenance we rely on it. The United Nations regards access to it as not only a basic right but a necessary step on the path of global development. Additionally, twenty percent of the world's surface freshwater rests in the Great Lakes. This simple resource has shaped Pickering and continues to do so today.

As settlers established themselves in choice locations along the shores of the Great Lakes and new trade networks were established, the transport and sale of grain, fish, stone, and later, ice, began, bringing commerce to Pickering regardless of the season. Frenchman's Bay was a natural port, but the construction of the pier in 1843 further aided in establishing the waterfront as an important trade venue.

As railways made water transport increasingly irrelevant, Pickering's waterfront evolved into a destination for leisure and amusement. The early Twentieth Century saw a dance hall, a yacht club, and a campsite emerge in the waterside neighbourhoods. Soon cottages were built along the edge of the water, particularly on the East Shore. This strip of land was so thin that it could only accommodate one line of buildings, so residents had access to the calm confines of Frenchman's Bay as well as to the seemingly unending expansion of the thirteenth largest lake in the world.

It may seem that Pickering's waterfront-related prosperity has declined in recent years. I have lived here all my life but have only spoken to people who can remember

such scenes, and these people are unfortunately few and far between. However, increasing attention seems to be given to the waterfront. The transformation of the beaches from private properties to public areas has allowed a greater number of people to use these spaces, and the 2013 construction of a new pier is a sign of renewed interest.

Today, a stroll along the East Shore will reveal the foundations of some former cottages, a reminder of the history of the area but also its evolving nature. Since the lockdowns I have seen more people visit the waterfront, and the diversity of these individuals speaks to the universal appeal of waterfront space.



An early aerial view of Pickering's beaches and Frenchman's Bay. Houses can be seen on the shore.  
*Image via [www.frenchmansbaymarina.com/history](http://www.frenchmansbaymarina.com/history)*



The remains of a cottage foundation on Pickering's East Shore. *Photo by Isobel Dalzell*

### **Works Cited and Consulted**

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