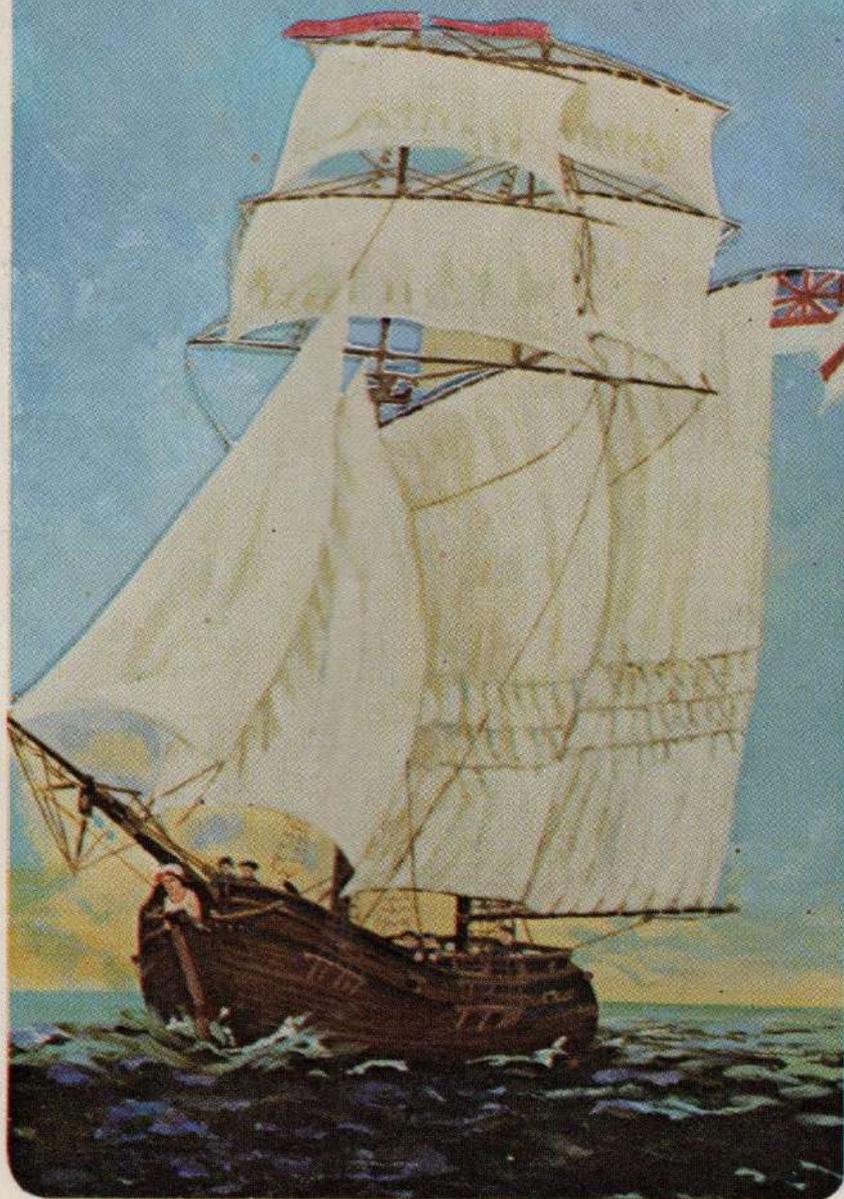


Historic Wasaga Beach



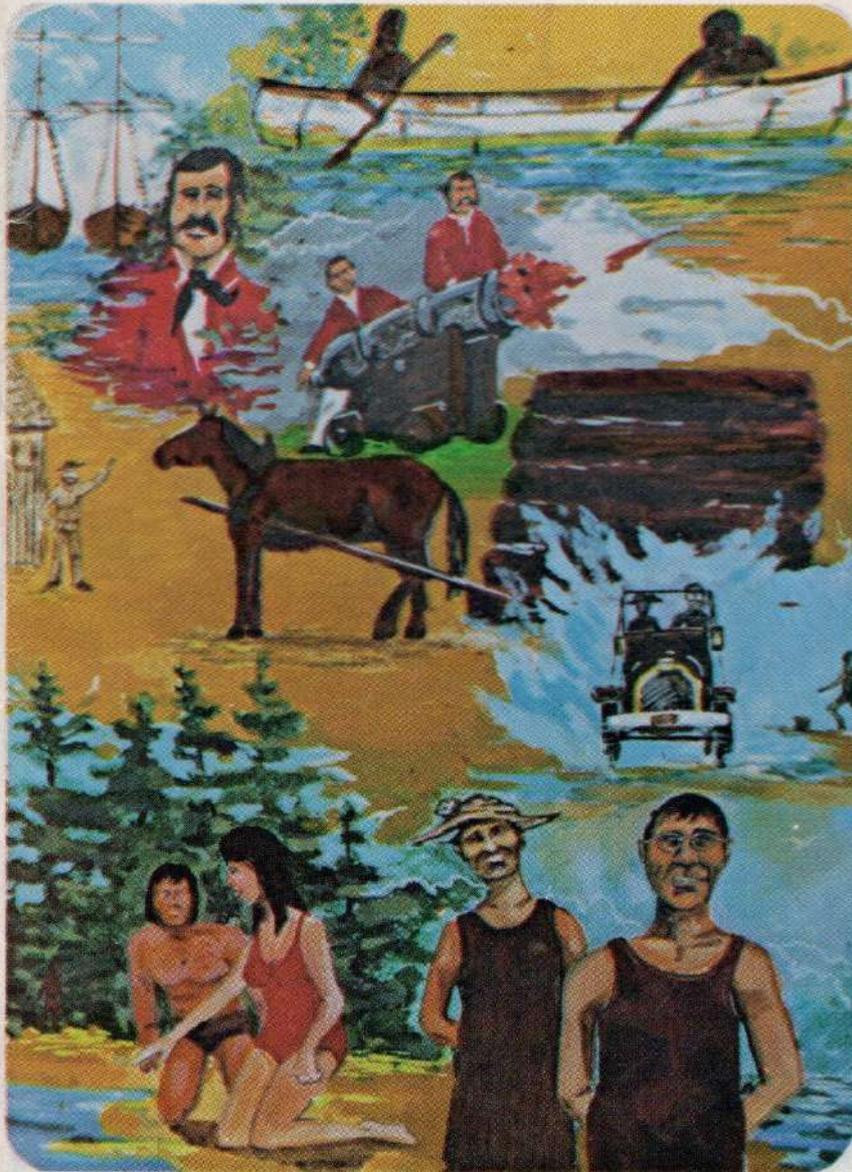
260.1

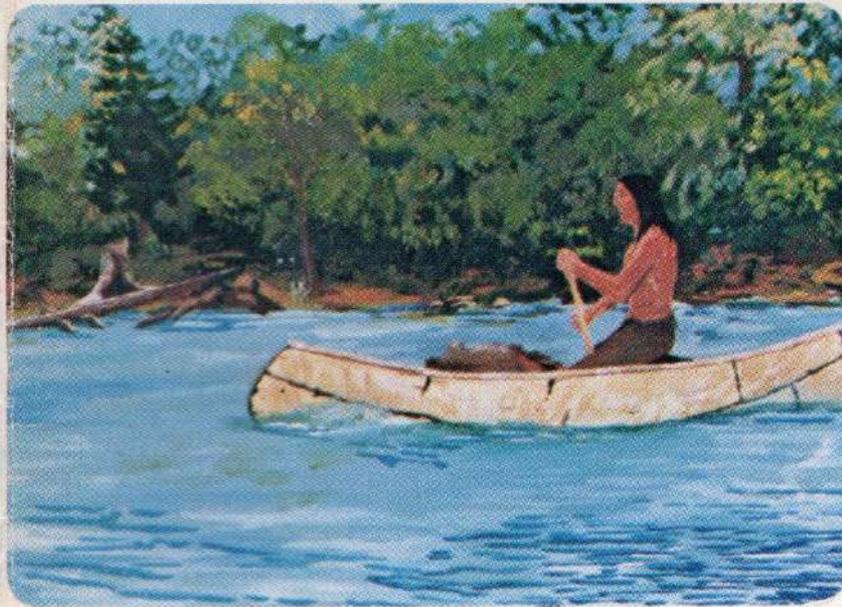
INTRODUCTION

The present resort community of Wasaga Beach is an area that has been influenced by the relationship of man with his environment - land and water - for over 2500 years.

Wasaga boasts a past that includes Indian fishing villages, a British Naval Establishment and a lumbering community. These settlements and their peoples - nomadic Indians, soldiers, sailors, trappers, traders, loggers - have come and gone. But the varied history and heritage left by them on both Beach and River, has helped shape the Wasaga Beach of today.

You are invited to experience that past. Interpretation at Nancy Island, Museum of the Upper Lakes, Schoonertown Parkette, and Van Vlack Display Court all provide the visitor with an interesting account of historic Wasaga Beach.





THE NOTTAWASAGA RIVER

In the past it was the Nottawasaga River rather than the Beach that attracted people to Wasaga. The Nottawasaga was the original passage to the area and the main travelling artery for Indians, early explorers and fur traders. For Prehistoric and Historic Peoples the river was also a valuable source of food.

Before the turn of the century, the fortunes of the area were determined by the Nottawasaga River. It was during the War of 1812, that the river served as a military and trade passage on the long haul from York (Toronto) to the Upper Great Lakes. Then with the timber boom of the 1840's and 50's, lumbermen used the Nottawasaga as a source of power and a means of shipping sawn lumber to market.

Today the Nottawasaga River plays mainly a recreational role for fishermen, boaters, canoeists and snowmobilers enjoying the beauty of the area.

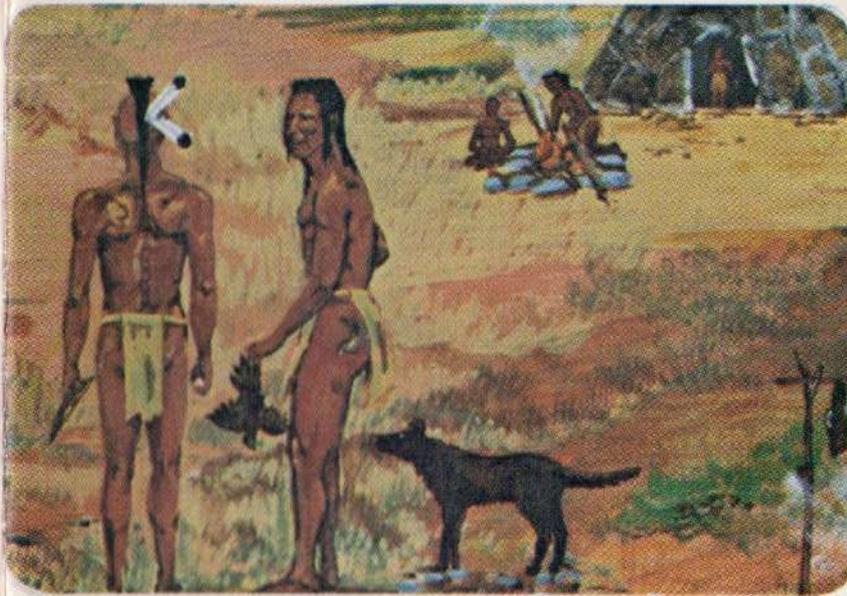
NANCY ISLAND HISTORIC SITE, MUSEUM OF THE UPPER LAKES

A vital moment of history is recreated for visitors at Nancy Island. It was here during the British-American War of 1812-14, that the British Schooner Nancy was trapped and sunk by three American ships. With her destruction on the Nottawasaga River on August 14, 1814, the American forces hoped to starve the Michilimackinac garrison between Lakes Huron and Michigan into surrender and gain control of the much desired Great Lakes. But the Nancy's crew and Michilimackinac troops rallied to capture two of those same American ships, regaining control of this vital supply route and hastening the end of the War of 1812.



The sunken Schooner Nancy formed an obstruction in the Nottawasaga River, and collecting sand and silt over 113 years resulted in the formation of Nancy Island. The hull of the Nancy was recovered from the Island in 1927 and today is located in front of the Museum.

Sails straining against the winds of the Lakes inspired the architecture of the Electronic Theatre and Museum, located on Nancy Island. This site vividly portrays the story of the Nancy and the War of 1812, along with other marine themes. A replica of an early Upper Lakes lighthouse on Tower Island allows visitors an interesting view of this historic site and surrounding Wasaga Beach.

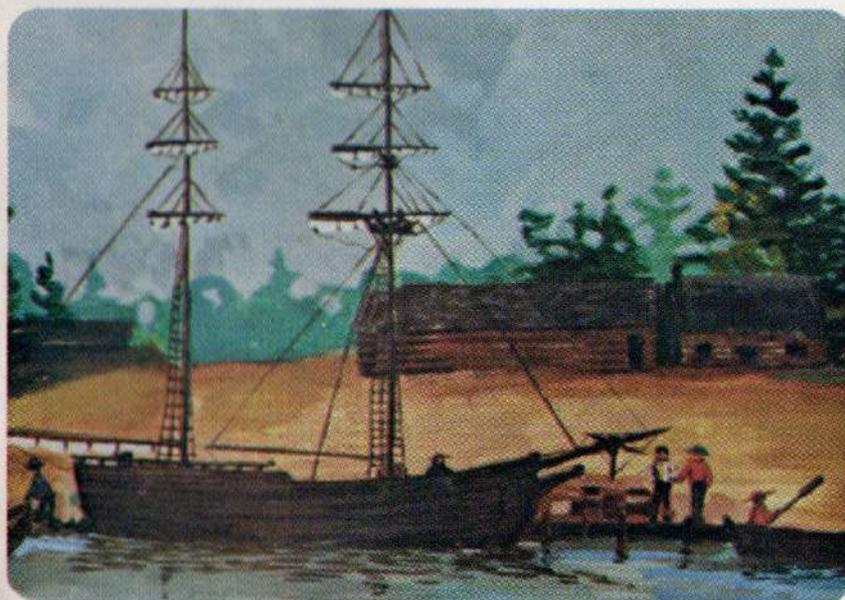


SCHOONERTOWN PARKETTE

Archeological evidence shows the area known as Schoonertown to be a site where both Prehistoric and Historic Peoples settled. Although both the Nottawasaga people and the Iroquoians were attracted by the fish of the Nottawasaga River, different lifestyles are evident.

In more recent history Schoonertown became known as "The Naval Establishment on Lake Huron". Built here on the Nottawasaga supply route in 1815 for the wintering and repair of vessels, it was to ensure continued transport of supplies and troops stationed on the Upper Great Lakes after the War of 1812. But its life was short lived. For with the end of the war and the signing of the Rush-Bagot Treaty in 1817, the Naval Squadron on Lake Huron was disbanded and soon afterwards Schoonertown was abandoned. That same year the Squadron and Establishments were transferred to the more suitable harbour at Penetanguishene.

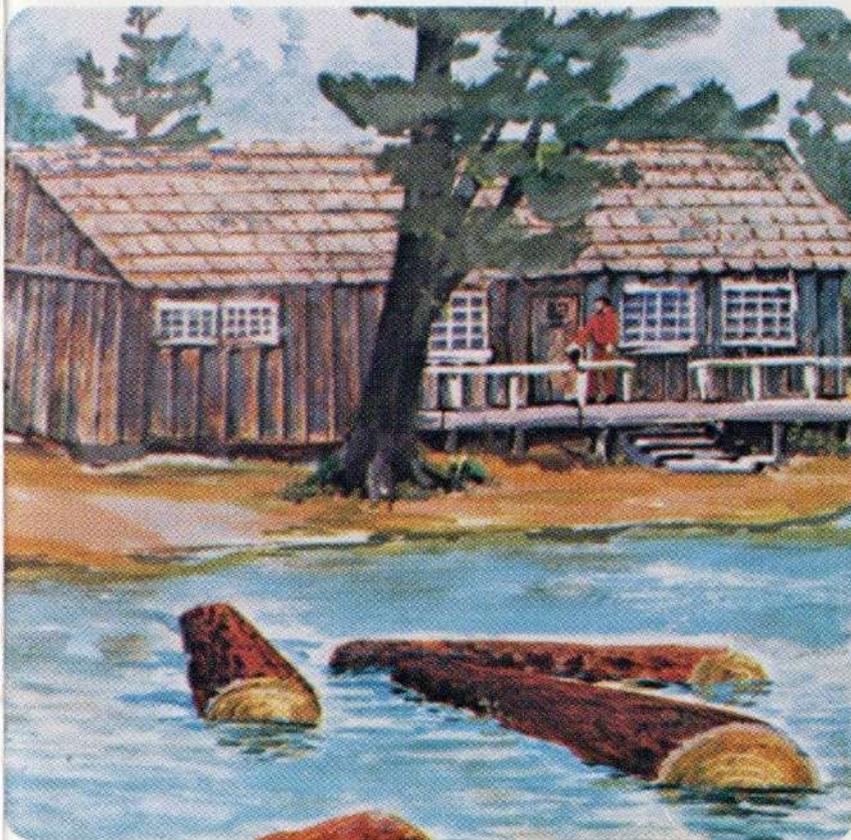
A small parkette, including display and walkway to the river interpret the events of this site for visitors.



VAN VLACK DISPLAY COURT

The Van Vlack hamlet was only one of the small communities which sprang up in this area as a result of the mid 19th century lumbering boom. Demand for and supply of lumber was sufficient to support up to five lumber mills along the Nottawasaga at one time, and bunkhouses were required for the mill hands.

But prosperity was only to last a few decades. For with the construction of the Northern Railroad to Collingwood in 1855 many of the mills moved away from the river and by the early 1900's the exhaustion of timber was near. As a result, buildings such as the Roaring Camp Bunkhouse at Van Vlack were to become the first lodges for the tourists that were soon to visit Wasaga Beach.



The Van Vlack site in the Point Beach Area is a pleasant outdoor court area, with interpretive models and displays depicting the early logging theme in Wasaga Beach.

WASAGA BEACH RESORT COMMUNITY

We now enter a new era of Wasaga Beach's history. By 1900 the focus was starting to shift from the River to the Beach. The arrival of the automobile, which placed Wasaga's fine sandy beaches within reach of Toronto residents and the influx of soldiers from Camp Borden during the Second World War, began a trend of increasing use. With construction of Highway 400 during the 50's, the popularity of the sun and sand experience of Wasaga Beach expanded, giving this developing resort community a commercial character.

In the interest of helping to preserve this class one recreation beach and area the Department of Lands and Forests, now the Ministry of Natural Resources, at the request of the Village of Wasaga Beach, began establishing a Provincial Park here in 1958.

The Beach itself has historic importance, as its firm sands served as an airstrip for the first flight from mainland Canada to England in 1934, by James Ayling and Leonard Reid. A plaque at the entrance to the Nancy Island site commemorates this event.

The Wasaga Beach of today is a pleasant and enjoyable town shaped and enriched by the influence of its past. You are invited to explore historic Wasaga Beach.

