

History of Spoon Cove

Introduction:

A small and lively fishing community on the saltwater shores outside of St. Augustin River that hasn't had an inhabitant in over 50 years. In order to fully grasp the fascinating story of Spoon Cove as a chapter in the history of St. Augustin, we must first dive into the beginnings of settlement on this beautiful and vast area we call the Lower North Shore.



Longley, WW. Settlement of Spoon Cove, North Coast. 1943. National Library and Archives of Quebec, <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/3011577>

Background:

The territory of and surrounding St. Augustin was originally occupied by Innu and Inuit tribes. However, in the late 17th century, Europeans arrived in hopes of exploiting the rich natural resources which were plentiful in the region. The fishing industry was particularly attractive. As a result of the Europeans' eager desire to explore this territory, the indigenous populations were dispatched. Fast forward a bit and the region was opened to settlement near 1820. This brought many people who were chasing the aforementioned and highly regarded fishing industry. Seals, Atlantic Salmon and Cod Fish are just a few

examples of marine life that can be found in the region. Those settlers mixed with the population who were already present in the territory. Those being the indigenous people and their descendants, the “Métis” (the offspring of a European and an Indigenous person). The way of life at this time was one of survival and in order to survive, you had to live off the land. With that goal in mind, the settlers, new and old, occupied an estimated 40 fishing communities! It just so happens that one of those communities is the place we have come to know as Spoon Cove...

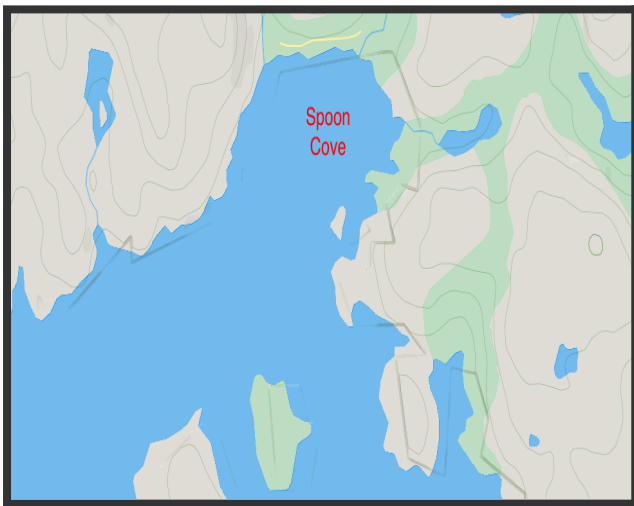


LNS Region, Map. Municipality of Saint-Augustin. <http://www.saintaugustin.ca/en/tourism/our-villages>

Description:

Spoon Cove is located near the halfway point of two well known and currently populated Lower North Shore communities, those being our hometown, Saint-Augustin, as well as the neighbouring village of Old Fort. Spoon Cove is very close to a tricky piece of navigation known as “Little Rapid”, a narrow waterway famous for its rushing and shallow waters. It also has close proximity to the islands of Shekatika and L’Anse-du-Portage, which are both summer homes for Saint-Augustin residents. Spoon Cove’s shape is not unlike that of a crescent moon or even the letter “C”. It’s a rocky shoreline with steep hills that approximately 10 families called home year round in the early to mid 20th century.

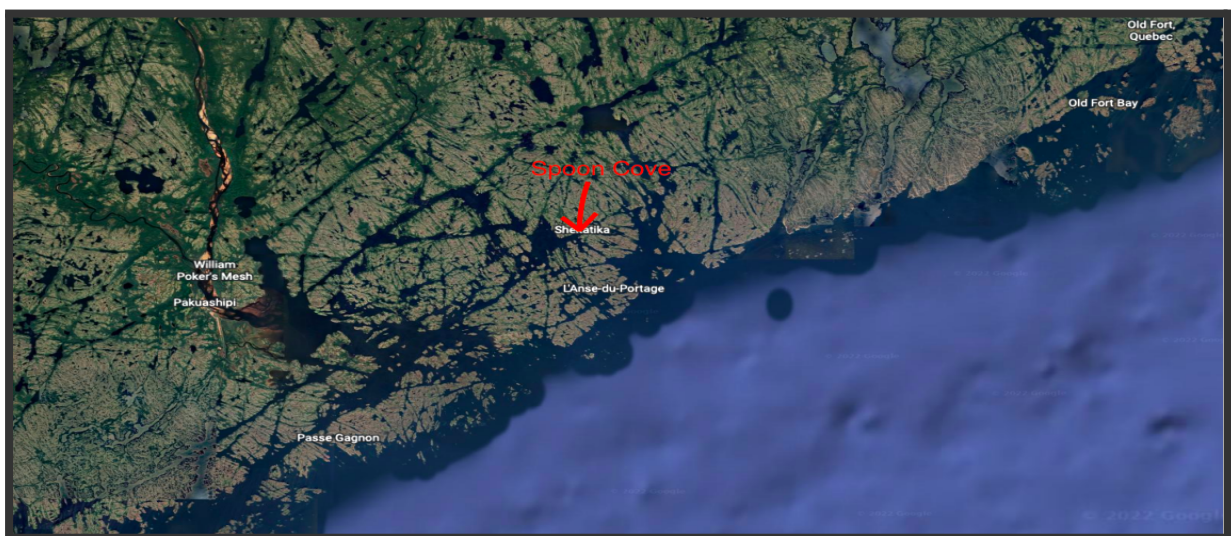
This once jolly community has been extinct for quite some time with the town's closure in 1965. The proud settlers of this land decided their best course of action was to leave their home after their only public building, the school, had been shut down. A dwindling population combined with lack of students meant the government was no longer going to sustain the school. Due to this, the residents of Spoon Cove packed up their belongings and moved away, the majority of whom choosing to settle along a lengthy straight road in our very own Saint-Augustin. To this day, over 50 years later, the local population refers to that street here in Saint-Augustin as the "Spoon Cove Highway". Needless to say "Spoon Cove Crowd" or "Highway Crowd" as they are called nowadays, made their mark. Hopefully that context has spiked your interest and helped you grasp the true uniqueness of Spoon Cove. Now, shall we jump back in time?



Very zoomed, picture of the landscape.



Spoon Cove in relation to Little Rapid, Shekatika and L'Anse-du-Portage.

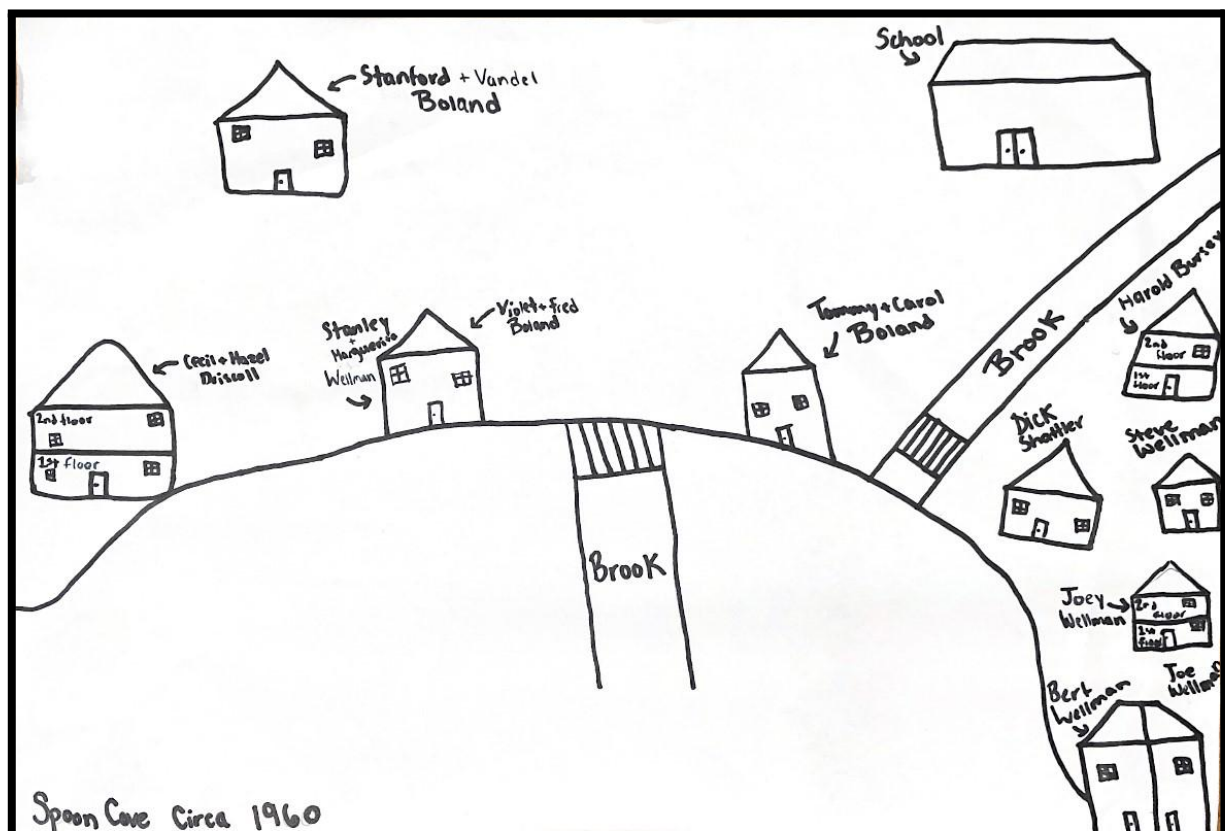


Spoon Cove in relation to Saint-Augustin/Pakuashipi and Old Fort

Map/Families/Population:

A couple of the earliest known settlers of Spoon Cove was a man by the name of John Shattler and his Eskimo wife who was mostly referred to as “Aunt Kate”. She was a midwife and by all accounts, an excellent cook. They had 8 children together, 5 girls and 3 boys. Those descendants had ties in Spoon Cove, all the way up to its closure, and still have connections in St-Augustin today.

As I mentioned previously, the population consisted of about ten families. Most estimates put the population number, at any given time, somewhere between 25-55 people. Of course, that varied over the years, but it was near that range. By the time the village closed in 1965, a little under 30 people lived there. The main family names who called Spoon Cove home were as follows: Driscolls’, Burseys’, Bolands’, Wellmans’ and Shattlers’. Those surnames are still very present in St-Augustin and on the Lower North Shore.



Drawing of Spoon Cove Circa 1960. By Brooklynn Beaudoin-Driscoll with help from Vivian Driscoll, Gladys Martin, Corain Driscoll as well as Carol Boland.

Challenges:

As you can imagine, living in a place as remote and underdeveloped as Spoon Cove came with a fair set of challenges. The necessities to sustain life were not easily accessible. Things like nourishment, medical care and occupational opportunities were limited.

If ever there was a medical emergency, available options were slim. Depending on the severity, the residents could have dealt with it themselves, as was the case in birth situations when the population called upon the local midwives. In other instances, the patient was transported by the residents via dog team or motorboat, depending on the season, to the nearby medical facility in St-Augustin. Finally, in extreme cases, the injured person may have required outside assistance, in which case, a call was made to request help from an external party. Even making a call wasn't so simple though, there was just one phone on the island!

In terms of employment, there wasn't much at their disposal. The men mostly fished and performed carpentry. The government also helped by providing jobs. The local men were instructed to slash trees, which created paths around the cove, as well as build a gravel road around the school. On the flip side, the women picked berries and took care of the children. They washed clothes, prepared meals and maintained the house. These women were not lacking creativity. Lye and animal fat was used to create soap. They took ashes from the woodstove to take the stains out of clothing. These were practices they had to adopt because of the absence of resources in Spoon Cove.



Hazel Driscoll putting clothes on the clothesline in 1959. Spoon Cove. Photo courtesy of Corain Driscoll.

As for light and heat, electricity wasn't a basic aspect of life for the people of Spoon Cove. They had stoves for warmth, fueled by wood they cut themselves. They used primarily oil lamps and candles to brighten their houses. Let's not forget that this was an island after all, meaning the only other light source they had on a dark night was the moon's glare on the water. It sure sounds peaceful, doesn't it?



Longley, WW. Rugged Character on north shore of West Spoon Cove, North Shore. 1943. National Library and Archives of Quebec, <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/3011592>

I'm sure you can gather at this point that they had no stores in Spoon Cove. To buy groceries, they had to travel by boat, approximately 2 hours for a round trip here, to St-Augustin. In the winter, when the river was frozen over, dogteam was the preferred mode of transportation. They often bought fresh foods, such as vegetables, and stored them in cellars below their houses because they couldn't travel into St-Augustin or the "mainland" everyday. In fact, they only made the trip 2 or 3 times per month.

Without electricity, it becomes very difficult to power a refrigerator, impossible actually. So, you may be wondering how they stored an essential item, such as milk... well they couldn't. Instead, they received **Klim** (powdered milk) which is mixed with water to make a nutritious beverage. Some people, those who have tried it, described it as tasting like melted ice cream. They told stories of, as kids, sneaking around the house to "sample" some. Funnily enough, if you'll notice, klim is simply milk spelt backwards. When we asked in our interviews for the proper spelling, this is the trick we were given! We think it's pretty neat!

Why was Spoon Cove special?

At the time of Spoon Cove's existence, there were many other fishing communities like it.. Spoon Cove, however, had something those other places did not... a school. That's what really separated it from the others. Some people have cited easier access to firewood being an advantage as well but the principal difference was without doubt, the access to education.



Spoon Cove School with some members of the town's population in front. Photo courtesy of Vivian Driscoll.

Throughout our research, we have come across the names of people who were teachers in Spoon Cove. The very first teacher being Jim Letto. Other recurring names of educators included Les Fequet, Gordon Rothney, Ivy Kennedy, Elwood Nadeau and Edna Sinclair. None of these teachers ever taught simultaneously, however. It was one teacher who taught all students and all subjects. It is also worth mentioning, whoever was the teacher at any given time, lived in the school.



Teacher Edna Sinclair standing in front of Spoon Cove School. Photo courtesy of Vivian Driscoll.

The most recent version of the school was built in 1949 and its construction cost a whopping 2,284 dollars! Since this was the one and only public building, more than just education took place there. The school was home to a wide range of activities. They had vaccinations, held church services and threw parties. The parties on Spoon Cove were so popular in fact that oftentimes the people of St-Augustin would make the journey out just to attend! Partygoers would even dance out in the snow with their winter rackets on!

THE PROTESTANT SCHOOLS OF THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC						219
The following schools were built on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, Saguenay County:						
Address	Year	Cost	Address	Year	Cost	
Old Fort Bay	1930	\$ 1,386	Harrington	1949	\$ 2,420	
St. Augustine	1930, 1943	2,040	Aylmer Sound	1949	2,930	
La Tabatière	1930	972	Spoon Cove	1949	2,284	
Wolf Bay	1933	1,150	Fox Island	1951	1,800	
Bradore Bay	1935	1,448				
Gull Cliff	1942	1,655	Total		\$ 19,751	
Kegashka	1942	1,666				

The total cost of building the rural elementary schools, colonization schools and schools in Saguenay County is \$302,075.

In summary, the cost of all types of schools (exclusive of those under the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal) built, enlarged and repaired during the period January 1st, 1930 to November 30th, 1951 is \$9,240,685. The Montreal expenditure of \$11,807,429 brings the grand total for construction during this period to \$21,048,114.

There were even wedding ceremonies done in the school. Vandel and Stanford Boland, Carol and Tommy Boland as well as Marguerita and Stanley Wellman were just a few of the marriages that happened there. The people of Spoon Cove used every inch of that building!

The school is an essential part of Spoon Cove's history and is still spoken of very fondly to this day by the people who had the pleasure of being in it. Interestingly, a piece of concrete foundation can still be seen out on the island, if only it could talk...

INSERT PHOTO

Daily Life/Activities:

If it didn't go without saying, in order to cure boredom, the younger generation of Spoon Cove were forced to innovate. They spent most hours of the day outside and played many games on the island. Activities, as you might expect, differ according to the time of year.

During the winter months, in freezing temperatures, the children would skate on the ponds and slide over the hills. Other than that, they would take the pieces of ice that floated ashore and jump from one to the other, trying their best not to fall in the ice cold water.

When the warmer climate rolled around, the kids preferred to paint the rocks using clay they dug out of the ground. Then the rain would fall, wash away their art, and they would start again. They also skipped rope using any old piece of fishing rope they could find lying around. Cliff climbing and clam digging on the water's edge were other popular summer activities... simpler times, indeed.

In the little spare time the adults had, they chose to spend it celebrating by singing and dancing. Eleanor Bursey mentions this in a blog post written about her life. She states the following when discussing her father Jack Bursey whose brother, Harold Bursey, lived in Spoon Cove, "In Spoon Cove, the furniture was pushed aside in someone's house and people danced. Jack sang too and told stories that seemed to lengthen with each telling." These adults were filled with responsibilities, therefore, it does make sense that they decided to let loose in their free time!

Closure:

As they say, all good things must come to an end. As mentioned before, in 1965, the renowned village of Spoon Cove was officially deemed to be “closed”. After the school was shut down, the hurdles to sustain life were too hard to overcome. So, the population dropped, until eventually, not one person was left on the island. Forever resourceful, a couple of Spoon Cove citizens purchased the school building from the school board and used parts of it to help build their houses in St-Augustin. In most cases, Spoon Cove residents floated their houses and placed them along the now famous “Spoon Cove Highway”...

Stories:

Story from Carol Boland:

Carol, a former Spoon Cove student, recalls sitting in class waiting for her substitute teacher to come when she notices one of her classmates get up from his desk. Billy Boland, who was a notorious class clown, knew he had a new teacher for the day and decided to be a bit mischievous. He rose from his desk and sprinted around the classroom, and then began running circles around the chalkboard almost in a cartoon fashion. He forced the substitute teacher to chase him, over and over, as his classmates laughed loudly. Needless to say, the teacher was furious!

Stories from Vivian Driscoll:

Spoon Cove was well known for its annual holiday parties, particularly Christmas. Many people would gather and celebrate the special time of year as a community. Vivian remembers, as a kid, being so excited when the Canadian Red Cross would send small gifts to their school. It didn't take much to bring joy to these Spoon Cove kids!

Vivian, a former Spoon Cove student, also has memories from attending the local school. They had a certain teacher who was not tolerant of much nonsense or silly behaviour. So, whenever the students would misbehave, this teacher would turn all their seats away from

the window, not allowing them to see outside. From the stories we have been told, we bet their chairs were turned around quite often!

Story from Corain Driscoll and Gladys Martin:

Corain Driscoll and Gladys Martin took a nice trip down memory lane while telling us this hilarious story. While at home, Vivian Driscoll, still in her early childhood years, had taken a pair of clip-on earrings directly off the ears of a guest who had gone to Spoon Cove for a party, or as they called it, a “time”. She ran away with them and Vivian’s mother, Hazel Driscoll, was not pleased. She urged very strongly that Vivian return the earrings to their rightful owner or there would be heavy consequences. Vivian looked at her with a grin and repeatedly yelled, “You’re not gettin’ ‘em back!”. The people of Spoon Cove were definitely one of a kind!

Conclusion:

In the present day, there is shrubbery grown over the last bit of foundation that would indicate that anyone has ever lived in Spoon Cove. We hope that by writing this piece we ensure that, while Spoon Cove may be gone, it is never forgotten! Moreover, there are very few people of the current generations who know about Spoon Cove, and we aspire to change that. Hopefully, you enjoyed reading this article as much as we enjoyed writing it! Spoon Cove is a fascinating story. You can’t tell the history of St-Augustin accurately without bringing up Spoon Cove and its inhabitants. Finally, we would like to dedicate a special thank you to Carol Boland, Corain Driscoll, Gladys Martin, and Vivian Driscoll for all their help. It was a pleasure talking to you all, and your passion in speaking about your former home really motivated our writing. So there it is, the tale of Spoon Cove!

Written by Brooklynn Beaudoin-Driscoll (aged 15) and Jordan McKinnon (aged 18) in the summer of 2022.

More Photos/Documents:



House of Hazel and Cecil Driscoll. Spoon Cove.

SERVICE DES PECHES MARITIMES

PROPRIETE A VENDRE OU SE DEPARTIR SELON LES A.C. #1302 - 898

SPOON COVE (DUPIESSIS)
NEIGERE #1300 (331)

Selon les renseignements de monsieur Reuben Evans du service de la protection, cette bâtisse n'existe plus; elle aurait été démolie.

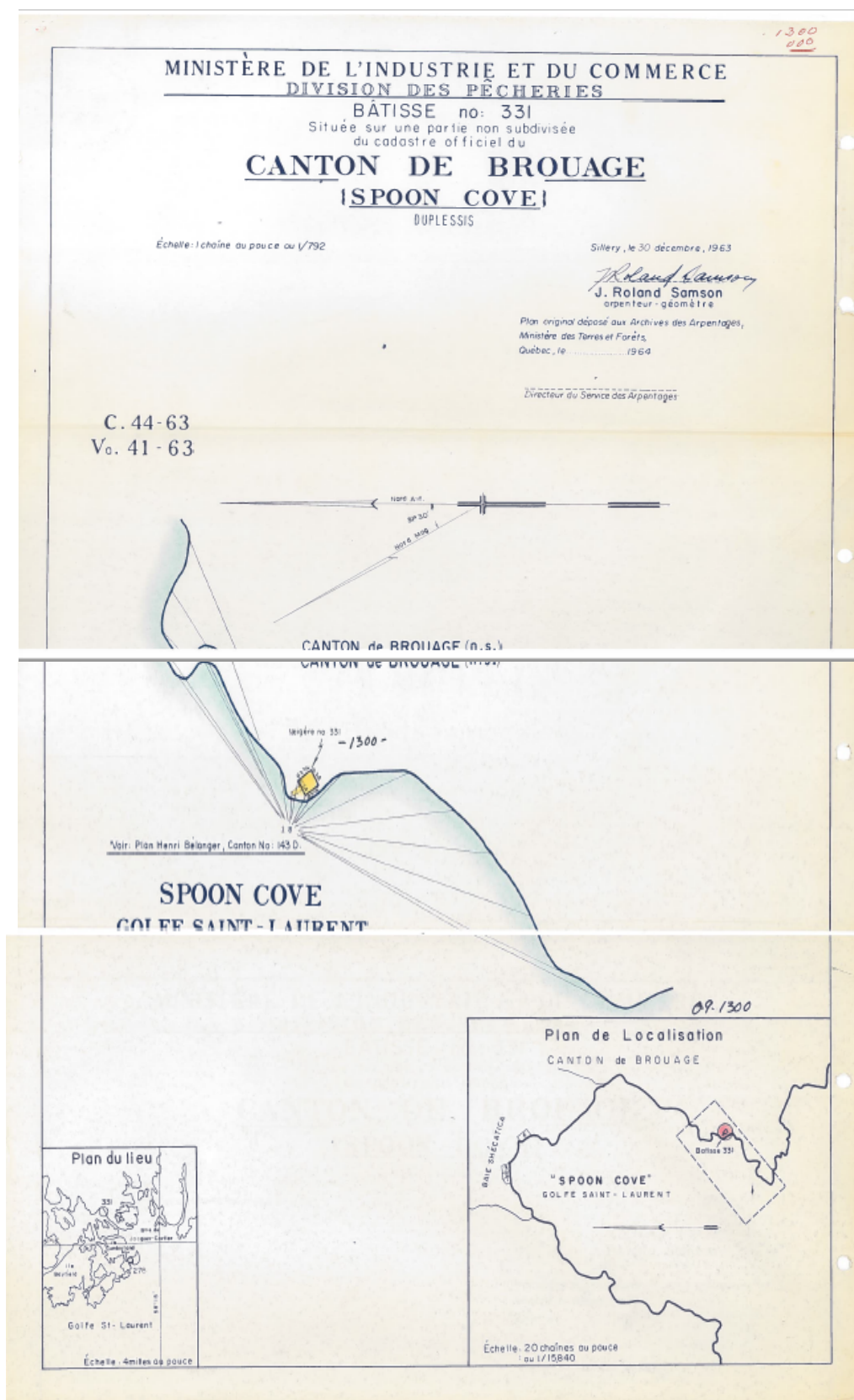
Terrain obtenu du Ministère des Terres et Forêts en 1965; lettre au dossier.

LB/db

L. J. Bellavance
Lionel Bellavance,
Chef par intérim,
Gestion des Equipements

Québec, le 22 octobre 1971.

Letter sent from Lionel Bellavance (acting chief of equipment management) , stating that building #1300 (which we assume is the school) no longer exists.




Spoon Cove, government land description.

SPOON COVE

Neigère construite en 1949 dont les immobilisations se chiffrent à \$92.50 d'où ici aussi il y a erreur. Les réparations qui doivent y être affectées sont mineures et pour une somme ridicule nous pourrions faire le chaulage et remplacer les quelques planches qui se sont détériorées.

M. Harrold Bersey, de Shecatica, en est le gardien et nous lui octroyons la somme de \$30.00 par année. M. Berth Wellman, de Shecatica, s'occupe de l'approvisionnement en neige pour la somme de \$45.00.

Writing stating that Harold Bersey, the keeper of the new school (1949), will get 30 dollars per year, and Berth Wellman, provider of snow, will be granted 45 dollars per year.

 GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC MINISTÈRE DE L'INDUSTRIE ET DU COMMERCE DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE DES PÊCHES HÔTEL DU GOUVERNEMENT QUÉBEC	<p>Québec, le 25 mai 1972.</p> <p>Monsieur Fernand Boutin, Sous-ministre, Ministère des Terres et Forêts, Hôtel du Gouvernement, Québec, P.Q.</p> <p>Sujet : Lot 5, rang Spoon Cove Canton de Brouage N/D #1300 (311).</p> <p>Cher monsieur,</p> <p>Nous rétrocédons à votre Ministère le terrain réservé sur le lot en titre pour l'érection de la neigère #331 car cette bâtisse est maintenant démolie.</p> <p>Nous annexons copie de votre lettre datée du 12 avril 1965 et autres documents s'y rattachant.</p> <p>Veuillez croire à mes meilleurs sentiments.</p> <p>Votre tout dévoué,</p> <p>Lionel Bellavance, Chef par intérim, Gestion des Equipements.</p> <p>LB/db c.c. M. Bernard Roy pièces jointes</p>
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Letter sent from Lionel Bellavance (acting chief of equipment management) , to Fernand Boutin (minister of forestry), stating that the school is now demolished, and they added the documents previously sent.



MINISTÈRE DES TERRES ET FORÊTS

PROVINCE DE QUÉBEC

CABINET DU SOUS MINISTRE

6593/34

QUEBEC, le 12 avril 1965.

Ministère de l'Industrie et
du Commerce,
Division des Pêcheries,
Hôtel du Gouvernement,
QUEBEC, P.Q.

Sujet - Lot 5, rang Spoon Cove,
canton de Brouage.

Messieurs,

Vous trouverez sous pli,
pour l'usage de votre bureau, une copie du plan
de M. l'arpenteur J.-Roland Samson, en date du
30 décembre 1963, montrant le lot précité, ainsi
qu'une copie de la spécification de notre minis-
tère en date du 25 février 1965.

Votre Neigère #331 est loca-
lisée sur ce lot 5 et nous annotons notre terrier à
l'effet que ce lot est réservé jusqu'à nouvel ordre
pour les besoins de votre ministère.

Votre tout dévoué,

CEB/cl


Fernand Boutin,
sous-ministre.

*Letter sent from Fernand Boutin (minister of forestry), to the fisheries department in 1965, stating that there
can be a copy of the school plan, created by Mr J-Roland Samson, in their office.*

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