Along the Northumberland Shore History
Merigomish and Area

Historical Timeline
Mi’Kmaq First Nation
French / Acadian
Irish / Scottish
Merigomish Mi’kmaq

Along the North Shore region of Nova Scotia, Merigomish was the main encampment area of the Mi’kmaq First Nations peoples,

“Beginning approximately 2500 years ago…..possibly older with further archeological exploration ….some undiscovered camp sites are still underwater .”

Michelle LeLievre, Pictou - PHD University of Chicago 2009

The Merigomish area was a favorable position for them. It was near the fishery in the gulf ; the islands abounded in wild fowl, the rivers swarming with fish and the woods in the rear were plentifully stocked with game. The principle place of encampment was at the foot of Barney’s River, on the east side. They also had encampments on Big Island and on of the smaller islands in the harbour and some points on the shore area.
Merigomish Mi’kmaq Sites

the Mi’kmaq burying ground was near the west end of Big Island. A short distance from Savage Point.

History of the County of Pictou – Rev. George Patterson, 1877
Catholic Church - Mi’kmaq and French Burial Site
Savage Cove, Big Island
...on the property of Donald McGregor of Big Island in ploughing a spot in his field turned up mass of human remains one skull had the arrow head transfixed in its place of entry.

....on examining the ground around, we found it was an ancient burying ground. This place is much older then the burying ground ½ mile to the west ....some of these remains seem to indicate that they belonged to another race possibly the Esquimaux.

*History of the County of Pictou Rev. Geotge Patterson 1877*
Archaeological Excavations

In the 1920’s H.I. Smith and W.J. Wintemberg conducted extensive archeological research in the Merigomish Harbour area.

The known archeological sites on Merigomish Harbour comprise eighteen shell-heaps, the prehistoric cemetery, a modern cemetery, a modern wigwam site, a battlefield site, an earthwork fort and a workshop.
The Memorial of Peter Toney, Chief on behalf of himself and the Indians residing in Merigomish.

humbly sheweth

That these are at present residing at Merigomish, thirty five families comprising upwards of two hundred men, women and children

that

For sometime past these Indians have been in destitute state for want of sufficient food and clothing that starvation is very common .......

Nova Scotia Archives
French Jesuit missionaries and Seminary priests began to administer the Christian Faith to the Nova Scotia Mi’kmaq as far back as 1605. In the late 1600’s and early 1700’s traveling missionaries visited the First Nations communities throughout Nova Scotia, including the Merigomish area.
Nicolas Deny Description of Merigomish – 1672

......starting from Cape St. Louis (Cape George), ten leagues thence we come to a small river, whose entrance has a bar which sometimes closes it, when the weather is stormy and the sea piles up the sand at the mouth, but when the river swells it passes over and makes an opening. Only small sloops can enter this river and it does not run deep into the country.
Father Pierre Maillard was a French missionary to the Mi’kmaq, who came to Nova Scotia from France in the year 1735. A brilliant linguist who perfected a system of written symbols for the Mi’kmaq language. He also was instrumental in making peace with the English in 1759 encouraging the deported Acadians to return to Nova Scotia.

Father Maillard lived with the Merigomith Mi’kmaq several times throughout his 30 year career. An early Catholic church and burial ground was established on Big Island during his visits.
During the French occupation of Nova Scotia, Big Island and the Merigomish area were covered with large oak trees much needed for ships masts being constructed at the Fortress of Louisbourg. English warships continuously patrolled the area looking for French wood cutting activity.
We thus learn the biggest Acadian settlement was on Big Island, Merigomish.....the foundations of seven or eight buildings could be traced.
“The French Channel, Big Island was well sheltered and was used by them for running their small shallops, in which they fished or processed their catch to trade with other French settlements.”

History of the County of Pictou
Rev. George Patterson 1877
Permanent Settlers to the Merigomish Area

The first permanent settler in the Merigomish area is thought to have been Barnabas McGee, a native of Northern Ireland. He and his wife came to Pictou in the year 1768 from Pennsylvania. They lived in the Roger’s Hill area (Scotsburn), not satisfied without shore frontage moved to Barney’s River in the spring of 1771.
...he was soon followed by George Morrison, who settled the adjoining lot to the west. He had originally come on the Hector in 1773.

.....they were soon joined by Walter Murray. He had been originally a soldier and had served in India, but emigrated to Nova Scotia on the Hector.
.....Your Excellency, Petition of Barnabas McGee, first settler of Merigomish, whose hospitality to strangers and travelers are still in remembrance, where settlers were few in that place.....

Charles McGee, Barnabas McGee
The next influx of settlers to the area was the disbanded soldiers of the 82nd Regiment who fought in the American Revolution of 1776-1784. The 82nd (Duke of Hamilton) Regiment was assembled at Lanarkshire, Scotland in 1778. “Many of the recruits were plied with port and guineas to join the regiment”. In addition, the 42nd and the 71st Highland regiments were ordered into the 82nd, and they mutinied.

Mutiny- Highland Regiments in Revolt – John Prebble
In May of 1779, a detachment of men from the 82nd were sent to Penobscot, Maine to construct a fort (Fort George) “to interrupt shipping in and out of Boston” and “to protect loyal Brit’s in the area”.

A large force of Americans laid siege to the unfinished fort, unsuccessfully after three weeks. British reinforcements arrived, causing the Yankee force to flee.
Some of the 82nd Regiment soldiers who applied for land grants in the Gulf area.

Approx. 200 soldiers of the 82\textsuperscript{nd} were given the opportunity to take up land, many came to have a look ……most declined the offer.
The 82nd Hamilton Regiment

- About two-thirds Lowland-one-third Highland
- About 40 officers and 1000 men
- 1779 about half were stationed in Halifax on garrison duty
- March, 1779 - 145 officers and men of the 82nd were lost in a shipwreck off New York
- May 1779, Fought in the Battle of Fort George
- 1780 - four companies of the 82nd stationed in New York
- Jan. 1781, Fought in the Battle of Wilmington
- March 1781, Fought in the Battle of Guildford Station
- Oct. 1781, Fought in the final Battle of Yorktown
- 1783 War ends - 82nd Regiment disbanded

82nd Regiment Uniform – Regimental Red Jacket, Faced Black, number of the regiment on button, blue cloth gaiter trowsers, round hat with white lace
Scottish Catholic Emigrants

The next major emigration settlement to the Northern Gulf shore region was in the 1791, 1793 and 1802 time period when vessels arrived in the port of Pictou, mostly carrying Roman Catholics from Invernesshire and the Western Islands of Scotland.

“A group of 400 Catholic Scots arrived at Pictou with a priest named Mr. James McDonald….his mission extended from the Rivers of Pictou to Antigonish, a distance along the shore the gulf shore not short of 80 miles….

A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia
Vol.1&2 - Rev. A.A. Johnston, 1960
In the Bailey’s Brook and Lismore areas, Catholic Highlanders settled the district. They were from Invernesshire of the clans McGillivary, McDonald (Clanranald), McKinnon, McLean, Smith, Chisholm.

In the community of Ponds, John Sutherland was the first settler in 1791 and soon after came John Paton, followed by the Mason’s, Arbuckle’s, Murdock’s, and others.

St Mary’s Church Lismore
1834-1984
150th Anniversary
Reasons for Emigrating

Our region of the Northern Gulf Shore, as well as most of Pictou County in the years of 1773-1848 was settled by Highland Scots. Extreme famine, lack of work, loss of arable land to produce supplies; loss of control of grazing land and population increase were the main factors why most wanted to leave Scotland.

“Emigration agents painted a Bright picture of the New World … a certain tree will give soap, sugar, heat and light…”
Many challenging hardships plagued our incoming emigrants to the Northern Gulf Shore. Most of the early ships were infected with smallpox or typhoid.

“The ship Nora left Fort William with 500 emigrants, and took four months to reach Pictou. Smallpox broke out on board, and 65 children below the age of five died.”

Once ashore, the formidable task of clearing the land to build a humble log cabin was there awaiting.
Indeed...our ancestors endured many hardships....but they stayed and we are better people for that reason. We are here tonight and our ancestors would be very proud of that fact.