

# The Family Farm



Atkins farm house with gas pumps and rental cottage

Early settlement on the Peninsula is not well documented but a number of families started farms here beginning in the early 1800s. Unlike most of Ontario, Presqu'île was not surveyed prior to settlement. It was supposed to remain a forested lighthouse reserve, but people saw empty land and moved in. The Perry Survey of 1896, a copy of which hangs in the Lighthouse Centre, shows thirteen families on a number of decidedly odd-shaped lots.

Further settlement was a little more orderly but, as time went on, farming families started drifting away as soil was poor, and access to the peninsula was difficult with no roads. Meanwhile, in the late 1800s leisure seekers started coming over for picnics and many started buying land to set up "camps", which turned into cottages. One of these early vacationers was John Atkins, a British subject, working in New York, who established a cottage here in 1903. John so liked the area that he began buying up farms on the peninsula and started his own farming operation, run by his son, also John, though known as Jack. The main farm house was located at what is now the Calf

Pasture Day Use Area. By 1927 they were the only operating farm left, and Jack and his family the only year-round residents.

The Atkins family farm thrived and Jack took formal ownership with the death of his father in 1933. The farm engaged in mixed farming with hay, corn and garden crops grown and hens, pigs and sheep kept, though the main focus was a dairy operation and later cottage services. The latter included supplying firewood, milk, ice (for refrigeration from stocks laid in from the bay in winter), fresh eggs and chickens. Additional tourist services were added in the late 1930s. Four rental cabins were built overlooking Calf Pasture Cove and



Bringing in the hay circa 1940

three gas pumps were installed in front of the house. Jack's sons, Harold and Bob, also provided a number of odd-job services including newspaper delivery, grass cutting, handy-man work, and supply delivery from town.



Cutting ice at Calf Pasture

In the 1940s Jack Atkins also started working as Presqu'île Park Commission foreman (the park commission had been established in 1922). Like all family farms, everyone in the family worked at making it a successful operation. A short list of the daily chores included; bringing coal, wood and water to the house, feeding and watering chickens, pigs, horses, and cows, gathering eggs, milking cows and transporting the milk to the dairy in town. Most of these routine jobs were carried out by the four children. Also like most family farms, changing times had a big impact on them. Refrigerators ended the ice business, the kids grew up and left home, and fire destroyed the dairy barn in 1956. That same year the farm was sold to the province to be added to the park's land and all remaining buildings were removed by 1959. The era of the family farm at Presqu'île was over, but not forgotten. Visit the Calf Pasture Day Use Area today to learn more about the farm and where it stood.