
A Brief History of Arnprior

Although there were settlers in the area since the early 1800s such as the McGonigals and Haveys, the first promoter of development at the mouth of the Madawaska River was Archibald McNab, the "Last Laird of the Clan McNab." This Highland Chief fled his creditors in Scotland, and was granted permission to settle 81,000 acres of land and water in what is now McNab/Braeside Township.

In 1825, McNab brought over almost 100 families from Scotland. In 1831 the brothers Andrew and George Buchanan built a small sawmill and timber bridge on the Madawaska River. The Buchanan brothers and McNab named the settlement Arnprior after the small village of Arnprior in Scotland. By 1843 the settlers had rebelled against McNab's feudal leadership, and by petition and legal action forced him to leave the area.

In 1851, the first Daniel McLachlin (1809-1872) arrived. Recognizing the potential of the site for a logging operation, he purchased 400 acres of land at the mouth of the Madawaska River along with the water power rights. Important to encouraging settlers was the surveying of the land into town lots, renovating the old Buchanan sawmill and bridge, and constructing a stone gristmill.

The eldest son, Hugh F. (1843-1912), assumed his father's responsibilities at what became the largest White Pine sawmill in North America at the turn of the century. In turn, he was replaced by his son Daniel (1881-1954), the last Dan. The great Depression hit at the same time as the lumber market went into decline. The

McLachlin timber limits approached exhaustion and the sawmills ceased operation in 1929 – the end of an era.

The McLachlin Trail Site

Bridges have crossed the Madawaska River in the same location since the Buchanans built the first bridge. The east side, which the McLachlin Trail explores, was the site of several McLachlin sawmills over the years.



Hydro Park

This park, overlooking the Madawaska River, is located just east of the bridge.

In 1972 approval was given for the generating station, the creation of a 10-mile lake (both upriver at Highway 17), the four-span bridge and a new downstream weir. This weir helps to reduce soil erosion above the weir and to improve and control marine life and vegetation.

Located near the island are manmade spawning beds for pickerel. This is a great fishing spot for locals and tourists.

After leaving Hydro Park, continue through the residential area to reach Bell Park.

Bell Park

This park was donated to the youth of Arnprior by the grandchildren of James and Kathleen Bell in memory of happy summers spent with their grandparents in this area.



As you follow the trail towards the point, you will pass the Yacht Club and the Fish and Game Club.

Bell Park, located at the conjunction of the Madawaska and Ottawa Rivers, has a beautiful view of the Quebec shoreline and the widened section of the Ottawa River known as Chats Lake (Lac des Chats).

1861-91 saw the height of the rafting of square timber down the Ottawa River, some of it from the former Gillies Bros. Mill at Braeside (visible to the left upstream on the Ottawa River) for export to Britain. The last Gillies square timber rafts floated in 1903. Water transport of logs continued into the 1990s.

Leaving the road to Bell Park, turn left and follow McLean Ave. along the river until McNab St. is reached.

Charles Macnamara

Charles Macnamara worked for the McLachlin Bros. Saw Mills and Lumber Yards, starting as an accountant in 1886 and eventually becoming secretary-treasurer of the firm.

A keen naturalist and photographer, among other things Macnamara illustrated a study of beaver colonies on the Ottawa River. This research is now on display in the Royal Ontario Museum. The Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club was named in honour of Charles Macnamara.

Macnamara Nature Trail

The kiosk at the entrance to the MacNamara Nature Trail is at the end of McLean Ave. across from the Arnprior Amateur Ball Association diamonds.

This trail takes one through the Nopiming Game Preserve (a game sanctuary since 1920, whose creation was promoted by Macnamara). Nopiming is an Indian term meaning "in the woods." It was originally intended to protect the beaver colonies living by the Ottawa River. Access to the preserve is courtesy of BASF Canada Inc., which owns the land.

This trail is maintained by the Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club.

