

Trading Post
to Provincial Park
(Gunn's Beach & Beyond)

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GUNN'S BEACH AND THE GUNN'S OF GOOD SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION

When I wrote Good Spirit Lake--A Century of Changes in 2000 I had many people say to me "I wish you had included more about Gunn's Beach and the people that used to come to the lake years ago and what things were like back then."

I have always wanted to record in more detail the life of my father John Gunn and also my grandfather Donald Gunn. They were both so much a part of the earlier history of the lake that they knew both as Devils Lake and Good Spirit Lake. This book records the story of their lives and in so doing it also looks at the people and events that made Gunn's Beach a happy memory for so many. As we get older it seems that many of us enjoy looking back at the little things that made a summer holiday so memorable whether it was the fun of just being at the lake or the new friends we made each year.

How did Gunn's Beach come into being? In fact why did the Gunns end up at the south end of Good Spirit Lake? We know that around the lake there were a good number of early settlers that came just after Donald did

but later moved farther north. Why did Donald Gunn stay? Was it the location that appealed to him? Perhaps he was just getting older and had lost his urge to see new country and do new things even though occasionally in later years he thought of moving to the Peace River country in Alberta. In his younger days he had been very much his father's son. His father, Donald Gunn who had left Scotland in 1813 to work for the Hudson's Bay Company in northern Manitoba, had an enquiring mind that led him on various paths after he left the Company and moved to the Red River Settlement. He was a schoolteacher, writer, politician and also correspondent and contributor to the Smithsonian Institution. He was one of the first meteorological observers for the Smithsonian. He made a number of field trips for the Smithsonian Institute and his contributions of objects of natural history covered large collections of skins and eggs of birds and numerous collections in the fields of archaeology and ethnology.

Is a man's future predetermined by his genes? Perhaps Donald of Good Spirit inherited his father's desire to see new country and do new things. And Donald's son John certainly inherited his grandfather's sense of adventure along with his interest and curiosity in the natural world around him. John in his lifetime served in two wars, ran a trading post, homesteaded in the Peace River country and ended up as owner of Gunn's Beach and Postmaster/storekeeper at Spirit Lake. His letters describing his life in those earlier days have survived and give us some idea of the hardships that he, and others, endured.

Hopefully this book for many of you will recall happy memories of good times you experienced 'back then' at Gunn's Beach or elsewhere at the lake. For younger people it may perhaps remind you of stories that your parents or grandparents told you of their time spent at the lake or what life was like growing up back in those earlier days.

Much of the information in this book has been taken from old letters and notebooks kept by family members and preserved over the years. Some are from the late 1800's. Others cover the first half of the 1900's. All of the material helps, in its own way, to give us a picture of life as it was lived by those who came before us.