

Georgina Island

The Jewel of the Lake

The ancestors of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation were inhabitants of the Lake Simcoe region long before the arrival of white settlers. Chippewa Chief, Joseph Snake, and his people first lived on Snake Island, one of three islands (Snake, Fox, and Georgina) not surrendered to the Crown.

In 1830, Snake and two other Chippewa communities (led by Chief Assance and Chief Yellowhead) were moved to 9,800 acres near what is now Coldwater, Ontario as part of the government's Coldwater Experiment to colonize the Chippewa people. Then, just six years later, the Chiefs were forced to surrender these lands under treaty. Chief Joseph Snake slowly moved his people back to Snake Island. By 1860, the band had outgrown small Snake Island and Chief Snake moved his people onto the larger and more spacious Georgina Island.

Cut off!

In the 1920s, when the Trent Severn Waterway was completed, water levels in Lake Simcoe rose three metres. This had a life-altering impact on the Georgina Island community. In earlier times, the ankle-deep water levels permitted passage by foot to the mainland. The low water levels also created fertile conditions for growing and harvesting wild rice and cranberries, staples in the Chippewa diet. The community was able to fish, hunt, farm and cultivate the land and rice fields. But with the higher water levels, the Chippewa could no longer walk to essential services or markets on the mainland, except in the winter. More significantly, all of the wild rice and cranberry fields were drowned and could be no longer harvested, and therefore ceased to provide an economic and nutritional staple for the community.



The Scoot - Spring and Fall School Transportation



Pow Wow Participants

Life was Changed Forever

Weather and reliable transportation became priorities with the higher lake levels. Families had to row across to purchase groceries, see a physician, or simply go to work. Students began to board on the mainland to attend school. Farming gradually ceased as modern equipment could not easily be brought to the island. Over the ensuing years, many members lost their lives due to storms, poor ice conditions and frigid water temperatures while attempting to cross the lake.



Chief Charles Big Canoe (died April 1930)

Bright Future

The future for the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation is bright. The island is currently undergoing a growth spurt which has resulted in the construction of new homes and cottages and this construction boom has created much needed job opportunities. There is also increased investment by some island residents in new businesses that will foster an emerging tourist industry as visitors to the area become more aware of this "jewel" of the lake.

Persistence and Creativity

With the advent of modern-day communications and new modes of transportation such as an airboat, snowmobiles and a car ferry called the Aazhaawe, island residents are better able to stay in touch with the world around them. Today, the Chippewas of Georgina Island have their own police department, a community centre, a radio station, fire service, church, government offices and medical clinic. The island school addresses the educational needs of children in grades K-6 and comes complete with an attached community library and new playground.



Island Administration Office

Government

The local affairs of Georgina Island, for the most part, are run by a Chief and four members of Council who stand for election every two years. Chief and council manage public works, transportation, emergency services, economic development, education, housing, financing and human resources.

Language and Religion

The Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation have revitalized their Ojibwe culture. School children are taught Ojibwe at the Island school by Elders. In the Ojibwe language, many words represent concepts and one word might paint an entire picture making it difficult to translate the language word for word in English. A deeply religious and spiritual nation, the people of Georgina Island at one time made the Island church the hub of social activity. The Nam'ewgamig United Church

Proud and Progressive

Members of the Chippewas of Georgina Island are descendants of a larger group known as the Chippewas of Lakes Huron and Simcoe. They are an Anishnaabe people and their language is Ojibwe. Proud and progressive, they continue to assert their Aboriginal rights as guaranteed in the Canadian Constitution. While almost all Aboriginal communities in Canada are still governed by the Indian Act, Georgina Island was the first to remove itself from all sections in relation to Lands. On February 12th, 1996 Indian Affairs Minister, Ron Irwin and Chief Bill McCue signed an historic agreement at Georgina Island that enabled the Georgina Island First Nation to develop a legislative framework allowing them to manage their lands. The Land



Present day Ferry - Aazhaawe

Virginia Beach Marina
Land owned by the Chippewas of Georgina Island



Ceremony for the launch of New Ferry "Aazhaawe"

Code developed by the community had a 92% approval rating as determined by a membership vote. The community no longer has to wait for approval from the Minister for decisions that rightfully belong to the First Nation.

This is not the only instance of Georgina Island taking a lead role amongst the First Nations in Canada. The community was one of the first to develop its own membership code, and they are leaders in developing alternative forms of energy. All of this has been accomplished by strong leadership from Chief and Council along with active participation from the membership.

The Land

Federally recognized reserve lands include Georgina Island, Snake Island, Fox Island and two small areas of land on the mainland at Island Grove and at Virginia Beach. The Lake Simcoe land is one of 134 First Nations reserves in Ontario. It also includes Chippewa Island in Georgian Bay, jointly owned by the Chippewa First Nation with the Mijikaning and Beausoleil First Nations. Georgina Island is 4.5 km long and 3.2 km wide and encompasses 3,499 acres. In areas around the island, non-native people rent or lease from the individual members. The Chippewa of Georgina Island First Nation number 682 registered members in total. Only 186 members live on the island year round.

Legend

- Limited-Use Roads
- Intermediate Roads
- Major Roads
- Buildings
- Forestry Study Area
- Fisheries Spawning Zone
- Environmentally Significant Area (ESA)
- Rivers / Creeks
- Coniferous Forest
- Deciduous Forest
- Mixed Forest
- Trails
- Wetland
- Open Space
- Wild Rice Field

Compilation of GIS Data was completed by the Alliance for a Better Georgina. Map produced and designed by The Alliance for a Better Georgina. This map has been created in Universal Transverse Mercator Zone 17 North, NAD83. Copyright © Alliance for a Better Georgina, 2007. Scale 1:15000 1 Centimetre = 0.15 Kilometres



Fisheries Areas
Georgina Island's in-water shoreline historically provided habitat for 25 fish species. This sand, pebble and vegetation "littoral zone" is always changing due to variations in wave and wind action, and development on adjacent land. Georgina Island research studies have designated areas for fish habitat protection.

Forestry Study Areas
The lovely forest on Georgina Island is one of the largest remaining in the GTA, covering 70% of the island. It includes 39 species of mixed wood, hardwood and conifer supporting over 400 species of flora, including several locally and regionally rare species, and approximately 143 species of birds. Rabbits, beaver, racoon, grouse, woodcock, wood frogs, salamanders and toads, foxes and deer also make their home in the forest and in the four adjacent wetlands. Large white pine and spruce trees up to 115 years old and fallen logs, many hundreds of years old, provide habitat for mammals and birds. Georgina Island preliminary research studies designate forested interior areas for protection.

Gwobanawning Point

Bonchang

East Point Marina Road

Milne Road

Duclos Point

Duclos Point Park



Our Future