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SAINT CROIX ISLAND

CALAIS, MAINE

Mr Appleman

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Submitted

by

Edwin W. Small

Assistant Historian

Boston, Mass.

REGION ONE, DISTRICT A
211 Congress Street,
Boston, Massachusetts.

November 10, 1936.

Branch of Historic Sites and
Buildings,
National Park Service,
Washington, D. C.

Subject: Report upon St. Croix
Island, Calais, Maine.

Gentlemen:

We hereby forward for your information a report upon St. Croix Island, Calais, Maine, including maps, descriptive and historical, and a set of photographs secured through the courtesy of Mr. H. B. Lamb of Milltown, Maine.

It has been noted that the historical facts of this site were reported upon favorably by Historian Chatelain in May, 1932, and that the approval of the Director for acquisition was given on October 5, 1932, provided the private holdings could be secured without cost. Nothing of further significance occurred until January 17, 1935 when \$,1149 -- to provide for the creation of the Saint Croix Island National Monument - was introduced by Senator White of Maine, and subsequently on March 13, 1936 when the site was reported upon favorably by the Department to the Committee on Public Lands.

The attention of this office was directed to the matter when a copy of a letter from Mr. W. L. Garrison to the Secretary dated February 4, 1936 was received in June, 1936.

On September 30, 1936 the Assistant Historian had the opportunity to interview Mr. Garrison who is a summer resident on the mainland near St. Croix Island and also John H. and Clarence Trimble, interested citizens of the City of Calais, Maine. A visit to the site had been planned on this date, but adverse tidal conditions and the inability of the lightkeeper to establish contact with the visiting party in sufficient time prevented this plan from being carried out. As the day was clear, however, and the aspect of the Island could be readily ascertained from the mainland, we did not

come away without some idea of its characteristics and the problems that would have to be faced in establishing a national monument in this location.

The Island is situated in the St. Croix River, about two-thirds of a mile from the mainland at Red Beach, a tiny community at the eastern extremity of the Town of Calais. Because of this isolation by water it is needless, perhaps, to point out that transportation between the mainland and the Island would be one of the chief problems to be overcome if the latter were to be designated a national monument. Possession of a landing on the mainland would seem to be prerequisite to the establishment of a national monument on the Island. A small park with picnic grounds and parking space as an adjunct to the landing would also be desirable. A small point just west of a cove into which the waters of Beaver Lake Stream empty would be suitable both for the landing and the park. This point occupies the position on Champlain's map designated "L" or the location of a charcoal pit used by the DeBonts colony. On account of the tremendous tides, varying from twenty-five to twenty-eight feet, a longer dock and possibly a pier would have to be built on the point if boats were to cross to the Island at low water. But in spite of an accommodation of this type it is doubtful whether continual access to the Island could be relied upon. When the wind backs up a running tide passage to the Island is rough, with the result that the lightkeeper does not care to venture out except from necessity. Under these conditions it is felt that an area on the mainland would serve a useful purpose at all times, with the Island held in reserve for fair weather.

As may be noted, we are not discussing the historical merits of the site inasmuch as they have been properly evaluated and reported upon heretofore by the Department. But since the matter now rests with Congress and has a good chance of being acted upon favorably there we have thought it advisable to supply the above information on the characteristics of the site and the following details of the movement to make it a national monument. Our information concerning the latter has been secured chiefly from Mrs. William B. Parker, 5 Billiard Place, Cambridge, Massachusetts, an interested property-owner.

Mrs. Parker was born and spent the early years of her life at Red Beach. Her father was an owner of the Red Beach Plaster Company which did a thriving business and was the means of subsistence for the community until it was destroyed about ten years ago. Mrs. Parker's father purchased the Island, before the Civil War we believe, and retained the portion not taken by the lighthouse Service. Mrs. Parker's husband who died in 1934, was keenly interested in the Island and took steps to secure its establishment as a national monument,

perhaps, as far back as 1926. He was responsible for Senator White's interest in the bill introduced in Congress and had also interested Senator Walsh of Massachusetts and other members of Congress. Mrs. Parker feels that Mr. Parker's death is all that had kept the Island from becoming a national monument and she intends, now that she has the leisure, to push the bill as her husband did. She advised us that she intended to talk with Senator White before Congress meets and otherwise promote the bill.

Mrs. Parker has title to half of St. Croix Island and she also owns a great deal of Red Beach, including the small point that would be suitable for a landing on the mainland. Mr. Garrison advised us that Mrs. Parker has suffered financial embarrassment but appeared to be in better circumstances of late. This was decidedly the impression we got when we called on Mrs. Parker at her request in Cambridge on October 27. We gathered, however, that she had no intention of making a gift of her share of the island or mainland property. She apparently expects this to be provided for in the bill before Congress or by the City of Calais.

From our conversation with John R. and Clarence Trimble, influential citizens of that place we understood that this item would be taken care of in the bill and that the City was in no position to assume the responsibility of land acquisition.

Our knowledge of the status of this site would be improved if we could be provided with a copy of S.1149. The chances of the monument being established would be considerably greater if the bill carries an appropriation for purchases. If the bill does not carry an appropriation, we would not recommend acquisition of the Parker property unless it can be done at little or no expense to the Government. Although we doubt the wisdom of ever attempting a restoration on St. Croix Island, it would be desirable simply to consolidate the ownership of a site that has considerable scenic and historic attraction as it stands to-day. The City of Calais might be persuaded to make the purchase if its citizens could be relieved of the conviction that the Government will do it all.

St. Croix Island except for its insular location is most accessible to the tourist. Highway Route No. 1 passes through Red Beach following the River closely almost all the way from the Passamaquoddy Tidal Project at Eastport into Calais. The Canadian

Customs at St. Stephen indicated that nearly 20,000 cars of tourists from the United States entered New Brunswick at that point during the last year and the United States Customs at Calais reported about one-fifth that number of Canadian cars gaining entry to tour in Maine. All of this travel passes through Red Beach.

Before ending we call attention to relics discovered on the Island which we failed to speak of in the body of our report. First are the French axes shown in the set of photographs, and second is an iron cannon-ball that was presented to the New England Historic Genealogical Society over sixty years ago. This ball is two and a quarter inches in diameter and weighs 22-3/4 ounces. It was one of five small cannon-balls unearthed on the southern extremity of the Island where DeMonte planted his cannon. It was found about a foot and a half below the surface by a workman who was excavating for another purpose about 1850. This suggests that a thorough excavation might reveal some interesting additional material. We hope to have the opportunity to discuss St. Croix Island with its greatest authority, Professor Conroy who is reported as still alive and residing in Northampton, Massachusetts.

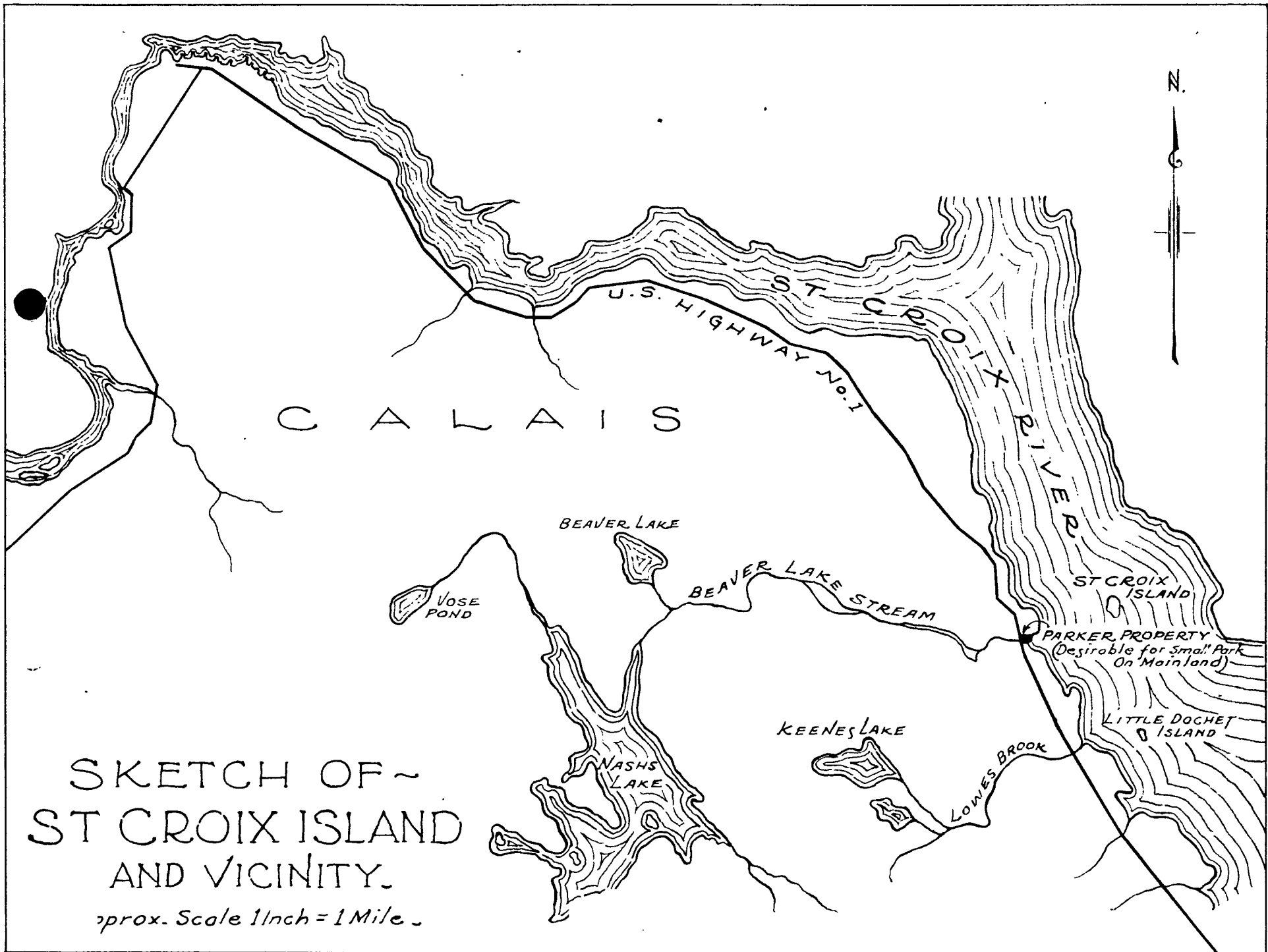
Sincerely yours,

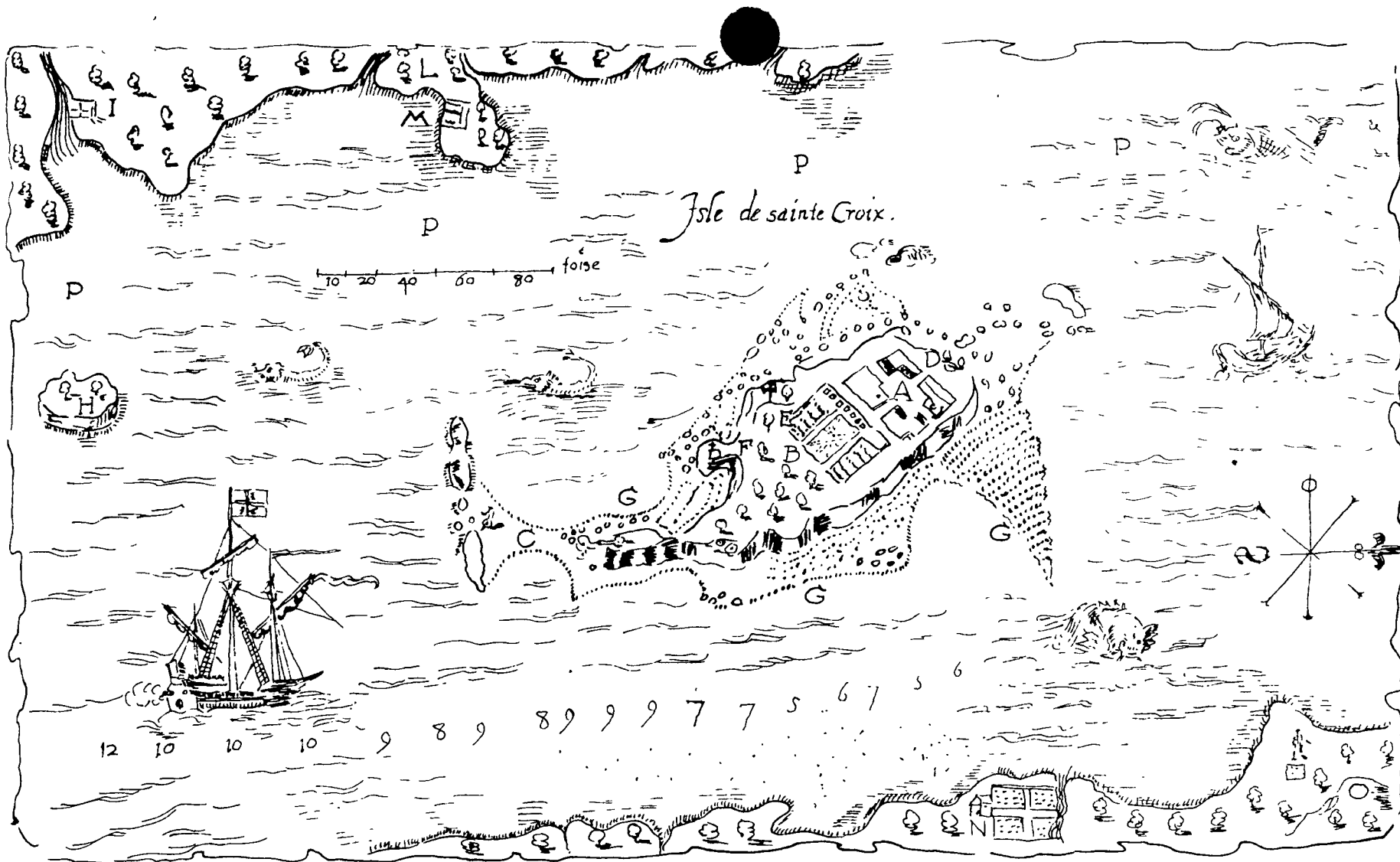
Joseph H. Peterson
Assistant Regional Officer
Region One, District "A"

By:

Edwin W. Small
Assistant Historian.

EWJ/am
cc: Wash.
cc: Richmond
cc: Mr. Small
cc: File





CHAMPLAIN'S MAP - ST. CROSS ISLAND 1604

LEGEND

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| A PLAN OF HABITATION | G ROCKY SHOALS |
| B GARDENS | I WATER MILL |
| C ISLET - CANNON PLATFORM | L CHARCOAL PIT |
| D CANNON PLATFORM | M-N GARDENS |
| E CEMETERY | O MOUNTAIN |
| F CHAPEL | P RIVER ETECHEMINS |

1. NAME OF SITE - Saint Croix Island, sometimes referred to locally as Dechet's Island.

2. LOCATION - Red Beach, Township of Calais, Washington County, Maine.

The island lies two-thirds of a mile east of Red Beach in the channel of the Saint Croix River, about four miles above Robbinston where the River widens into Passamaquoddy Bay. The island is three-quarters of a mile away from the shore of the Province of New Brunswick, Canada, the international boundary in the middle of the River passing not more than one-sixth of a mile away from the east side of the island.

Red Beach is nine miles from the City of Calais with a population of approximately 5,500 and eighteen miles from Eastport, Maine, population 3,500. Acadia National Park, the nearest area administered by the National Park Service, is 130 miles distant.

3. Area of site - About five and one-half acres, September, 1936. The area is steadily declining, especially on the south end from tidal washing. Wright's and Cannon Bubbles which were long ago joined to the island at this end are now distinct islands at highwater.

4. Nature, extent, and condition of historical contents

None are in evidence on the surface of the island. Some of the land on which gun platforms were erected by the DeMotte colony in 1604 has disappeared into the sea but the northern half where the settlement was laid out remains in tact as the lighthouse reservation.

A bronze tablet bearing a suitable inscription was placed on the north end of the Island in 1904, the tercentenary of the DeMotts settlement, by the Maine Historical Society and inhabitants of the Saint Croix valley.

8. Scenic qualities, topography, and setting. - The north end of the Island rests on a solid ledge of rock. The shore on this end is strewn with rocks and small boulders and except for a small runaway in front of the lightkeeper's boathouse is unapproachable by water. The south end, on the other hand, consists of sandy strata resting in places on solid rock. At low water this end is connected by a short bar with Wright's Nubble, just a circular dot covered with pines. Three hundred years ago Champlain indicated that this nubble was joined to the larger island even at high tide.

Formerly well wooded, Saint Croix Island has at present only a small fringe of softwoods on the east side and north end. Although the Island does not rise more than twenty-five feet out of the water at high tide, its banks are precipitous, except for a short stretch on the west side. This characteristic doubtless appealed to the French colonists who lived in fear of the Abenaki Indians who frequented the mainland, and of hostile ships which might sail through Passamaquoddy Bay.

Against a background of a low range of green-clad hills in New Brunswick, the Island with its white bell-tower and lighthouse offers a pleasing aspect from Highway Route No. 1 which follows the left bank of the River. The shore on both the Canadian and American sides is well protected by trees and possesses more accessible recreational values than the Island.

6. Historical Facts concerning the site - Saint Croix Island is significant as the site where French colonization in North America began. The settlement planted here on June 26, 1604, sheltered the only group of Europeans north of Florida on the entire continent. From that day when "all New France was contained in two ships" riding at anchor in the Saint Croix River, French possessions in America were within another century to include Canada, half of the State of Maine, parts of Vermont and New York, and the whole of the Mississippi valley. The date DeMonts and Champlain took possession of this little island was the first move in the contest for a continent to be played between the French and English for over one hundred and fifty years, not closing until 1760 when Montreal was taken by Lord Jeffrey Amherst.

Once the Revolution divided the continent again, the Island was under dispute between the United States and Great Britain. A commission appointed under the terms of the Jay Treaty "to decide the Question what River was truly intended under the name of

the River St. Croix" mentioned in the Treaty of 1783 finally awarded the Island to the United States in 1798.

In 1856 half of the Island was purchased by the Government and a lighthouse built to protect the great amount of shipping originating from the rapid exploitation of forest resources in eastern Maine and New Brunswick.

7. Historical work accomplished to date

Research - Few sites have had more sound scholarship lavished upon them. The Island has received definitive treatment in a monograph, H. F. Ganong's "Dochet (St. Croix) Island" published in Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 2nd series, (1902-1903) vol VIII, section 4. Source accounts of the DeMonts colony have been left by the scribe of the expedition, Marc Lescarbot, and the official geographer, Samuel de Champlain. Lescarbot's History of New France has been published with elaborate notes and maps by the Champlain Society, 1907-1914, and similar treatment given Champlain's Voyages by the Prince Society, 1878-1882 and by the Champlain Society, 1922 - Book III of the latter entitled "Acadia and New England, 1604-1607", translated and edited by Ganong.

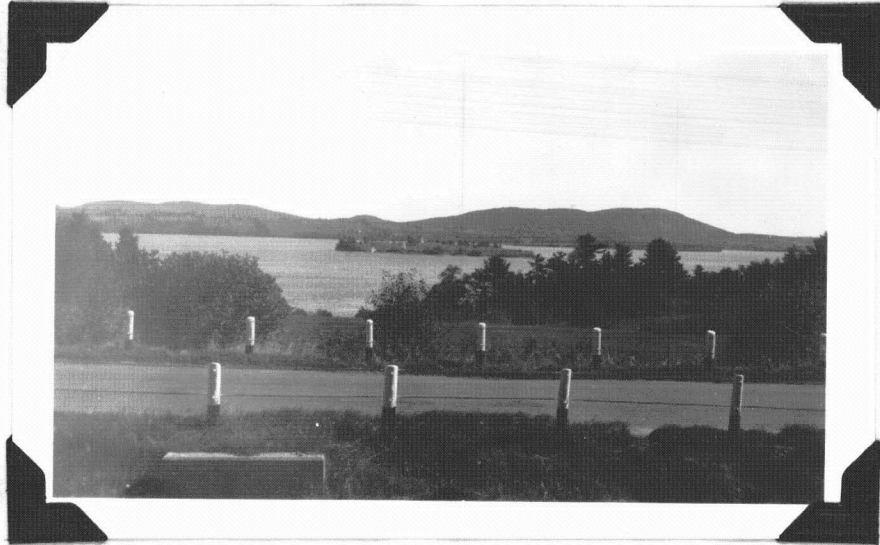
Preservation - None, except marking -- the bronze tablet placed on the Island in 1904, and a similar marker designating the site of a watermill begun by DeMonts at the mouth of Lower Brook, about one mile south of Red Beach and just off Highway Route No. 1.

Restoration - None

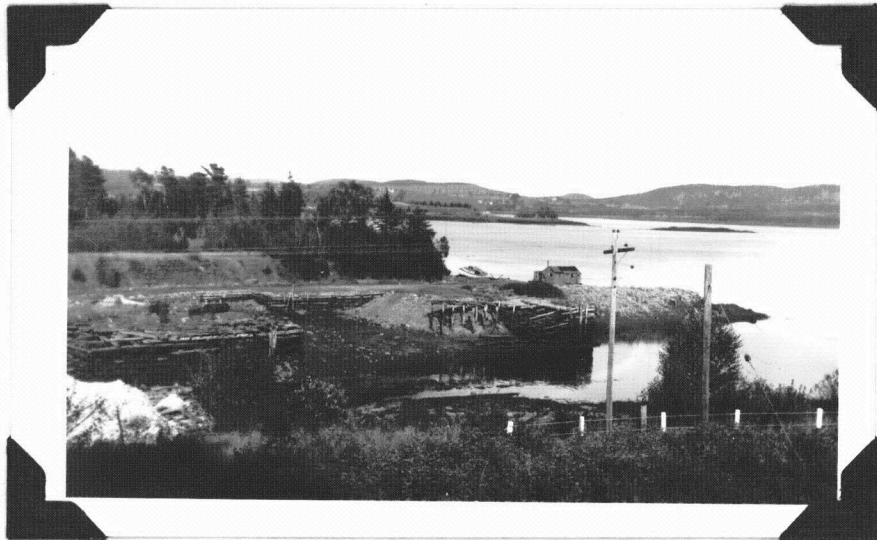
8. Work required to complete historical reality of the site - To achieve this end a complete restoration of the buildings, docks, and gun platforms built by the DeMonts colony would be necessary. This would be inadvisable if not out of the question because the buildings of the lighthouse reservation occupy much of the ground upon which the French settlement stood.

Data obtainable from Champlain's map of the Island and his picture - plan of the settlement there would be the best guide to a restoration. His sketches though not accurate in particulars, give a general picture which can be improved only by conjecture.

Saint Croix Island



The Island with hills of the Province of New Brunswick in the background, and United States Highway No. 1 in the foreground. Boathouse, bell-tower and house with light-tower are visible on the west side of the Island.



Cove with landing sheltered by a wooded point desirable as a base for access to the Island. The **south** end of the Island shows in the central background. This end of the Island is washing away at the rate of about one foot a year.

Saint Croix Island



Wooded point sheltering cove with landing.
The distance of boat from mud flat in the foreground
gives a good idea of the tide sweep.



St Croix River at low tide *south* of St Croix
Island.

Saint Croix Island



The Island from the Calais shore at high tide. The tide runs in and out swiftly at this level.



The Island from the Calais shore with the tide partly down. There is a rise and fall from 25 to 28 feet in the St Croix River.