

## Some History and Geology of Pettes Cove, by J. G. McHone

Pettes Cove is one of the prettiest places on Grand Manan, with its wide cobble beach overlooking beautiful Swallowtail Head Light. It has attracted travelers and painters as soon as they started to visit Grand Manan in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and most modern tourists leave the island with many photographs taken here.



Pettes Cove and Swallowtail Head Light, during one of its frequent calm moments.

The part of Grand Manan that includes Pettes Cove was granted in 1805 to John Sprague, and for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was called Sprague's Cove. For part of that century it was also known as Cameron's Cove, after Lt. John Cameron, a soldier in the British army during the American Revolution who settled on Grand Manan after his discharge. The cobble beach of the cove is somewhat steep, but the harbour is deep enough for larger boats with keels. It is sheltered from the north, west, and south by Swallowtail Head, North Head, and Net Point, but winds from the southeast can create rough water and surf, as shown in the old painting to follow. Even so, it was an active spot for fishermen, and for more than a century the cove held a wharf, stores, sheds, and houses. B. F. De Costa described it in 1868:

Sprague's Cove itself presents the most complete view of a fishing hamlet that I have anywhere found. Everything likewise appears to have been arranged for artistic effect. The old boats, the tumble-down store-houses, the picturesque costumes, the breaking surf, and all the miscellaneous paraphernalia of such a place, set off as they are by the noble back-ground of richly-colored cliffs, produce an effect that is as rare as beautiful. Certainly no artist should undertake to depict scenes of this character before he has studied Sprague's Cove.

In 1841, Captain James B. Pettes moved his family to Sprague's Cove, probably from Boston. He was a merchant or "trader" who bought fish to process and sell, mostly by carrying it in his small ship to Eastport and possibly Boston and elsewhere. It is likely that he had been trading at Grand Manan since 1828, as indicated by the 1851 census. In that census, the family is listed as James B. Pettes, Merchant, age 55, arrived [initially] 1828; wife, Catherine, age 38; daughter, Elizabeth, age 19; son, James Allen Pettes, age 15; and Lodger, Magah (Megan?) Bedmon, age 9.

In the Perley Report on the Fisheries of Grand Manan (1850), it is evident that the Pettes were becoming prominent:

Cameron's Cove – This is a narrow cove at the northern extremity of the island, to the southward of a curiously projecting spur of rocks, called the Swallows Tail which separates it from Whale Cove. At this place, Mr. J. B. Pettes, an American citizen, has a neat fishing establishment, and a store for retailing merchandise and groceries. It is alleged, that he manages to transact a profitable business, without himself entering into the fishery, by purchasing green fish from the fishermen, and curing them on his own premises.

By 1878 the name Pettes Cove was in use, as in this description from a travel narrative by Edward Abbott in Harper's Monthly Magazine. He was staying nearby at Flagg's Cove:

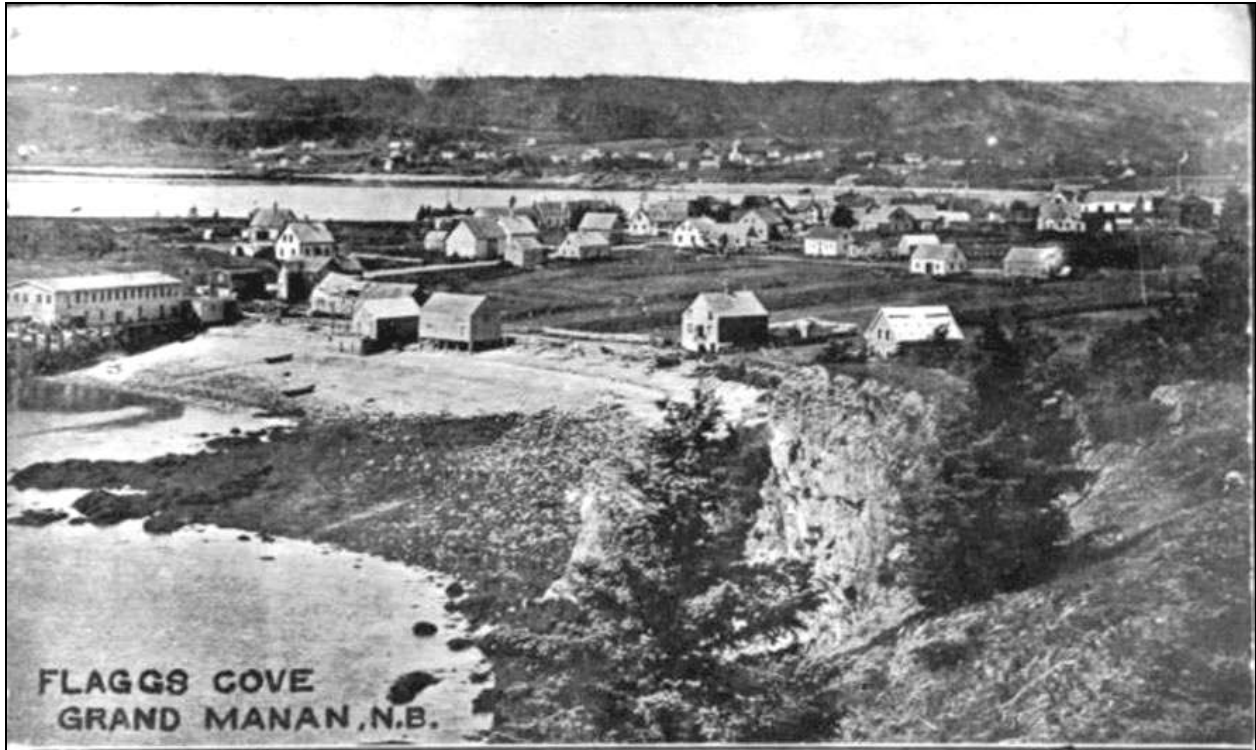
**There being no service easily accessible to us in the morning, we went apart by ourselves over upon Swallow-tail Point, which is perhaps the most romantic and picturesque precinct of Grand Manan. The bold and rugged promontory is crowned with a light-house, and adjacent is Pettes's Cove, the very perfection of a fisherman's abode—a little bit of circular beach flanked by the frowning Swallow-tail on the one hand, and backed with a row of fish-houses and cottages, and with a fleet of boats for a foreground; the whole so retired, and approached by such a sudden turn of the road, that it bursts upon the eye without a premonition of what is coming, and adds to the charm of absolute quaintness that of surprise.**



An easterly gale is causing problems in this painting done in the 1870s by Robert Swain Gifford (1840-1905), called "Pettes Cove."

Captain James B. Pettes died in 1866, but his son James A. Pettes carried on the trading business, using his sloops "Anglo- American" and "Farmer." As a ship owner/operator, he is also known as Captain Pettes. He married Mary Ann Burnham (of another family that emigrated from the USA) in 1858, but they apparently had no children. Capt. J. A. Pettes and Mary also kept a popular inn on the hillside above Flagg's Cove from the 1860s, called Marble Ridge House. In 1898 they combined their hotel with the Marathon Inn by moving the Marble Ridge House northward a few hundred meters. It is next to the Victorian main hotel building, and now The Annex. They also moved the old family home from Pettes Cove to the hotel, where it is today called the Captain's Quarters. Captain Pettes died in 1910, but his Marathon Inn continued, and after some ups and downs is currently a successful and popular hotel.

As the fishing industry and the Grand Manan community continued to develop, additional fish processing sheds were built on and near the beach at Pettes Cove. The post card below shows some of them, but later cards (1930s) also of views from the top of the light house or foot bridge show the cove to be pretty much as we see it today.



This above photo was probably taken in the 1920s or possibly earlier, apparently near the foot bridge over The Sawpit. In the foreground, a large fish processing building dominates the Pettes Cove beach. There are few indications of these buildings in the photo below, circa 1931, as is true now (next page).





Rocks and ledges exposed at low tide are hazards for larger boats when the tide is up (photo 2004).

#### Geological Features

On the southern (right) side of the gravel beach are gray schist and quartzite of The Thoroughfare Formation, which is Late Proterozoic in age (about 618 million years old). Along the Net point Trail are little coves and points where these rocks are very well exposed. Notice how they split along curving planes, which are due to fine grained mica minerals that crystallized in layers during an ancient metamorphic event.

On the north side, toward Swallowtail Head, a fault separates the schist from gray metamorphosed basalts of the North Head Formation, which might be only slightly younger in age. The fault is in dark rocks at the far end of the beach on the first photo of this paper. If you walk up to it, note the glossy bands of dark steel-gray graphite in the fault zone, and there might also be good cubes of pyrite crystals (iron sulphide, or fools gold) in this rock. Also look for light colored veins of barite, which resembles calcite but is much heavier.

Walk or drive around and up the Swallowtail Head road to park above the stairway to the “sawpit,” where a foot bridge crosses a thick rusty red basaltic dike, which was made when magma rising toward the surface cooled and froze. This intrusion might be Triassic in age, but no knows for sure. On Swallowtail Head a trail wraps around the handsome lighthouse, which was built in 1860 and is possibly the most photographed lighthouse in Canada. Look for small veins of crystalline galena and quartz in the meta-basalt, but you may not collect minerals on these public lands without a permit, unless they are lying loose along beaches.



Fine grained grey mica schist and phyllite of the Thoroughfare Formation are on this side of Net Point.



A rusty Triassic basaltic dike (far left, under the foot bridge) contrasts with greenish gray meta-basalt of the North Head Formation. Fish Head and Hole in the Wall are similar rocks, also latest Precambrian in age.