

# Bluebloods, black market

Campobello is known as Franklin D. Roosevelt's beloved island. But for centuries, its secluded coast was a favoured destination for other visitors—smugglers and rum runners

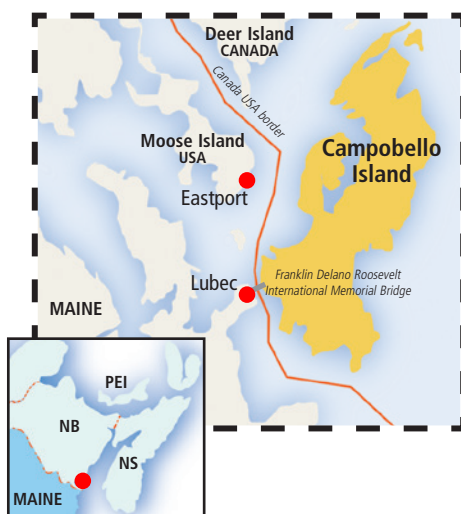
by Janet Wallace

ON CAMPOBELLO ISLAND, Eleanor Roosevelt once wrote, "I had a feeling of remoteness, which I rarely experience anywhere else." In her "My Day" syndicated newspaper column, she often described how much she enjoyed Campobello Island's isolation and beauty.

The sentiment was shared by many high-society Americans. Each summer for decades, bluebloods like Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor visited the small New Brunswick island, which straddles the Canada-US border. For them, Campobello was a summer vacation spot akin to Cape Cod or Martha's Vineyard, but more remote and less populated.

The remoteness drew Americans like Eleanor who wanted to escape city life. It also attracted others who travelled to and from the island in the dark, or under the cover of fog.

For centuries, smugglers and black-market profiteers valued Campobello's secrecy, using the island as a way station



between Canada and the US. Historians even say that dating back to the 1880s, islanders had a saying about smuggling: "That's why fogs were made."

Getting to Campobello Island—which sits in Passamaquoddy Bay between New Brunswick and Maine—isn't easy for Canadians. For much of the year, the only route to and from Canada to Campobello is via the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Bridge from Lubec, Maine. In the summer, you can catch a Campobello ferry from Deer Island, NB, which is linked by another ferry to mainland New Brunswick year-round.



Franklin D. Roosevelt with a group enjoying a picnic on a Campobello beach in 1906.



Workers loading barrels of fish onto ships at the wharf on Campobello.

In 1881, much of Campobello was bought by a group of Boston and New York businessmen who invested \$1 million to develop the island as a summer resort. They built three luxury hotels, including The Campobello Inn, which advertised its ballroom, billiard parlours, electric or battery-operated servant bells, and horses and carriages for hire.

Campobello was described in a souvenir publication from 1908 as "famous for the natural and extraordinary landscape as well as for the health-restoring qualities of its salubrious climate." Time on Campobello was prescribed as a treatment for weak nerves and hay fever. The cool breezes, clean air and



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## roots & folks: history

peaceful environment allowed visitors to escape the stress of urban life in the 1880s.

It was around this time that President Roosevelt's father James first visited the island. He fell in love with the place, bought land and built a cottage.

Bunny Hodgson, a former Campobello summer resident, who now lives in St. Andrews, NB, played with Eleanor and Franklin's grandchildren when they stayed at the Roosevelt's neighbouring 34-room "cottage." She was best friends with the Roosevelts' cousin, Laura Delano Adams. "We would play hide-and-seek and drop-the-hanky," says Hodgson, describing a game similar to tag. "The summer people would hold scavenger hunts for all ages."

"And when FDR was a young man," adds Hodgson, "he and Daddy used to go sailing and fishing together all the time."

But hiding behind the island's glossy veneer were secrets: under the cover of fog, smugglers slipped on and off the island with black-market goods.

According to Stephen O. Muskie, who wrote a research paper on Campobello Island for the University of Rochester, smuggling on Campobello started around 1807, during the Napoleonic War. Britain had blockaded all of Europe, cutting the US off from trade. The US retaliated with the Embargo Act, forbidding American ships from traveling to foreign ports.



Former Campobello summer resident Bunny Hodgson used to play with the Roosevelts' grandchildren.

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It turned out that Campobello, just a few hundred metres off the coast of Maine, was the perfect hub for illicit trade.

Flour from the US went through the island to ships headed for England. Gypsum was trafficked from the Maritimes to fertilize American wheat fields, and during the War of 1812, English goods, including imported silk and wool, were smuggled into Maine.

The contraband was transferred to American vessels, which returned to Maine, and American captains reported that their goods were from a neutral nation, like Sweden. According to doctored log books, Eastport schooners were the fastest in the world: some were recorded as travelling to and from "Sweden" up to twice a day.

## Fifty-year friendship

This summer, celebrate the anniversary of North America's only international park.

The Roosevelt Campobello International Park, which was founded by both Canadian and American governments in 1964, marks its 50th anniversary in 2014. The park's official anniversary weekend is August 7 to 10 but special events are taking place all summer to commemorate the occasion.

The park's popular history series, *Tea with Eleanor*, will be expanded this season, and guests will receive a *Cookies for Eleanor* cookbook,



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compiled by Chandler Roosevelt Lindsley, full of the Roosevelts' favourite family cookie recipes. The park will also host special teas throughout June and July in Bangor and Falmouth, ME, and in St. Andrews, NB, where a preview of the seven-part PBS documentary called *The Roosevelts*—set to air this September—will be shown.



Rum running started in the late 1870s during an economic downturn, and warehouses on Campobello were soon stocked with rum, Holland gin, Irish and Scotch whiskies and French wines.

Bootlegging resurfaced during American Prohibition of the 1920s. During daylight hours, high-society summer people took their yachts to isolated islands to enjoy picnics and bonfires on the beach. At night, the secluded coves saw other action. Barrels of rum were transferred to local fishing boats, and the fishermen later brought the rum to Maine.

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"Elderly Campobello fishermen tend to change the subject when asked about the rum running days, when Black Diamond rum could be bought in Jamaica for 17 cents for a five-gallon keg that could be sold in the United States for \$40," Muskie wrote.

Eighty-year-old Vera Calder grew up on Campobello, and her grandmother, Anna McGowan, was a housekeeper for the Roosevelts, first at their cottage and later at their house in Hyde Park, NY. Even after Prohibition, she says, "When I was a child there were always police boats in the water checking the boats that were coming and going."

The era of the "summer people," as wealthy Americans were called, is past. Instead, thousands come to the island to tour the Roosevelt Cottage, explore the beautiful beaches and parks, and discover why FDR called Campobello his "beloved island." 🐾



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