

Sambro, Nova Scotia

Sambro is a picturesque coastal community located in Nova Scotia, Canada. Nestled on the eastern shore of the Atlantic Ocean, it offers a tranquil retreat for residents and visitors alike. Sambro exudes a warm and close-knit community spirit and has since its genesis, three years after the founding of Halifax in 1752. At that time, 26 families settled and worked on Sambro Island after Governor Edward Cornwallis saw the need to populate the area with British settlers to prevent a French attack by sea.

Sambro is also home to the Sambro Island Lighthouse, the oldest operational lighthouse in the Americas. Her light has been shining since 1758 and guiding ships to safety for over a century. Prior to this, the area was originally inhabited by the Mi'kmaq indigenous people, who relied on the region's abundant natural resources for their sustenance and livelihood. A former community that was part of what we consider the greater Sambro area is Coote Cove.

The story of Coote Cove actually begins more than a thousand years ago, prior to the arrival of European settlers, during what is known as the Maritime Woodland Period (2500 to 500 years ago), when the Mi'kmaq used the area as part of their seasonal migration through the province. The first European settlers at Coote Cove were Scottish Methodists who landed in 1794 from Barrington, Shelburne County. Many of these families have another indirect indigenous connection to the Wampanoag nation in New England via the Mayflower descendants that eventually arrived in Shelburne.

The community has evolved into a fishing and tourist community over the centuries, although many residents currently commute into Halifax for employment. While Sambro possesses a peaceful and serene ambiance, it is conveniently located near Halifax. This proximity allows residents to enjoy the benefits of both rural and urban living. Halifax offers a wide range of amenities, including shopping centers, restaurants, cultural attractions, and educational institutions. When you hear a Sambronian saying they are "going to town" they're heading in at least as far as Spryfield.

Sambro has a rich history deeply rooted in its fishing and maritime traditions. Fishing remains an important part of the local economy, with lobster and other seafood being prominent catches. The community's fishing heritage is celebrated annually during the Sambro Sou' Wester Days Festival, where locals and visitors come together to enjoy live music, food, and maritime-themed activities. Each summer, this festival pulls many people back home, those who had to leave the community for other opportunities in other parts of the world.

Education and community involvement are highly valued in Sambro. The community takes pride in its small but vibrant school, which fosters a nurturing environment for its students. The school has always had a lot of community support in the way of volunteers. When people from other schools have visited the Sambro Ketch Harbour Elementary School, many have said they are envious of the things they see in our

classrooms that aren't in others, solely due to the fantastic financial support received from the community.

Despite our small community school not having a cafeteria, Sambro also has a very unique hot lunch program where parent and grandparent volunteers come in to provide hot meals to the children at cost or a reduced cost. The original program was started over 40 years ago by a few very dedicated women, two of which who are no longer with us (the late Muriel Gilkie, Eunice Laing and the late Dorothy "Dot" Henneberry). Many locals still rave about their famous turkey soup.

Sambro's charm lies not only in its natural surroundings but also in the warmth and hospitality of its residents. The community embraces newcomers and visitors, making them feel like part of the extended Sambro family. Whether it's a friendly wave from a neighbor or a shared conversation at the local corner store, at the wharf, or at the community mailboxes, Sambro radiates a genuine sense of community that leaves a lasting impression on all who visit. This was especially evident during the early days of the pandemic when locals would volunteer to pick up needed items when in town during the lockdowns and restricted shopping hours. We all did our best to keep each other safe in such trying times.

Known for its rich maritime heritage, Sambro has deep roots in fishing and seafaring. The community's history is intertwined with the sea, and you can still witness the presence of traditional fishing practices and a strong connection to the ocean. Nothing shows our maritime roots like a natural disaster. While many lost a lot during the historic Hurricane Juan, the local fishermen all descended to the harbour together to help each other gather up and save what could be saved of their belongings that were scattered all over the shoreline.

During the long power outages after the hurricane when generators were in short supply, many people would only run their generator for a few hours, then lend it to a neighbour for a few hours so they could try to save the contents of refrigerators and freezers. It's unselfish deeds like this that make Sambro a very special place where people look out for one another, friends and strangers alike.

Similarly, in times of great tragedy the community of Sambro pulls together to support each other and mourn the loss of those who lose their lives to the sea. Like many other fishing communities, we know all too well how dangerous the ocean can be. We suffered one of our greatest losses in March of 1998 when The Bonnie Lou II sank in a storm, killing all five crew members, including two brothers and all were cousins. There was no family in the area that were not related or close friends with all of those souls on board. But we persevered and have stepped up to the plate to help when other fishing communities experienced their own tragedies.

Nature enthusiasts and outdoor lovers find themselves drawn to Sambro's scenic surroundings. The rugged coastline, dotted with picturesque coves and beaches, provides ample opportunities for hiking, birdwatching, and exploring the

shoreline. Sambro offers an abundance of hiking trails and scenic spots. The area's rugged coastline, pristine beaches, and lush forests provide ample opportunities for outdoor adventures and exploration. Whether it's a leisurely stroll along the shore, a challenging hike up a rocky cliff, or a peaceful picnic amidst nature, Sambro has something to offer for everyone seeking tranquility and natural beauty.

Crystal Crescent Beach, part of the Pennant Point Provincial Park (originally Coote Cove) is part of the Sambro community. We welcome everyone to our beach and park, even those who come to experience the unofficially named "Nudie Beach" where people are known to go clothing optional.

Any time there's a need, Sambronians step up to get things done with a high degree of citizen participation. When a need is expressed, we always see lots of support in the form of volunteers, organizers, fundraising dollars, participation and attendance. Some notable examples are:

The Live Well Challenge

In 2018, the Live Well Challenge was started by a Nova Scotian fisherman, Todd Newell, after a tragic fire in Pubnico Head. Todd challenged other captains to jump into the "live well" of their boat and donate \$1,000.00 to help support the families affected by the tragedy or to a charity or cause near and dear to their heart. A "live well" is a holding tank under the deck of the boat, filled with near freezing salt water, used to hold live lobster. The challenge took off across the province with close to a million dollars raised in a very short period of time while a variety of fun and very cold videos were made! Countless Sambro fishermen participated in this challenge and local charities were helped as a result of this effort.

Reintroducing the Sambro Sou' Wester Days Festival

In 2008, as a part of the Democracy 250 celebrations in Nova Scotia, local volunteers brought back to life a former festival that was held prior to the collapse of the Atlantic groundfish industry in the early 1990s. Once the call was made, multiple groups came together to pull off a celebration of D250, and the Sambro & Area Community Association was later established to carry on this event.

Groups involved in this weekend long event included the Mainland South Heritage Society, the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society, the Sambro Island Lighthouse Heritage Society, the Sambro Harbour Authority, the Harrietsfield Sambro Volunteer Fire Department, the Coast Guard, the Department of Natural Resources, and countless individual volunteers.

Our events include a ceilidh/kitchen party of local entertainers, a photographic heritage display and walking guide, corn boil, ball tournament, children's carnival, cake walk, pancake breakfast, dance/beer tent, fireworks, parade, boat tours to the Sambro Island Lighthouse, and a blessing of the fleet. The festival has continued on every year since

with the exception of one year and of course, none during the pandemic lockdowns. The festival is back on for August 2023.

Sambro Elementary School – Small But Mighty

Another example is our local school. Sambro Ketch Harbour Elementary School is small but mighty. When Sambro holds school fairs or runs events, there is never a shortage of volunteers and participation at the events. Our school fair fundraising results rival that of some of the larger schools in HRM. Over the years, our little school was at risk of closing and was on the potential chopping block. Every time Sambro School was on someone's radar for possible closure and merger, the families of existing and former students always came together en masse to successfully campaign against closure. Each time to date, we were successful in saving our school.

A Community Far too Familiar with Fishing Tragedies

As mentioned above, and as a third example, Sambro is no stranger to tragedy and to helping those in need. In 2018 a tragedy hit another Nova Scotia fishing community, with the sinking of the Miss Ally. A group was formed and the ladies of Sambro came together and took action. To quote one of the organizers:

“From one fishing community to another... We, the ladies of Sambro, were really hit hard by the recent events surrounding the fishing vessel, the Miss Ally. We have decided to sell anchor bracelets in support of the crew and their families at this hard time. We will be selling the bracelets for \$10 a piece and ALL proceeds will go directly to these families. We are a small group of girls who want to show our support to our fellow fishing community. ...Thank you all for your interest & we hope your bracelets will remind you each and every day of the courage and strength of these men as well as the many other fishermen who risk their lives at sea.”

After the event, one of the organizers, gave a follow-up. “On Sunday June 9th, the Ladies of Sambro travelled to Woods Harbour to deliver the funds raised to the families of the Miss Ally crew. We met with many family members and we are so thankful that they all showed up to meet us and so kindly welcomed us into their community. It was an experience that all of us will remember forever. We raised a total of \$35,000 between bracelet sales as well as the Fisherman's Pride benefit we held in April. None of this would have been possible without the tremendous support of our own community of Sambro. We would like to thank everyone who donated their time and money to help make our fundraiser such a success. Once again, from each and every one of us, thank you so very much for your amazing support throughout this fundraiser. Sincerely, the Ladies of Sambro xoxo”

Evidence of community pride – James McPhee Memorial Ballfield

One thing many people have noticed when they come into our community is the pristine condition of our community ballfield, the James McPhee Memorial Ballfield. Although

HRM owns the field after inheriting it during the amalgamation of HRM, the Late Skip Horton took it on as his personal mission to ensure that our local ballfield was maintained to the nines and made up for the shortfalls of care that HRM did not provide to this field.

If you visited any other rural community in HRM, you could tell their field did not have a Skip taking care of their field. He was dedicated to this labour of love for many years and into his retirement. He single handedly lobbied for and spearheaded the addition of a much needed parking lot to the field, which was no easy task when dealing with both municipal and provincial governments. After Skip's passing, Mitch Roscoe, another local, took over this job from Skip and the field still remains in great shape due to his efforts. It truly takes a village.

Community Pride – The Sambro Spirit Awards

Evidence of community pride is also very evident in the number of Sambro Spirit Awards generated by the Sambro & Area Community Association. Many people participate by nominating prospective candidates and then each year recipients are picked and honoured during the Sambro Sou' Wester Days festival.

In 2017 the inaugural year, the first annual Sambro Spirit Awards were presented to Catherine Banks, Skip Horton and Danny Gray who have all shown long term dedication and involvement in community, family, friends and a true love of the rugged and natural beauty of our area.

In 2018 awards went to The Lionheart Society for organizing the annual Shay and MacKay Fishing Derby; creating and awarding a J.L. Ilsley scholarship; fundraising for various charities; and for their steadfast commitment to creating a wheelchair accessible picnic area and fishing park at Grand Lake. Also to Paul and Doris McGrath (posthumously), and Kerry Ann and Dave Gibson of the Dock and Dory Marina were recognized for organizing local events such as a dart league, dances, jam sessions, talent shows, comedic entertainment, and for organizing the early Sambro Sou'Wester Days. Lastly, Frankie Reyno of Reyno Fisheries was rewarded for his generous sponsorship of local fundraisers, church, school, hockey and community events; for donating the use of machinery to clean up the community; for providing opportunities for disadvantaged individuals to grow and improve their lives; and the many other things he does that we are not even aware of.

In 2019 Jeanne Henneberry for her participation in the St. James United Church choir, Sambro Dinner Theatre, talent nights, and other live performance shows; volunteering at church meals and other events; knitting dolls, socks, mittens and more for the IWK and the needy; making quilts for the homeless; sewing aprons, costumes and more; for her continued dedication to teaching and sharing; and her gift of making newcomers to the area feel truly welcome. Also to Eva Mae Gray for her vision and creation of the Sambro Dinner Theatre, which she wrote, directed and produced for over 10 years and which continues to run today; for her live theatre productions at Melville Heights and the

other fun activities she initiates there; her generosity to her family, friends and community members; her continued love of teaching; and for her dedication to remaining young at heart. And lastly to Barb and Gus Reyno for their tireless work at church suppers and other functions; serving on their board of management; volunteering for over 20 years with the hot lunch program at Sambro Elementary School; generous donations; and enthusiastic participation at community events.

Our community is full of individuals just like those from these three years and we look forward to continuing this award post pandemic in our 2023 Sou' Wester Days Festival.

Saving our Cultural Heritage – Saving the Sambro Island Lighthouse

Along with the Sou' Wester Days festival mentioned above, citizens rallied to do their best to save our Canadian Lady of Liberty, the Sambro Island Lighthouse. Many locals were and continue to be members of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society and eventually a local organization, the Sambro Island Lighthouse Heritage Society was formed. With lots of pressure from these groups and the local citizens, to date, the structure remains intact and is still maintained by the Coast Guard.

Cultural Heritage – Participating in Nautical Traditions

When the local Coast Guard station was assigned a new search and rescue lifeboat, CCGS Hare Bay, Kim MacKay and Leslie Harnish were approached to be the vessel sponsors for the community of Sambro, neither had any idea what was involved and thought the Coast Guard needed help in organizing a ceremony and arranging catering and instinctively started planning and calling in volunteers. Much to their surprise their help was not needed in this way and they were honoured beyond words to be such an integral part of inducting this vessel into service in the community. This is yet another glowing example of the pride the people of Sambro have for our area and the readiness to help at any given moment if and when needed.

Gary Ivany, Assistant Commissioner for the Atlantic Region and Marc Mes, Director General for Fleet and Maritime Services, were joined by Sipekne'katik First Nation elder Joe Michael, and vessel sponsors Leslie Harnish and Kim MacKay in the traditional breaking of a ceremonial bottle upon the ship's bow.

It takes a Village with all of Sambro Solving Challenges Together in Good times and in Bad

A big challenge for the community of Sambro is the lack of a central community centre and the biggest example of us all working together is the successful hosting of Sambro Sou' Wester Days. When you don't have a building big enough to host an event you rent a big community tent! And then that tent needs to be erected and set up with tables and chairs and other items and then disassembled at the end, the local fishermen do not hesitate to head to the site and take charge of all the heavy and manual labour needed for such an endeavour.

Eventually, the Sambro & Area Community Association partnered with the Spryfield Business Commission to purchase a large tent. This collaboration has worked well over the years and saved money in the long run.

Another prime example of working together to solve community challenges has been mentioned elsewhere is the cleanup of the destruction that had to take place after Hurricane Juan as fisherman gathered all that could be salvaged and cleanup of the shoreline despite their own individual damages their livelihood had suffered. All pitched in without a moment's thought because that's just what the community does as second nature.

Similarly, if a vessel is broken down while at sea fishing or in need of help, other locals fishing in the same area do not hesitate to stop their fishing efforts and go help tow a boat back in or whatever other assistance they can provide. It truly is the "it takes a village" mentality.

Persevering though Dark Days – The Collapse of the Groundfish Industry in Atlantic Canada in the 1990s

The mere fact that we're all still here and thriving since the early 1700s is a testament to the fact that we're an adaptable and flexible community. Some of our biggest challenges in more recent history were faced in the 1990s when the ground fishery in Atlantic Canada collapsed.

Some took advantage of the buyout packages to leave the industry, went back to school, others remained in the fishery. During these hard economic times, locals and businesses still continued to financially support the fundraising efforts of the church, school and community groups, despite having very limited incomes. While Sambro never truly bounced back fully economically, the industry continues to thrive and we are still a significant part of the fishery, despite ongoing challenges.

Recreational and Cultural Activity-HUSL

Over the years volunteer groups have run small and informal baseball and soccer leagues for the children of Sambro and the surrounding area. These groups were set up as an alternative to the more expensive formal leagues and groups "in town" allowing kids of all economic background a chance to participate. HUSL (Harbours United Soccer League) was originally started over 20 years ago and many of the original players are now parents and volunteering in the same group they played in as a child. For a time, the Sambro Little League Baseball League provided an outlet to elementary school age children from around the Sambro Loop.

Recreational and Cultural Activity-The Sambro Dinner Theatre

St. James United Church has been holding a dinner theatre fundraiser going back to 2000. These events involve writing a script, a large cast and crew, countless hours of practice and rehearsal of the lines and the music, creation of stages full of artwork and advanced sound systems, and a kitchen crew to prepare and serve meals to all that attend. The shows are full of local culture, history, comedy and even a bit of sadness as they take a peek into the way of life of our vibrant community.

Earlier this year the dinner theatre returned from a pandemic-induced hiatus and it was like time had never stopped. This event draws in performers and volunteers from all around the community and the actors are often approached by strangers in the grocery stores “in town” only to hear great complements. “I know you! I saw you in the Sambro Dinner Theatre. It was fantastic!”

In reality these local celebrities would prefer to fade into the woodwork and be average everyday people instead of the local heroes they’ve become. In fact, we’ve had participants who aren’t even from the community and not affiliated with the United Church of Canada, but they pitch in because it is needed and because they enjoy helping better the community. They often say they get more out of it than they put in, because of the strong relationships they build.

The Youth of Sambro – Our Up and Coming Best Resource

The youth of Sambro participate in the community in many ways. They often volunteer in the local dinner theatres put on by St. James United Church. Many local youth regularly volunteer at Sambro Sou’ Wester Days helping out with the kids carnival. They play on various sports teams in our greater local area and represent Sambro proudly including sports such as, baseball, hockey, and ringette. Every year, children from Sambro School go caroling around the community to bring some joy to the seniors and businesses of the area.

Not to be outdone by the adults around them, in 2014, the students of Sambro Elementary joined the fight to save the historic Sambro Island Lighthouse. Anderson Fukala, a Grade 3 student at Sambro-Ketch Harbour Elementary, says he was inspired to save the Sambro Island Lighthouse after hearing a song about it. Not long after, he told his mom that he wanted to do a fundraiser. Sambro-Ketch Harbour Elementary then backed Anderson who sold bracelets to raise funds for the lighthouse. The school held an assembly during which time the students presented letters to local politicians, asking the government to save their lighthouse.

The Sambro Island Lighthouse is more than 250 years old and was designated a national historic site in 1937. Sambro residents wanted another designation that would require the federal government to provide funding to maintain the lighthouse. To quote Anderson, who was wise beyond his years, “It’s a big piece of history and, without it, it just wouldn’t be Sambro.”

The Seniors of Sambro – Our Greatest Resource and Peek into the Past

Like many Nova Scotia communities, Sambro has a higher than average senior population, who are well respected and admired. Prior to the pandemic, members of the St. James United Church held a monthly free lunch for seniors and others in the community as a thank you, and a way for people to get out and socialize. During the pandemic this program turned to a monthly delivery of meals to seniors and shut ins. This group of 7-10 volunteers typically produces a meal including desert and hand delivers it to close to 50 local seniors/shut-ins.

In the past, foot care clinics have been held in the church hall for those in need. When many of our seniors get to an age where they can't drive themselves anymore, community members always offer to help out when needed. This was especially evident during the pandemic. During and after severe weather, we always check on our elderly neighbours, and keep their snow plowed.

Unique and Lasting Partnerships

Many formal/informal partnerships are present in our community. All of our groups and organizations work in conjunction with each other so that we do not interfere with the programming and fundraising endeavours of each other. For example, SACA ensures we don't do any fundraising events that would interfere with the events taking place at the local school or church and they do the same for SACA.

For the proper execution of the Sou' Wester Days festival, we have informal partnerships with the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society to ensure boat tours are run, and the island is tidied up and grass paths are trimmed in advance of the tours; St. James United does a Blessing of the Fleet that same weekend in conjunction with the local Coast Guard Station; the local volunteer fire department is always on standby for anything the committee needs during the festival including having a truck and volunteers are present at Crystal Crescent Beach the night of our ending fireworks. Because these fireworks are launched from the beach and over the water, the local Harbour Authority has volunteers in the water helping divert boaters safely away from the launch/landing area of the display. The local fishery association also steps in to help when needed, be it financial or volunteer help. Volunteers clean up the beach the following morning and restore it to pristine condition.

Another informal partnership example would be between St. James United Church and the local fish plants and fishermen related to their fundraising suppers and the dinner theatre. In the case of the dinner theatre, to help keep costs down, local fishermen donate the lobster, the plants store them and cook them, and volunteers do the sorting and weighing before they reach the church volunteers who prepare the meals. Similar instances would take place with fish products being donated for other suppers. Yet again, the term "It takes a village." is right on point.

Respecting Our Environment

Throughout the years, there have been countless community-driven spring and fall trash cleanups all led by dedicated community members. It's a very informal collaboration of smaller groups of locals that announce which parts of the community they will clean up and then it results in the majority of the community being tidied up. As an example, for a number of years Lynn Rotin has organized the cleanup of the West Pennant Road from the ballfield to the end of West Pennant. Similarly, in Sambro and Sambro Head, Lee Paul and Tara Sampson organize a cleanup for the Basin View Drive and surrounding areas, and other various members have taken care of the areas on the Old Sambro Road and Ketch Harbour Road. Catherine Banks, another local (and a past recipient of SACA's Sambro Spirit Award), is also a long time gatherer of trash over the years while out walking her dog. Nicole Schnare organized the "Sambro Trashbusters" cleanups off and on over the years. Every year it gets done, despite not having an official organization to run it.

Faith-based/Spiritual Groups as contributors to our Community

Historically, the Sambro and area residents have had two main churches covering two faiths (St. James United Church in Sambro and St. Peters Roman Catholic Church in Ketch Harbour) yet people of various other faiths are happy to call Sambro home. Sambro Elementary always includes various faiths and cultures into their programming as well. The faith-based groups are welcoming to others outside of their particular faith and do not discriminate. An example of this would be of the lunch delivery program hosted by St. James United delivering to those in need, not just United Church members in need. All are welcome.

The Gospel Tent and its Time in Sambro

Another example of welcoming all faiths was the presence of "The Gospel Tent" in Sambro for many, many years. You would be hard-pressed to find an adult over the age of 50 that doesn't have a bible that was provided to them as a child while the Gospel Tent was here in our community. In the 1950s and beyond, Thomas Roach felt a calling from God to spread the word in Sambro. He spent his summer vacations in Sambro in a children's evangelistic ministry known as the Gospel Tent and it was very popular. By 1967 he moved his family full time to Sambro to continue working full time in his ministry. He went on to raise his family here for a number of years and he and his family became true Sambronians.

In summary, it truly does take a village to make a community successful and vibrant in so many ways. I am proud to submit this application on behalf of our community and I only hope I've come close to doing it justice. To quote the lyrics from the locally composed song entitled "Sambro Beside the Sea":

"This is my haven and this is my home. This is where I want to be. In a house by the harbour with my neighbours around in Sambro beside the sea."