

Climate Observations by Vance and Emard Court, Rustico Harbour

As part of a study about climate change in the North Rustico area, local knowledge of the history of coastal erosion, sea level rise, coastal flooding, sea ice, and saltwater intrusion was obtained from Vance and Emard Court in June of 2011.

Court Home

Their current home on Harbourview Drive was built by their father about 100 years ago. It was built on a foundation of posts driven into the ground. There is a basement under the house and it is mainly sand. The Courts have lived on this land for over 150 years. Vance has lived there all his life and he is in his mid 70's.

The brown house to the east is owned by their brother and is 125 years old. It was also built on wooden posts and is listing because one or more of the supporting posts has given away. The yellow house to the east is the original Court homestead and is not occupied except occasionally by members of the family.



Figure 1- Vance and Emard Court - Court House

Rustico Harbour Tide Gauge

The federal government operated a tide gauge near their home for a number of years. The gauge building is still there and they believe the power is still connected. Their brother, Quintin Court, operated the gauge for a number of years.

Lighthouse

The lighthouse was there before their father, Beecher Court was born. Their father told them the lighthouse fell over when he was 5 years old after a storm. The soil around it washed out due to wave action. The lighthouse was operated by the Federal Government, but the land ownership is still in question. The Courts believe they own the land on which the lighthouse is located.

Rustico Harbour Island

When their father, Beecher, was 10 years old (approx. 1898) the Rustico Harbour area was actually an island. Small dories used to sail into the harbour where the Breakwater Road is currently located.

They recalled fill being hauled into the area where the buildings on the wharf are located every fall when they were young. It seems some sand and soil were getting washed away on a regular basis.

Rustico Breakwater

The breakwater is in bad shape and has been hit by many storms over the years. Vance believes the solution is to build it 2 feet higher and a couple of yards wider. Big storms like the one last December completely flood the breakwater. The storm waves can then still reach the shoreline along the lighthouse with a lot of energy causing substantial erosion.

Shoreline Protection Along Lighthouse Shore

The armour stone along the lighthouse shore was placed by the government several years ago. It has helped protect the land behind it, but they believe it is just a matter of time before this protection system will break down.

Major Storms

There have been many storms over the years of their memory. There was a bad storm in the mid 1960's which did a lot of damage. This storm occurred during a high tide and resulted in a lot of damage including building and boats being flooded in the harbour area. If the water had risen an inch higher the water from this storm would have been inside their house. Vance

indicated this storm was unusual as nearby harbours at Covehead, Tracadie and New London did not experience the same high tide levels as at Rustico. The tide at Rustico was very high for some reason.

The Dec. 21, 2010 storm surge was also a significant event. The water flooded the area around their house and several other buildings in the area. Some flooding of basement occurred. They had water in their basement, but it didn't cause any damage as their basement is composed of sand. Vance indicated that he and his wife Alice were away that day and tried to return home and couldn't get down Harbourview Drive so they went to a motel in Brackley and stayed there for the night.

Flooding / High Water Mark

The peak water level during the Dec. 21, 2010 storm was 12 inches above the floor at the Court Brothers Gift Shop operated by Mike Doyle. (see photo attached). They are aware of the area around the existing Fisherman's Wharf Restaurant being flooded. The existing Coop Store (Alyre Gallant), Amanda's Restaurant (old post office) were two such locations. At the latter location they used to store turnips in the basement and the basement would sometimes flood with fresh water in the fall and the water would remain until the spring. This wasn't a good environment for storing turnips.

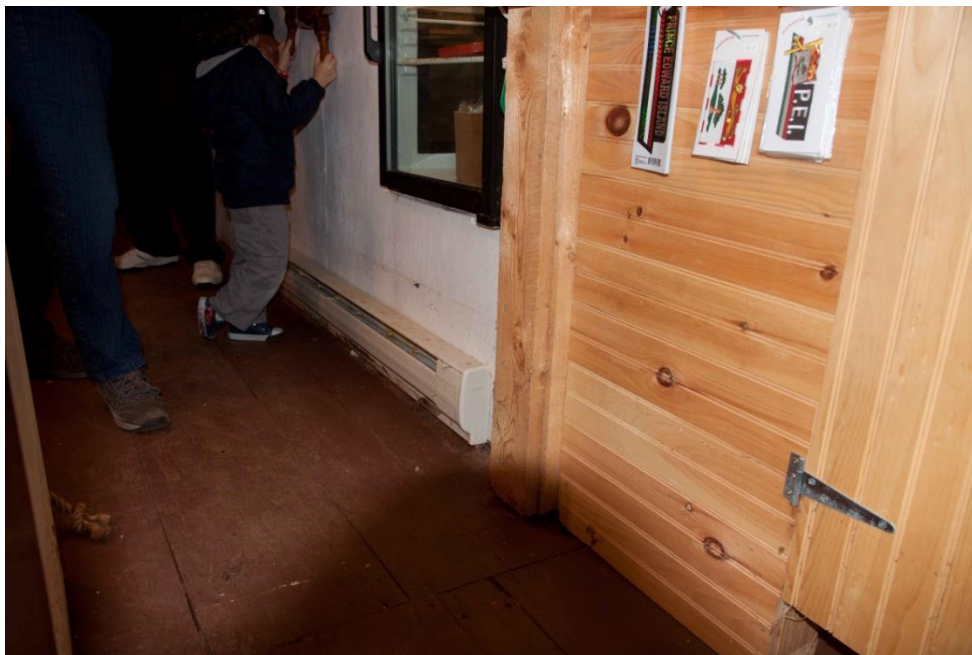


Figure 2 -High water mark just above baseboard radiator inside gift shop

Groundwater / Saltwater Wells

All the homes at Rustico Harbour currently get their water from the Village of North Rustico. Each home has their individual sewage disposal system.

The Court home originally had their water supplied from 2 molasses barrels stacked on top of each other. They were buried in the sand behind the house and their father, Beecher installed a small hand pump to take the water into the house.

The Fisherman's Union drilled a well several years ago which was originally 300 feet deep and the water was fresh. This well was eventually deepened to over 400 feet. Vance believes that Joe Paturel had something to do with this well.

Vance indicated that they drilled a well several years ago by the current location of Outside Expeditions which was 70 to 80 feet deep. This well was slightly salty (approx. 1% salt). This was the only salt water well in the area that he knew about.

Fishing

Vance fished most of his life. He recalled that in the early days a lot of the fishing occurred in the evening. He recalls holding a 106-pound cod fish in his hands. This was the biggest cod fish he could recall. Both Vance and Emard believe that fishing changed drastically when the method changed from gill nets to draggers and seiners. They recalled that government helped set up soldiers returning from the war with buying draggers, and this has serious consequences for local fishermen. They indicated that lobsters were much more plentiful in their younger days than they are now.

Sea Ice

When their father was young he told them that one could drive a horse and sleigh on the ice in the Gulf from North Rustico all the way to North Cape. Another indication is the seal hunt. They recalled an active seal hunt on the ice off North Rustico when they were young but this hasn't occurred for many, many years. They believe that anyone under 30 years old hasn't seen a real snow storm or sea ice. Nowadays Vance stated, "You couldn't find enough ice to supply an ice house now".

Older Infrastructure

Years ago there used to be a lobster cannery located where the existing range light is located. Vance can recall seeing this operation when he was about 10 years old. He also recalled when the wharf was completed that there used to be creosote and tar floating on top of the water around the wharf.

Future of Rustico Harbour Area

Vance believes that eventually that a storm or storms could cause severe damage to the point and he stated, “The Point Area is not worth two cents” for this reason. He provided the evidence of what has happened to Robinson’s Island for this. This island used to be 3 miles long and now it is under 1.5 miles long.

Source: Interview of Vance and Emard Court, Don Jardine – June 16, 2011

Update:

During Post Tropical Storm Fiona on September 23 and 24, 2022, the Court Home experienced severe flooding with water reaching a level of 12 inches above the floor in the kitchen. This resulted in Emard Court and his housekeeper having to evacuate the house and seek shelter elsewhere.



Figure 3: Watermark on wall and Kitchen Range of Court Home after Fiona Sept. 2022