

# SPARROW LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Spring 2018



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Please see our website [sparrowlake.ca](http://sparrowlake.ca) for a complete list of executive and contacts.

## PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS



**Welcome to spring!** We are excited about the coming year's program with more local history to learn and explore. Our Spring meeting will be on **May 26, 2018 at 7 PM at the Severn Bridge Community Hall, 1035 Southwood Road.** We will be hearing a presentation about the history and new development at Wasdell Falls hydro-electric dam. Coffee, tea, and goodies to follow. During the summer of 2018, we will also have a tour of the recent rebuild of the Wasdell Falls hydropower project.

I am looking forward to seeing everyone again. The last few meetings have been smaller gatherings than we have enjoyed in the past. Please plan to join us **May 26<sup>th</sup>** and bring any friends or neighbours who might be interested in hearing about this piece of local history and its evolution.

## The Story of Thomas and Jane Johnston

by Steve Stanton

On the night before a large church wedding in Connaught County in western Ireland, Thomas Johnston arrived at the celebration along with other wedding guests. Upstairs, in secret, he convinced the bride to steal away with him through her bedroom window to be married that very night at the house of her aunt and uncle. Her enraged father, who had arranged the foiled church marriage to another man, disinherited his daughter, but later relented of his harshness after her first son was born and lived but a short time. A promised inheritance was never received, because the strict Orangeman had some bitter enemies among the Roman Catholics, and after rescuing a woman from the hands of two drunken men, he was beaten and left for dead, never to fully recover his mental faculties.

Thomas and Jane sailed for Upper Canada (circa 1860) with three children, Adam, John, and Mary Ann, who was only three weeks old, and settled with cousins in North Gower, pronounced "North Gor," (now part of the city of Ottawa.) After a short time, they moved to start a farm in the wilderness near Severn Bridge on Lot 7, Muskoka Road, (now Highway 11.) The date is uncertain, but a cousin, William Johnston, received one of the first recorded land grants in the area in 1858. The young couple

were there only about a year when Thomas and two other men decided to explore Sparrow Lake to the west, but their canoe was upset in the river, and Thomas drowned along with one other man, leaving Jane with five small children in the bush alone.



*Muskoka Road circa 1870*

Jane Johnston was brokenhearted, and she returned to relatives in North Gower to die within a year. Her five children were raised by her husband's cousins, one per family. Little Mary Ann Johnston was raised by Thomas Burke, and later married Robert McMaster. Two of their daughters, Martha and Voilet, returned to Sparrow Lake to marry two Stanton brothers, Albert and Frank, and together they worked to establish the new resort community of Port Stanton, beginning with Lakeshore House in 1905, and Stanton Bros. General Store. Making the Johnston family's full circle back to the area of their grandfather's death, these two sisters brought triumph out of tragedy, and lent a touch o' the Irish DNA to the children and grandchildren to follow.



*Lakeshore House 1930s*

## Hockey at Swift Rapids

by George Page

In the 1920s, hockey was a large part of the social fabric of this small community, so much so that the residents, (who, men, women, and children, would number less than fifty), built a covered rink complete with electric lights. I am sure that some financial assistance was provided by Orillia Water Light.

The rink was built over the water of a quiet back bay behind the two islands on the south shore above the dam. Fluctuating water levels are quite common in this area, particularly in the spring, so to prevent the ice surface in the rink heaving, the base was filled with rocks (which can still be seen along with some of the original support pilings.)

Train service to Ragged Rapids ran daily, and hockey teams from surrounding communities such as Severn Bridge and Washago would come in one day, play a game in the evening, stay over night and return home the next day. The trip from Ragged Rapids to the Swift would be made by horse and sleigh.

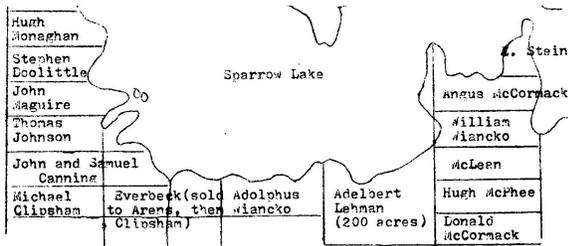


The building frame was built from poles cut locally and sheeted with lumber milled at Sandy Jarick's mill just upstream from Ragged Rapids. The roof became unsafe some time in the late 1930s or early 1940s and was removed, but I can remember skating there when the walls were still in place in the late 1940s or early 1950s, which would not have been long before the walls were also taken down.

## Early Resorts on the North Shore of Sparrow Lake

by Susan Pryke

(Adapted from a SLHS presentation by Stan and Jean Clipsham, May 31, 1985)



Before it was destroyed by fire in 1932, the Lakeview Hotel, owned and operated by Anthony Miller, was the grandest hotel on Sparrow Lake. The Lakeview was built in 1910 and did a booming business during the 1920s after the First World War. A dance hall was built at the water's edge, and a Hawaiian orchestra drew people from miles around.

Wenona Lodge, another Sparrow Lake resort, was built in the early 1900s by Jim Maguire Sr. At the close of the First World War, a huge reception was held there in the form of an oyster supper in honour of those in the area who had returned from service in the army. William Clipsham arranged for the supply of oysters which came in gallon cans. The Plunkett family, known as the Famous Dumbells, entertained guests. James Maguire Sr. and his sister Hannah operated Wenona Lodge for some time until Hannah's health deteriorated and Jim grew tired of the "danged towerists." Frank and Muriel Maguire bought the place and restored it to working order by 1944. Jim Maguire Jr. and his family rebuilt it again after a fire destroyed the main lodge in 1982.

Built in 1898, Uneeda Rest was one of the first tourist establishments on Sparrow Lake. Owner-builder Wesley Clipsham was a dynamic and ingenious man who became

handicapped in childhood when he suffered the amputation of a leg. During a long and active life, he wore out many artificial limbs. Clipsham invented a unique laundry arrangement for the hotel which was run by a steam engine obtained from Hinds Bottling Works in Orillia. Due to the foresight of Wesley Clipsham, the Sparrow Lake Association secured a fish hatchery for restocking the lake.

Other early hotels on the Muskoka side of Sparrow Lake include Wiancko House, built in 1912 by Harold Wiancko, whose father, Adolphus, served as Reeve and Justice of the Peace in Morrison Township; Delmonte-in-the-Pines, built by David Sanderson in 1906; Franklin House (now the Silver Pines Campground;) Balmoral Hotel, built by Roy Mortimer in 1922; the Mount Royal Hotel, built in 1907 by the parents of Harry Schultz; Hamryth Lodge, opened in 1940 by Harry and Myrtle Schultz; Vanomi Hotel, later known as Sparrow Beach Lodge, built in 1910 by Joe Jackson, whose brother Jim was Postmaster and merchant at Severn Bridge; and Clipsham Lodge, which was built from scratch after World War II by Stan Clipsham on the lakeshore property on the south side of the Kahshe River. The original owner of the Clipsham Lodge property was John Canning (great-grandfather of Jean Clipsham.) Lumber for the Clipsham Lodge Resort, which is now the Canadette Sports Camp, was cut in Wood Township near the Swift Rapids. It was late in November by the time the logs were cut, skidded into the river, and made into a boom. Frank Stanton delayed putting his boat into winter storage just to haul the logs to Marshal's Mill in Washago. Tom LeQuyer, lockmaster at Lock 42, was kind enough to keep the locks open late to help get the lumber for the resort to the mill and back before snowfall.

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