

# SPARROW LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Winter 2020



President – Sara Clipsham – 705-689-6180 – [saraclipsham@gmail.com](mailto:saraclipsham@gmail.com)  
Please see our website [sparrowlake.ca](http://sparrowlake.ca) for a complete list of executive and contacts.

## PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS



Hello Everyone,

As historians, we study change, what was, and try to preserve what is for times to come. How do we ever interpret the year 2020? Change, well that has a new meaning doesn't it? Changes we never dreamed of seeing. How surreal it is to look around in the grocery store and see everybody wearing a face mask! We know we cannot predict the future. With global shutdowns and the loss of freedom to travel, it is hard to focus on some of the activities and issues that kept us busy in the past.

I see a couple of ways of looking at this. Firstly, I think most of us have had the thought, at least once, in the past eight months, "I need a diversion!" I am pretty sure some of the people I have heard from in the past months were looking for diversion, sorting through pictures and papers when they thought to contact the Sparrow Lake Historical Society to ask a question or share some piece of history they found. So, if you find yourself again looking for diversion, dig through those boxes, go

through photo albums with grandchildren, or write down stories of old that you are finding harder to remember. I think it is 53 years of age when the average person starts asking relatives about the time when... Write it down now, make a video (kids love to do that) and record what you know. Having lost all of my grandparents and my father by age 26, I know you just can't ask later. Secondly, if you don't feel the need for a diversion, take it as your duty as a historian and a witness of the year 2020 to preserve what I'm sure will be "The Pre-Pandemic Period."

I neglected to contact you all this summer to confirm that our summer outing was cancelled, although I'm pretty sure not too many people wondered about it for long. Who knows what May will bring, but I'm doubtful of us gathering that last Saturday in May for our annual Spring meeting. I do hope though that we will be able to meet outdoors next July sometime. Please let me know if you have further thoughts on the topic of getting together.

I also have a challenge for you and your families. I would like to hear from you all by email (or phone) by the end of January about a story from history that you want to share or learn more about. In February I promise to share, by email, a collection of these stories. For those of you who get your newsletter by snailmail, I will speak with you on the phone or you can send your stories by any medium you prefer. I'm also suggesting that when we finally meet again we have a show-and-tell program. I think it would be a good way of getting back in gear. I think at that first meeting you could also tell us about your Covid-19 experience. History in the making!

In the meantime, please everyone take care of yourselves and those around you. Stay safe, and stay in touch.

Sara Clipsham

## Sparrow Lake Roots

by Kathryn Toms Adams

My children are the fifth generation of Toms family to enjoy our summer cottage on the north shore of Sparrow Lake. My great-grandfather, Isaac Grayson Pickering, came to the area to fish and camp, and he fell in love with Sparrow Lake. He and my great-grandmother Gertrude spent their honeymoon here in 1900, and shortly after built a lovely cottage with a sloping lawn down to the lake. This cottage had a gorgeous front porch that today still commands one of the best views of Sparrow Lake.

My great-grandparents gave the piece of land next door to my grandmother and her new husband (Lillian and Charles Toms) as a wedding gift. This little cottage was built in 1933 and still sits strong and proud today. I am their granddaughter and have been bringing my children up here since they were born.

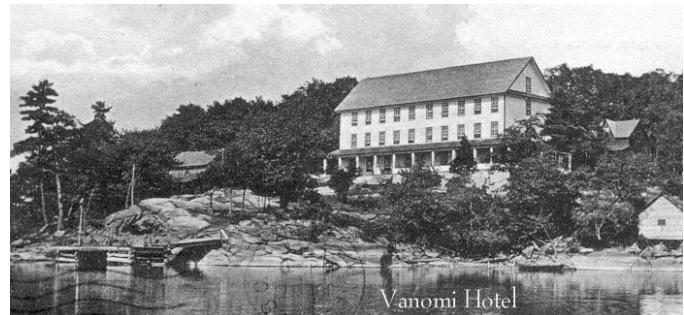


The Toms Cottage in 1933

My father spent every summer from the last day of school to Labour Day at the cottage. He learned to walk and talk there. We have many old photos lining the walls. My dad spent many nights dancing at Delmonte and the Royal Stuart, and playing games with the neighbours—the Mays, the Simons, and the Culkeens. We have strong bonds with these families today, as our fifth-generation children are all friends. My parents

spent their honeymoon at the cottage in 1961, where my mom recalls spending most of her time cooking and cleaning! My children took their first steps at the cottage too.

For eleven summers through my university years, I would invite my school friends up to the cottage for weekends. We would have loads of fun and laughs. One weekend in particular, we decided to take a late night walk down the road behind our cottage. I was always drawn with interest to the old Sparrow Beach Lodge (previously named Vanomi Hotel) that loomed large and neglected over the shoreline a few properties past our cottage. We would often stroll with our dog down to the end of McCormick Road with hopes of getting a closer look at the old hotel.



Vanomi Hotel

This particular night, my friends and I, brave under cover of the night, decided to walk to the hotel and likely scare each other with its haunted vibe. As we quietly approached the long laneway to the hotel, we could hear voices and soon saw a large bonfire was lit on the lawn near the hotel. There were a few people standing around the fire, and as we got closer, a young man said, “Hello!” He introduced himself as one of the owners of the property after we explained that we had come from down the road and were interested in checking out the cool-looking old hotel down the shore. He indulged our curiosity, and offered to take us inside the building. It had been boarded up and closed for many years, but once inside it was as if time stood still. The tables and chairs were still set up in the dining room, which made it easy to imagine what it was like in its heyday. In the kitchen, there were very large knives hanging above the big ovens. This was beginning to feel like we were on the set of a horror film!

He offered to take us upstairs to see the guest rooms. It was very apparent that the guest rooms had been unused for many years. We were only allowed up onto the second floor as the third floor had see-through floor boards making it very unsafe. I can imagine leaky roofs and many rainstorms had seen to those floors! The guest

rooms were very small and basic, and were still furnished as if the owner of the hotel had simply closed the doors and walked away. There were bats flying around our heads. It really was like being in a horror movie!

It wasn't until many years later that I learned that my great-uncle Wilfred Osler Mercer (called Pop) owned "The Vanomi." Pop's son married my great-aunt—likely after meeting at a dance at the hotel! When Pop died, his wife sold the property soon after. Her sons were not interested in helping her run the hotel. One had become a police officer, and the other had different plans.

I spend a lot of time at our cottage imagining the past. It is easy to do that, since our cottage has changed very little in the almost 100 years it has stood, unlike the vast mansions being built today. We are proud of our little cottage—no internet, no tv, showering in the lake water, and just listening to the soundtrack of the shore of Sparrow Lake.

## Malcolm Weethee Sparrow

by Steve Stanton

Malcolm Sparrow was a dentist from Toronto who had a summer home on the north shore of Sparrow Lake in the early 1900s.

He was born circa 1862 to Dr. Thomas West Sparrow and Lydia Ann (Weethee) Sparrow in Athens, Ohio. His mother was famously one of the first three women to receive male-equivalent Bachelor's Degrees from Waynesburg College in Pennsylvania in 1857.

Malcolm married Bessie Hamilton Ecclestone on Aug. 10, 1898 in York, Ontario. They raised two sons and sponsored a British Home Child, Stanley Herbert Maxted, who became an actor and correspondent and one of Canada's earliest radio show hosts on CBC Radio. Dr. Malcolm Weethee Sparrow was the victim of a major heatwave on July 11, 1936 that ultimately killed over 115 people in Toronto (*Toronto Daily Star*, 1936). His widow, Bessie Sparrow, who was thirteen years younger, passed away suddenly at the family cottage on Sparrow Lake on Aug. 28, 1948, as reported in *The Globe and Mail*.



Dr. Sparrow was the subject of rumour from the time he arrived at Sparrow Lake until the present day. In response to query, he began research into the true origin of the name "Sparrow Lake," and the pursuit of this mystery inspired him to write a book of poetry, "The Legend of the Lake." Although never published in his lifetime, a typewritten copy of the manuscript dated 1924 was photocopied in the book, *Legacy Almost Lost*, Kilworthy Historical Society, 1992.



In 2020, a demolition application was filed for Dr. Sparrow's former home and dental practice at 1437 Queen Street West in Parkdale, Toronto. In July 2020, a Heritage Property Nomination was submitted by Adam G. Wynne in Objection and Opposition to the Issuance of a Demolition Permit, in which he notes that "the property is of the Edwardian Classical style designed by prominent Canadian-American architect James Hartley Galloway (1881-1961) in September 1905."

The British Home Child Advocacy and Research Association has sponsored an online petition in Objection to the Demolition of 1437 Queen Street West.

\*<https://www.change.org/p/toronto-city-councillors-object-to-demolition-of-1437-queen-st-w>

Photos provided by Adam Wynne along with a copy of the Heritage Property Nomination and Objection to Issuance of Demolition Permit.

For greater information and family pictures, see also:

- \*<https://greenconnections.pastperfectonline.com/photo/6F721514-D0FF-4632-9D72-420776138850>
- \*<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Sparrow-294>
- \*<https://greenconnections.pastperfectonline.com/photo/698E7C7E-BF98-4CE6-9BEE-140053786500>
- \*<https://www.sparrowlake.ca/books/the-legend-of-sparrow-lake/>

## **Sparrow Lake Historical Society Membership Renewal & Application Form**

**We now accept PayPal from the link on our website at [sparrowlake.ca](http://sparrowlake.ca)  
For those email recipients who are not sure of their renewal status, please contact Karen  
McKenzie. [kswood@sympatico.ca](mailto:kswood@sympatico.ca)**

**Name -----**

**Mailing Address -----**

**Postal/Zip Code -----**

**Email address -----**

**Will you receive your newsletter via email?      YES      NO**

**Single \$15.00 ----- Family \$25.00 -----**

**New ----- Renewal -----**

Also note that now there is a ten-year membership available for \$200.00 for a family or \$125.00 for a single membership.

**Ten Year Single ----- Family-----**

Please make cheque payable to – **Sparrow Lake Historical Society** – and mail to Treasurer -  
Karen McKenzie  
1511 Stanton House Lane  
Severn Bridge, ON  
P0E 1N0