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Please see our web site www.sparrowlake.ca for a complete list of executive and contacts.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mark your calendar for our spring meeting on Sat. May 31 at the usual venue the Severn Bridge Women's Institute Hall at 7:00pm. The speaker will be Mary Storey from the Gravenhurst Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Wow what a winter we've all had. Hopefully we are done with it by now. Spring birds are back and the Severn is open and if the weather co-operates we might avoid major flooding. Hope you are all well to boot.

We are putting out an urgent call for a newsletter producer. Dave and George have been doing a great job over the years and George will finish this year after our Fall issue. We have asked before with no response so now is the time to dust off your talents and give a thought to carrying on this vital communication. We'll assist in any way to get the job done. Let's hear from you!

We have two great stories in this newsletter, one submitted by Bill Darker and one by Jim Stanton. I hope that both of these stories will spark some interesting discussion at the next meeting.

Ron Hunter & Concerned Citizens for Water Level Management.

Ron Hunter was a true individualist and very determined man. He lived in a cosy log house, built by himself, on East River Drive near Washago. The logs were cut into 12" pieces, stacked like cord wood, & cemented together. He graduated from community college with a Survey Assistants' certificate.

His mother's home was on Looking Glass Pond, a part of the Lake Couchiching / Severn River confluence and in the 1970s, the Province through MNR, decided to reduce the cost of flood damage by actively discouraging building homes on the flood plain. Her home was in the flood plain. The potential for financial loss if sold or on insurance coverage, encouraged Ron to inquire into the method used to determine how a flood plain was established. With his surveying background he could understand the data used to draw the plain and successfully fought MNR to a draw. A good example, is his study of the Black River which is responsible for a major part of a Severn River flood. He showed that the 100 year flood tables were based on one major event; the collapses of a succession of dams that had been built in the 1880s for lumbering and then were abandoned 15 years later. The dams were never repaired or replaced, so the maximum flood level could never occur again. We don't hear much about Flood Plain Management these days and I like to

believe that if one man could tie up the program for three years, then the program was seriously flawed and thus abandoned to that back shelf where so many government reports are buried.

People who lived on the Severn River & on Sparrow Lake were also interested in floods. The year of 1983 had 2 floods, one in late May after everyone put their docks in and again in September before the docks were taken out. The one in September flooded the Torpitt Road & many guests from Grandview & Torpitt Lodges had to be taken back & forth to Port Stanton by boat. Ron discovered that some of the flooding on Sparrow & the Severn could be alleviated by managing the dams used by Parks Canada in a different fashion and so be able to control the levels on Simcoe, Couchiching and the Severn River and reduce flooding.

Ron met with groups and individuals and it was a "marriage made in heaven" and Concerned Citizens for Water Levels Management (CCWLM) was born. He held public meetings, addressed municipal councils, and contacted government agencies, Parks Canada, MNR, Orillia Light & Power (OWLP), and Ontario Hydro, Environment Canada and other citizens groups on the Severn, Lake Couchiching, Lake Simcoe. The agencies plus CCWLM formed a committee and released their first report: "Report of the Black / Severn Rivers, Lakes Simcoe/Couchiching Watershed Study Committee" in 1984. To say that this was a harmonious group would be a massive overstatement. Each participant had his own agenda. Parks Canada, who was the chair, was determined that no changes would be made to their operating system, since they had the engineers and 65 years of experience. MNR, felt nothing should interfere with their fishery or flood plain research. Ontario Hydro, wanted changes that would allow a better water flow to their generators at their Big Chute Hydro Plant. OWLP, affectionately known as Owl P, could have used more water for their Swift Rapids power plant, but did not want to oppose Parks Canada.

The water level on Simcoe Couch is defined by the Rule Curve. When the Trent-Severn canal was constructed, a chart detailed what the Simcoe Couch level should be for every day of

the year. This was designed to provide enough flow so that navigation on the canal would have sufficient water and secondly, enough flow all year long to provide hydro power. It was based on only a few years of observation. Sixty-five years later, we are still using the same Rule Curve. Think of the changes, the homes and cities along the shore, rain fall and summer evaporation to mention a few. All of us who live on the system are affected by the operation of the Rule Curve.

Eventually the Black / Severn Rivers, Lakes Simcoe/Couchiching Watershed Study Committee agreed to commission a study of the whole problem. Financed by Parks Canada, they hired Acres Consulting Services Ltd, and formed a Steering Committee and a Technical Services Committee; Ron Hunter was the only member on the Steering Committee to be a member of the Technical Committee as well. The Acres Report, completed in 1988, is still the definitive report on the Simcoe/Couch/Severn Waterway.

What is the legacy of the Acres Report and Ron Hunter? Now in 2013, the Rule Curve remains unchanged. However; there were results. Bad floods on Sparrow Lake only occur once every 8 years now, rather than every second year and Ontario Hydro received enough water to justify the rebuilding of their power plant. The Rule Curve is still hotly debated, as citizens with boats on Couch and Simcoe, look to modify the Rule Curve so they can boat into September. Ron Hunter resigned as President from CCWLM prior to the completion of the Acres Report, for family reasons and was succeeded by Bill Darker in 1986. Later Ron's house was badly damaged in a fire and he moved to the Toronto area.

Submitted by; Bill Darker
Owner & operator of Grandview Lodge Resort,
former President of CCWLM & Sparrow Lake
Historical Society, former director of the
Sparrow Lake Association, former member of
the Trent Severn Advisory Committee & a
retired Professional Engineer
Nov 22, 2013

60 Years Ago—The Great Uranium Strike by Jim Stanton

“Port Stanton March 12 – Two dozen prospectors, uranium hungry and fresh from a Toronto convention abandoned their autos and vanished into nearby woods on the fringe of Sparrow Lake, 20 miles north of Orillia yesterday.”

This was the story that appeared in the *Toronto Star* sixty years ago—March 12, 1954. Someone, it is not clear just who, started the rumour that a valuable uranium deposit had been found two miles northwest of Sparrow Lake.

“Northwest of Sparrow Lake” would place the treasured site in the Lower Severn region. But elsewhere in the article mention is made of Morrison and Wood Townships as the target areas. With a lack of any exact evidence, the chaotic response which followed was probably predictable.

The confusion is borne out by email discussions with some of our correspondents who chimed in when the first draft of this article was shown to them. George Page wrote: “I remember my Uncle Jim obtaining a Geiger counter and roaming the country around the Swift trying to get some action, which of course never materialized”.

Ken Thomson says he remembers “a hectic and frantic time” as the uranium-seekers trespassed over private properties near his Lauderdale Point home. Ken’s older brother, Jim, provided another recollection of those heady days: “I was working in Oakville at a company called Isotope Products when news of the uranium strike hit the papers. I grabbed a Geiger counter and got on the *Northland Express*. The news of the strike seemed to center on a farm owned by Fraser Miller, right on the mouth of the Upper Severn River at Sparrow Lake. I tramped the property all one weekend and could not get a flicker of the needle. Coincidentally, the farm had been unsuccessfully for sale for some time, but miraculously was sold immediately. Seems like the only one to “find anything” was Mr. Miller.”

As the rumours ramped up, more locals joined the prospectors. These included Gerald McDonald and Carl Brooks of Washago who were excited at the “new find” only a few miles from their homes. Also joining the party were veteran prospectors Louis Robillard and Charles Seehaver of Sparrow Lake.

Further afield, the stories in the *Star* and the *Telegram* were all it took to spook two dozen prospectors attending the Prospectors’ and Developers’ Convention at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto and they jumped in their cars and headed for Port Stanton, some of them still in their dress slacks and oxfords.

Toting Geiger counters, heavy boots and axes to cut claim stakes, they headed into the back country much of which was still blanketed in deep snow. Not surprisingly, no one was able to pinpoint the strike, which was supposed to be the unregistered claim of a big mining company.

The only people who weren’t excited were the residents of Port Stanton itself. Jim Martin, who owned the general store at the time, is quoted in the *Star* as saying “I don’t think there’s uranium there. Four years ago prospectors staked through here. Last fall there was a helicopter, a plane and teams of prospectors. Today I saw four carloads of men go into the bush—but they all went in after the newspaper story about the new find. If there was anything worthwhile, I think they would have found it.”

Although trace amounts of the valuable uranium did show up on some Geiger counters, the great rush of 1954 died out quickly and the village returned to its sleepy March routines, awaiting the more lucrative rush of tourists who would not appear for another three months.



—Star Photos by Jack Gale

HOPES THAT some day a uranium mine will replace his gasoline pumps are held by Alex Newell of Sparrow lake. He has 75 acres in the area where the prospectors are working



GEIGER COUNTER gives out its clicks for Len Cunningham of Cobalt. Teddy Martin listens to the clicking caused by a radioactive rock beside his father's Port Stanton store. Prospectors are flocking to the radioactive area

URANIUM'S MAGIC MAGNET DRAWS PROSPECTORS' I



Tiny Port Stanton, in background, served by Sparrow Lake station, is centre of prospecting gossip brought on by magic word "uranium."

Chalkdust memories



HAMLET SCHOOL, 1945—46

Muriel Maguire taught the 1945-46 class at Hamlet School. Students were front row, left to right, Shirley Ann

Nichols, Shirley Stanton, Pauline Sykes, Ann Louise Miller, Ronald Stanton, John Stanton, Jim Maguire; back

row, left to right, Richard Stanton, Harry Broome, Jim Stanton, Marilyn Miller, Bill Van Kralinger, Shirley

Willet, Eva Morrison. The picture was brought into the Packet by Richard Stanton of Lindsay.

Jim also sent the above picture along and I am sure that it will bring back memories for some. I know it did for me because when I lived in Severn Bridge my parents had converted the upper floor of the large house we live in into an apartment, and one winter they rented it to the Millers. I assume that they wanted to get away from heating the lodge at Sparrow Lake. I am not sure of the year (late 40's) but Marilyn Miller I believe was in high school and would have gone to OD in Orillia and Ann Louise went to the public school in Washago with me.