

SPARROW LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Spring 2017



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Please see our website sparrowlake.ca for a complete list of executive and contacts.

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS



Spring! Sparrow Lake is opening up, the crows are calling, and the sun (when it appears) is oh so warm. May is rolling around again, and we are planning our Spring meeting for **May 27, 2017 at 7 PM.** We will be meeting at the Severn Bridge Community Hall as usual. All are welcome; bring a friend. We will have tea and coffee after the meeting. If you would like to bring goodies for the table, please do!

Our speaker for the Spring meeting will be Richard Tatley from Gravenhurst. He is well known for his writing on Steamships and his contributions to the preservation of history in Muskoka. He is going to speak to us about “Early Transportation and the Settling of South Muskoka.”

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone together again. Please try to come.

UNEEDA REST STORIES

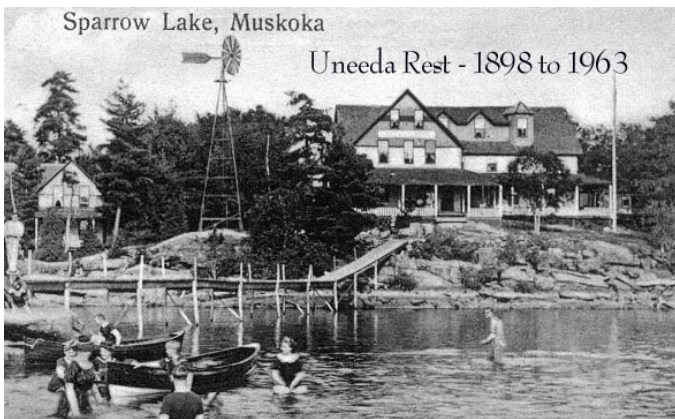
An Excerpt by George Page

*When I was young and at my best,
I used to work at Uneeda Rest.*

In the early summer of 1949, when I was 14 and living in Severn Bridge, Esmond Clipsham, with my friend Jim MacTagert in tow, knocked at our back door. He told my Mother that he was looking for boys to work at his resort on Sparrow Lake and that he had just hired Jim who had recommended me. He was offering \$35.00 per month complete with room and board. This event started my working education, a six-year association with Esmond, and a lifetime relationship with his son Robert.

During the time that I worked at Uneeda Rest, the resort contained a considerable complex of buildings. There were three buildings with rooms to rent. The main lodge, a two-story building called the cottage, and a single-story building called the bungalow adjacent to which was a recreation hall. The male staff had rooms in the cottage, where I initially shared a room with Jim, and then when Bryce came on board he and Jim shared a room and I had a room all to myself. There were rooms in the main lodge over the kitchen area where the female staff was housed. In addition there was a large two-story concrete house that was the family winter home. There was a stable with drive shed, a garage, Es's shop, and a laundry building. Down on the lake shore was a large dry-land boathouse, and next to it

was an unused building that had been a fish hatchery. There was also a small barn at the farm.



The guest rooms by today's standards were quite rudimentary. They did have a sink, but no toilet, tub, or shower facilities, all of which were in a common bathroom down the hall. The furniture was quite plain but attractive, and I believe made of birch circa 1900 era. In the guest rooms, drinks were cooled with a block of ice that I delivered on a daily basis in an old metal ice-cream can wrapped in newspaper. Es cut the ice from Sparrow Lake, and it was stored in the ice-house covered with sawdust. I had to get out at least one block per day, clean off the sawdust, and cut it into pieces the right size to fit the cans in each room.

Another of my daily chores was to clean any fish caught by the guests, which they left in a pail at the back door of the kitchen. This was done at a cleaning station at the rear of the ice-house. There was a specific way to clean each type of fish, and another lesson learned was the value of a sharp knife. Most common fish like bass, pickerel, small pike, and often there was a bunch of little stuff like sunfish and rock bass caught by kids, these were all eviscerated and scaled. Catfish had the sharp fins removed first, and then they were skinned and eviscerated. Large pike were scaled and had the entrails removed along with the gills after cutting out the vent without opening the cavity. The head and all the fins remained intact. Orma would then stuff the cavity with bread stuffing (like a turkey) and bake it whole. The fresh-baked fish would then be paraded to the dining table on a platter to the delight of the catcher as well as the whole dining room.

One of the downsides of this fish-cleaning operation was that the remains were buried near the cleaning station, and this attracted skunks. More than once I had three or four skunks sitting in front of me waiting for their share like so many cats. Now, having skunks wandering around a summer resort is not a desirable situation, particularly after dark, but Es had an ingenious way of getting rid of them without causing a big stink. Some fish guts in the bottom of a delicately balanced wooden barrel would attract the skunks to go into the barrel, and their extra weight would cause it to tip up without unduly alarming them, but trapping them in the barrel. Es would then bring down the tractor, put a hose on the exhaust, stick the hose in the barrel, which again did not unduly disturb the skunks, but in a short time it did asphyxiate them. Then we just had to take the barrel up to the bush and dump out the dead animals.

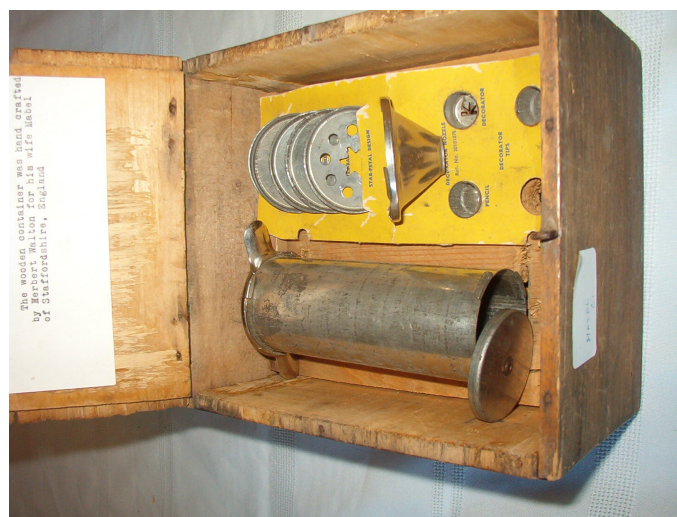
Another unique operation at Uneeda Rest was the laundry, which was housed in a small building up the hill from the main lodge, where all the guest-room and kitchen linen was washed, dried, and pressed on site. In one end of the building there was a large circular drum, roughly 4 feet in diameter and 8 feet long, with holes in it every few inches. The rotating drum was enclosed in a solid fixed tub that was open along the top quarter. The rotating tub had two hatches that could be opened when aligned with the opening in the fixed tub. Items to be washed were loaded into the rotating tub through these hatches, the fixed tub was partially filled with water and soap, and the rotating tub set in motion. The rotating tub was driven with a small steam engine via a mechanism similar to the rewind on a fishing reel, that drove the tub several revolutions in one direction and then reversed itself and drove it several revolutions in the other direction. Steam (at 15 psi) for the engine was produced from a small upright boiler that looked like a large hot water tank with a fire box at the bottom. It was my job to keep the boiler fired with the garbage that was collected each day from waste baskets in each of the rooms and stored for wash day, augmented as necessary with some wood. The wash water was also heated with this steam. All of this linen (sometimes for as many as eighty or ninety guests) was then hung out to dry on clotheslines. When dry, it was folded and put through a hand-cranked mangle, which again

was another of my jobs. In addition to this operation the laundry had a regular wringer-washing machine, where the staff could wash their clothes, and one of the girls would wash guests' clothes for a small fee. Virtually all of us who worked there were from working-class families, where the money we made and the accommodation we got was a distinct help. However, one summer a couple arrived on site with their daughter, who were obviously not in need of any extra financial assistance, and they wanted Es to hire the daughter so she could get some experience of what it was like to have to earn her own living. This arrangement was terminated rather quickly one day when the parents arrived on site to find the daughter in the laundry washing dirty diapers. I guess that their experience with the lower classes had to be selective.

All of this seems like a lot of work, and it was. I was up before six am every morning to get the kitchen stove lit, and we all worked until the supper dishes were done, which would be after six pm. By today's standards, this was for very little pay, although we did get our room and board, which did not mean that much to us as individuals, but was a help to our parents. By the sixth year I was making \$85.00 a month. Usually the tips were quite good enough to keep us in spending money all summer. We usually had time off each afternoon to go for a swim, and Sunday afternoons were free. We also had access to the recreation hall where there was a pool table and a ping-pong table, and there was always a boat that we could take for a row. The dining-room servers and guest-room maintenance staff were all girls, and two or three times as many of them as the male staff, so this was interesting for us and led to a lot of socializing. I know that I had several crushes on some of the girls, none of whom ever returned the favour. It seemed that almost every night there was a dance at one resort or another. We usually could borrow a boat, or some of our friends had access to a vehicle and would pick us up. So generally a good time was had by all.

In retrospect it was a great learning experience and a great way to grow up.

Some pictures of Artifacts from the Fall Meeting 2016



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