

# SPARROW LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Summer 2016



President – Sara Clipsham – 705-698-6180 – [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



Welcome to our summer newsletter! The summer outing on August 10 to the Muskoka Steamships & Discovery Centre was a success. About fourteen of us had an informative discussion with Mr. J.P. Cockburn himself, and a look at the watershed display. Afterwards we enjoyed lunch at the Muskokabilly restaurant at J.P. Cockburn Square (next to the Segwun dock).

## ANNUAL FALL MEETING

The Sparrow Lake Historical Society annual fall meeting will be a potluck dinner on **September 24, 2016** at Severn Bridge Community Hall. (**Hall opens at 6 P.M., sit down at 6:30.**) Following dinner, there will be a presentation on the conception, building, and operation of the Orimat Road which travels west from Torpitt Road, following along the Severn River. Please plan to attend.



## Early North Shore on Sparrow Lake

An Excerpt by James Stanton

The first Europeans on Sparrow Lake were highland Scots, Irish, and north Germans. One of the earliest settlers was a Yorkshire man, John Franklin, who came to Orillia with his family in 1863 to practice his trade as a stonemason. In 1876, he and his growing family took up residence on a farm he purchased from Gustav Lehman, the present site of the popular Silver Pines Restaurant. He farmed the inhospitable fields, raised sheep and horses, and worked for the lumber companies which were stripping the mighty stands of white pine that stood beside the lake and nearby Severn River. John's unmarried daughter Elizabeth and son William later transformed the farm into a tourist home called Franklin House around 1905. Miss Franklin (or Lizzie as she was called) was much loved by her guests for her warm hospitality and delicious meals.

Another pioneer of north English extraction was Michael Clipsham II, who in 1865 took possession of a lot on the Muskoka Road four miles north of Severn Bridge. He built and operated a blacksmith's shop there until 1883

when he purchased better property for farming on Sparrow Lake at the mouth of the Kahshe River. He rebuilt his smithy's shop, farmed the land, timbered, and built lap-strake boats. This property was originally settled by Aberdeck, sold to Arens, then purchased by Michael Clipsham. The home on this site is said to be the oldest continuously inhabited dwelling on the lake.

As the lumber industry started to decline at the end of the nineteenth century, tourism began to flourish, providing work for the second generation of settler families. Michael Clipsham's eldest son, John Wesley (Wes) built a summer hotel on the lakefront in 1898 and opened for business in July 1899. One of the first American guests was an employee of the Uneeda Biscuit Company, and he reportedly provided the name for the hotel, *Uneeda Rest*. An early brochure lists rates as \$14.00 for a double room. Boat rentals were \$3.00 a week.

Wes was a highly skilled innovator, and added some clever features to his business. Water was supplied by a steam pump, and there was also steam laundry. In addition, Wes installed gaslights to the hotel that utilized acetylene gas produced in a carbide generator. In 1908, he built a fish hatchery on the lakeshore, which, once supplied with eggs from the provincial hatchery, was able to restock the lake with game fish such as pickerel for many years. The business was bought by son and daughter Esmond and Orma in 1927, and was operated by them and their family continuously until 1963.

Among the German settlers were names like Everbeck, Lehman, Heidman, Wiancko, Roehl, Stein, Schell and Schultz. Wes Clipsham's wife, Ella, was a daughter of Adolphus and Meta Wiancko, who built another tourist home next door to Uneeda Rest. In 1912, their son Harold built a hotel called Wiancko House. The earliest guests to both Uneeda Rest and Wiancko House came first by stagecoach to Severn Bridge, and were ferried the eight miles down to the lake by steamer. Hotel residents enjoyed the home-cooked meals created by Meta and Ella and Orma, including locally grown treats such as blueberry pie and cranberry sauce. Until regulations came in requiring pasteurization, Wianckos and Clipshams kept their own cows for the milk served in the dining room. All of the old hotels on the lake included an icehouse in which 100-pound blocks of ice were packed and surrounded by wood sawdust. Guests could store their fish catches on the top layer of ice, and when they went home the fish could be packaged up with chips from a block of the ice. Until plumbing was installed, sanitary facilities were limited to outhouses and chamber pots in the guests' rooms. Basins were not installed in the rooms at Uneeda Rest until 1939.

Next door to Wianckos stood Delmonte Hotel, later Delmonte-in-the-Pines, built in 1906 by Dave Sanderson of Gravenhurst. This popular resort was operated for many years by Fred and Bill Kimpton of Toronto, who came to Muskoka after their pineapple plantation on the Isle of Pines in Cuba was destroyed in a hurricane. Delmonte boasted a fine large dance hall, with live bands playing once a week. Guests to the dances were carried by boat from other hotels on the lake. The Skalosky family has owned Delmonte for many years, and today it functions as a housekeeping resort.

Further north on the lake stands one of the grand old hotels from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Vanomi Hotel. Built in 1910 by Joe Jackson, the 160 guest hotel has had several owners over the years. In the 1930s, it was run by W.H.O. (Pop) Mercer with his sons Wally and Dalton. Otto Roehl, who owned Grandview Lodge across the channel from Vanomi, purchased it from the Mercers in 1938 and operated it until 1948, when he sold it to Stanley Socha, who changed the name to its present form, Sparrow Beach Lodge. No longer an operating business, the three-story frame building still stands high on a rocky point, a reminder of an era when grand old wooden hotels were the trademarks of Sparrow Lake.





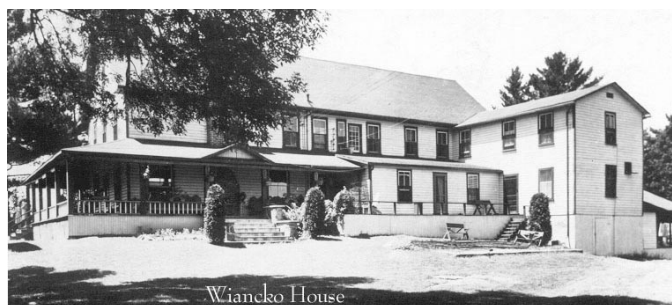
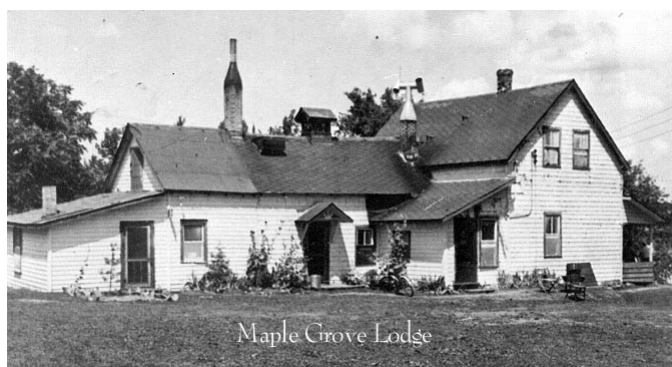
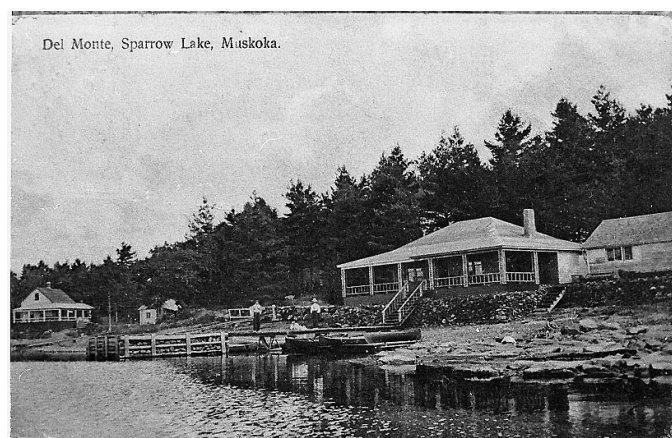
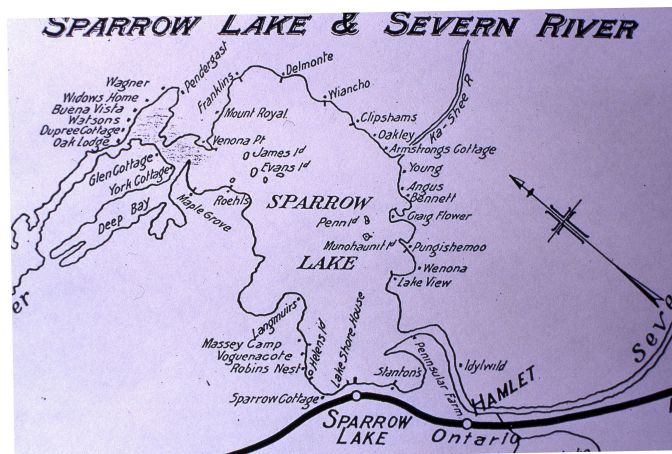
## MAPLE GROVE LODGE UPDATE

Submitted by Robert Tmej

My family was visiting and vacationing at Sparrow Lake since the 1950's (before I was born). My parents, Jerry and Denise Tmej, long-time renters, along with 3 other families, purchased Maple Grove Lodge from Margaret and Jack Sykes in the mid-1970s. The history of Maple Grove and other significant Lodges on the Lake is well known, thanks to your efforts and that of other volunteers contributing to the work of the Sparrow Lake Historical Society (SLHS). However, it is the reported lineage of Maple Grove that I wish to focus on today.

As mentioned, our family was one of four partners that purchased Maple Grove from Margaret and Jack and operated the business as Maple Grove Cottage Resort (now housekeeping cottages) for a few more years. I lived and worked in the Lodge house with my brother and cousins from the end of school until Labour Day. The other partners were the Patava (Miro and Helen) family, Gregor (John) family, and Mr. Frank Hanka. By the early 1980s, the partners decided to cease operating the business. Two waterfront lots (at the easterly end of the property towards Torpitt Lodge) were subsequently partitioned and sold to very anxious buyers.

The property that remained was divided into 4 approximately equal lots. Upon a lottery (picking a number out of a proverbial hat) my parents became the owners of the main Lodge house, existing cottage (so named "Bill's Cottage" after Margaret's son, Bill) and Jack's old garage/workshop. The Gregor family still owns the lot closest to the point (and the Darker family). The Patava lot (owned by my uncle Miro and Aunt Helen) was eventually sold to a now full-time resident, and Frank Hanka's property and cottage was taken over by Miro and Helen's two sons (my cousins Jerry and Ron) and their families upon the passing of Mr. Hanka. My parents (now in their mid-eighties) do not spend very much time at Maple Grove, but my wife and kids have grown to embrace the cottage life while we lead busy lives at our winter home in Mississauga.



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

**Please note: The year that your membership subscription is paid up to is shown on the envelope in bold letters next to your name.**

**For those email recipients who are not sure of the year please contact Ken Thomson at [ken.macthomson@gmail.com](mailto:ken.macthomson@gmail.com).**

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**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 **Ken Thomson**, Treasurer 1729 Peninsula Pt. Rd. RR #1, Severn Bridge, ON, P0E 1N0.