

Sturgeon Lake is one of the most scenic lakes in the Kawartha chain of lakes. In this Confederation year it is chronicled that in the days of Champlain the lake was crowded with Indian canoes and warriors, and Indian Treaty Rock at Thurstonia bears an engraving testifying that here the pipe of peace was smoked and two old Indian tribes signed a peace treaty.

This historic rock at Thurstonia Park has been visited and pictured by thousands of visitors from Canada and The United States.

In this connection the story of Percy H. Skitch of Lindsay, founder of Thurstonia Park, has been penned in order that it may be part of a book of the history of Verulam Township. The interesting story as told by Percy Skitch follows:—

## MEMORIES OF THURSTONIA PARK

My earliest recollections of Thurstonia Park were about 1896 when my brothers and I used to camp and fish there. Early in 1900, my uncle Henry J. Thurston purchased this beauty spot which was much in the shape of a triangle and covered 17 acres of land with almost a quarter of a mile of lake front. Shortly after, possibly around 1905, Smith Surveyors were hired and, as a result, a plan was drawn up showing 91 building lots, many of which were beautifully wooded with cedar, pine, spruce, poplar and other varieties of trees. For several years, the community of Thurstons and their relatives celebrated the Dominion Day holiday with a large picnic of the farming community at this picturesque location. I believe it was at one of these gatherings that my uncle conceived the idea of naming the place Thurstonia Park.

During the summer of 1914, about the 15th of July, I received my vacation for two weeks from the Massey Harris Company in Toronto where I was a clerk in the office for 9 years. We stayed with my parents who had recently built a summer cottage in the park. These were a memorable two weeks as well as a most enjoyable holiday. The fishing in those days was excellent and bass and muskellunge were in abundance; a Paradise for the fishermen.

Mr. H. Thurston had the Park up for sale and it was on this holiday occasion that we decided to purchase the property from him. At this time, there were four cottages, 17 acres of beautiful land, a small store. This was a significant time in my life; I was the new owner of Thurstonia Park.

Only two weeks after the deal was completed, the First World War broke out. This really gave us a scare as we had put everything we owned into the purchase. With the

war suddenly on, things looked bleak and we had visions of our all being lost.

It was very fortunate that there were 150 or more of a staff in the offices of the Company for which I worked. During the winter and early spring months, I made plans and reservations for many of my office friends and others to visit our lovely resort. When I left Toronto in April 1915, much of the accommodation at the lake was reserved.

My wife and two children, Bruce and Marion, travelled to Lindsay by train, and believe it or not, I had purchased a horse and light wagon and drove down. With muddy roads and a heavy rain storm which overtook me outside Oshawa, I was delayed for a day but arrived in Thurstonia after three days. It really seemed like an endless journey and I often felt sorry for my horse which was certainly a faithful beast, and pretty well tuckered out at journey's end.

After a month's hard work, things were shaping up for the coming season. One of the facilities badly needed was the direct mail delivery, which up to this time came to Dunsford, two miles distant. Of course, in those days, there was no rural mail delivery and the present set up proved very inconvenient. I made application through our member of Parliament, The Honourable Sir Sam Hughes, who was really a man of action and quick decision and tremendous vigor. It was only a short time after that I was

in receipt of a letter advising me that I was now Postmaster of Thurstonia Park; the office would open on June 15th. We were very gratified with this very encouraging news and what a boost it was for the park.

The first lot was sold to Mr. Thomas Holmes of Toronto; another was purchased by Mr. Charles R. Conquergood, a great friend and help to the community.

Accommodation was inadequate to house the many guests who came the first year and we found it imperative to build a larger lodge. Through the kindness and the generosity, I arranged for a builder, Mr. Jim Thurston, to make plans and estimate the required lumber. I put my bicycle in one of our row boats and rowed across the lake to Sandy Point and on to Feilon Falls to the big lumber mill who inside of a week had the lumber delivered by scow. Within 6 weeks, we had the building well under way. This structure, consisting of 27 rooms, a large dining room, kitchen, a store and a post office and a verandah 56 feet in length, was completed in the spring of 1916. My aunt, who was the cook, named the lodge Swastika which was an Indian name for "Good Luck". The name was later changed to Thurstonia Lodge.

It was a popular event during the summer to hold open air concerts on the verandah. Many in the community attended each Thursday night and we were able to find willing and talented singers, dancers, piano and violin players and eloquutionists.

The first church service in the Park was started on the Lodge Verandah, later at the Pavilion operated by Mr. Martin Thurston. In 1931, Mr. and Mrs. William Arnold built the little church on the

hill, calling it Trinity Community Church, for the convenience of the three summer places of Greenhurst, Thurstonia, and Kenhill. This was later deeded to the community as a gift from Mr. and Mrs. William Arnold. Mr. Fawcett, owner of Ernscliffe Lodge, Charles Conquergood and Percy Skitch were the first trustees. This church has been carried on ever since and two services are held during July and August, Mass at 9 a.m. and undenominational service at 11 a.m.

About the year 1920, the C.P.R. ran week-end Special trains from Toronto. This was a great boom to the resort business for a number of years and we found it necessary to invest in a bus to convey guests to the Park. It was also used to take our Roman Catholic friends to Mass at Downeyville. The roads were rather rough south of Dunsford and on one occasion a remark was made to me, "Percy, I don't know why you brought us to church this morning as you shook the devil out of us before we got here." We had merry times driving to and fro on these trips.

The park grew rapidly during the years of 1920 to 1935 with cottages, lodges, new Pavilion, Boarding houses in Greenhurst, Thurstonia and Kenhill. The mail carrying service or contract was then brought to Pleasant Point and Sturgeon Point by the steamer Esturian during the years of 1910 to 1920. Then, Cap-

tain Gray secured the appointment and with the Lintonia, served Thurstonia as well as other points on the lake.

In the year 1922, there was a business boom and the lodge was enlarged to its present size with 39 rooms, a house for winter dwelling at the rear of the Lodge and a six room cottage. Each year from 1918 to 1933 an average of two cottages were erected and a large boathouse for the many boats required for the convenience of the guests.

I contribute a major part of the success of the growth of Thurstonia Park to my wife and family and the congenial help of my staff and an extra word of thanks for my faithful cook, Miss Barchard, who was an excellent, congenial cook for 20 years.

An incident comes to mind of a number of Indians and their wives and families from the reserve from Curve Lake or Indian Village. About the year 1919, they camped for the summer across the lake near Sandy Point, on Mr. Robert Knowlson's 20 odd acres of wooded land. There were about 30 in the party and they made rustic chairs, tables and other pieces of furniture; the women sold baskets and fancy beadwork. I believe there are still some of the cedar rustic chairs in use on the Lodge verandah. I used to chat with the chief of the group and asked him if he could relate some of the history of the Big Stone called Indian Treaty Rock on the shore by the boat house. On the underside of the Rock, he showed me a chiseled Treaty, used in the early days to mark the boundary lines of the fishing and hunting grounds of the two tribes, one from the east, the other from the west. There was also a legend that Samuel De Champlain on his discovery and voyage through the lakes to Orillia stopped at this historic Rock with his Indian Guides.

It was to me a wonderful experience to have had a share in the growth and development of this beauty spot on Sturgeon Lake, to see the area increase from four cottages in 1914 to better than four hundred in 1966. It was our pleasure to spend 35 years in this healthful place which is now being operated by the new owner Mr. Harry Nichols and his family and we wish them every success. Fond memories are still lingering in my heart of this popular resort, Thurstonia Park.