

Teddy Bear picnic attracts visitors to former canning factory

When her family's canning factory on Huycks Point Road in Hillier closed in 1986, Hazel Conley had a bright idea.

Every season for more than 50 years, the family business had been bustling with activity. Workers came down from Bancroft and Arden to help pick the many acres of tomatoes which were then canned in the processing buildings and shipped out. At the height of the season in September, as many as 60 people were kept busy at the Conley farm.

So when a deafening silence descended on the property, Hazel missed the annual visitors and wondered how she might attract people to share the beautiful woods and scenic Lake Ontario beach behind the house.

In her spare time she began to lay trails through the woods. Her husband Wilmot had sand delivered to the beach to make a play and picnic area and they fixed up the cabin in the woods where once the seasonal workers had stayed. And when it was all finished, Hazel invited the neighbourhood children over to enjoy what she called her first Teddy Bear's Picnic. Naturally, it was such a success that it became an annual event.

Recently, on a warm and sunny Saturday, with just enough wind blowing in from the lake to keep the mosquitoes away, Missis and I were among 130 adults and children attending Hazel's seventh annual picnic. Price of admission was a teddy bear, which was deposited in a big box, and if you didn't produce one you deposited a looney in another box as a fine.

After being handed a paper cup with a number on the bottom, which Grandma Teddy Bear Conley hung about your neck, it was off down wooded trails to the recorded music of the only tune you'd expect to hear at a Teddy Bear's Picnic. Upon carefully skirting Skunk's Crossing leading to the outhouse, one entered a world of animal paths. Bearing names like



Thoughts of a new Empire Loyalist

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By Eric T. Chapman

Deer Trail, Monkey Trail, Squirrel Trail, Bunny Trail, Snake Trail, all of them were complemented with ceramic figures and stuffed animals to greet you along the way.

Dog Trail even had a handy fire hydrant and Cabot Trail, leading to an overlook at the lake, an original rock gleaned from that Nova Scotia paradise. Meandering along past a real live pond with imitation ducks, a Wood Chuck Hole, an old lime kiln and a beaver dam containing timbers actually chewed by real beavers, you discover Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Here, a grey-bearded "Uncle Tom" greets you and escorts you inside. A 70-year-old wood stove in the kitchen, copper boilers sitting atop the range. Shelves and cupboards displaying all manner of knick-knacks collected over time. A Sears-Roebuck catalog, issue Number 117 dated 1908. Pictures on the wall, one of Uncle Tom Wilmot's grandparents, John and Fanny. Another of the members of County council, circa 1944, and another displaying four generations of Conleys gathered at noon September 23, 1985, in celebration of 50 years in the tomato canning business.

Two bedrooms, a wooden bed in one, steel bed in the other, both neatly made up with covers and feather-ticked quilts and pillows. A bed-pan hanging from the wall alongside a string of former tenants' old neckties. An ancient copper bathtub on the floor beside a bearskin rug, the original owner having been shot in an apple tree by Hazel's Dad. On the night

table, a very old and frayed bible. Inside, a Pledge Card issued by the Wellington Band of Hope. Promising to abstain from the use of all intoxicating liquor as a beverage, from tobacco and profane swearing, it was signed on the 8th of May, 1887, by somebody with the Christian name of Eugenia.

Then it was back through the woods, crossing the creek on a Frog Log, past Smurf Trail and along Teddy Bear Trail to the picnic area at the beach where children were busy playing games. A ship's bell tolled ten times signifying it was time to eat and out came a big can of Grandma Teddy Bear's home-made cookies and slabs of chocolate cake.

Sitting at picnic tables with balloons flying gaily in the stiff breeze, you watched the white-capped rollers washing up on shore as Grandma's helpers cooked wieners on a grating atop a red-hot log fire. Son Dennis Conley and Bernadette Hill were chief turn-overs, Bob Porcheron and Ruth Miller retrieving them from the grate and doling them out between sliced buns. Hazel's daughter, Janet Hawley, supplied and spelled the names.

With the paper cups you helped yourself to ice-water or freshie, but since it's almost impossible to fill a cup while it's hanging about your neck, you remove it. Then upon finishing your drink you naturally discard it into the nearest garbage can. A big mistake.

Shortly thereafter all the cups were placed in a receptacle from which Grandma Teddy Bear randomly drew them out. If your number was called you won a chocolate bar. Missis and I searched through three garbage cans before finding those we'd thrown away.

Then shortly after 6 p.m., all the tired teddy bears who'd been idling away the afternoon in the big box were removed by their owners and taken home. And sadly, for Hazel Conley, the picnic was over for another year and everything became silent once more.

St. Paul's 1993 student wins big contract

Despite the fact model Melissa Hobson didn't win anything at this year's modelling competition, she may have walked away from the competition the big winner.

Hobson, 15, and a Picton resident, attends St. Paul's Secondary School in Trenton and is in Grade 11. She's also represented by Mode Elle Modelling Agency in Belleville.

Following competition at the Modelling Association of Canada convention in Toronto, Hobson was approached by several agents with offers.

To Hobson's complete disbelief, a Japanese agent from Tokyo's Central Fashion agency offered her a \$100,000 contract for only two months work.

Mode Elle owner Audra Anderson still can't believe her model's good fortune.

"This was the highest contract bid at the convention. Melissa fits exactly what the clientele want for their products. I've talked with Melissa and she's unsure of when to go because she wants to finish her Grade 11 year," says Anderson.

"I'm hoping she and the agency can work out a deal so she can go to Japan in the summer or fall."