

## BACK TO THE OPINICON — A SAGA OF CHAFFEY'S LOCKS

by Thomas Van Dusen

Last week, we went back to the Opinicon Hotel — those who had arrived there by boat in the summer on the epic cruise of the Blue Gull and reinforcements picked up at various intervening parties.

Our cottage at the Rideau Lakes haven, was Cypress and leaving Shirley to ready the place for visitors, some of whom had already arrived in the shape of Major G. and his wife, I went down to the wharf to commune.

The lake lay spread out in the afternoon light like the five fingers from which it obtained its name. Over the low hills crawled dark clouds like a scribble of charcoal on the sky. A wind moaned high in the arching elms and maples, relics of the ancient wilderness. All was serenity, calm and peace. A shangri-la away from home.

Others arrived and still others. The Popes, the Stephensons, Commander C. and his wife, former Glaswegians never known to use the phrase "Hoot mon".

As dusk fell silently over the sequestered vale, we were greeted briefly but warmly by our jovial host, A.H. Cross and repaired to the dining room in the main lodge amid scenes of wassail and revelry unequalled since the Wars of the Roses.

Tottering away from the groaning table, we made our way on foot to what had formerly been the miller's cottage when there was a grist mill at Chaffey's. This had been allotted to our party, presumably because it was out of hearing of the main lodge which contained a fair quota of septua- and octogenarians and a smattering of children whose tender ears must not be assaulted by loud political war cries and challenges wafting across the placid waters.

That evening as the flames leaped up in the hearth at Cypress cottage we held a Witenagemot in the grand old style of our remote ancestors, shedding reason and light on such sacred issues as the state of Mr. Brett's hemorrhoids as he went up to bat in the World Series and what Pierre Trudeau was really after.

Next day lustre was added to the party, by the arrival of Cap'n Henry from the Blue Gull, my old skipper and in his honour I donned my sea-going headgear for the first time since last summer, causing a sensation in the dining room where at least one retired admiral was seen to seize up on his bouillabaisse.

Saturday we occupied ourselves as best we might. I sat by the dock while the wind rasped the surface of the lake and chased the low-lying clouds across the back of the hills. The sun came out and

created a path of beaten silver to my feet. The tall trees groaned and cracked as the wind lashed them and drove clouds of bronze leaves in its path. Here and there a pilgrim braved the surge and trudged across the base of the hill where I occupied my time feeding peanuts to a beige-coloured squirrel.

The old lodge with its multiple verandas towering high over the lake was a resort of family parties, old folks recapturing memories of the twenties and thirties and foolish virgins wondering why.

Following another of A.H. Cross's enormous dinners, we gathered that night in Fernbrae cottage overlooking the locks, soothed by the gentle murmur of the mill stream and recounted tales of our activities. Some had wandered in the hills, others had slept; some had worked old manuscripts and some had remained glued to the frenzied activities of the ball players portrayed in full colour via the miracle of television. Again, a spirited argument developed and after a happy honing of wits on the anvil of controversy, we retired, one party to Cypress cottage, one to Fernbrae and Cap'n Henry and his wife, Noreen to their self-contained suite opening on to the Opinicon's screened porch.

These were only some of the highlights of our Opinicon weekend.



FOR THE FALLEN

On Nov. 11, 1918, the British and German armies laid down their arms, and fraternized in Flanders Fields. This epochal event, marking the end of the war to end all wars is commemorated in the stark, simple memorial in Morewood Village Square. "At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them." (Photo Dennis McGann).

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