

## Memories of Early Cottaging on the Shores of Georgian Bay in Tiny Township

By Babs Sennett

A few years ago, following one of our Association's annual meetings, a young woman spoke to me rather wistfully. She said, "I wish that I had the memories that you have of the years spent at Cawaja." She was a relative newcomer to the area, whereas I have been lucky enough to spend close to 70 summers by the shores of Georgian Bay.

Her words stayed with me, and I began to realize that little information had been published regarding the development of cottage communities on Georgian Bay. Stories about the early years on Tiny Township's beaches were even harder to find. I decided to try to collect a few of these stories and so began to talk to some of the many families who, like mine, have shared many wonderful years and memories on "our beach" - Cawaja.

One of the first families to discover Tiny's beautiful beaches were the Addisons, of Addison Beach, arriving about 1914, settling on the 14th Concession. Gradually, subdivisions of the various beaches occurred, that of Woodland being in 1921. Mr. Robert Finley of Barrie founded Balm Beach, buying the land about 1920, dividing it around 1922. His surveyor from Barrie, a Mr. Ardagh, purchased the adjacent property to the north, now recognized as Ardmore, a combination of the names Ardagh and Moreau, purchaser and vendor.

Messrs. Card, Walker, and Jamieson were introduced to the area by Mr. Finley, all of them being Barrie residents and associated with Collier St. Methodist Church. They too recognized the beauty and value of the area, and in 1922 purchased land north of the 11th Concession, which they subsequently subdivided. Cawaja Beach was named by combining the first two letters of each family name, Card, Walker and Jamieson, a suggestion of Hazel Card. (Most of us originally thought that it was of Indian origin!) Other beaches slowly began to develop. Some of the other divisions took place as follows: Ardmore and Nottawaga in 1924, d'Aoust Bay 1925, Bluewater 1926, Maureen and Wymbolwood 1927, Wahnekewaning and Rowntree 1929, Ossosane 1931, Mountainview 1932. Further development was delayed until after the war. In 1946, Georgina and Wendake were founded, followed by Edmore in 1947, Belle-eau-claire 1949, Ishpiming 1954, Sand Castle 1965, and others until to-day.

The gradual growth of Cawaja Beach is characteristic of most beaches. It was the culmination of a dream of three men and their families after the war of 1914-1918. For the most part, at that time, families were struggling to get on their feet, to begin life again, to find a peaceful retreat somewhere and to own some land there. This dream was made possible for many with the purchase of this beautiful strip of waterfront property along the shores of Georgian Bay about five miles from Penetanguishene and Midland. Being close to Barrie and about 90 miles from Toronto, it attracted many families from these areas - mine included.

My own memories begin in the year 1926, when our family first came to Cawaja, through the kindness of Mr. Jamieson. In June of that year, my brother, who was five, my sister, six months, and myself, two-and-a-half, came down with chickenpox. We were in the midst of moving from Barrie, where my dad had been the minister at Collier Street Methodist Church, to Toronto, and the health authority insisted that we three children remain behind. Mr. Jamieson kindly offered his cottage to my mother and dad, and it became our temporary home and quarantine.

Mother and dad were enthralled with this glorious place, and eventually managed to buy the lot next to Jamiesons'. That was the beginning of our love affair with Cawaja Beach, which has endured to this day. Gradually, more and more families began to locate here, tenting for a while in the beginning and later building simple cottages. Many of the original families still retain ownership.

We were all mesmerized by the sheer beauty of nature, with the vast body of Georgian Bay water clear and pure, the wonderful pine forests mixed with oaks, maples, and birches, the multitude of wild flowers,

so many varieties of birds, not to mention the purity of the air and the white sandy beaches.

Indeed, it was so unspoiled that it provided a real contrast to our city and town life. Living here, in nature's paradise, was to be a challenge to all of us. How we met this challenge, while preserving the uniqueness, is a story worth sharing.

Conservationists we all were, without ever having the label. We will always be grateful to the local residents, who gave to us very strong support and encouragement. We developed lifelong friendships. Family names continue to be associated with businesses established by parents and grandparents, so many years ago. Some of the names which became so meaningful to all of us were Belcourt, Lesperance, Robitaille, Lefaive, Pauze, Quesnelle, Moreau, Dault, Hamelin and Asselin. Everyone lived together harmoniously, and the benefits that the cottages brought to the area were recognized and appreciated.

We have learned that, long ago, the native people used to camp on the shores where we now lie on the sand sunning ourselves. When I was a child, "the Indians" would arrive each summer, with their beautiful wares and delicious fresh fish. Their crafts included furniture built with cedar logs, items made from birch bark and decorated with colourful bead work and quills. The area is greatly endowed with folklore.

Roads were few and far between in those early years. Most were just very rough, sandy wagon tracks, narrow, but with exceedingly beautiful scenery. Going out in the car was a real adventure. Frequent flat tires, getting stuck in the sand or mud, and coming upon impassable spots all provided much excitement. We still have a road surrounded by nature's loveliness - may it always be preserved - a safe beautiful quiet trail, along which the happy voices of children and families can be heard as they enjoy a walk. Elsewhere safety is now a concern, as traffic gets heavier and its speed increases. But our road is primarily a walking path, as it should be.

It didn't take us long to realize that living at the cottage was going to be quite different from city or town living. Learning to be resourceful and flexible was necessary, as it encouraged us to make the best of things. Sometimes it took a bit of courage, but we lived in a spirit of co-operation with a sense of community. All of us soon realized that we needed each other, particularly the women folk, who were here on their own with their children from Sunday evening until Friday evening, without transportation.

Once a few cottages were established, it didn't take long before some of the local farmers began to arrive at regular intervals. The fresh milk and cream were rich, thick and delicious additions to our bowls of hot oatmeal and brown sugar. Cooking was done on a coal-oil stove, which required regular cleaning of the wicks and the addition of oil to the tanks. So you see, the "cook" had to be very skilful in organizing the dinner. I can still recall the aroma of delicious pies, cakes and roasts cooking. Meals were always substantial.

Sunday was always a very special day at the cottage. Needless to say, we were up early, dressed in our very best cottage attire. Everyone walked to "church", carrying cushions and car rugs. We sat among the trees and hills behind the Walkers' cottage for many years. Eventually, there were seven or eight ministers who owned cottages on the beach, including my dad, and they all enthusiastically volunteered to conduct services during the summer. This tradition of weekly services in July and August, initiated over 75 years ago, continues to this day, though our outdoor cathedral is now in a different location. Over many years, our outdoor church-going has provided strength to the "Beach Family".

In writing my book *Cawaja: Memories of Cottaging on Georgian Bay*, I have been able to share many other memories, as well as the stories of most of the other families who have made Cawaja Beach their summer home over the years. Thanks to the generosity of these families, and with the encouragement of my husband and my son, I have managed to include over 200 photographs in the latest edition. I trust that sharing these memories will help to provide some interesting information, as well as a bit of fun, and will allow the younger generation to appreciate the legacy that the early cottagers have left them.

"As you glimpse into the past, may you find hope for the future."