

Rotary Club Kawartha Boys' Camp.
Written by Claude H. Rogers
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The Peterborough Rotary Club was organized in the year 1921. First president, F. L. Roy.

One of the first duties of the new organization was to decide on some suitable "club activity". It was decided to devote the efforts of the Club along lines that would help the underprivileged boys of the community and surrounding country.

After considerable preliminary investigation, it was found that there were few, if any, opportunities for boys (except those of well-to-do parents) to take advantage of the wonderful lake district. All young boys would like to go "camping" but the dangers of unsupervised camping trips which are so apparent from the accidents that so frequently occur every summer, cause the majority of parents to hesitate to allow their boys to go on camping trips.

Even the YMCA in Peterborough only made a pretense at that time of operating a summer camp for boys and then, sometimes, only for a couple of weeks, camping in the open without proper equipment, boats or permanent housing.

After deciding that the boys' camp idea was feasible and desirable, the Club appointed the writer to look into ways and means of carrying this idea out. After looking around for the most desirable location, we suggested a site on Clear Lake, twenty miles North of Peterborough, far enough away so that parents and friends would not get under the feet of the Director too much, and yet be accessible for supplies, post-office, churches, etc.

Clear Lake is part of the Stoney Lake District which has approximately a thousand islands and well over 1500 cottages. From this location, trips could be made into the North country which would appeal to the romantic and adventurous instinct of the average boys, and at the same time be close enough to a center of activity so that the boys could have the advantage of other recreation, such as regattas, bonfires, and camp life in its various forms. Plenty of fishing and open country for hikes, etc.

The writer and V. J. McElderry proceeded to Clear Lake to try and acquire a site that the writer had in mind. We called on Samuel Bryson who owned a cattle range, along the shore of the lake, of 600 acres or more. We suggested that he sell us a few acres on the North boundary, facing on Clear Lake. He told us to go ahead and put up the buildings but I explained to the old man that we could not very well erect a camp on property that we did not own. He finally agreed to go with us by boat to see the site that we had in mind. He did not want to name a price so I suggested that he be generous and accept \$500.00 for the few acres but he said, "Oh, no, I would not consider this as I do not think the property is worth that much." We finally prevailed on him to accept \$200.00.

My next step was to try and obtain material and labor at the lowest possible cost to the Club. We circulated a form letter with an enclosed return postcard which was a pledge offering to supply certain materials which the donor checked off on the card. We did not ask for money, but for materials and labor.

These letters were mailed to practically every manufacturer, lumber dealer and contractor, as well as stores, in the Peterborough District. The result was most gratifying. Manufacturing companies offered to provide various materials. Lumber companies offered us a definite amount of lumber, hardware, roofing, paint and other articles. Most gratifying of all was the fact that many people, some in moderate circumstances, offered to contribute a definite number of days of work. Many volunteers took their own cars and motored to the camp and gave their time to building or equipping the buildings under the direction of Tom Ephgrave.

The Stoney Lake Navigation Company and Jack Fitzgerald, wood and coal dealer, offered and did transport supplies from Peterborough and Lakefield to the site of the camp.

Rotarian Tom Ephgrave offered to build the camp on a cost basis, hiring help where needed, and using the voluntary labor and donated materials where possible.

Mr. Billy Barry, worked with me on preparing the plans.

We first built a bunkroom with dining tables down the center. This building was connected by a passage to a large kitchen and storeroom, and a separate superintendent's cottage was built. Later on, we decided, on Herb Mowatt's recommendation, to build a separate bunkhouse with rooms opening on to a veranda, each room being equipped with four or six bunks (double) which could be supervised by a responsible head-boy who would be in charge of a section. As time went on, we enlarged the camp and equipment.

About this time, the Rotary-Anns were organized and they did wonderful work in helping equip and furnish the camp. They added blankets, mattresses, kitchen equipment, boats, etc., and when we moved the bunks out of the main camp house to the new bunkhouse, they put a large stone fireplace in the Main Dining Room and made it into an Assembly Hall. They also supplied the camp with its first large canoes. Without them, the camp would not have been as comfortable or as well equipped.

Under the supervision of Herb Mowatt and, later, Capt. Douglas Loomis, M.C., the camp grew, and many hundred boys learned to enjoy camp life, overnight trips, games on the supervised playground, campfires on the islands and in front of their own camp, trips to Blue Mountains, swimming in the lake, fishing, etc. The boys took part in the various regattas and learned the value of competition in sports. I believe, from the many expressions I have received from the boys since they have grown into manhood, that the effort that the Peterborough Rotary Club put behind the Boys' Camp was appreciated.

Not one fatal accident has occurred during all the years the Camp has been in operation, which is a great tribute to the supervisors, first Herb Mowatt, and then, for many years, Doug Loomis. We even had a child born at the Boys' Camp, son of Mr. and Mrs. Doug Loomis.

One of our first problems at the camp was the trouble of overcoming the natural opposition of boys to "lights out". Our first building, which was a combination bunkhouse and dining room, accommodated about forty boys in bunks lined around the walls and the space in the middle was devoted to tables and benches. Naturally, with such a mixture of boys, of different ages, constantly coming and going, some staying all summer and others only for a couple of weeks, we had considerable difficulty in enforcing a semblance of order after sundown. Therefore, we later built a separate bunkhouse where boys could be, to some extent, segregated according to age,

disposition, etc. An older boy was selected and put in charge of each section. In this way, the problem of discipline and housekeeping could be simplified to some extent.

Doug Loomis, who is a born supervisor, remarked to me once that "The best way to get them quieted down at night, is to keep them busy with their various activities starting early in the morning, so that when night comes they are glad to go to bed--and to sleep--and quiet."

During the first years of the Camp, thanks to the help of Club members, many jobs that loomed up as obstacles were simplified by the cooperation of volunteers from Club members.

For example, when the first scow load of lumber and supplies were sent up to the camp, we were faced with the problem of getting the material from the scow on the shore to the campsite. Fortunately, quite a number of the club members motored up and "manhandled" the material from the scow up the bank and carried it to the site of the buildings, so as not to delay Fitzgerald's outfit too long.

Jack Fitzgerald used to operate a tug and scows bringing wood down from the North Country. His scows returned empty and he volunteered to take supplies on the return trip, which saved the Club large transportation costs, as we did not have a road into the camp at that time.

The same help was forthcoming when we built the steamboat wharf, the cribs had to be filled in with rocks, and the only way to get them there was to pick them up along the shore and get them over to the wharf. I imagine that some of the members had blistered hands.

East of the camp, about a hundred yards or more from the camp buildings, the ground is fairly level but was covered with rocks which had to be carried off and thus made the area into a baseball diamond and playing field.

The only means of access to the camp "by road" was across Bryson's ranch from the road which led down to his farm. We picked out a cowpath and removed the worst of the stones and rocks and made a passable (?) trail for our cars and an occasional truck. This trail, humerously called "Rogers Highway" served a useful purpose and also, I believe, caused a lot of profanity at times, as the contour of the ground did not lend itself to road building.

The first few years, the club loaned the camp and equipment at times to other organizations, such as the YMCA, for their special activities and the Roman Catholic Church's organization used it several periods. One amusing instance occurred during one of their periods of occupation. One Sunday morning I visited the camp and the priest in charge was holding Mass in the supervisor's cottage which was small and would not accommodate all the boys at once, of course, so the rest of the boys had to wait on the veranda outside. Some of the boys got a hold of a set of bones and had a little game going on the floor of the veranda while they waited their turn. I was telling Rotarian Father Paul Costello about it and he said, "Well, at least it kept them around."

The two large freight canoes, which were called "war canoes", each accommodated twelve or fourteen boys with a helmsman in charge, turned out to be most useful, in fact, almost indispensable. Young, inexperienced paddlers could sit on the thwart and use a small paddle. They soon got onto the "swing" with the result that it became a familiar sight for the cottagers in that district to see the camp canoes going across to the spring to get drinking water or to the post office or taking the Catholic boys to church on Sunday morning to Young's Point, about three

miles to the Southwest. I also suspect that when Doug Loomis hadn't anything in particular for the boys to do, he would send them across the lake to the spring or post office and thus work off some of their surplus energy.

The camp also obtained a large lumberman's barge, (known as a pointer), which was equipped with an outboard motor. This was used to get supplies or to tow the war canoes, and sometimes other canoes, filled with boys when going on a long trip to the North end of Stoney Lake, where the Blue Mountains are.

Speaking of spring water, reminds me of how we obtained fresh water. It became a bit of a problem to bring so much spring water by boat, as we had to cross the lake to Sandy Point, a distance of over a mile, sometimes in bad weather, to the nearest cold spring. The Club gave us a grant of \$150.00 to drill a well. I got a well-digger from Warsaw to give us a price of \$3.00 a foot to drill the well and put in a pump (not that price today). Doug Loomis and I got a divining rod, such as is often used to locate springs. (Believe it or not, it works; I have located several wonderful springs with them, including a cold spring of running water in the center of the planing mill at the Peterborough Canoe Company plant, right in the midst of all the machinery and we have been pumping out of this well water for our drinking fountains for probably twenty years.

Doug and I walked back and forth across the campsite at about fifty yard intervals and every time the rod dipped we put in a stake and when we had finished several trips, we found that all the stakes lined up and that our supposed spring ran under the camp buildings.

We started the driller on the rocky ground in front of the camp and, after several days of drilling, the driller came into my office and reported that he had drilled fifty feet and used up the \$150.00, and no water! He said he had come to town to get authority for more drilling but that the outfit would work ahead drilling until that evening and unless he got more money he would then knock off. I told him to go back and phone me that night and, in the meantime, I contacted the other directors. He phoned me that evening and reported that while he was away the drill had struck a seam and the water was nearly up to the top of the ground, well above the lake level. We had the water tested and it was pure and cold, and ever since then the camp has had a wonderful supply of cold spring water.

Sunday was always Visitor's Day, and Doug Loomis always seemed to have the camp spick and span, in the early part of the day, at least. Parents and friends of the boys came by car and truck over the "highway" and also by boat to the camp and picnics were held all around the campsite and along the shore, where later Doug Loomis built his summer cottage.

I have not visited the camp for quite a number of years since I left Peterborough, but I know that it has served a useful purpose and given many hundreds of boys a memorable outing that they might otherwise not have been able to enjoy.