

The Historic Lodges of Peninsula Lake

by Heather Moffat

Enterprising individuals and families have opened Penlake accommodations to welcome guests since 1889. These lodges and inns have been important for introducing city-dwellers to the beauty of Muskoka. Some guests have returned year after year with their families or bought properties and settled on the lake. Thanks to the authors of "Penlake: Reflections on Peninsula Lake" and present and past owners of the lodges for their help in writing these articles and providing pictures.

Cedar Grove Lodge

Cedar Grove was fully opened as a resort in 1932, although it begun accepting guests as early as 1927. The owner was Hugh Fleming, who bought the land from his father, Hugh Fleming Sr. Buster spent two years building and developing the property money earned from his winter jobs in the Detroit automobile industry. The first cabin was built from his own logs. Since road transportation was not feasible, they were taken by water to sawmill at the locks between Fairy Lake and Mary Lake.

Buster married Evelyn Fowler in 1940, and Cedar Grove known for its warm welcome. The lodge began as a summer resort, the Flemings having to cut, store and sell ice to manage financially in the winter months. However, in 1942, when Huntsville became known as a winter sports destination, the lodge began operating the resort year-round. In 1948 they were one of the first venues to install a rope tow (using an old Jeep motor) to carry guests to the top of their ski hill. The lift operated until 1963, when guests could enjoy all-day skiing for just one dollar.

For a time, Cedar Grove also offered riding for its guests, but when the horses kept returning without their riders, Evelyn decided it was best to stop that diversion. After that, however, there were many other activities to keep guests happy, and during the 1940s and 1950s, business boomed, particularly from May through August.

Staying at Cedar Grove has become a tradition for many families visiting Muskoka. Some of them have been guests for as long as five generations. Now it is Buster and Evelyn's son, Gary Fleming, and his adult children, Kelly and Jeremy, who welcome company to this traditional Penlake resort, which has grown to include 19 cottages, plus a fitness cabin and a main lodge.

In 2017, "Bluebird," one of the lodge's first cottages, was rebuilt just in time for Cedar Grove's celebration of its 90th anniversary on Peninsula Lake.



Buster and Evelyn Fleming, original owners of Cedar Grove Lodge.

Photo courtesy of Kelly Fleming

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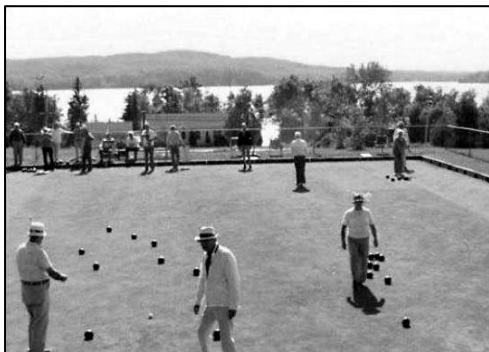


Cedar Grove Cottages

Friendly Acres Resort

Reverend Robert Norton Hill, Methodist minister, justice of the peace and farmer, was the first pioneer to settle permanently east of Huntsville in the area now known as Hillside. The Friendly Acres Farm was part of his property. It was handed down to his grandson, Hugh, through his son, Joseph. Many early cottagers enjoyed horse rides from Hugh's stables, led by either Hugh, his daughter Lorraine (also known as 'Toots'), or George Hinton. One favourite all-day ride was along Limberlost Road to the Walker Lake sawmill.

Capitalizing on the tourist trade, after 1940, Hugh Hill decided to convert the farm to a cottage resort. He built some cabins, converted the farmhouse to a main lodge, and added insulation to the barn so guests had an area for recreation and social activities. He financed this by subdividing his lakeshore property and selling some of the lots, though he kept a beachfront area for his guests.



Lawn Bowling at Friendly Acres



Friendly Acres Lodge

Friendly Acres lived up to its name, becoming known for its warm welcome and home cooking. The hired hand, Andrew "Scotty" Murray, was one staff member whose amiable manner made him popular with guests.

Lorraine, and her husband, Aage Peterson, took over the resort when Hugh and his wife, Florence, retired.

For many years, Friendly Acres was the site of one of the big social events of the summer season, the 'Pancake Frolic'. The United Church Women of the Hillside United Church (now Pioneer Memorial Church) held this. Both local residents and cottagers would attend. In a large cabin kitchen, church members would pitch in to prepare and serve pancakes with all the fixings, hotdogs, and drinks. Visitors would dig in at a long row of picnic tables under the trees. In earlier years, the women had booths at which they would sell delicious home-baked pies, cakes, cookies and other treats, as well as hand-knit or hand-sewn items such as baby clothes, scarves, tea cozies, toilet roll covers, potholders and placemats. There was always something interesting to buy!

One popular event at the Pancake Frolic was the baseball game. Horseshoe pitching was another activity. In later years, there would be an auction sale, so keenly anticipated by lake residents that they circled the date and would not plan anything to interfere with it. The Penlake Corn Roast also took place at the Friendly Acres property for several years after the golf course clubhouse was destroyed by fire, thanks to the generosity of new owners Jan and Tom Roberts.

The Roberts, having fallen in love with the atmosphere of the main lodge, purchased Friendly Acres in February 1975 without even looking at the beach or grounds. They left teaching jobs in Toronto to raise their family in Huntsville. The Roberts ran the resort until 1990. A great cook, Helga Hayward, Aage Peterson's sister provided full meal service. They had a very loyal staff, especially Barbara and Betty Graham, who were with them the whole fifteen years of operation. One of the resort's main attractions was lawn bowling - most of the Roberts' guests were members of lawn bowling clubs in southern Ontario. Another big attraction, of course, was the beach on Peninsula Lake. Their guests used it regularly, and it was the setting for a weekly picnic lunch.

However, by 1990, the Roberts felt they needed more family time. So, they gave up the meal plan and tried renting housekeeping cottages, but this was challenging as, by then, Highway 60 had become too busy for easy access to the beach. Therefore, the Roberts started renting the cabins on a more permanent basis in 1993 or 1994.

In 2007, the Roberts' children, Dylan and Sarah, opened The Acres Driving Range on the Friendly Acres site, which is still in operation today. Golfers can practice on a variety of tees and terrains and improve their game by taking lessons from Todd Thompson, 'Dr. Golf'. In keeping with Friendly Acres traditions, the range is known for its friendly, relaxing ambiance and beautiful location.

Tally Ho Inn

Tally Ho Inn, in Hillside, began life as a lumber mill owned by the Brooks. Eventually, the family changed the mill into a rooming house and added cabins and wood-framed tents on platforms. It was named "Weqash", which means "white swan" in Algonquin, as it was built on the site of a native campground.

The inn was sold to the Robinsons, then Gordon and Marion Hill, when it was used as a stopover for guests on their way to Limberlost Lodge. At that time, it was renamed "Tally Ho Inn". Renters enjoyed the luxury of having their very own cabin but not having to cook, as meals in the main lodge were included in the price. It might be hard to believe now, but in 1938, you could stay at Tally Ho for \$3.50 to \$5.00 per person daily, including three meals.

In 1939, the lodge was bought by the Emberson sisters, Betty and Isabel, who ran it year-round with help from other family members. During World War II, Norwegian pilots enjoyed staying there as they took a break from their training in Canada.



Portage Inn

One of the first Peninsula Lake businesses was the Portage Inn, originally known as “Portage Lodge”. Built in 1889, it was a welcome refuge for many of the first visitors to Muskoka, who were loggers. Tourists arrived later to visit the lake or pass through to Lake of Bays.

The route between North and South Portage passed near the lodge, which became a concern when the Portage Flyer train replaced horse and cart as



Portage Lodge 1923

Photo Courtesy of Nancy and Syd Kirkpatrick

the means of transport. Though the train was faster and more convenient, sparks were cast from its flaming engine, which occasionally ignited fires as it chugged by. In the dry season, workers and guests had to be ready to run for buckets of water to quench any fires before reaching the buildings or the surrounding woods. However, the train’s boilers were not deemed unsafe until the 1940s when a new engine was brought in. After that, inhabitants of the lodge could rest a little easier.

The Allison family, who owned the lodge, sold it to the Walker family in 1941, and they called it “Walker’s Lodge”. Guests had a good bargain at the time: A room, with meals home-cooked by Mrs. Walker, cost only \$25 a week.

The Walkers tried to sell the lodge three times. Though the first two buyers defaulted on the mortgage, John Turner eventually bought it. He operated the Portage Inn as a teen disco. However, the neighbours objected to the loud, late-night music, and he was charged with breaking the anti-noise bylaw and shut down the business. After that, the subsequent owners, the Sloans, ran the establishment as a luxurious women’s health spa for a couple of years. Then, the Dearing family purchased the property, intending to run it as a restaurant.

Today, the Portage Inn is in the hands of Sidney and Nancy Kirkpatrick. After a loving restoration, the couple opened and ran the inn for several years. Now, they rent the inn and the nearby Portage Chalet for group stays and functions. This historic site has also become popular for Penlake workshops, parties and wedding celebrations.



Portage Lodge

Photo Courtesy of Nancy and Syd Kirkpatrick

Pow Wow Point Lodge

Alex Fisher, a businessman and inventor, first built a cottage on the Pow Wow Point Lodge property after buying it in 1920. He named his cottage “Bluebird” after a chocolate bar he created with a machine of his own invention. Due to its beautiful lakefront location, he decided his property would be the perfect place for a resort. He then set to work building log cabins which, although they looked rustic, contained modern amenities, such as electricity, hot and cold water and even flush toilets, all powered by his own generator.



Fisher’s first guests arrived in 1930. Visitors were brought in from Huntsville on his forty-two-foot boat named the “Big Chief”. They were greeted by the Emberson sisters of Toronto, who managed the lodge and became well-known for their warm hospitality. Two of these capable women, Betty and Isabel, later went on to purchase a property of their own, Tally Ho Inn.

After Fisher died in 1938 and problems ensued with his estate, Douglas Fairly, who owned the Royal Muskoka Lodge, bought the property and added some updates. He attracted many visitors from the Niagara area, as he was active in that region’s theatre circles.

John Lobe acquired Pow Wow Point Lodge during the World War 11 era. During his ownership, the famous comedy duo, Abbott and Costello, flew to Pow Wow for a break after performing at the CNE. They were lucky to make it back to Toronto in one piece since one of their plane’s pontoons was damaged upon arrival at the lodge. Unfortunately, the plane sank into Lake Ontario immediately after they disembarked on their return flight. Nevertheless, the comedians put this adventure to good use, making it material for a new skit!

Sam Vale and Mr. Brown bought the Pow Wow property from John Lobe in 1948. They purchased a Shepard inboard ski boat at the CNE to entertain lodge visitors with waterskiing shows featuring a “bride” and “groom”, in full costume performing aquatic feats. However, their ownership was short-lived. In 1954, the two sold the property to Mr. and Mrs. Chalonor from Burlington, who operated the lodge every summer with the help of their three adult children. Daughters, Ida and Dorothy, began operating Pow Wow as a year-round resort in 1962, after the development of Hidden Valley Highlands Ski Resort, across the bay from the lodge.



After 26 years of operating the lodge, the Howells were ready for change. Consequently, Pow Wow was closed in 2015. On October 29, 2016, there was a contents sale which gave local residents and former guests the opportunity to buy a bit of the lodge's history. Unfortunately, the historic main lodge ended its days in a blaze of glory on April 3, 2017, when the building was set aflame in a controlled burn, as regional fire departments practiced. On August 5, 1969, Jack and Jacquie Howell, who had enjoyed staying at Pow Wow in the winters, bought the lodge, eventually passing it on to their son, Doug Howell and his wife, Dee. Avid skiers, the Howells were active in the Hidden Valley community, teaching many Huntsville residents how to ride the slopes. Dee and Doug's daughter, Dara Howell, who grew up at Pow Wow, and learned to ski and snowboard at Hidden Valley, won the first-ever Olympic gold medal awarded in Ski Slopestyle at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Honeymooners and generations of families stayed at Pow Wow, some returning every summer. The lodge was also a location for the TV series, 'Canada's Worst Handyman', which filmed its entire fourth season there. Not only known by Canadians, but the resort was also popular with Germans and Japanese tourists, some of whom would come to see and photograph the area's spectacular red maple trees in the autumn.

The property has been divided into five 2.5-acre waterfront lots for cottage development. However, many visitors to Pow Wow Point Lodge retain treasured memories of the lodge.

Betty wed Ted West, and the inn remained in their family for four generations – 76 years! As well as welcoming guests, Tally Ho has hosted the Penlake Regatta Dance and the Annual General Meeting. These events continued there for several years after the Penlake Golf Course was sold and before the events were moved to their present locations.

Not only did the Wests run the inn, but they also bought a nearby ski hill, Tally Ho Winter Park, in 1962 to add to the winter fun of their visitors. Locals and vacationers enjoyed it before it was sold in 1988.

In the fall of 2015, the West family sold Tally Ho Inn to Greg and Patti Dryden, long-time residents of Peninsula Lake, continuing to operate it as a unique family resort.