

# Steenburg Lake

## "SHORELINE NEWS"

Summer 1988

Steenburg Lake Community Assoc.

### Historical facts about the lake by John Brett McGeachie

Richard Curtis Brett 1861 - 1950 (Reeve - Limerick Twp. 1926-1935)

Richard Curtis Brett was born in Namur, Belgium while his father, an English gentleman, was attending University there. Returning to London the family next emigrated to Canada to spend 6 years hunting and fishing at lots 86-87, East side, Hastings Road Survey, Tudor Township. During this time they became acquainted with Bob Powers Sr. the first settler on Bass (now Steenburg) Lake and his family which included daughter Eliza, age 10.

In 1865 a party of 5 Americans, members of the Oneida Community arrived at Thanet on their way to trap at Salmon (now Limerick) Lake. One, John Noyes, became acquainted with the Bretts.

'Dicks' family left Brett's Lake when he was 9 and moved to Strathroy, Ontario.

The Oneida Community in the meantime had established the now famous Community Silver Plating factory at Niagara Falls, N.Y. Later Noyes was to arrange for 'Dick' to be apprenticed as a silver buffer. His next assignment was as a salesman traveling between Niagara Falls and Bellville selling silverware.

In Bellville he was reunited with Eliza Powers now the schoolteacher at Foxboro. After a months courtship they were secretly married in Brighton. A month later Liza resigned her teaching post and the couple set up house keeping in Niagara Falls, Ontario and Dick commuted to work in the factory across the border.

Brett next moved to Trenton where he bought and developed 10 acres of 'black muck' vegetable garden. He also established an apiary and a flourishing taxidermy business. During these years he kept in touch with Bass Lake, deer hunting with the Powers gang in the area between Beaver Creek, Muskrat Lake and the Hastings Road. Dick 'pushed' dogs over territory he had been familiar with as a boy and identified by such names as , The Pinery, The Big Burn, and The Hole-in--the-Wall Hill.

In 1910 he purchased Lot 24, Con II, in Limerick Twp. About 1880 Lawrence Conley bought out the squatter on this Lot, one William John Emery. Lawrence's son David cleared 25 acres for cultivation and built a 12 x 24 frame house and a 25 x 30 two story frame barn. The barn was on a 7 ft. stone wall for a stable below. About 1904 he

sold to Charles Drinkwater for the sum of \$475, who in turn sold to John and Eliza Reid. In 1910 Reid was in default on the mortgage and the property was in the hands of an auctioneer, Curtis Bogart of Stirling. Brett was advised of the situation by his nephew, Bert Weller, the Twp Clerk, and paid the Reids \$10 for a Quit Claim Deed , clearing the mortgage and reclaiming the property.

Now financially independent Brett rented out the garden to his brother-in-law and retired to spend the summers at the Lake. The annual migration was by horse and Democrat camping overnight at Mud (Moir) Lake. The couple soon tired of this, rented the Trenton home, and established permanent residence in Limerick during World War I. Brett busied himself with small scale farming, kept bees and did taxidermy in the winter.

With the township in financial trouble and rumors of mismanagement, Brett decided to run for office and see for himself. Attempts were made to dissuade him. These only confirmed his suspicions and as he put it, "Got his dander up" and he persisted. With no previous experience he set out with horse and buckboard to 'stump' the Township and visited every house to solicit support and was elected Reeve on his first attempt. This was Dec. 1926.

Moving quickly he appointed new Township officers and had them bonded, for a first. Misappropriated funds were traced and arrangements made for repayment. He applied his own financial creed which was simply not to buy anything until he had the money to pay for it. When he left office 9 years later, in Dec. 1935 Limerick was the only Township in North Hastings with a surplus in the bank.

Never one 'to stand pat' he bought lot 23, Con. II, Limerick from Drinkwater in 1917 and started renting the old log cabin to summer campers. Tourist business at the lake had been pioneered by his sister-in-law Mrs. Norton and later by her son-in-law Harry Fitzgibbon with the Lakeview Hotel.

Dr. Simpson, a Trenton dentist was the first tenant for the Drinkwater place, then the Benards from Toronto followed by many more from that city. The lake also had a large contingent from Rochester drawn by Mrs. Norton's ads for boarders in the Rochester papers.

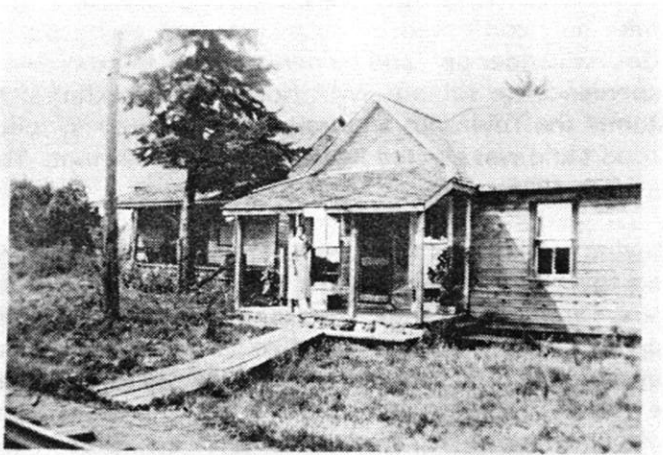
Cottage renting was very popular during the 20's and Brett ended up with nine. Then renting waned during the Great Depression and the trend turned to the 'own your own' generation. Brett retired from active business for good.

Walter Brett Sr. , Richards father, spent his entire fortune in the scientific study of birds. This earned him a niche in posterity as all his field notes and over 1000 specimens repose in the Royal Ontario Museum. In recognition of his work in Ornithology his name has been officially accepted for the lake in Tudor Township and will appear on the next issue of the topographical maps.

- July 1987 -

#### Central Ontario Railroad (long gone)

In 1885 the three Mawson brothers, John, Mark, and Tom who had emigrated from Yorkshire, joined the brushing gang clearing the right-of-way to extend the Central Ontario Railway from Bannockburn to Coe Hill. With the arrival of the work gangs Sidamer Steenburg built a bunkhouse to board the workmen. When this section of the railway was completed in 1886 the mail was transferred from the Hastings Road stage coach to the railway and Steenburg opened a post office and general store in the vacant bunkhouse. Mark Mawson became section foreman of the work gang that maintained the tracks and road bed. Dave was Mark's son and in time also worked on the section crew for the C.O.R. and later for the C.N.R. when the National absorbed the original company.



Steenburg post office and general store Circa 1920 (old bunkhouse)

The RR was extended to Bancroft in 1907 and during it's hayday there were two passenger trains a day, one south in the morning, and another north in the afternoon. With the construction of Hwy.#62, competition from private vehicles and a bus line killed the passenger service. From Toronto to St. Ola by train took 6 hours. As passenger service declined, a coach was added to a mixed freight train which made the trip up to 12 hours in duration.



train pulling into the St. Ola (Steenburg siding) station around 1925

Steenburg sold the store and post office to Camby, who sold to Weller, who in turn sold to Dave Mawson. Dave moved the business to it's present location (Trudy's Place) when the highway was opened. The post office was closed and reopened as a summer post office at Carol Murphy's marina on Bass Lake without any change in name. When there were found to be some 30 Bass Lakes in Ontario the lake was renamed after the post office. It was rather a travesty as Steenburg was only involved in the bunkhouse for a short time and that family lived east of the railway and had nothing to with the lake. (Camby was a son-in-law and Weller a son of Mary Ann Norton from an earlier marriage. Mary Ann was a daughter and Carol a great granddaughter of B Powers Sr.).

*Text and pictures by John Brett McGeachie - Feb. 1988*

**Bass Lake Community Association:** If you were missed by a canvasser for this years membership dues of \$10.00, they may be mailed to: Anita Waddell, 5 Charles Tupper Dr., West Hill, Ont. M1C 2A8. You will be mailed an updated map of the lake and a listing of cottagers.

**SHORELINE NEWS;** This newsletter will be published as needed during the cottage season and distributed through Trudy's and the Marina. If you have any lake news that you would like included please contact Tom Hughes at #28 or phone 474 - 5753

30