

CHAPTER 14 - Names of the islands

I remember thinking as a young boy how different the lake would be with all different people living in the individual cottages and homes around the lake. I had a hard time trying to imagine not having our great neighbours living around us, and looking forward to seeing them every spring at the beginning of another great summer. Thankfully, a lot of us leave our lake residences to our children, and there is a certain “continuity” in the ownership of our lake properties. I’ve lived in North York, Scarborough, and several locations in Peterborough, but feel that my real home is Steenburg Lake.

As the years have gone by, names have changed with the residents of the lake. I can remember when roads were being named in the Maple Landing area, that the Township preferred not to give names of families to roads, so that the names wouldn’t have to be changed as the years went by. Most of the islands on Steenburg Lake had family names attached to them when I was young, back in the ‘50s. I was initially surprised when the lake committee gave them names like “Little Bob” and “Big Bob”. Someone explained to me that these were names that had been found on older maps of the lake, and did have some significance.

These are the names the islands were called in the last part of the 20th century:

- A** Little Bob Island - **Dewey’s Island** - Right out in front of our family cottage where the Pollards are now.
- B** Big Bob Island - **Brooks Island** - Ralph Brooks was a bus driver & street car driver with the TTC, and it was always a thrill to meet him in Toronto during the year when boarding a bus or streetcar.
- C** Poplar Island - **Walsh’s Island** - The Walsh family still have this beautiful island, and travel from the USA every year for a vacation.
- D** Birch Island - **Power’s Island** - Doris Powers had her summer home on this island where Bill and Sharon Langman now live.
- E** Crystal Island - **Batemans’ Island** - John Bateman & Ann Bateman were friends when we were young. They lived in 563A where Judy and Don Leahy are now. Charles Bateman is still in 563B and Doug Bateman owned 563C where Kathy and Bob Henderson now reside.
- F** Picket Island - **Snake Island** - Where the Junior Bass Lake Association was going to build a dance floor.
- G** Limerick Island - **Wilson Island** - Clive Wilson, as I recall, was a minister at a local church.
- H** Loon Island - **Loon Island** - Loon Island is the only one that has retained the same name



CHAPTER 15 - A memorable boat ride with the Johncox family

I've spoken before about the Johncox family that lived at #663 The Steenburg Lake Road North. Mr. Johncox had been such a good friend to me as a little guy, helping me fix up my wooden boat that the Yenovkians next door to them had given me. The Johncox's children were Bob and Betty. Judy, who is Bob's daughter and her husband Eric St. John are now the owners of the family treasure.

Mr. Johncox was a retired wood shop teacher when I knew him at the cottage. They were very good friends with the Rottmans who lived on the other side of the lake, somewhere around #718 or #720 on the South Road. The Johncoxes and the Rottmans built their cottages at the same time and in the same style, with cedar shake shingles for the siding on both the cottages and the boathouses. When you are out for a boat ride, you will be able to identify the similarity of the boathouses from the water.

One beautiful sunny day, a boat trip was planned to the Rottman's cottage, and Betty asked me if I would like to come along. The Johncox's boat had been built by Mr. Johncox, and was a very seaworthy plank structure. It was powered by a blue 16 HP Evinrude outboard motor and was probably the most distinctive boat on the lake at that time. Folding chairs were set up on the wooden floorboards of the boat, and Mrs. Johncox came down from the cottage with a scarf around her head, looking forward to the outing. After we had cast off and were under way, Mr. Johncox asked me if I would like to take the wheel and steer the boat for a while. Unfortunately, with my lack of experience driving a boat of that size, I hit some waves at the wrong angle, and Mrs. Johncox got sprayed with water. It was all fun and laughter at the time, but someone else took over the helm right away.

Years later, someone pointed out the old boat to me that had belonged to the Johncoxes, and I couldn't believe how small it looked, as it had seemed like such a large craft when I was a child.

CHAPTER 16 - Berry picking with my good friends

Betty Johncox and Doris Powers were taking the boat one day to Moore's Landing to pick berries, and invited me to come along. Moore's Landing was at around #620 to #624 on the South Road. The Moore family would have used the landing years ago to access the Moore Headland across the water. It was a glorious day picking berries. I'm sure I must have consumed half of the berries that I picked. All in all, it was a successful and happy outing.

CHAPTER 17 - Onion sandwiches

I was never an onion eater as a young guy. If there were egg sandwiches that had little pieces of onion in them, I wouldn't eat them. I just couldn't handle the "onion" taste.

The Johncoxes had long vines of purple Italian onions hanging on their back porch. One day when I was over there at around mid-day, they asked me to stay for lunch. Without knowing what they were going to have, I gladly accepted the invitation. Large onions were picked from the vines from the back porch and sliced into about 1/4 inch slabs and presented at the table on plates for us to make onion sandwiches. Backed into a corner, I had to watch as everyone made themselves an onion sandwich, and of course I had to copy what they were doing. I ate that sandwich with super mild onions in it, and couldn't believe how much I enjoyed it. I was so pleased with myself to be able to go home and announce that I'd had an onion sandwich for lunch.

CHAPTER 18 - My loss of a very special friend when she got married

One summer, I arrived at the lake to the news that Betty Johncox was engaged to be married. I was probably about 11 or 12 years old at the time. Betty had been such a good friend of mine, I remember feeling sad that I would be losing my special friend to someone else. Betty was marrying a man by the name of Bill Burton, and when I met him, I was shocked that he was so old, feeling that he was as old as Mr. Johncox. I got over my sadness of having to share my special friend, and the more I got to know Bill Burton, the more I realized what a wonderful man he was. Bill was retired when they got married. He had been a pilot during his working days, and had many interesting stories to tell. Although he was older in years, he was definitely "young at heart", and lots of fun to be with. Years later, Marilyn and I had the pleasure of visiting them at their home in Florida when we were down there on vacation.

CHAPTER 19 - Boating tragedy, with loss of a special lady

You have heard me speak of the boats that Bruce Fitzgibbon made for the residents of Steenburg Lake, and about how great they were especially for the islanders. They were stable in the water, and had just the right amount of weight that you could stand up to start the engine, and still feel quite comfortable.

One day, late in the fall, probably around Thanksgiving, Doris Powers arrived at her dock which was up around the Fitzgibbons' to go over to her island. Doris had recently purchased a new aluminum boat. She stood in the back of her boat to start the engine, and didn't realize that she had left the motor in gear. Most outboard motors now won't allow the engine to start if it is

not in neutral. As it was late in the fall and quite cold outside, Doris had a long scarf around her neck. When she pulled on the starter cord, the engine started with a lurch causing her to fall into the water over the stern of the boat. Her scarf became entangled in the propeller of the motor, and she was sucked underwater by the scarf. The entangled scarf then stalled the motor and held her under until she drowned.

I believe it was Bruce Fitzgibbon who discovered her there, and had to deal with the anguish of losing a very special "Lady of the Lake".