

CHAPTER 20 - Steenburg Lake Marina

Pat Stallaert has asked me to document any of the memories that I might have of the “Steenburg Lake Marina” property that is now owned by Mike and Donna Cochrane. I’ll try my best to recall some of the history of the marina.

Mart Murphy and his wife Carol lived at the location where Mike and Donna Cochrane’s home is now. The house that they lived in was substantially smaller than the existing house. Mart Murphy and his brother Charlie Murphy were the two Murphy brothers that I knew, and operated the lumber mill that was located on the south-west corner of Murphys’ Corners. You’ll notice that I called it “Murphys’ Corners” rather than “Murphy Corners”. Somehow the “s” got lost over the years and Murphy became singular. In any event, Mart and Carol decided that it would be a good idea to build a store on the lake, and Carol would run the store. It was called “Carol’s Marina” and was operated by Carol for several years. It was stocked with items like bread, milk, soft drinks, chocolate bars and many of the items you’d expect to find in a variety store. I remember that Carol’s mother lived directly across the bay from Carol’s Marina in possibly cottage # 729B owned by the Flavelle family.

The next memorable owners were the Millers. I’m not sure whether the spelling of the surname was Miller or Millar, but I’ll stick with Miller. Al Miller and his wife operated the marina as a “retirement project” and felt he would enjoy having the “little business” to keep him busy in his retirement. They ran the store, and had the expansion added to the side of the building where the stone foundation is now located. Al did repairs to small motors in that little shop, and he reminded me of a wonderful retired man who lived on Brooke Avenue in North York, Toronto who repaired all the kids’ bikes in the neighbourhood, and was called “Uncle Mac” by everyone, as his name was MacKenzie. The Millers worked very hard at their business, and I can remember Al Miller saying that he had no idea what he was getting himself into when they purchased the marina. He had never worked so hard in his life.

After the Millers, there was a man by the name of Rick “something”, and I cannot remember his last name. It operated for a relatively short period of time as “Rick’s Marina”. Trudy had purchased the Steenburg Store by this time, and everyone on the lake went to Trudy’s for any of their supplies and gas for the boats. Having gas storage tanks at the marina, close to the water, would have been very expensive for a seasonal business, and having gas delivered to the marina would have been just as difficult to arrange. Trudy did such a terrific job of renovating her place that the marina couldn’t have competed against it for business.

Perry and Donna Conlin owned the marina property for quite a number of years after that, and transformed the small house on the property into the larger one that is there now. Perry had built the new structure outside of the existing building, and dismantled the original house after he had erected the new structure. It was a “unique” building with eccentricities such as a swinging rope walk to the master bedroom, and a large tree trunk in the interior of the building. Many improvements had to be made to the building after the Cochranes took over, and Mike and Donna have made it into the beautiful home that it is today.

CHAPTER 21 - The development of a stretch of the Steenburg Lake Road

Martin (Mart) Murphy had a great influence on my life as a young man growing up. I was always intrigued by someone working, and would much rather watch a skilled person performing a job than to play a sport. Mart would be called to repair a road, bring loads of gravel or fill, drop a tree and remove stumps with his bulldozer, or even when needed, build an entirely new road. If he was working in our area, I would always hang around with Mart when I got the chance to do so. Mart was kind enough a person that he taught me how to drive his bulldozer and his dump truck. These were skills that came in handy when I became a Junior Forest Ranger with The Ontario Department of Lands and Forests. Back in those days, it didn't matter if you had a special licence that would qualify you to be able to operate a large piece of equipment. It was only important that you knew how to operate it properly. In the forestry, I was able to drive the dump truck around and dump the loads when we were developing the Clear Lake Campground at Grundy Lake Provincial Park, while the other Junior Rangers had to cut the brush with their sharp axes, and throw the brush into the dump truck.

At some point in the early '60's, Bowes and Cocks Realty Limited in Peterborough decided that they would buy up all the land around Dickey Lake and develop cottage lots for sale. The development would be called SHAWANO. A Mr. Harold McGrath, a senior executive at Bowes & Cocks was in charge of the development. Mr. McGrath has died in the last few weeks, sometime in September, 2015, and this little tale should be a tribute to his good work in the opening up of our beloved cottage country. Harold realized that the road going from Murphys' Corners to The Ridge Road was very twisty and narrow, and would make it difficult to sell lots in the Shawano Development on Dickey Lake. He contracted with Mart Murphy to build the road that exists there today. When the road was first developed, it was cleared way back from the edge of the road, being a new construction. When you came from the shores of Steenburg Lake to Murphys' Corners, and started to drive towards the Ridge Road, you thought you were driving on Hwy. #62, and anyone would have been amazed to see this beautiful roadway being built right through the middle of the woods. Mart Murphy had his home for the rest of his life on the shores of Dickey Lake, and died several years ago. It would be interesting to know how much Bowes and Cocks paid Mart Murphy to build that terrific stretch of road then 50 to 60 years ago, and to compare that figure to what it would cost today to build the same thing. I can never travel that road, past Murphys' Corners, along past the Dickey Lake Road, then the Thanet Lake Road and eventually to the turn off to the Ridge Road without thinking about our good dear departed friend Mart Murphy.