

AS I REMEMBER IT

by Barlow Reid

I conclude from all available evidence that my first visit to Thompson's Point was as early as 1911. The Norton cottage (now Braun) is said to have been built in 1912 and I know it had not been by that first summer. It was through the Nortons that we came at all. Pop and Mr. Norton were friends by common employment. At that time each was a traveling auditor for the New York Central Railroad. Guy Norton had been born in Addison and was a staunch Vermonter. He could speak, as so many Vermonters do, without moving his lips. He spent most of his life in New York State, for a while in Pleasantville, Rochester, and later in Utica, but he loved Vermont and he called his camp "O Land Of Long Ago." He persuaded Pop that Mother and I needed a Vermont vacation and so we came. I think we brought with us the Bakers, more New York Central people who also lived in Syracuse and I am reasonably certain that Mr. Baker was rowing the boat when I caught the biggest of the few fish that I was, in any sporting way, ever associated with: a 3 1/2 pound Northern Pike. I insisted it be kept for Pop to see when he came back at the end of the week, by which time it had spoiled and was inedible. A suitable interment was arranged at which Pop, who always wore straight collars, reversed his neck tie so it fell down his back in High Church style.

We stayed in a cottage at the end of the bay in the grove of pine trees next to what was later the Mascot's house. I think it was owned by people named Gove. In any case, I remember the wonderful view south toward Westport framed by Thompson's Point on the right and the back of Flat Rock (or as we used to call it the South Shore) on the left and with Diamond Island smack in the middle, the trees of which, for me spelled "I F double T", which was what I always called it.

How different was Thompson's Point 80 years ago from what it is today? In most ways not very much. I say that with confidence knowing there are perhaps only three people who can contest it of their own knowledge: Bill Hall, Bill Carroll and Donald Gibbs (and Don, poor soul, can't see.) I am sure they would agree that Thompson's Point has always been a place of comfortable porches and rocking chairs and therefore a spot

of limited movement. People who lived near the dock seldom took much interest in the area beyond the Indian's and vice versa. Of course, in those days everyone was very old and immobile just as an uncomfortably large proportion of the population really is today. Having lived close to the dock only the one summer when we had the Root house (now Opie's) I am weakest on the end of the Point which from time to time has been the power center. However, this is not a political analysis.

The principal difference between then and now is obviously the people. There are not too many who survive such a span of years under any circumstances. Families, on the other hand, tend to persist, and there are a few that have: the Halls, the Carrolls, the Fullers (Moore), the Hicks, the Colbys, the Caldwell's (Drye) and the Gibbs. Thus, there has been a moderate turnover but, in general, the social flavor of the place has remained reasonably constant: a congenial mix of law abiding middle class people. Those who did not fit the mold generally tended to isolate themselves or sold out to others who did. There has been a growing tendency for the Point to recognize the North Shore and Flat Rock, but progress in that direction has been glacial. It may accelerate somewhat with a common disposal system.

The houses also have remained much the same. As for new building, the Norton house (Carl Braun) was followed by the Stowell house (Bedford) a year or two later. Two were replaced because of fires: the Sprague house (Rutter) and Annie May Hicks. Only recently has there been any truly new building, notably the Engberg house on the Rutter lot. On the other hand almost all the houses on the North Shore beyond Buckwheat Bay and Flat Rock beyond Cartmell's, despite the appearance of age, are new (at least in terms of 1911.)

The Glenwood Lodge which suspended its operation no later than the early 20's was moved northward a hundred or more feet and stripped of its south and part of its west porches to become a garage and servants quarters when it was acquired by the Von Bommels along with the Orvis (Barton) house.

The Outwaters added a large living room and deck to the former Davis (later Falby) house and later a play house where Alice can study. Most recently, extensive changes have been made in the McCormack (Woodbury)

house. Whether it can still be considered a camp is debatable. During the time the Shepardsons owned the Corey house (as it was known the summer we lived there) the front porch, which was open and breezy in our time, was enclosed by a solid balustrade which, I think, spoiled it.

Other changes, I suspect, have been made indoors. For example, the Eno cottage (now Kuene) when we re... bauntub in a small room adjoining the dining room but... that essential was an outhouse in the back of the lot... barn.

In our own case, we had to... the house after we bought it from Bob Adsit in 1950 simply to accommodate us all. It has gone through many changes but ours was probably the most dramatic. We started with a tiny living room, the south half of the present one, an unnecessarily large part of which was taken up by a staircase to the upper floor located on the west side of the room obscuring the view of the lake. At the north end of the room there was a bedroom extending almost the full width of the house. The only bathroom was as it is now. The kitchen was larger than it needed to be. We cut the bedroom in two and made the west end of it part of the living room. We moved the stairs away from the windows and took the space needed from the kitchen. Upstairs we left the big bedroom as it had been. The stair landing became the small bedroom on the west side and, by raising the east side of the roof, we created a space for the southeast bedroom and for the upstairs bathroom. Mommy was the principal architect. Later, when the back porch roof began to leak, we took it off rather than reshingle it and made a lovely deck we don't use.

Most important as new construction on the Point (since 1911) are not the cottages, but the clubhouse. I was not around when it was built but I am reasonably sure it was after 1920. It has been a gathering place for sociability and business both for those on the Point and for others ever since. The building is much older than most of its patrons and in surprisingly good health for the care it has had. Over the years the tennis courts have been a perennial attraction. One new clay court and one new hard surface court which now does double duty as a basketball court have been built. A clay court behind the Fuller - Rixford cottage has been abandoned to provide parking space. The number one court predates the clubhouse by several years. I have always supposed that it was built by the Spragues. They had a

son who enjoyed sports including among others the early-20th-Century equivalent of water skiing. He was seen frequently towing Helen Simmons on a surf board behind his mahogany motor boat.

The road between the Paul and the Gibb's driveway has been raised gradually by at least five feet. So much so that neither the Hicks' nor the Cranes' garage is any longer useful as a dining room and kitchen of the Williams house is still there and the driveway is all but vertical. If Henry Lane had continued as road commissioner any longer the houses on the bay side of the Point would have become accessible only on foot and only from the lakeside.

Nowhere is the passage of time more evident than in the decay of the rustic fencework that at one time adorned some part of almost every lot. Vestiges remain along the Path and at the gate to the clubhouse, but at one time the fencing was all but continuous from the dock to Outwater's, not only on the lake side but at right angles along the property lines between the houses. It was made of small cedar poles about two or three inches in diameter (with the bark left on) arranged in geometric designs of great imagination and beauty. Between each yard there was a gate or turnstile, each different. As a consequence the Path was great fun to walk on and something definitely to show the visitors. It was the main thoroughfare of the Point, comparable to the Boardwalk at Atlantic City or the Promenade at Cannes. It was the thread with which the social life of the Point was held together. It was illuminated after dark by a series of large kerosene lanterns which were lit each night at sundown and turned out well before midnight.

At the center of its artistry and services was Simon Obomoswain, the Abenaki Indian caretaker. He built and maintained the fences and their lovely gates; he lit the lanterns, trimmed their wicks and polished their chimneys, followed faithfully by his black dog "Ouiniese" that responded to commands only in French.

Simon also built furniture of the same cedar boughs he used for his fences - benches, tables and chairs not notable for their comfort. Between the Corey house and the cliff overlooking the lake he also built an elaborate summer house where one might contemplate the sunset. A violent windstorm one night when we were there uprooted trees all around the

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cottage and completely destroyed the summer house. It looked like a box of kitchen matches dropped on the floor. Nearly as bad was the fate of the kitchen of the cottage. It had been built as a lean-to against the main house over the roots of a tall pine tree that stood near the back door. The storm toppled the pine tree and moved the whole kitchen sideways so that we couldn't get in the next morning. It was an exciting night for us but people on the bay side of the Point never realized that anything unusual had happened.

Simon was also the ice man. Ice was harvested in the bay during the winter probably mostly by him with whatever help he could get and stored in sawdust in an ice house on the road about in back of the Fullers. We always came to the Point late in the season and I can't recall there ever having been an ice shortage, so the harvesters must have done their work well. If they hadn't we should all have had to go home. (There was no electricity.) At least one house (now the Hodges) had an outside door leading directly into the ice chest so the delivery of ice would not interfere with the other more important purposes of the kitchen.

Simon lived in a little red house at the edge of the pine woods beyond the Brauns. His wife made Indian baskets of raffia and sweet grass, the aroma of which I have more vivid memories than I have of her. It was a popular spot for the ladies to visit and buy souvenirs of their vacations - a sweetgrass thimble case large enough for one thimble or a case for a two ounce drinking glass for the traveling or a bookmark or, in fact, baskets for almost any purpose whatever. On the beach below the house Simon kept a birch bark canoe which I am sure he built himself.

About 1915 or 1916, Simon retired and was succeeded by John Lucier and his enormous family. I don't remember how many children he had, nor do I remember if any were girls as there surely must have been. There definitely were boys, and enough of them to make life interesting for the rest of us. We played baseball and had track meets and we roamed the fields and woods on each side of the road from Deer Point on one side to where the Marina is now on the other. It was great fun, and when the pace slackened as it did once in a while, Bill Carroll and I built a stone fort on the rocks in front of the Simpsons house. Occasionally I also played tennis.

