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 knew 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 Pleasantvill[illegible]tchester, 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 3½ 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 Caldwells (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[illegible] bathtub in a small room adjoining the dining room but [illegible] that essential was an outhouse in the back of the lot [illegible] barn.

In our own case, we had to [illegible] 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 Pau[illegible] 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 a[illegible] ining room and kitchen of the Williams hous[illegible] 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

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.

In time, the Luciers were succeeded by the Laberges, father and son, and following them by others whom everybody knows. By the time Pete came, the point had pretty much assumed the present state - telephones and electricity, streetlights and hard pavement from the village to the caretaker's house. That too had been built.

In 1911 there were virtually no automobiles on Thompson's Point. The Spragues had one and there may have been one or two others but most people came and went by public transportation. Between the railroad and the Point was Tim Dillon and his horse and carriage which together met all the trains. The spot designated as Thompson's Point on Rutland Railroad time tables was a wooden shed about 15 feet square on the east side of the track a little north of the crossing. It was completely open on the side facing the west. A bench ran along the three sides of the inside wall and afforded minimal shelter from rain but little or none from cold. It was familiarly known as the Dog House. Departure and arrival times were not shown on the timetables. Nor did every train deign to stop there. For those that would, the time tables used the symbol "F" meaning that the passengers had to request the conductor to have it do so or a potential passenger had to hang out a green and white flag provided by the railroad or green and white lanterns after dark, for which it was important to have ones own matches. It was a flag stop. It was demolished by a high wind in the twilight of the Rutland's passenger service.

When Tim met a Point visitor at the Dog House he tethered his horse to a tree on the right side of the road beyond the crossing and then set the outgoing mailbag on the crane along side the track to be picked up by the train on the fly. Incoming mailbags were simply thrown out of the mail car as it passed the crossing. Tim was postmaster of Thompson's Point. The post office was in the Southeast corner of the Glenwood Lodge and everyone came to get his mail twice a day. The post office included a candy counter but more important, it was the source of ice cream cones.

Early in the decade Tim fo[illegible] his horse and acquired a primitive motor bus: a chain drive which [illegible]gers entered over the tailgate and sat facing each other. It was not ter[illegible]mfortable nor noticeably faster than the horse had been. Its brand name was Vim, which taken with its owner's name occasioned some joking but it was practically the only way of getting

to and from the Point. In those days, once you were on the Point you stayed put. There was no running off to Burlington to see a movie nor even to go so far as Williams' Old Brick Store at Charlotte for a newspaper or groceries. In fact, Mr. Williams drove his horse and wagon down to the Point (and also Cedar Beach) each day and took orders for delivery the next. What you forgot to order you did without. This service lasted until some time in the '40's. Meat was sold by an itinerant butcher from Hinesburg or Vergennes (I forget which) who came once or twice a week. Fresh vegetables were obtained the same way. Only milk, unpasteurized, was obtained locally at the Poor Farm. Everyone fished and everyone ate fish, mostly yellow perch, and nearly every camp had a table at its kitchen door on which to clean fish. Along side was a bait pail. Later during the second world war when transportation was restricted for lack of gasoline, Peg and I used to ride our bicycles to Louis LaFlame's farm at North Ferrisberg to get roasting chickens - the best I ever ate.

In 1911 the big dock at the end of the road extended further into the lake than its ruins now suggest - at least 20 feet. It had a concrete surface and a shed with benches and it was faced with heavy timbers and piling against which the "Ticonderoga", built in 1906 and familiarly known as the "Ti", landed. In 1911 it came daily except Sunday, northbound just before 7 a.m. and southbound just before 7 p.m. That some may have commuted to Burlington on it for a time is possible, but by 1916 daily service had been reduced to Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and Wednesday and Thursday mornings. The Ti regularly laid up for the night at Westport except on Saturday, when it was berthed at Burlington and in the early days went as far north as St. Albans Bay. Well before 1920 its northern service was cut back to Plattsburg. Ultimately, it became a ferry between Burlington and Port Kent.

Wednesdays were excursion days when a modest fare was charged to go to St. Albans and back or to Ausable Chasm and once in a while in connection with the Ti's sister ship, the "Vermont" to Crown Point. We did all of these. Ausable was the most fun. We got off the boat at Port Kent and took a little passenger train that ran back from the lake into the Adirondacks at Keesville and stopped at the chasm entrance. We walked along the chasm wall where the river was too shallow or too turbulent for boats stopping part way for a picnic lunch brought form the Point. This was never too

satisfactory because there was no place to sit down except on very uneven rocks but after lunch we went on to a deeper part of the river where we rode in large wooden row boats quietly but quickly downstream to a sandy beach where the river flowed into more level land before finally reaching the lake. That part of the chasm was quite narrow and the walls on either side showed the strata of the rock through which the river had cut its way. The whole rock mass had been tilted in such a way that it looked as if the river was flowing uphill - an illusion that the boatmen always pointed out.

The Ti also regularly had a Sunday afternoon excursion from Burlington. This meant that it returned on Saturday nights there instead of Westport. Therefore it had a Saturday evening excursion from Burlington to Westport and return. These excursions were inexpensive and very popular. There was a small orchestra on the rear deck for those who wanted to dance and an open bar in the New York waters for those who wanted to drink. The campers on the Vermont shore participated in the gaiety by decorating the porches of their houses with strings of colored kerosene lanterns and the Ti's pilot would turn his powerful search light back on them as he passed by.

The Ti and its sister ship, the Vermont, along with the Horicon on Lake George were more than excursion boats. They were a link in a journey of outstanding natural beauty between New York and Montreal. In those days it was possible to go from New York to Albany on the Hudson River Day Line (whose boats were named for the historical heroes of the valley: Hendrick Hudson, Robert Fulton, DeWitt Clinton, Washington Irving and Peter Stuyvesant) passing the Palisades, the Highlands (with Anthony's Nose on the east bank and the Storm King and West Point on the west.) In the afternoon, the Catskills rose on the western horizon and the boat reached Albany in time for dinner and the night. Next morning by train to Lake George Village in time to catch the Horicon for the trip through the lake and its islands, one would be at Baldwin by noon. Another short train ride to Montcalm Landing on Lake Champlain would find the Vermont waiting to take you to Plattsburg and a Delaware and Hudson train that would put you in Montreal in time for bed. Such a trip is no longer available. There is no way to replicate the leisure and the charm of this Victorian adventure. The full glory of the lakes can be appreciated only by being on them - a privilege no longer available to most people.

The Ti is now in the loving hands of the Shelburne Museum but even loving hands leave fingerprints. When she was in service she did not have a red and yellow band on her smokestack. Nor did she have a bird perched on her walking beam. These, however, are only minor detractions from the joy of knowing that her retirement is comfortable and secure as befits the great lady of the lake.

The stern of her main deck was the dining salon. One summer afternoon about 75 years ago Pop and I had dinner on her as we came back from Burlington where we had gone from the Point by train. It was the epitome of railroad dining car cuisine - white tablecloths, white napkins, the special china and tableware of the line, colored waiters, all the dignity and elegance that was part of the summer hotel tradition. It probably cost no more than 75 cents.

The Ti, however, served Thompson's Point in other ways. It was a great social magnet. It brought everyone together to join in its early evening visits. Some came to the dock by rowboat and tied up at a float on the north side. Others walked, but they all came and visited with one another. At other landings on both lakes, seemingly no matter what time of day, the same thing happened. It was a part of the summer vacation ritual.

The ice cream which was sold in Tim Dillon's little store came from Burlington on the Ti (the only way it could get here.) As a consequence the crowd always included lots of children who accompanied their prized delicacy in Pied Piper fashion from the dock to the hotel. Even with electric refrigerators you can't get an ice cream cone on the Point anymore. Nor can you hear the gossip that you heard at the post office. The mail boxes and the automobiles have taken care of that.

To some extent the Club, which of course did not exist in 1911, has become a surrogate for both the dock and the post office. It has brought the tennis players and the basketball players together and the suppers and the annual meetings have done their part as well. So too the 4th of July celebration, but the remote insular quality of the early days of the century is gone forever. Automobiles have separated us from each other. We can go to Burlington to the movies any time we choose and not have as much fun as on a Saturday night excursion on the Ti.

Once each summer, Pop and I would walk from the point to the top of Mt. Philo, eat our picnic lunch at the lookout, admire the wonderful view and walk back. (In those days, Rte. 7 was a dirt road.) It took a good part of the day. Now it can be done by car in a matter of only a few minutes. Usually we took sandwiches from the house, but one day we had our lunch at the Mt. Philo Inn. It lacked much of the éclat of the Ti. The mountain in those days was privately owned and was dotted with summer-houses - resting places for hikers - each of which had its own name on an enamel plate over the entrance. I think at least one survives. The view has not changed significantly except that the Rutland RR is not what it was then. I had my first lesson in physics one day when we were hiking. We watched a freight train going south. The engineer blew his whistle for the crossing at North Ferrisberg and we could see the steam blow off from the locomotive, two long, one short, one long, but it was a noticeable time before we heard the sound. Sound, I learned, travels at 1100 feet per second and we were about a mile away.

In recent years the lake itself has changed. Unfortunately it does not sparkle as it once did. It carries a burden of fertilizer runoff and other chemicals that have stimulated marine growth and may even have had an adverse effect on the fish. It has been a long time since I have seen perch jumping for flies on a still afternoon and even longer since I have seen schools of minnows shimmering in the sunlit waters of the bay. On the other hand there never used to be a fishing derby as there is now. That any fish whatever survives the annual roundup is quite remarkable.

Benign as it may appear on a summer day when the lake is covered with sailboats of all sizes, it can be terribly destructive as it freezes. Ice is less dense than water (otherwise it would not float) and so water expands as it turns into ice. Many docks were [illegible] making a wooden cradle, filling it with rocks and surfacing it [illegible]. They lasted usually at the most about 10 years. The [illegible] classic. Only because of its size is there anything left of it. But [illegible] disarray of boulders and slabs of concrete is a sad reminder of what it once was.

But the contours of the Adirondacks are just as they used to be; probably just as Champlain himself saw them. Split Rock hasn't changed

and we even have the old lighthouse standing sturdily as it has for a century. So far we have been spared any development along the rugged shore to the south. Diamond Island is still where it always has been. So too is Sloop Island even though the shapes of the trees on each has changed a little each season. These landmarks are some of my oldest friends and I rejoice that they are not noticeably different from the way they were when I first met them in 1911.