

# THE FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF LAKE KENNISIS

*By Gordon MacKinnon*

The saga of the settlement on Lake Kennisis is one of frustration and bankruptcy as investors slowly came to the realization that the hard granite of the Canadian Shield would never become sustainable agricultural land. Not until the completion of the road from West Guilford in the 1940s made possible the creation of vacation property did the area attract many people. Most of acreage remained the property of the successive owners of the original block until cottage development began after the Second World War. Haliburton Forest and Wild Life Reserve Ltd. bought the remainder of the property exclusive of the lakeshore of Big and Little Kennisis Lakes in 1962.

## **NAMING THE TOWNSHIPS**

Big and Little Lake Kennisis lie almost entirely in the geographical Township of Havelock, Municipality of Dysart et al., County of Haliburton. Named for British general Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857) who died after leading the successful relief of Lucknow during the 1857 Mutiny in India, Sir Henry's fame was so great that a statue was erected in his honour in London's Trafalgar Square. Several places in Canada were named after him. Today, he is completely forgotten and the geographic Township of Havelock has never had a separate administrative existence. As a part of the Municipality of Dysart et al., its name has been subsumed in the "et al.", a Latin legal abbreviation for "and others".

The southern part of Big Kennisis lies in Guilford Township, Concessions XII and XIII, Lots 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Its name seems to be a variant spelling for Guildford, a town in Surrey, England. Havelock and Guilford were two of a block of ten townships sold by the Province of Canada to an investment group whose headquarters were in London, England. This was the last of the government sales in southern Ontario of huge blocks of land to private companies which, in return, promised to promote immigration and settlement.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL CONFUSION**

This transaction took place a few years before Confederation created the Dominion of Canada in 1867. The area of present day southern Ontario was known as Upper Canada from 1791-1841. It got its name from the fact that it was situated partly on the upper part of the St. Lawrence River. The section of the former New France on the lower part of the river was called Lower Canada. In 1841 the British government united the colonial governments of the two sections and gave the united colony the name Province of Canada. There was only one legislature but the existence of French civil law in the former Lower Canada and English civil law in the former Upper Canada required two distinct sections. These corresponded to the former colonies and were named Canada East and Canada West. The Province of Canada ceased to exist in 1867 when the British North America Act (now called the Constitution Act 1867) restored the two

provinces and renamed them Quebec and Ontario. The name Dominion of Canada was assigned to the new federation of provinces.

You will note on the original survey plans of the townships that the name employed is Canada West. County of Peterborough is used because The Provisional County of Haliburton did not come into existence until 1874, ten years after the map was printed; it remained a "Provisional County" until December, 1982 when the Ontario Legislative Assembly passed the Haliburton County Act and made it a full county.

## **CREATING THE LAND AND IMMIGRATION COMPANY**

In 1859 the Crown Lands Department of the Province of Canada offered the townships for sale with the hope that private enterprise would be the key that would open these "back townships" to settlement. The raw forest had been surveyed into ten townships in 1857 and 1859. Sir Francis Bond Head, former Governor of Upper Canada, interested other potential investors in England, and was expected to be the chairman of the group. However, he decided not to accept the position and Thomas Chandler Haliburton (born in Nova Scotia 1796, died in England 1865) who had gained a reputation as an author, lawyer, justice of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court, and Member of the British Parliament, became the chairman. The company was incorporated in London in 1861 as the Canadian Land and Emigration Company. (C.L. & E.C.) Negotiations resulted in the final agreement between the company and the Province of Canada in 1864 and the C.L. & E.C became the owner of ten townships with a total of 403,125 acres at the price of 50 cents an acre. Deduction was allowed for 41,000 acres of swamp and badlands. Haliburton's name was given to the settlement in Dysart Township in 1864 and to the county in 1874 when three townships from Victoria County and twenty from Peterborough County, were joined to create the Provisional County of Haliburton.

## **THE ORIGINAL SURVEY**

The original company Plan of Havelock [1864] shows that the township contained 42,219 acres of lots, 8,342 acres of water, and 1,434 acres of road allowances for a total of 51,995 acres. Lake Kennisis, comprising both the main body of water and its smaller extension, was re-named Lake Alexandra by the company in honour of Alexandra, Princess of Wales, (later Queen Alexandra) who had married Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, (later King Edward VII) in 1863. Lake Kawagama in the upper north-west corner of the township was re-named Lake Albert Edward. No doubt this was an attempt by the company directors in far away London to make it more enticing to the British settlers, but the names did not remain for long. Curiously, the company plan for Guilford Township labels the part of the lake that lies in Guilford as "Ke-ne-ses Lake."

The survey followed the standard rules of the time. Havelock Township is an almost perfect square consisting of seven one mile squares west to east and seven one mile squares south to north. Guilford Township is not a square because its eastern boundary deviates to the north-east starting at Concession XI. Havelock has fourteen concessions numbered consecutively from south to north; Guilford has only thirteen concessions. Each section (except Concessions XI, XII, and XIII in Guilford) consists of ten 100 acre lots in two tiers of five and each lot is 16 chains wide by 40 chains long. (One mile

equals 80 chains in traditional surveyor's measurement.) They are numbered consecutively from the western boundary with Sherborne Township and Stanhope Township (Lot 1) to Lot 35 at the eastern boundary. There is an extra Lot 36 on the three northern concessions of Guilford at the border with Harburn Township. A road allowance of one chain (66 feet) on each side separates the sections. Each lateral row of lots constitutes one concession. Lots, concessions, and road allowances are deemed to continue through the lakes and streams and reappear on islands and points of land. The north-south lines do not follow true north.

## **WHITE PINE DOMINATES THE ECONOMY**

None of the English investors visited the lands at that time. They expected a fair return on the money they were contracted to invest by promoting emigration to Canada and selling land to the settlers but it was not an attempt to get rich quick from gullible settlers. The company contracted to invest ten percent of the money received from land sales in roads. The real potential for wealth in the great stands of white pine seems to have been overlooked by the C.L. & E. Co. The timber barons, however, were already cutting and the extensive system of lakes and rivers made it possible to float these logs to mills for processing and export to Britain and the United States. The hardwood trees were of much less interest because they could not be floated down to the mills. Several timber barons operated under licences called "limits" in the company lands. Mossom Boyd held timber rights to the whole of Havelock and owned outright 1000 acres of the township. He was also responsible for developing the Havelock Farm Depot between the head of Little Redstone and Kennisis which the Haliburton Forest Base Camp now occupies. Over 1100 acres were cleared and 120 acres were growing oats, peas and potatoes for the lumbermen and their horses. Men from the backwoods farms found work in the woods cutting the pine in the winter for the spring drive down the waterways. Because there were no roads to Kennisis until long after the timber drives ended, the lumbermen lived during the winter months in the shanties provided by the timber companies. The great timber drives ended in 1889 when the accessible old growth white pine had been depleted. By the early 1900s the Havelock Farm Depot was abandoned: the buildings were used as a source of lumber for hunting shacks that were located nearby. No one lived on Lake Kennisis year round.

## **THE DAM**

By the 1880s, Mossom Boyd's lumbermen had built a four foot dam where the Kennisis River flows out of the lake. The dam was probably on the site of the present one because remains of an earlier structure were found when the present dam was constructed in 1906. The function of the original dam was to provide a few weeks longer of sufficient water to float the logs down to the mills. It was not built as a control dam for the Trent-Severn Waterway.

The Trent-Severn Canal was begun in 1833 under authority of legislation passed by the government of Upper Canada. Work went on sporadically until 1920. Legislative authority over canals and other navigable waters was given to the federal government at the time of Confederation. It was not until 1905 that an Ontario Order-in-Council authorized the transfer of certain dams and other works on the Trent-Severn Waterway

to the federal Department of Railways and Canals. Attachment A of the Order-in-Council, under the heading *The following dams shall be maintained for all time by the Dominion Government* has the sub-heading *Keneesis Lake (modern spelling Kennisis.)*

Subsequent Orders-in Council transferred authority to other federal departments and in 1972 the dam came under the jurisdiction of Parks Canada.

## **ROADS**

Access to these back townships was not easy. A colonization road called the Bobcaygeon Road ran to near Minden and the Peterson Road ran east from the village of Muskoka Falls near Bracebridge. The Peterson Road crossed the company's lands near the border between Guilford and Dysart, sometimes in one township and sometimes in the other, as is indicated on the Plan of Guilford. A short stretch of it can still be seen near Carnarvon but most of it has returned to bush. Both roads were virtually impassable much of the year in the early days and water routes were important.

Lloyd's Map of 1923 shows the road from West Guilford ending near the south-west corner of Redstone Lake in Guilford Township. This served the arable lands of Guilford which run out near Pivot Lake at the Redstone River. Drivers today will note the abrupt change from flat farmland to rocky hills at this point. Travel onward to Lake Kennisis was by canoe and portage through forest trails. The Plan of Guilford shows those in use in 1864. A deal was made in the 1930s by the company to have a road constructed in the 1930s from Haliburton Village to Eagle Lake and Redstone. In return for paying for this, the Province of Ontario was given the Township of Clyde.

In 1942, Hay and Company of Woodstock, the Canadian subsidiary of the United States Plywood Company, bought 15,000 acres in northern Guilford, and much of Eyre, Havelock and Harburn. A steam powered saw mill was built two years later at Havelock Depot to take advantage of the increased demand for lumber during the Second World War. Yellow birch, a hardwood, became a valuable commodity during the war because it was used in the manufacture of plywood veneer used in the wooden bodied de Havilland Mosquito fighter/bombers being built in Downsview and the United Kingdom. This airplane, nick-named the "Wooden Wonder", was the fastest bomber in use before the creation of the jet aircraft. Over 7000 were built. The hardwood, which did not float well, had to be transported out to the railway for shipment to Woodstock. The road out of West Guilford was extended from Redstone Lake starting in 1942 by one of the first bulldozers seen in the county and by autumn of 1943 had been completed to the mill at Havelock Depot. This mill ceased operations in 1971 and was burned in 1984. No saw mill operated until the creation of the present mill by Haliburton Forest and Wild Life Reserve Company, Ltd., in 2009.

By 1954, the Ontario Department of Highways map of Haliburton County shows a broken line to indicate a rough road to where the Marina is today. By 1964, the Department of Highways map shows a road along the southern shore of Lake Kennisis and on the northern shore to the Narrows between Big and Little Kennisis. Work on the West Shore Road began in 1999.

## **FARMING and SETTLEMENT**

The southern townships of Dysart, Dudley, and Harcourt had some land suitable for cultivation. The middle tier of Guilford, Harburn, and Bruton are partly in the granite of the Laurentian Shield and the top tier of Havelock, Eyre, and Clyde had almost no land suitable for agriculture. The 1911 Canada Census records only 957 people in Dysart and 262 in Guilford. There is no entry in the 1911 Census for Havelock which indicates that there were no permanent residents. The only area where agriculture had been started was at the Havelock Depot. Here, on suitable arable land between Redstone and Kennisis Lakes, the shanties, cook houses, and stables for the lumbermen and oxen employed in cutting the white pine of Havelock Township were located until the cessation of the great timber drives. Remains of some buildings are still to be seen. Bruton was eventually sold as a block to Ontario Hydro which harvested its plentiful cedar trees for hydro poles. Clyde and Livingstone were incorporated into Algonquin Park along with part of Eyre.

## **FIRST NATIONS**

Not even First Nations made permanent villages in the Kennisis area. Nila Reynolds writes *In Quest of Yesterday*: "Backtracking to 1834 when Ontario's Indian reserves were established, one finds tribes of Mississaugas and Ojibwas (also known as Chippewas) both Algonkian stock, who claimed Haliburton as their ancestral hunting grounds. At that time they withdrew to permanent reserves at Rice Lake, Chemong Lake, Rama on Lake Couchiching and Sarnia. Some retained trapping rights in Haliburton." (p.2) By the Williams Treaty of 1923 between the federal government and these tribes, the First Nations gave up all rights to lands along the Trent-Severn Waterway. The Iroquois had claimed some of this area after the expulsion of the Hurons in the seventeenth century and still maintain a disputed claim to it. There are relics of First Nations people found in areas of Haliburton where villages had been established by the Hurons. Early settlers recorded the name of Joe Kennisis, (also spelled Ke-nese), an Indian whose family had lived by hunting and fishing around the lake which bears his name.

## **DISAPPOINTMENT AND BANKRUPTCY**

The lands of the Canadian Land and Emigration Company did not receive the number of settlers expected and this was blamed initially on the economic dislocation caused by the American Civil War. Making things worse for the company, in 1868 the Ontario government opened the remaining Crown Land surrounding the company's block to Free Grant. Settlers could get title to that land by clearing a lot and building a house and so had no incentive to buy land from the company. The Depression of 1873 resulted in a huge drop in the money received from the lumber companies who saw the market for white pine greatly diminished. Even the completion of the railway to Haliburton Village in 1878 brought neither prosperity nor immigrants. Settlers who had received high prices from the timber operators for their surplus produce and animal fodder now had to accept the lower prices set by goods brought from the south on the railway. The population did not grow: younger men left by rail for better free land in the American West and later the Canadian West. In 1883 W.H. Lockhart Gordon, a Toronto lawyer, and James Irwin, a

Peterborough lumberman, were appointed Commissioners by the company with the mandate to sell it. In 1889 these two gentlemen bought half the shares and reorganized the company under the laws of Ontario as The Canadian Land and Immigration Company of Haliburton, Ltd.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s the company defaulted on its taxes. Dysart et al. and the County of Haliburton became insolvent and were administered by a Board of Commissioners appointed by the province. The Second World War restored prosperity. The last of the timber rights in Guilford, Eyre, Havelock, and Harburn were acquired by Hay and Co. of Woodstock, the Canadian branch of United States Plywood Company. These rights were later sold to Weldwood of Canada.

### **COTTAGERS COME TO THE LAKES**

In 1955 Hayward and Jones Ltd. of Peterborough obtained an option to buy the shoreline of Big and Little Kennisis from Hay and Co. Development began on the south shore of Big Kennisis in 1957 with Plans 367, 370, 375, 378, 381 and 386. In 1962 Plans 402 and 423 laid out lots on the east side to the Narrows and Plan 426 began development on Little Kennisis from the Narrows.

Weldwood of Canada sold its 50,000 acres in Havelock and Eyre in 1962 to a German landholding company which took the name Haliburton Forest and Wild Life Reserve Company, Ltd. In 1963 Hayward and Jones Ltd. sold their remaining lots and options to the Kennisis Lake Development Ltd. Between 1964 and 1969 three bridges and hydro service were built between the Narrows and the dam and Plans 458, 459, 460, 467, and 479 were developed. From 1969 to 1972 Plans 493, 513, and 540 were initiated on the west shore of Little Kennisis. Plan 595 was also developed on Little Kennisis.

The name of the developer changed once more when Kennisis Lake Development Company was sold in 1972 to Redkenn Development Company. The lakeshore on Big Kennisis west of the dam was sold to Shall-may Holdings in the 1970s and Plans 584, 585, 586, 588, and 589 were registered from the dam to Cat Bay. Building on the west shore did not begin until the West Shore Road was completed in 1999.

### **THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of cottages on the two lakes had reached over 800. Improved roads and dependable snow clearing made it possible for retirees to live in comfort and security all year long. Changes in the municipal construction standards resulted in all new cottages being constructed to the same high "four season" standards as those in towns. Winter sports such as ice fishing and snowmobiling attracted many. Today, Lake Kennisis has acquired the reputation as a desirable place to live all year long.

## **SOURCES**

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<http://www.haliburtonforest.com/history.html>

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***Gordon MacKinnon has been a cottager on Lake Kennisis since 1985.***

