

THE HISTORY OF OL-MAR

By Marty Chepesiuk

On the mantle of the fireplace at our cottage sits a dried-out tree fungus that my father would eagerly display to visitors. Inscribed on that fungus are the names of three men, including a "G. Grant", and the date 1930. This link to the past has enthralled our children, who sought out an even bigger fungus to carve their names in so that some day, they too, could be remembered. As a member of the fifth family to own this rugged piece of land, I often wonder about the previous owners, and have pieced together only a little bit of this history.

The detailed hand-written notes in the Land Registry office in Parry Sound show that in 1874 Hugh Cargill Senior (1821-1903) and his wife, Ann, sold their timber deed to W.E. Dodge and J.C. Miller for \$10. Dodge and Miller in turn sold "all pine" to the Parry Sound Lumber Company for \$8000 and the following year took back a mortgage on these and other lands from the company for

\$65,000. The Cargill's later purchased the land from the Crown in 1879 for one English Pound. They had lots 21 and 22 in the 4th concession, a total of 200 acres. Over the next 33 years, a complicated series of sales of timber rights and mortgages highlighted the financial difficulties the Cargill's faced, with a power of sale of the property in 1884 to Catherine Stewart whose estate, in turn, sold it to William Beatty who then sold it back to Hugh Cargill Junior (1858-1937) in 1896 for \$200. Lot 21, mostly swamp, was "released" to the English Lumber Company in 1883 and has been owned by individuals only since 1932. The Cargill's kept only lot 22. In 1910, all timber rights were discharged through the Liquidators of the Ontario Bank, suggesting there were no more trees to be harvested. A great fire had swept through the area around that time, and pictures from that time show a barren rocky land stripped of any large trees. My father said the Cargill's were potato farmers from Scotland, but the local historian, John Macfie, says the rocky soil was best suited to oats and turnips. The local economy depended on growing enough fodder (hay and oats) to keep the horses working during the winter when the trees could be more readily harvested. As you may know, a lumber mill existed at the site of the public boat launch on Little Otter Lake.



The Cargill's left behind a 20x25' log cabin and log barn, as well as rock piles scattered throughout the craggy and swampy land. In 1912, Hugh Cargill Junior sold the land to Dr. Joseph Sutherland Graham for \$500. According to my father, Dr. Graham built a nine-hole golf course and

several cabins, spending summers here with his male friends, while his wife preferred the less buggy location of Sans Souci Island on Georgian Bay. When I was a child I recall walking and driving through what were once open fairways, at that time filling in with scrub and small trees. No remnants of these fairways exist now, having become a dense forest. Decaying remnants of this era can still be found, with old outhouses, iceboxes, a platform for a diesel water pump and, at the top of one hill, an old shed we were told was called the "Gravity House". Water was pumped to this covered concrete basin and flowed down to the cabins through cast iron pipes. These pipes once snaked all over the property but are now buried or rusted away. The swamp behind the main cabin once served as their dump, and interesting old glass bottles turn up there from time to time. We display these too on the fireplace mantle.

Though the Cargill's sold their property, they were still hired on to manage the farm and sold their produce locally. According to Foley Township records their offices were supplied with water from the Cargill's, though by this time it may have been some other farm they owned. Archie Cargill (1904-1962), a grandson of the original owner, was still for hire and worked on our property until he died.

Dr. Graham sold the land to William Lawson Grant (1872-1935) in 1925 for \$5000, and the property remained in that family until 1952 when they sold it to their nephew, George Bramfitt, for \$2. The Grant family was a pillar of the Upper Canada Establishment. William Lawson Grant's father was the first principal of Queen's University, and he himself was one of the most important principals of Upper Canada College. His son, George Parkin Grant (1918-1988), the fungus scribe noted above, was born in Toronto and became one of Canada's most noted intellectuals and nationalists of the 1960's. He taught philosophy and religion at Dalhousie and McMaster and is best known for his books, 'Technology and Empire' and 'Lament for a Nation'. The Grants were close friends of the McMurtry's from Sentinel Island. They called the climb from the lake to the Grant cabin 'Heart Attack Hill', something we can readily relate to on a hot buggy afternoon.

My parents, Martin and Olga (hence the name Ol-Mar), bought the property from George Bramfitt in 1959 for \$10,500. This did not include the cabins and a pedal organ, so these were carted away, along with other antiques we can only guess at. The log barn fell down one snowy winter in the 1960's and could not be rebuilt, but the original log cabin has been rescued from dry rot and carpenter ant infestations and with proper care will last for many more generations. The attic remains a hospitable home for a multitude of brown bats that we cannot seem to evict. The stone chimney cracked and fell away from the log cabin because an animal seeking warmth dug out a den at its base, causing a partial collapse. To my horror I discovered scraps of burnt newspaper nestled among the charred logs behind the chimney, showing us how fortunate we had been that the cabin had not burned down. We fitted the fireplace with a wood stove insert and chimney liner, but the cabin never felt quite right until we repaired the chimney and could again use the roaring open fireplace. Though drafty, smoky and inefficient, the fireplace with the artifacts on its mantle is our strongest connection with the many generations who have lived here before us.

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