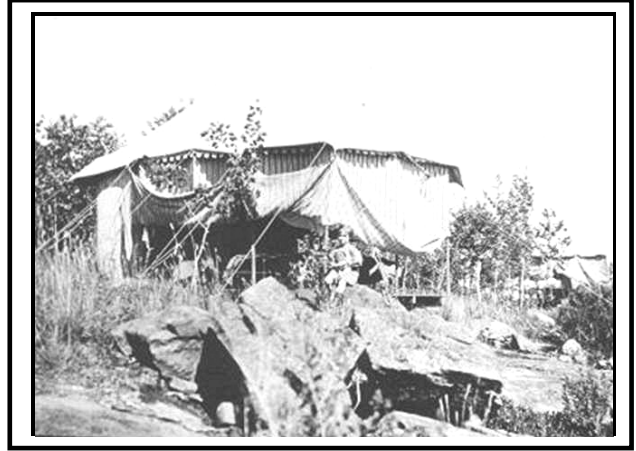


Sentinel Island

An engineer with the railway in the early 1900's recommended to his brother that he purchase property on Otter Lake, due to the excellent fishing and hunting. And so he did – Ernest McMurry, together with his friend, Dr. William Goldie, purchased a beautiful island in 1909, sight unseen. The price tag -- \$64.00! When they arrived here they discovered that vegetation on the island was mostly scrub, as a great fire had spread through the Parry Sound area a few years before. Originally intended for hunting and fishing trips, the island would soon serve a more recreational purpose for the whole family. Dr. Goldie sold out his share to the McMurry family around 1912-14.

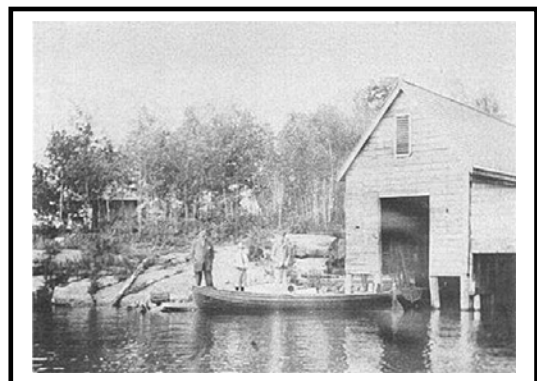
At first they stayed in tents erected on platforms, building the main cottage (18'x24') in 1910. Of course, they also had an icehouse and soon, sleeping cabins were built, eventually numbering six in all, as well as a boathouse with a room above. Later, a second multi-slip boathouse was also built, which stood until around 1978.



Ernest and Henrietta McMurry and their guests vacationed in high style, complete with hired help, usually a couple who had immigrated from Britain, looking for work. The wife would cook, wash, etc., while her husband helped with the various chores. Meals and High Tea (see photo below) were formal occasions, served by the hired help. The island was neatly kept, with all the paths lined with stones, which were whitewashed each year. Beautifully manicured flower gardens were kept and only certain trees were allowed to grow on the point so as not to interfere with the view.



Among the various boats at the island over the years, the one best remembered by family and friends was *The Pointer*. A 24' long, flat-bottomed boat, it was run by a 1-cylinder St. Lawrence engine. Basically a miniature lumberman's pointer, it could be driven right over the log booms on the lake. Being so large, it was used for the transportation of building materials, furniture, etc. Other boats over the years included *The Lion*, *The Swan*, *The Tinkerbelle* and *The Allegria*.



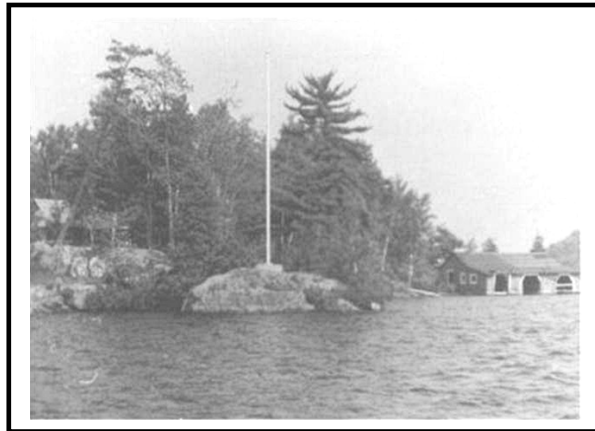
Named Sentinel Is. for its ideal mid-lake position, where one could look out in several directions, it is the first island just along the shore to the west of where the Otter Lake Marina is today. It was later passed down to their only daughter, Ernestine and her husband, Stefan Buszynski. It remains in the family to this day.

Mario Buszynski recalls stories from his boyhood days – about how his grandparents used to keep chickens on the island, providing them with eggs to eat and chicken dinners towards the end of the season. One year they brought a pig up, but became quite attached to it over the summer. When they finally slaughtered it and the beautiful roast pig was there on the dinner table before them, not one of them could bring themselves to eat it!

In the fall, the men (perhaps 20) would come up on a hunting trip, bringing along a chef from a Toronto hotel. He would cook the Thanksgiving dinner, pre-carving the turkey. All Ernest had to do was cut a string here and a string there and the whole bird would fall apart for them, ready to serve.



Guests were expected to draw a picture of a pig in the guest book while blindfolded and then make a comment. Signatures included names such as Foster Hewitt. Another notable guest was Lady Eaton who arrived at the island complete with her chauffeur and a large picnic lunch in a wicker basket.



Ernestine Buszynski was an excellent long-distance swimmer. In fact, she had been known to swim (accompanied by a boat) all the way from the island to The Elliott House on Little Otter, pick up the mail at Walter Crisp's store on Rankin Lake Rd., and swim back!

Sadly, the original boathouses have been gone for many years and the main cottage, far beyond any hope of restoration, was taken down in the fall of 1989. Only one of the original sleeping cabins stands today. Careless smoking of a visitor to the island resulted in a fire that took the other cabin in late August 1999. It was only due to the great and very appreciated response of many neighbours that the whole island did not go up in flames! Fortunately, for Mario and Tony, no one can ever take away all the wonderful memories they enjoy from growing up on Otter Lake.

Article by Cathy Morrison