



THE COBALT LODGE

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THE ASHWENE CABIN 1948-2005

O'Connor Island, North-East Arm, Lake Temagami, Ontario

The Ashwene cabin, built over the summer of 1948, came down fifty-seven years ago to the week that had seen the dedication of that bright, golden jewel. It stood atop a ten-foot cliff of schist overlooking the main navigation channel off O'Connor Island in the North-East Arm of Lake Temagami. In late August 1948, fifty or so people were there that afternoon to pay a surprise tribute to Miss Alson Creighton, Girl Guide Captain of the First Cobalt Girl Guide Company, a former Girl Guide Commissioner and a Girl Guide Director. Spearheaded by Fran and Carm Donegan, the money to build the cabin was raised by the efforts of the Local Girl Guide Association of Cobalt. The property consisting of five-eighths of an acre of second growth forest was leased from the Ontario Department of Lands and Forest (now Ministry of Natural Resources) as a 99 year surface rights lease signed by the Minister. Built over the summer, by Mr. Holly Cook, Principal of Cobalt Public School whose cabin was located on an eastern point of O'Connor and by Fran and Carm Donegan from Island 152 with the help of three twelve year-olds, their son Gerry, his Cobalt friend Noel Ramey and Chuck Conway, the Abel's grandson from the Abel's island just west of the Axe Narrows.

The shell was built of pine half-log siding, 20 ft long by 16 ft wide, the wood protected by a 50/50 mixture of boiled linseed oil and turpentine. The pine lumber came from The William Milne Lumber Company brought to the Island by boat using the Ontario Northland Boat Lines. The foundations were concrete blocks formed by Miss Creighton's cousins Ted and Alex Underwood. The roof was covered in green asphalt rolled roofing. Two stoops led to the windowed, varnished mahogany doors while eight, nearly square, white windows, 23 by 22 inches, were let into the walls. The nine windows were hinged and latched. Removable window screens kept out the bugs. Inside, a third mahogany door opened to a bedroom furnished with a set of built-in bunk beds. The kitchen area held a wood-burning cook stove and a wooden counter with a shelf. Set into the floor was a trap door with an insert handle. It opened onto a wooden box meant to keep food cold by covering the outside with burlap bags kept wet by soaking them in pails of water. A gift given by Bea and Ralph Colquhoun, whose cabin was located on the south side of O'Connor Island, was a tiered-shelf holding a dinner set of multi-coloured Fiesta ware. Farther down a rear trail of the property was an outhouse in half-log siding. Extending from the shore into the cove was a small dock. The site was spectacular with a view of two miles up the Lake to the Axe Narrows, facing the prevailing winds with its crashing waves breaking over the shoal below for drama as well as a panoramic view of the glorious sunsets.

Given to Miss Creighton, the cabin was to show the appreciation of an entire community to the almost thirty years of effort of this dedicated Guider and Camper to the Girl Guiding movement. Also presented was a guest book, inscribed in the copper-plate handwriting of the Cobalt cartographer Geoffrey Dixon with the names of those who had donated to the building fund. The wooden cover was decorated with a landscape design wood-burned by the artist George L. Cassidy.

One of the first additions to the cabin was the sign ASHWENE that hung from the eaves overlooking the Lake above the cliff. Miss Creighton had asked her friend Benny Belaney to enquire of the Natives of Bear Island what word would best represent the motto of the Girl Guide organization "Be Prepared". The word *ashwene* was the closest approximation. The sign is made from a log split in half, carved out to within five inches of the bank at either end and the letters fashioned from twigs nailed in place. Periodically varnished, it was carefully removed at the closing of camp. For fifty-six years the doors and windows were shuttered against the winter snows.

Under the windows overlooking the Lake a long, narrow table was built with purchased bar stools at the end and higher than normal benches crafted to take advantage of the view. The first lighting consisted of kerosene-filled metal lamps and one Aladdin. Later propane gas wall fixtures were installed and eventually electricity. The window looking down to the Axe Narrows was replaced with lowered sliding glass ones.

Weathering began to take its toll on the golden siding so the exposed north, east and west sides were painted forest green. As the trees grew the cabin disappeared from the lake view but the Ashwene sign glowed. A further change outside was a deck with cedar railings along the Lake side that was eventually expanded to the east and south. As the cabin settled and the siding weathered, insulating paper and plywood were fitted inside between the 2x4s. Propane wall lamps took the place of the kerosene lamps and a propane refrigerator supplanted the ice-box refrigerator on the deck. Ice was brought up in a galvanized square washtub from Motor Park, now called Finlayson Point Park. Mr. Ross, the Provincial Park's caretaker would uncover a block covered in the ice-house in sawdust and with huge tongs place the washed-off block into the washtub for its ride in the red fiberglass-hulled boat with its 5hp outboard motor.

For one summer, water was carried up from the Lake by pails then the red pump was installed emptying into a shallow, enameled kitchen sink and only water for priming was needed. Eventually propane was supplanted by electricity, the wood box outside the kitchen deck now held an electric pump and a faucet was added next to the sink. An electric refrigerator and a small freezer were added as well as a two-burner hot plate. The propane light fixtures were removed and there were several electric light switches. When the firebox of the cook stove began to disintegrate, the stove was replaced with another one from the Underwood cousins. The white enameled oven door had a temperature gauge set below the handle.

Over the years the roof was repaired as needed and instead of roof supports placed inside in the winter, trusses were added to the tie beam. John Kilbridge from the Temagami Canoe Company would check the snow load and remove it if necessary - quite a job because the snow was first removed from the decks, then the roof and from the decks again.

The underpinnings had been stabilized as needed and the decks recovered. With young children on the scene, the cedar railings of the decks were backed with wire netting.

The Property saw the outhouse repositioned farther away down the trail, as required, with a tool shed added to it. A porcelain toilet utilized the pail-a-day water system. That was followed by a third outhouse replacement using a toilet seat on a bench and bacterial sewage treatment.

The dock and cribs were replaced several times over the years with an L-shaped dock proving the best formation for protection of boats. A dock was built in 1990 by a professional builder Peter MacMillan. Near the beginning of the dock, hidden in the growth along the shore, stands a small, green A-frame boatshed for paddles and life preservers. For years, down in a hollow away from the Ashwene cabin, a tent platform served as a sleeping cabin for youngsters. It was eventually replaced by a 20ft. long by 20ft. wide by 20ft. high cedar-sided cabin built through the summers of '87 to '89. The original tool house was demolished and a new one with a loft accessed by an outside ladder was built behind this cabin. With great good fortune the doors to the shed and the loft are mahogany just like the doors in Ashwene.

In the fall of 2006 a new cabin was erected by Ray Richmond on the Ashwene cabin site 36ft. long by 20ft. wide. As the siding weathers and the trees increase, it too will disappear into the woods but the brave sign Ashwene will remind boaters of the historic cabin given by grateful people to an inspiring person.

Written by: Vivian Hylands

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REMINDER – Annual membership dues: card and return envelope enclosed.
If you know of other people interested in the stories from Cobalt,
enclose their names and addresses, and the Society will make
the contact.