THE STORY OF WIGWASSAN LODGE

after ~~20~~ 28 years

WIGWASSAN LODGE — AFTER 20 YEARS

The growth of Wigwassan Lodge is revealed in this photograph, although three buildings, Manakiki Lodge, the Cabin and North Lodge are to the right and are not visible. The Wigwassan Lodge plant comprises nine buildings containing guest rooms with accommodation for 225. There is a staff of 65. The sports facilities and the informal friendly atmosphere have made it a particularly attractive vacation headquarters for the better type of young business people.

BY EVOLUTION, not birth, Wigwassan Lodge came into being on 1,000 acre Tobin's Island, Lake Rosseau, Muskoka during the blackest, bleakest days of the Great Depression . . . i.e. 1932. Since then it has developed into one of the best known resorts in Ontario, if not in Canada. It is because so many people have expressed an interest in this development that this story is told.

In the early years of this century several large resorts were built which were destined to play an important part in making Muskoka widely known as a tourist area. Part of the present main building of Wigwassan Lodge was built in 1906 by Frank S. Hurlbut of Toronto, and he christened it Hotel Waskada. Even in those early days Hotel Waskada earned a reputation for outstandingly fine meals and tourists from other resorts used to come by boat to enjoy them.

The Hotel Waskada encountered difficulties with steamer service so that the venture did not prove as successful as its builder had hoped and in 1913 he sold it to an Englishman named Rice. The following year the First Great War upset business generally, and about 1916 Rice discontinued operations, with the property heavily mortgaged. This ended the era of the Hotel Waskada.

To understand the next development we must turn to New York state, where for many years the Chautauqua had been operated on Lake Chautauqua. At this summer rendezvous an all-summer cultural and religious program had been carried on for many years, and in fact still is. Many Ontario ministers and laymen spent their vacations at the Chautauqua, and felt there was an opportunity for a similar enterprise to be established in Ontario.

A group of Methodist ministers in and around Toronto of whom Rev. C. S. Applegath was the prime mover conceived the idea of establishing a Chautauqua in Muskoka. The Hotel Waskada property was bought, and turned over to a company

known as the Canadian Chautauqua Institution Limited. The name of the Hotel was changed to "Epworth Inn", later abbreviated to "The Inn". The Post Office was called Muskoka Assembly.

TO DEVELOP A CANADIAN CULTURE

The founders of the Canadian Chautauqua Institution Limited had much idealism but little business experience, and were seriously handicapped by a shortage of capital. They dreamed of an institution that would give leadership in developing a Canadian culture and in assisting the people to become less rather than more American in their viewpoints — the need of which was commented upon in the recent report of the Royal Commission on National Development of Arts, Letters and Sciences. While the desirability of having this distinctive Canadian culture is now recognized, promotion of that ideal in the early twenties seems to have been ahead of the time, as sufficient support was not forthcoming.

The Chautauqua started operations in 1920 and arranged excellent programs each season. Many outstanding musicians, literary personalities and religious leaders assisted, including men and women whose names made up the Who's Who of Canadian arts and letters of that generation. Among those who assisted were the well known poets and writers Sir Gilbert Parker, Bliss Carman, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, Wilson MacDonald, Edwin J. Pratt, J. W. Bengough, W. H. F. Tenny, Jean Blewitt, Dr. Albert Durant Watson, Marshall Saunders, Mrs. Florence R. Livesay, Robert E. Knowles, Lewis Milligan, Katharine Hale, Jules Trembley; musical directors W. H. Hewlett and Ernest Shildrick; and leaders in the religious realm, Rev. Dr. S. D. Chown, Rev. Salem Bland, Rev. Stanley Russell, Rev. J. L. Gilmour, Dr. D. D. McKenzie, and Dr. C. J. L. Bates.

The stage for A Little Theatre in the Woods was built by the technical staff of Hart House and during each season dramatics were encouraged, and by having amateurs staging Canadian pageants which typified great events in Canadian history a knowl-

The pictures — in 1909
New arrivals
Guests on Lodge verandah
Happy bathers in "all over" suits

edge of early life in this country was made available to a great many persons.

The directors of the Chautauqua at the time the Great Depression forced the company to cease operations, and most of whom were active in its affairs from its inception, included: Rev. C. S. Applegath, president; Rev. A. I. Terryberry, vice-president; W. H. Male, secretary; George A. Martin, Oliver Hezzelwood, John Medland, Walter J. Bolus, Rev. E. B. Lanceley, Rev. H. S. Dougall, Miss Ida M. Steward, Dr. A. E. Marty, Mrs. T. R. Stark, William Hood, E. E. Appleton and Joseph M. Vaughan.

COMPANY RE-ORGANIZED TO SECURE FUNDS

In their efforts to secure more funds to carry on the enterprise various people were invited to buy shares. It was in 1922 that the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. George A. Martin, were persuaded to buy two shares of stock for $200 to help along the idealistic enterprise. At that time, the just-married Martins had never been in Muskoka and were living in Oshawa, where Mr. Martin was editing the newspaper. The following year they were asked to help the Chautauqua further by lending $1,000 with which to build an annex — now known as the Bungalow — so as to provide further sleeping accommodation.

In this way the Martins were further drawn into the Chautauqua activities. A year later they returned to Toronto, where Mr. Martin entered advertising work. At this time the founders of the Chautauqua found it necessary to reorganize the company in an effort to secure still further financial assistance. Three prominent Methodist laymen, with excellent business and financial backgrounds, were invited to join the directorate. A few other shareholders, including Mr. Martin were persuaded to join the directorate at the same time. In the reorganization which followed Mr. Martin became treasurer of the company for two or three years.

Even with the infusion of new "blood" the company could not be operated successfully. A bank loan was secured for $15,000

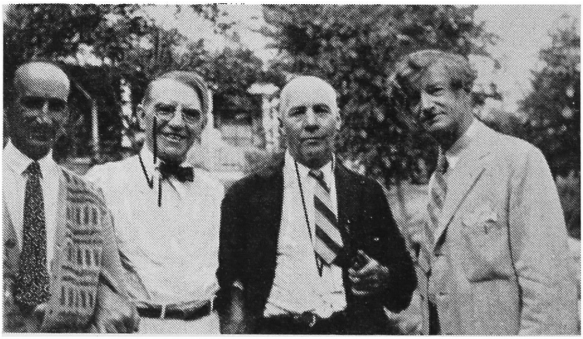
which was personally guaranteed by the directors. All might have been well but in 1929 the Great Depression broke over the world, and the Canadian Chautauqua Institution entered more difficult times. The bank was persuaded not to insist on the loan being paid for a time. The directors, meanwhile, tried to sell or lease the property, but in its badly run down condition, and its record of never having been a financial success there were no takers. In 1930 the company operated the property for the last year. In 1931 one of the directors, Rev. A. I. Terryberry, operated it rent free, and still couldn't make a success of it.

PAY UP — OR ELSE

In the summer of 1931 the bank insisted that the loan be paid by the directors personally. This brought on a crisis and forced the directors to take action. They had to put up the money personally or face legal action.

At a stormy directors' meeting, after again being told the property could not be sold or leased, a price was named at which it would be sold. The price was made low in the hope of getting rid of the property, so as not to have further expenses incurred for such matters as insurance and caretaking.

Finding themselves on the horns of a dilemma of having to pay the bank $1,200 or $1,500 with nothing to show for it, and also losing what they had already invested, the Martins decided to buy the property. One of the financial trio, who was getting on in years and much concerned because his estate was so involved with that of the Chautauqua and his guarantees to the bank, agreed to take a mortgage for the Martins . . . a risk which no financial lending institution would take. Thus the Martins entered the resort business. Their friends and business associates were unanimous in feeling sorry for them, were quite convinced that ere long the new owners would be in financial difficulties, and that in the vernacular "they would lose their shirts".



Thus ended the second era, with the passing of the Canadian Chautauqua Institution Limited at Muskoka Assembly, Muskoka, Ontario.

PUBLICITY KNOWLEDGE BASIS OF SUCCESS

The chief qualification the Martins brought to the enterprise was a knowledge of publicity and human relations, as both Mr. and Mrs. Martin had had several years' experience in newspaper reportorial and editorial work. In the eight years Mr. Martin had been in advertising agency work with The James Fisher Co. Limited, of Toronto and Montreal, as secretary, treasurer, and later as vice-president, he had not only handled the advertising for several nationally known manufacturers, but he had specialized in business research and sales counsel. In spending their own limited money on their run-down and never-successful Muskoka resort, the Martins naturally applied all they had learned in their previous experience.

At the outset research was used, and a questionnaire was prepared and sent to about 100 former guests to secure their views on what was wrong with the property when operated by the Chautauqua and what they would do if they were in the Martins' position. Many useful suggestions were made, but the one on which most agreed was that the name should be changed. Several suggested that the property should be given an Indian name.

Securing an Indian name which could be pronounced was difficult, especially if it were to designate some characteristic which the property possessed. Finally, a pamphlet issued by the U.S. Government was found in the Toronto Reference Library, which contained a list of Indian names, with their meanings, suitable for camps. From this list was selected a number of Indian names, which were included with a list of Anglo-Saxon ones, 16 in all. Then a memorandum was prepared which outlined some of the characteristics of the property, such as "blue skies", silver birches", "sunrise", "sunset", and so on.

The Pictures: Chautauqua Personalities
Sir Charles G. D. Roberts and Sir Gilbert Parker
Marshall Saunders
Wilson MacDonald, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, Robert E. Knowles, Bliss Carman

THE PUBLIC CHOSE THE NAME

This list of names, with their meanings, was submitted to a group of friends and business associates, who were asked to vote their first, second, and third choice of name. When the ballots were counted "Wigwassan" was found to be the first or second choice of 75% of those who voted. According to the U.S. Government pamphlet "Wigwassan" is Algonquin for silver birches, and these "pale brides of the forest" are one of the attractions which are known to the thousands of guests who have visited this happy vacationland. Long before there was a hotel here the location was shown on old maps as "birch point".

The property was bought by the Martins in the winter of 1931-32 and all the free day and night hours, seven days a week, were spent in getting ready for the first season 1932. It was now that their advertising and newspaper background served in good stead. The Martins knew nothing about operating a resort, except the few things they had learned through their association with the Chautauqua and from their having stayed at hotels from coast to coast. But as an advertising agency executive Mr. Martin had learned that good advertising could not make a poor product permanently successful, but that a good product plus good advertising, could make a product or a resort successful. In the case of a resort this meant good facilities and good service.

A FRIENDLY PERSONAL SERVICE

Realizing that the property and equipment were badly run down the Martins decided to tell the public frankly what they had to offer, and by good service, and friendly, personal attention see that guests who did patronize Wigwassan Lodge had a good time. Equipment was shifted around to see that guests were made comfortable, and with the limited funds which were available — and these were limited to a few hundred dollars — a start was made to freshen-up the buildings with paint, to make much needed repairs, and to buy new equipment.

In those days there was neither telephone service nor hydro power on the Island. The first year, telephone service was secured by the Martins buying and installing their own submarine cable. Incidentally this cable has since been replaced by a heavier one by Wigwassan Lodge.

Two years later hydro power was secured, the Hydro Electric Power Commission laying a cable to make this possible, thus replacing the broken down home-electric system, which had creaked along pumping the water and supplying spluttering low candle-power lights.

For the first few years, when the operation was small, Mrs. Martin managed Wigwassan Lodge, while Mr. Martin was at the Lodge week-ends, all reservations and correspondence being handled by him from Toronto. A launch destroyed by fire, and a serious motor accident, were only two of the many difficulties which had to be surmounted in the first four years of operation.

A PROGRAM OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

All the proven methods of sound publicity, advertising and sales promotion were used in these years, as they have continued to be ever since. Reunions were held at the Royal York Hotel, Toronto, "package" tours were promoted, buses were chartered from Toronto for special holidays, special discounts were offered to induce people to stay for two weeks rather than six or seven days, and smart folders and sincere, direct mail letters were sent to former guests and prospects. Classified newspaper advertising was done in Toronto papers of a kind which is common today, but which at that time set a new pattern. Inquiries were handled so quickly from the Toronto office that reservations were frequently secured before a letter of inquiry could reach Wigwassan. With the passing of years motion pictures and kodachrome slides were taken and used extensively for sales promotion purposes, particularly in the United States.

Also with the passing of years the "product" — the plant and the services — were continually improved and enlarged, as they are

being improved still. When a resort stands still it starts to slip back. Wigwassan Lodge continually plans for the future, and does not live in the past.

At first Wigwassan Lodge drew most of its clientele, as was to be expected, from Toronto. In those days it was feasible to hold a reunion in Toronto. However, over the years the management has recognized that the "natural" market from which Wigwassan Lodge can draw guests is all Ontario, particularly the larger cities, and from the border U.S. cities which are within a two day motor drive from Muskoka. Guests from the U.S. make up from 33% to 47% of its clientele, varying with changing conditions.

FUNDAMENTAL OPERATING POLICIES

Some of the policies which have been evolved over the years, and which guide the operations today, include:

Catering to the middle-class market, rather than to the so-called luxury trade.

Recognition that ample, satisfying meals, of top quality, with a choice of foods are of first importance. Out of this was born the slogan "A second helping is yours for the asking" and this is the most popular line on the printed menus. Even in wartime second helpings were offered on all but rationed foods.

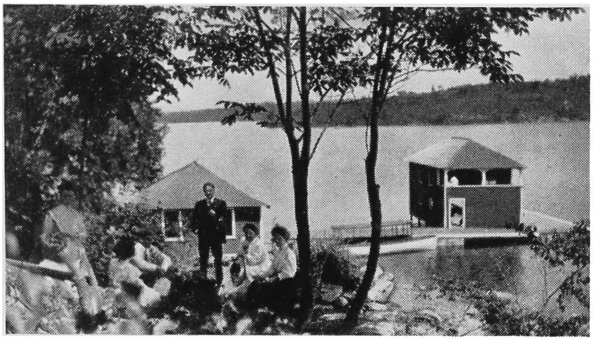
Recognition that comfortable beds, even if the rooms are not luxuriously furnished, are second in importance only to good meals.

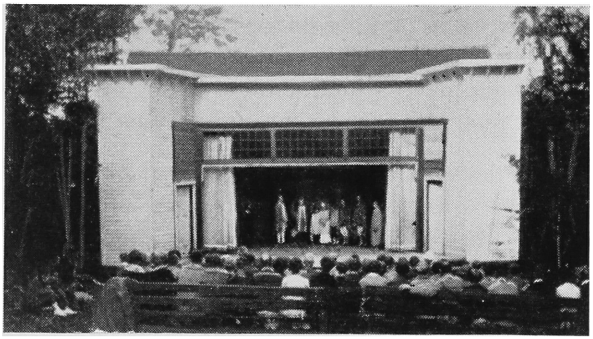
Recognition that provision must be made by way of facilities and organization so that guests have a good time.

Believing that in a resort of this type it is not practical to cater to all types of clientele Wigwassan Lodge concentrates on what it describes as "the better type of young business people". It is not a family resort, and no longer has a special rate for children. While there are a number of older guests they are the type who enjoy young people and the latter's activities.

Rowdyism is not tolerated, and over the years a long list has been compiled of people from whom reservations will not be

The Pictures:
The dock in 1909
"Little Theatre in the Woods" in the Chautauqua Era
The Lookout — as popular in 1909 as now





accepted. Maintaining this policy, particularly since Wigwassan Lodge has become so popular, has been one of the most difficult tasks, but the "hard-boiled" policy has gained much favourable comment, and has resulted in a particularly high repeat business.

To be truthful in all advertising, to understate what is offered, rather than to overstate. This has frequently gained the comment "your folder does not do justice to the place", even though it is one of the few four-color folders produced by any privately-owned resort in Canada and "even your printed menus do not give a proper idea of just how good your meals are".

Never intentionally make a promise which can't be fulfilled.

To be successful any business enterprise must have good public relations. The management believes these good public relations must be four-fold — with guests, with employees, with neighboring resorts, and with supply houses and their representatives.

As part of this public relations policy the management believes that every business has a responsibility to the industry of which it is a part. In carrying out this policy Mr. Martin has been a director, and for several years president of the Muskoka Tourist Development Association; was the founder and for six years president, and is still a director of the Association of Tourist Resorts of Ontario; is a member of the Hotel Association of Ontario, and was for six years a director; is a member of the Hotel Association of Canada; is a member and was for two years president of the Canadian Tourist Association, and of which he is still chairman of the Finance and Membership Committee; was one of the organizers of and a lecturer in the course in Institutional Management at the University of Toronto since 1946; is a member of the American Automobile Association. Wigwassan Lodge is recommended in the "Vacation Guide" of Duncan Hines, and is an allied member of the American Society of Travel Agents. Mr. Martin is a frequent contributor of articles to Canadian hotel trade papers and a speaker on various aspects of resort operation.

Adhering to these policies, plus much hard work the whole year round, and the support for many years of a loyal key staff, has resulted in Wigwassan Lodge growing until on its 200 acres of Tobin's Island it now has ten buildings. It accommodates 225 guests — with an average of 200 daily during July and August — compared with the maximum of fifty-four who had Civic Holiday dinner in the old plant of twenty years ago. It has a staff of approximately 65, five of whom are on the pay roll the whole year through . . . compared with the twenty who worked for the eight-week season of 1930. It has a plant which is owned entirely by Mr. and Mrs. Martin, has no indebtedness yet is worth many, many times the initial purchase price.

In 1951, when naming a new building of ten bedrooms, which some guests refer to as "swish" the Martins again went to the little pamphlet issued by the U.S. Government for the name "Manakiki" Lodge, which is Algonquin for "in a maple grove".

The management of Wigwassan Lodge believes that it is possible to practice the Golden Rule in business — "Do unto others as you would that they do unto you". This will continue to be the motivating policy of the Martins in the operation of this popular resort.

A Famous Literary Trio:
Wilson MacDonald, Bliss Carman, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts

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