

A Blast From The Past

by Pam Sinclair

In the context of time immemorial - the five thousand or so years or so the Temagami area has supported human life - the existence of the Temagami Lakes Association (TLA) is but a blink of the eye. Nastawgan travel ways weaving around the rugged terrain of towering Temagami pines and through crystal clear waters carved by glacial ice eons ago bear ancient testament to past occupations. In one century, recent inhabitants have vastly altered the political, geographical, cultural, geological and ecological landscape of the Temagami wilderness.

The Temagami Association, as the TLA was originally dubbed by a group of some 100 founding "settlers" in 1931, was spawned in reaction to potential degradation sustained by a population boom. For 30 years, Lake Temagami had been attracting in earnest an equal mix of Canadian and American tourists. The founding president was Robert Newcomb, a Cleveland lawyer and Temagami devotee since 1902.

Early Association concerns were forest fire prevention, property protection, garbage disposal, canoe route maintenance and fish stocking. All these issues went hand in hand with increasing recreational usage. The fledgling group's prime objective was to "be properly organized to meet any commercial invasion," as stated in a 1932 membership drive letter. By 1930, there were five companies holding logging berths in the area, a harbinger of the struggle to regulate the forest industry in which the TLA has been perpetually embroiled.

The Association began collecting \$5 dues from property-owning members in 1932. Around the same time, a \$50 Reward Notice was nailed to boathouses, and one trespasser had been nabbed by 1936.

Annual general meetings, held at Granny Turner's Lakeview House on Bear Island until 1963, were called "Association Day." The one and only cancellation happened in 1942, after the U.S.A. entered WW 2. From 1935 until 1939, the Association sponsored a popular regatta at the Hudson's Bay Post on Bear Island every Civic Holiday. It's social side reemerged in 1982, when the TLA started hosting a well-attended annual flea market, craft sale and barbecue on the front lawn of its headquarters building.

By 1935, logging was becoming a major headache. Pine stands were being cut in close proximity to Lake Temagami. The beauty of the untouched shoreline with its skyscraping vistas had attracted the early campers, and the Association was determined to see that it remained as pristine as they had found it. The Association lobbied for timber extraction to be conducted in a responsible and non-destructive manner. The provincial government agreed to special restrictions being added to contracts, including the protection of shoreline and skyline reserves, which were later enshrined in the 1994 Tenets for Temagami. Through the late 1940s and 1950s, a large percentage of the province's best pine originated in the Temagami forest. Thanks to restrictions championed by the Association., most cottagers weren't aware of this beehive of activity.

A Blast From The Past

During the summer of 1936, several forest fires raged near Lake Temagami. In 1938, a new forestry plane was bird's-eye viewing Lake Temagami from a base at the Bear Island station of the Department of Lands and Forests (the precursor of the Ministry of Natural Resources). The TLA rightfully took some of the credit.

The Association was instrumental in the passage of provincial legislation in 1942 allowing lease holders to obtain outright ownership of their islands, upon the removal of Lake Temagami's 1,200 islands from the Temagami Provincial Forest. The provincial government had established it as the Temagami Forest Reserve in 1901 to set aside pine stands for future logging and to protect them from forest fires threatened by tourism. Mainland development was thereby forbidden, though the islands within the Reserve had been available for leasing since 1906.

For the Association, the post-war period was the salad days. There was no super stack in Sudbury, no Copperfields Mine on Temagami Island, no far-reaching land use plans with conflicting interests, no native land claim needing settling, and logging was not highly mechanized nor access roads all-season. Property protection and the fishery figured prominently on the agenda at annual meetings, which were brief and more of a social occasion.

Earl Rodgers was president by 1950 and is believed to have served in this position the longest – until his death in 1961. A Toronto mining engineer, he had discovered the lake in 1938 and soon bought island 990. He was a vigilant watch dog over members' concerns, and his number one priority were logging operators who ignored the license restrictions set out in 1935. He believed the situation was causing irreparable damage and deterioration. It was in 1955-56 that the peak volume of wood was harvested from the Temagami district. Earl was concerned with protecting not just Lake Temagami but also its interconnecting waterways. It is commonly held that the Association's name was changed to Temagami Lakes Association around this time to reflect the widening extent of its interests.

The Association approved its constitution in 1953. The aims and objectives were: protection and promotion of the common interest; maintaining and improving health; sanitation, safety and general welfare conditions; and preservation of the natural scenic beauty of the lake and its surroundings. These are still the objectives the TLA lists today in its bylaws.

It was during the early 1950s that the Association produced its first Directory of Camp Owners and Services, and it has been published every year since. Its purpose was to help the police track down parties in case of emergency, bolster communication between members, apprise them of local services and give an overview of Association business.

Another venture into the printing business was a four-piece set of navigation charts, which are extant today, having gone through several revisions and quality improvements over the years.

Copperfields Mine opened in 1955. The executive sensibly realized the operation and all its "obnoxious activity" wasn't going to pack up and move on, so instead tried to have summer drilling and blasting

A Blast From The Past

banned. The Mine Road (now the Lake Temagami Access Road) was built in 1958 to transport ore, and islanders began bypassing Temagami village and the boat lines.

During the late 1950s, the Association laid blame for poor summer fishing at the door of ice fishing huts and the increasing popularity of snowmobiles. A fish committee was struck, chaired by Dewey Derosier, a local lodge owner and part-time prospector. He would become president in 1961 and chart the Association on a moribund and shortsighted course to instability.

Convinced that winter lake trout fishing would doom summer angling, Dewey proposed the construction of a headquarters building on a mainland site, which would include a basement hatchery. Despite denials by the Dept. of Lands and Forests to grant permission to breed fish, and despite the Association's long-held opposition to mainland development, Dewey forged ahead and the headquarters/hatchery was completed in 1971. The \$28,000 two-bedroom raised bungalow has never raised a single fingerling.

By 1970, a group of disgruntled members was growing alarmed that the executive seemed to view the Association as a private fishing club. Major subdivision plans by the Dept. of Lands and Forests were being blissfully ignored. At the 1971 annual meeting, the Derosier executive was ousted in favour of a new order, which made pollution, island subdivisions and proposed mainland development the focus. A 1973 native land claim put a legal freeze on Crown land development over 4,000 square miles surrounding and including Lake Temagami. It scuttled the government's plans for mainland cottaging and its grandiose and impractical scheme to build a mega-tourist resort atop Maple Mountain in the Lady Evelyn wilderness.

One of the Association's first accomplishments after the coup was the launching of a quarterly tabloid called the Temagami Times, "the voice of the TLA." It is still going strong today. The newspaper's acronym for the Association soon became common usage.

The TLA was one of the first organizations to sound the alarm over the noxious effects of acid rain on plant and aquatic life. In 1972, the Sudbury super stack – the world's highest chimney – started puffing malignant sulphur dioxide clouds Temagami way. It wouldn't be until the late 1980s that American and Canadian governments got tough on industry to reduce SO2 emissions.

The TLA grew an offshoot in the 1970s. The Temagami Region Studies Institute (TRSI) is a non-profit research agency, legally independent of the TLA, whose mandate is to raise funds to conduct educational and scientific research. An ambitious fundraising effort was mounted by the TRSI in the late 1970s for an environmental study. Two years in the making, the study concluded that the lake could ecologically support more development, but its semi-wild character would be compromised. The TRSI followed up this study in the 1980s, raising funds to gauge how much development lake users felt the lake should support. The resulting planning guidelines, showing overwhelming support for planning controls on private and Crown lands, became the framework for the Temagami Planning Board. Representing a range of user groups, the board's mandate was to develop an official plan for regulating

A Blast From The Past

private development on Lake Temagami, including organized areas on the north-east arm and Temagami Island which were part of the Township of Temagami municipality. Completed and approved in 1986, the plan specified islands-only development and a maximum 20 new cottage lots per year.

The nearly idle headquarters building barely survived a bid by the membership to sell it and have it removed from its offensive mainland location. In 1979, the upper living quarters were equipped with a C.B. radio and a party phone line, and became a message and information centre. Since then, the radio has switched to VHF marine frequency and the operation has moved downstairs. Other services have been added over the years, including laundry, lending library and mail delivery.

To provide continuity, the TLA hired its first executive secretary that same summer. Former president Tim Gooderham, a North Bay teacher whose family presence on the lake goes back to 1903, still holds that post. In recent years, as administrative duties became increasingly linked to electronic equipment, Tim has maintained his office and living quarters on the building's upper floor.

In the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) proposed an extension to the Red Squirrel Road, which runs east-west across the north end of the lake and connects to Hwy. 11 north of Temagami. The extension would intersect the Liskeard Lumber Rd., which runs north-south through the Lady Evelyn-Smoothwater Wilderness Park. The purpose was to ease access and haulage of timber by area logging companies to a mill in Elk Lake and the Milne sawmill in Temagami. The proposal would soon turn the Temagami landscape into a battleground as conflicting resource users clashed.

At the 1981 annual meeting, the membership had, by a narrow vote, endorsed the MNR's plans for the provincial wilderness park, in which no logging and no new road access would be allowed. The planned road linkage would create direct access to the wilderness park and Lake Temagami from Hwy. 11 and the Elk Lake area. The TLA felt it would put enormous pressure on the MNR to remove access-limiting gates and allow unfettered use by all recreationists and sportsmen of publicly funded roads. Feeling left out, fish and hunt clubs in the Sturgeon Falls area asked for an additional link-up from the south. As the issue heated up, the MNR agreed to perform an environmental assessment of the project. The final EA report recommended that the Red Squirrel extension proceed with gates to restrict public access.

A new environmental lobby group, called the Temagami Wilderness Society, proposed a Temagami Wildlands Reserve as a buffer zone to protect the wilderness park and Lake Temagami. Most access roads, and all mining and timber extraction would be banned. The concept got lots of media attention and was embraced by local, national and international environmental groups. Bitter local opposition sprang from the forest industry, sports clubs, the business community and municipal governments.

To diffuse the powder keg, the Ontario government appointed a Temagami Area Working Group, composed of diverse interest groups including the TLA, to come up with a compromise. The TLA's stand was that the Red Squirrel Rd. should not be linked to other roads, and that forest industry

A Blast From The Past

employees should be compensated for lost wages by those who would benefit from the establishment of a wildlands reserve. The working group folded prematurely when it could not reach a consensus. The working group reinvented itself through the 1980s, eventually becoming the Comprehensive Planning Council (CPC) in the 1990s.

The reaction of the native population, now known by its traditional Teme-Augama Anishinabe (TAA) name, to the government's approval of road construction was to set up a blockade and encampment on the Red Squirrel at Sharp Rock Inlet. The TWS decided to sue the government for its failure to hold public hearings. About 100 forestry workers and supporters, angered by these tactics to delay road construction, blocked the Lake Temagami Access Rd. near Hwy. 11 on the 1988 Labour Day weekend. A reported 300 OPP officers, including riot squad members, dispersed the crowd. Many believe the police presence was grossly overdone.

After seven months of occupation, court orders ended the native blockade, but delayed road construction pending a land claim ruling. In 1989, the TAA lost an appeal of an earlier Ontario Supreme Court decision against the land claim, and the TWS also lost its lawsuit. Construction soon began, prompting a massive TWS blockade of the site. Numerous protesters were arrested, including Bob Rae, soon-to-be Ontario's NDP Premier. In the meantime, a court injunction filed by the band to halt the road was rejected, so the band resumed its blockade. All told, nearly 600 protesters were arrested in connection to the road extension.

In the meantime, the Temagami sawmill had gone into receivership, meaning the extension would not be used in the immediate future. Tempers began to simmer down as an uneasy sense of calm returned to the battlefield Tem had become. The combat would move to Owain Lake in 1995 as protesters from Earthroots, a successor to the TWS, occupied a pine forest being cut by Goulard Lumber of Sturgeon Falls. Once again, the logging vs. conservation issue captured international headlines.

The Wendaban Stewardship Authority was created in 1990 as a joint venture between the TAA and the government. It was given management responsibility for a four-township area that was removed from the land caution, covering a portion of the Red Squirrel Rd. extension. The Authority eventually recommended that the extension should remain gated and used as a tertiary road in off-summer months only.

In 1995, criticism of the CPC, a citizens' advisory committee whose mandate was to develop a resource and land use management plan for the Temagami area, became quite vocal. The TLA, which had no representation on the CPC, felt that CPC activities were not being directed by local stakeholders, and that extractable and consumable resources were getting more attention than non-consumable resources such as cottaging, youth camps and back country recreation. The TLA's Tenets for Temagami, which included no cutting in the skyline reserve, no new road access and no mainland development, had been adopted by the Township of Temagami and the permanent residents' association, but were not being endorsed by the CPC.

A Blast From The Past

Meanwhile, the Ontario government was attempting to remove the native land caution through the courts. The caution was quashed in 1996, but the decision was appealed by native groups. They lost, paving the way for mining exploration and development after a 23-year drought. In the fall of 1996, the land claim area was opened to claim staking. A frantic one-day rush saw more than 600 prospectors swarming the land and beating the bushes. The skyline reserve was omitted from staking until the CPC completed its plan, due to an 11th-hour deal between the government and the TLA. Lobbying by the TLA and other organizations led the final CPC plan to treat the skyline reserve as a Special Management Area where there would be no commercial logging. The CPC also directed that a Temagami Lake Review Committee be set up to process applications for prospecting and mining within the skyline reserve. The reserve was opened to staking and exploration in 1998. Amendments to the Public Lands Act and the Mining Act should ensure that any activity in the reserve does not impact negatively on Lake Temagami.

Other important TLA initiatives during the 1990s were creel census sponsorship and environmental surveys of septic systems including follow-ups. Campsite inspections were carried out, and the inception of a steering committee led to the establishment of a Temagami Stewardship Council in 2001 to manage the area fishery. The lake populace was urged to practise the three Rs – recycling, reusing and reducing.

In the mid-1990s, access to southern and western parts of the lake by West Nipissing residents was again threatening to degrade the Temagami area. The access issue was taking on more significance as recent fishery studies revealed that sensitive lake trout populations might be in jeopardy. In the fall of 1997, an unusual provincial court case saw one arm of government sue another arm of government. The MNR was tried and convicted of breaching the Environmental Assessment Act, after it allowed the West Nipissing Access Group to improve an access road to Cross Lake without public consultation. All building of roads and access points is subject to the Act, and the area is also protected under the CPC plan. The Ministry of the Environment launched its investigation against the MNR after the TLA and other organizations complained about the illegal access point. The MNR belatedly launched an environmental assessment.

A similar situation was unfolding at the Baie Jeanne access point, but the lack of a paper trail foiled the laying of charges. The CPC had recommended that the MNR facilitate the establishment of a partnership between Temagami interests and user groups from the Sturgeon Falls area to address the problems at Baie Jeanne. The TLA, not the MNR which had closed its Temagami District office in 1996, took the first conciliatory step. The inaugural meeting made huge strides and, by the conclusion of the tete-a-tete, the TLA and its southern neighbours had drafted a Memorandum of Agreement. It was essentially a framework for future cooperation. The TLA has since agreed to very limited access at Baie Jeanne, to be monitored and enforced.

A proposed new access point on Lake Obabika grabbed the TLA's attention in 1998. West Nipissing groups were advocating the construction of an access road and boat launch after their only access, via

A Blast From The Past

private property, was cut off by the landowner. At a series of public meetings sponsored by the MNR, the TLA argued that more accessibility would impact adversely on remoteness and lead to increased pressure on the fragile lake trout fishery. The MNR decided not to permit this access.

Another hot issue during the 1990s was amalgamation of the Township of Temagami and the unorganized townships on the lake. The municipality had courted the lake in the 1980s, but the TLA had brushed off all proposals. In the meantime, Temagami had lost two major sources of industrial taxation when the Milne sawmill folded and Sherman Mine shut down. Then, in 1996, a penny-pinching provincial government introduced municipal restructuring which included downloading of services and shrinking transfer payments. The objective was fewer and larger municipalities, and reduced service duplication. The Township's wooing of the lake began in earnest. After flirting with the idea, the TLA decided marriage might be mutually beneficial. Advantages for the TLA would be increased local control over planning and development, and more power to protect the lake and the Tenets for Temagami. A local government study with representation from the TLA looked at the relationship's pros and cons, including an open or ward election system, representation, services, costs and taxation.

The new municipality celebrated its union in 1997 when the Lake Temagami community voted, mainly by mail, in its first municipal election. The heavy slate included four mayoral candidates and 16 council hopefuls to fill six seats. As with most nuptials, names were changed: the reeve became a mayor and the township became a town. A spat developed early in the alliance when some cottagers felt it was unfair that they were paying the core rate for services they would never use. The municipality now covers most of Lake Temagami and Marten River. Three townships at the bottom of the lake remain in limbo, and are the subject of a tug of war between Temagami and West Nipissing. While Temagami wants the townships to control lake access, West Nipissing wants them to open up access.

A revamped Official Plan (OP) was now needed to fit the new boundaries. A planning advisory committee was struck, and included five lake representatives out of 10 members. The TLA agreed to a maximum of five non-cumulative lots developed per year from private and Crown land over a five-year period, to be dispersed throughout the lake. During the five-year period, a Master Recreation Plan would be prepared to assess all uses and users, and this information would be applied to the OP. The TLA hoped for a speedy conclusion to the planning process, in order to replace the 1986 OP which is still in effect. That OP allows for 20 new cottages per year from private land only. Splinter groups, having parted ways with the TLA over its OP stand, have attempted to bring the process to a standstill. These cottager groups believe the OP is too pro-development. They also fear that the OP could be arbitrarily amended by a majority council vote. The TLA accused the splinter groups of being NIMBY (not-in-my-back-yard) proponents, while the TLA is advancing a whole lake approach.

The native land claim is an issue that predates the birth of the TLA, yet had seen no resolution by 2002. In the mid-1990s, the Temagami First Nation (TFN) twice rejected an Agreement in Principle which the TAA had approved. The agreement allocated \$20 million and 112 square miles of land under

A Blast From The Past

Shared Stewardship Management. The Ontario government removed the agreement from the table after several months of inaction. In 1998, the TFN and TAA advanced a joint proposal to renew serious and protracted land claim negotiations. A Framework Agreement was proposed and the native organizations agreed not to further their claim in the court system but to pursue negotiations exclusively. A 12-member advisory committee with a TLA representative was struck. The TLA's position is that a fair and just settlement must be reached, subject to the Tenets for Temagami. Some of the issues being negotiated with the provincial and federal governments are the location of a new mainland townsite; the size, location and type of ownership of a proposed 112-square-mile land base; and the size, location and use of native family tracts.

Many issues involving the TLA of the 21st century are open-ended. The dawn of a new millennium brings the promise of new challenges, while activities such as land planning and native claim resolution continue to evolve. To celebrate its 60th anniversary, the TLA published a 126-page history volume in 1992. In the conclusion, the author posed several questions about the future direction of the TLA regarding land use planning, land claim negotiations, forestry activities, pollution from airborne sources and sewage systems, fisheries management, and privacy issues concerning houseboats and other recreational water craft. Most of the questions are still relevant today and are still being answered. The book is closed on one question: Yes, the TLA finally elected its first female president in the mid-1990s.

The selfless hard work of a veritable legion of volunteers over the past 71 years has earned the Association a solid and respected international reputation. It is important that the voices of its 700 members, both American and Canadian, continue to be heard as the TLA strives to represent their interests in a sensitive, equitable, sensible and open-minded manner.