

The History of the Manitou Association

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The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the opening of the Manitou area around Moose Deer Point and Twelve Mile Bay to visitors from the south. A number of resort hotels opened, private fishing clubs purchased islands for their members' use and a limited number of private cottages were built. Add to that campers, fishermen and tourists and the long time lumbermen who cut logs for the Georgian Bay Lumber Company were no longer alone on Georgian Bay. By the turn of the century the Manitou area was well known to US fishing enthusiasts and campers, with the odd Canadian thrown in for good measure.

Local First Nation people provided considerable support for these visitors; acting as hunting and fishing guides, as well as helping out many new to the area. The Moose Deer band was the closest, and they lived in isolated settlement on Twelve Mile and King Bays. The road to these towns was not opened until 1965.

With no roads, steamboats became the source of transport to bring all these new visitors, and support their hardware, grocery and mail needs. There are several good books describing the history of the steam ships and their regular runs from Collingwood, Midland, Penetang to Parry Sound and points in between.

By the late eighties, regular service to the area was bringing dozens of folks every week. Along with their baggage, these mostly American visitors needed a good deep-water dock to land. The steam ship captains used their extensive knowledge of the local rocks and deep-water channels to land passengers and freight at a small, select number of islands.

Initially, Kah-She Dock served as the landing for the Manitou area, and the 60 foot long steamship dock on its north shore has since been restored to its original design. The dock was originally owned by the Kah-She-She-Bog-a-Mog fishing club, from Pittsburgh, Pa. Descendants from some of the original seven families still live on the island. Rowboats and a few private motor launches would meet the steamship and carry passengers to the resorts, private islands and campsites.

As more and more people arrived, the demand for a larger common dock increased and Manitou area cottagers formed an association for the purpose of acquiring a deep-water dock and operating a common landing and freight shed that was capable of meeting the big boats at least once a day.

For twenty-five years transportation in the area centered on Manitou Dock. Earlier, big boats called at fishing camps upon request, as well as at their regularly scheduled stops.

Some camping parties chartered launches from liveries in Honey Harbour, Midland or Penetanguishene. Later, liveries based on Parry Sound brought cottagers.

The Manitou Association was granted Letters Patent and became a corporation on June 10, 1929. It was incorporated “to provide opportunity for social intercourse amongst the members, transportation, postal and to construct a dock ...convenient for the purposes of the Corporation.”

In 1929 Island #483, on which Manitou Dock was built was transferred to the Association by Judge Kennedy, one of the owners of Kah-She Dock. In 1930 Captain Wallace, a retired steamship captain was authorized to clean up Manitou Island and build two outhouses.

In 1931 a 'motor boat dock' addition was authorized. The work was awarded Capt. Wallace. The initiation fee for new members was set at \$50.00 with annual dues at \$10.00.

In 1933 the first Annual Meeting was held on Kah-She Island. Judge Kennedy moved that the "nine members of the association pay \$1.50 per month for ten months to Fred Wallace as official caretaker for the association". Dues were raised to \$25.00.

In 1949 a contract for repairing the main dock and building a row boat dock was awarded to Napoleon Trudeau for \$300 .00. Hap. Hemphill, the son of one of the original directors, was elected Secretary-Treasurer and continued in the post for twenty-five years.

By 1954 the dues were \$20 .00 and in 1956 a request by the Association to have Manitou Dock made a Government Dock was refused. By 1961 the initiation fee was eliminated as the Manitou Association had changed fundamentally to a social organization as cottagers now had their own boats and dock facilities. The last steamship stopped running in the mid-sixties.

In 1962 the Manitou Association joined the Georgian Bay Association, an association that has continued to this day. In 1969 noted local artist Ed Bartram was President, and fondly recalls holding the annual meeting on Manitou Dock. Presidency of the Association has cycled through many local families and it seems that most residents have served on the executive during its 83-year history. Meetings are now held at the home of the current President, which has led to everything from well organized events in local lodges to members perched on lawn chairs on rocks and wooden decks. The original spirit of camaraderie and helping each other remains strong.

In addition to buying a fire pump and an AED for local emergencies, the Manitou Association hosts an annual regatta at the home of Ken and Dianne Wilson – the old Manitou Inn. Every year whole families compete in hard fought events such as swimming races, canoe races and the much loved clothing race. An annual winner is proclaimed, and

it usually is the family who corrals the most children, grandchildren and spouses to participate.

The original island, Manitou Dock had become abandoned and was over-run with wild trees, bushes and flowers. It was not being used and the Association became concerned with ensuring that it would be protected in its natural state in perpetuity. In 2006, then Association President Ian Baines led an initiative to interest the Georgian Bay Land Trust in acquiring the property as a gift. After an environmental study of the island and with the support of the GBLT executive, in particular then Executive Director Wendy Cooper, Manitou Dock became part of the Land Trust, to be protected and maintained as a day use picnicking island, with Ian Baines and Darin Buckland elected as long term stewards.

The outlines of the original Manitou Dock can still be seen in the water to the west of the island now called Manitou Dock. Cribs from the original show a large dock in an L shape. The buildings on shore are long gone and the property is no longer used.

Now most people come through Twelve Mile Bay using their own boats or local services such as Moose Deer Point Marina. Traffic is heavy at times on the local 'Highway 400' - Starvation Bay, as cottagers rush back and forth announcing their progress using the newly installed cell service. It is a long time since canoes or rowboats moved quietly from each establishment to 'meet the boat' at Manitou Dock.

Everybody went to the boat. Their presence indicated that all was well, and, they depended on the boat, their lifeline to the world outside.

I will conclude this history with a short description of the original Manitou Dock, from whence all this came.

“The dock to be seventy (70) feet long, twelve (12) feet wide, on four (4) piers, each twelve (12) feet by twelve (12) feet, in a depth of from eight (8) to twelve (12) feet of water and standing five (5) feet out of the water, with four (4) good mooring posts. The dock if necessary, to be connected with the shore by a suitable approach.

The piers to be built of hemlock logs up to the water level and pine logs above the water level, and to be filled with stone. All logs to be from seven (7) to nine (9) inches in diameter and spiked with five-eighths (5/8) or three-quarter (3/4) inch iron spikes, enough of them to insure a job strong enough to withstand the bumping of the Steamer Waubic and other steamers of like draft and build.

Three (3) stringers of ten (10) by twelve (12) pine timbers to be placed over the piers from end to end, one in the center and one at each edge, and well spiked to the piers. These timbers to be covered by a course of ten (10) inch pine plank, well spiked with five eighths (5/8) inch spikes, two (2) to each bearing. The mooring posts to be placed on one (1) in

each pier, each to be ten (10) inches in diameter, to start from bottom of the piers and project about four (4) feet above the piers.”

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